WORSHIP WITH CHILDREN

Agentive Participation in Dutch Protestant Contexts

Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede

Worship with Children

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Netherlands Studies in Ritual and Liturgy 25

Published by
Institute for Ritual and Liturgical Studies, Protestant Theological University
Centre for Religion and Heritage, University of Groningen

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ISBN 978-94-6416-903-4

Printed by
Ridderprint, ridderprint.nl

Graphic design, illustrations & photos
Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede

Cover reference photos, front and back
Robert Collins, unsplash.com/@robbie36
Linde Dorenbos, lindedorenbos.com

Financial support for the research
Fonds Brandenburg

Financial support for the publication
Stichting Ad Pias Causas

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Worship with Children
Agentive Participation in Dutch Protestant Contexts

Vieringen met Kinderen
Agentieve Participatie in Protestantse Contexten in Nederland
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Protestantste Theologische Universiteit te Amsterdam — Groningen,
op gezag van de rector, prof. dr. P. M. Wisse,
ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen te Amsterdam
op 9 december, om 15:45 uur.

door
Lydia Cornelia van Leersum-Bekebrede
geboren op 7 Mei 1992 te Vianen

Promotor
Prof. dr. M. Barnard

Tweede promotor
Prof. dr. A. de Kock

Co-promotor
Dr. P. M. Sonnenberg

Zij zullen saam, de groten met de kleinen,
dansend de harpen en cymbalen slaan
en onder fluitspel in het ronde gaan,
zingend: “In U zijn al onze fonteinen.”

Barnard, Willem and Klaas Heeroma. 2013. “Psalm 87: Op Sions berg sticht God zijn heilige stede.” In *Liedboek: Zingen en bidden in huis en kerk,* edited by Interkerkelijke Stichting voor het Kerklied. Utrecht: BV Liedboek.

Acknowledgements

Completing a thesis depends on so much more than the author alone. This research would be nowhere without the contributions of the children, parents, ministers, youth workers, church members, and youth work professionals who welcomed me into their churches, offices, and homes. You made me enthusiastic about the topic of children in worship and embody its relevance. Thank you for sharing your lives, experiences, and faith with me. I hope my findings will benefit you.

I am grateful to the Protestant Theological University for offering me this research opportunity. As I have said repeatedly, I have a stellar supervision team. Marcel, Jos, and Ronelle: thank you so much for the collegial welcome you gave me, your faith in my research abilities, and your ever-helpful feedback. You each opened up to me about your personal faith when my dive into theology raised so many questions that they started to overwhelm me. Marcel, you set an inspiring example for how to reflect on liturgical practices in more ways than just writing. Jos, I appreciated your down-to-earth attitude and structured feedback. Ronelle, thank you for the great experience of collaborating with you in teaching and research. Martijn Oosterbaan, thank you for rekindling my anthropological conceptual curiosity when we collaborated on Chapter 5.

Life as a Ph.D. student was so much better with fellow Ph.D. students. During our many conversations, we shared in each others' joys and miseries. Those walks and talks—even our endless Zoom sessions—were a great comfort to me. Henk Vogel, I treasure our creative rambling about topics ranging from material religion to music, life, and faith. Niels den Toom, you have the gift of listening people into a better version of themselves: thank you. Anne-Marije de Bruin-Wassinkaat, your collegial attitude and work ethos inspire me. Marinka Verburg, you bring along *gezelligheid*, and I enjoyed our methodological discussions. Joyce Ronday, thank you for welcoming me and showing me the ropes at the start of this project. To my NOSTER colleagues, your academic work broadened my horizon. I am humbled by how much all of you have taught me.

Tree-climbing, fine dining, outdoor picnics, watching fairytales and series, sunny holidays… in sum, where would I be without my friends? Nelly, Willianne, Marleen, and Marit, you provided much-needed perspective and relaxation time. Nelly and Meindert, it was truly precious to be a church-within-the-church with you during a time when we could meet very few other people.

Both my families have been immensely important to me as a place to crash, socialize, and become grounded again. Your care, interest, and hospitality sustain me. I love you all so much! To all my siblings: thank you for your support. To my parents, thank you for raising me and making worship part of our daily lives. I love how we continue to grow through gardening together. Seeing the change that a few hours’ work makes and taking a harvest home at the end of the day were especially rewarding when it was a struggle to get my ideas to appear in words on a screen.

My husband Hans supported me during my low points and victories and the daily trudging in between. Thank you for your steadfast love throughout these years. Joas, my son, you bring me so much joy! Thank you for the chance to discover the world anew with you.

Above all, I give thanks to God, Who is worthy to be worshiped! Thank you for inviting me out of the (home) office into nature, where forest, heather, and the rhythm of walking kindled meditation.

List of Publications

The core subject of this thesis is worship with children. The five middle chapters were submitted to international academic journals as research articles. Data collection, analysis, and writing were the principal responsibility of myself, Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede. Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos de Kock and Marcel Barnard supervised this project. Martijn Oosterbaan collaborated on Chapter 5. The inclusion of their names as co-authors acknowledges their input to this team-based research.

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. 2019. "Deconstructing Ideals of Worship with Children." *Studia Liturgica* 49 (1): 26-43.

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. 2019. "Setting the Stage for Children's Participation in Worship Practices." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24 (2): 166-82.

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. Forthcoming. "Children's Agency in Worship." *International Journal of Practical Theology*.

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Martijn Oosterbaan, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. 2021. "Sounds of Children in Worship: Materiality and Liturgical-Ritual Spaces." *Material Religion* 17 (5).

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. Submitted. "Performing God with Children."

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1

Introduction

Worship practices with children are acts of religious devotion where children are present. In this research, worship is used as a stand-in for the more technical term *liturgical ritual*, which is broader than the regular use of the word *worship*. It includes Sunday services, children's church, Sunday school, crèche, and special services. The presence of children makes a difference: Children contribute with their participation, insights, and values while they interact with Bible stories, Christian liturgical traditions, and faith. Indeed, when children participate, they transform worship. This dissertation is an invitation to discover the fascinating dynamic between how adults adapt worship to suit children and how children contribute to and change worship.

This first chapter introduces the research context of Dutch Protestant worship with children. In the following, I recount the motive and formulate the aim and questions. Then, I explore key literature on worship practices with children to show how this dissertation contributes to existing knowledge. Next, I detail the research methods and position myself in relation to the research. Finally, I present an outline of the dissertation.

Thematizing Worship with Children

Context

Across the Netherlands, children are participants in Dutch Protestant worship. Children are baptized, sit in pews on Sunday mornings, take part in children's moments, make artwork about Bible stories, sing in choirs, welcome people at the door, say prayers, and witness or participate in the Lord's Supper. These practices are developed, prepared, performed, and evaluated in editorial offices, youth work centers, homes, and church buildings.

The studied worship practices are located in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN, *Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*). In the Netherlands, the PCN is the largest protestant denomination by membership (Katholiek Sociaal-Kerkelijk Instituut 2015, 2014). It includes evangelical, liberal, (strictly) Reformed, and Lutheran congregations (van Eijnatten and van Lieburg 2005, 313, 341-3). The PCN hosts an array of different worship practices with children, which makes it an appropriate context for the current research (see also Chapter 2).

There is a sense of urgency to the topic of children in worship. Demographically, youth amounts to an increasingly smaller percentage of the already declining PCN membership. This decline leads to reflectivity among church members and professionals. Researchers often see parents as having the primary responsibility for children's faith formation (van de Koot-Dees 2013). In a secularizing context, the weight attributed to adults' role in children's faith formation increases (Sonnenberg 2020, 31). Thus, congregations launch initiatives to support parents in raising their children in the Christian faith, like talk groups, extended baptismal catechesis, and parenting courses. During events, training sessions, and in magazines, themes like children's theology and connecting children with older generations regularly receive attention.

The urgency regarding children in church translates into a great diversity in practices. There are many different methods and formats for worship with children. *Methods* refer to curricula. I use *format* to refer to a combination of an intention, target group, spatial setting, and way of performing liturgical actions. The diversity stems from theological differences and the importation of methods and formats from abroad. Also, congregation members, youth work professionals, and method developers actively search for new ways of being church with children, which regularly leads to innovations. Youth work professionals scout such new initiatives and facilitate their distribution to other congregations. Also, different congregations have different needs. Thus, organizers adapt methods for their own use. A report made by PCN staff categorized its congregations into three groups in terms of youth attendance (this includes children): A third of PCN congregations, which seem mostly strictly Reformed, has over thirty children, with an average of eighty (Nagel-Herweijer et al. 2018, 9). Another third has less than ten children (7) or between ten and thirty children attending (8). These differences relate to different possibilities for worship with children.

The diversity that characterizes the Dutch Protestant field of worship with children, and the felt urgency to pay attention to these children, sparked the interest of the Research Centre for Church, Youth, and Culture. One and the other led to the following motive for this research.

Motive

What happens with children at church on Sunday mornings? This question arose in the Dutch Research Centre for Church, Youth, and Culture (OJKC, *Onderzoekscentrum voor Jeugd, Kerk en Cultuur*). Reviewing recent research, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos de Kock, and Marcel Barnard observed a lack of research about children at church. Subjects of ongoing and completed research included faith in small groups of adolescents (van Wijnen 2016), participation in youth worship (Sonnenberg 2015), catechesis (Meerveld 2019), religious identity development of Muslim adolescents (Visser-Vogel et al. 2015), faith education of young children at home (van de Koot-Dees 2013), and religious education at primary schools (Nagel-Herweijer and Visser-Vogel 2017; Renkema 2018; Markus et al. 2019). A small-scale study on speech acts in children's church found four conversation patterns: exam, conversation, sermon, and social talk, corresponding to four modes of faith: knowledge, reflection, moral, and social (van der Veen 2009). In combination with the diverse field (see above), this begged for further research that would include analytical angles complementary to that of the speech acts described by van der Veen (2009) and cover a broader range of Dutch Protestant worship practices with children. Research was needed to observe what happens in practice and to ask children for their perspectives on worship. The motive led to the following aim and research questions.

Aim

This research aims to understand Dutch Protestant worship with children and contribute to practical theological understandings of these practices. In this research, I follow Miller McLemore's (2012a, 20) definition of practical theology as "a general way of doing theology concerned with the embodiment of religious belief in the day-to-day lives of individuals and communities." Her definition emphasizes embodied practices, lived reality, and individuals and communities. It resonates with how I want to approach worship with children. My goal is to consider children as agents in context. Children's participation both sustains and transforms worship. Simultaneously, adults and the worship environment shape worship practices. I want to uncover the complex dynamics of worship practices with children, representing both the tensions and good practices, the frustrations and inspirations. I hope to enrich the existing research with in-depth descriptions and analyses to contribute to the involvement of children in worship. Thus, I aim to produce academic knowledge that is relevant for practice.

Questions

How are liturgical rituals with children performed in Dutch Protestant contexts, how do these practices contribute to children's agentive participation, and what is the theological significance of these practices? The following sub-questions will help answer this research question:

1. How can we describe and understand the variety in worship practices with children?
2. How do adults shape worship with children?
3. How do children show agency in worship?
4. How does materiality play a role in worship with children?
5. How is God performed in worship with children?

First, I want to map the field of worship with children (question 1). Then, as adults seem to determine much of what happens in worship practices, I investigate their choices, roles, and reasons for participating in worship with children (question 2). Children are part of worshiping communities. Therefore, I want to know how children's particularity, questions, answers, even their critique or resistance play a part in worship practices (question 3). The question about materiality (question 4) proved too broad, so I focused on sound in the environment by asking, How do adults and children manage the sounds of children in worship? The final question considers what worship with children communicates about God (question 5). The research questions highlight a dynamic between how children contribute to worship and how adults adapt worship to children. This dynamic relates to both the performance and theological significance of worship practices with children (research question). To answer these questions, I needed qualitative data like observations and interviews. However, before describing the methodology, I conceptualize worship with children.

Conceptualizing Worship with Children

In this section, I define worship with children and then review key empirical research on the topic. Most of the existing research stems from practical theology or its related fields of liturgical studies, children's theology, children's spirituality, youth worship, and religious education.

Definitions

This research is about worship with children. I elaborate on each of these words.

I approach worship through the concept of liturgical ritual. Ritual and liturgy partly overlap in what they express, the former encompasses aspects of the latter, i.e., all liturgy is ritual, but not all ritual is liturgy (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener

2014, 47). Ritual is the broader concept. Across different definitions, it becomes clear that ritual consists of actions, is patterned, and communicates something (Eller 2007, 29-30, 111). Therefore, liturgical ritual is a specification of ritual. Liturgy often contains ritual acts like praying, preaching, singing, candle lighting, and sometimes rites like baptism and the Lord's Supper. As a theological concept, liturgy draws attention to the opportunity for God and humans to meet each other. Liturgy is a liminal space (a threshold or "in-between" space) and may be the result of our response to God's call to worship (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 47, 356-63). Our approach to liturgy focuses on liturgy as it is performed (see Chapter 6), on the formational qualities of such performance (Barnard and Wepener 2012, 7; Tufano 2010, 2; see Chapter 2 and 3), and on how material and imagined space are intertwined (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 296-7; Meyer 2009, 6; see Chapter 5).

In this research, "child" refers to a person in the first phase of their life. Across cultures and historical periods, the boundary between childhood and the next stage in life differs (see Lancy 2015). In the Netherlands, legally, children come of age and are treated as adults when they become eighteen. The age of twelve is also significant. From their twelfth birthday on, children get access to many rights and duties (see Leeftijdsladder, Defence for Children). When around twelve years old, children leave primary school and start to attend secondary school. In worship practices with children, in general, the age of twelve is a boundary line. The term "child" is also relational: A child is someone's child. Here, theological meanings come in: children are God's children. Children are also children of the congregation. This is especially true for baptised children. As in many Dutch Protestant contexts, infant baptism is a central liturgical ritual with children in the PCN. Thus, a congregation member that is not a parent may nevertheless speak about "our children."

Initially, the research topic was worship *for* children. I changed this to worship *with* children for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to emphasize that children have agency. This perspective highlights how children interpret, appropriate and transform their social contexts, including worship (see Chapter 4). Secondly, I wanted to include any worship practice where children were present, like regular Sunday services. The included practices fall into five categories: regular church services, special services (like family services and church-and-school services), children's church, crèche, and Sunday school (see Chapter 2). To further explain why and how I researched these practices, I now discuss the existing research on the topic of worship with children.

Existing Research

In this section, I discuss research on worship with children, published in the last twenty years. The presence of practitioner knowledge characterizes the field of worship with children. Whether academics or practitioners, authors almost always draw on personal experience of worship practices with children, as religious educators, pastors, chaplains, parents, etc. Primary examples of this approach are found in a range of professional handbooks on worship with children (for example, Francis and Astely 2002; May et al. 2005; Idema, Roukema, and Berger 2006; Beckwith 2010; Csinos and Beckwith 2013; Pritchard Houston 2013).

Halfway between handbooks and academic writings, scholars and reflective practitioners have written many articles based on their own experiences with worship (De Klerk 2002; Sledge 2005; Ingersoll 2014; Brelsford 2016; Sampson and Nettleton 2016), many of which appeared in *Liturgy* (n.d.), a journal "for studying, preparing, and celebrating Christian worship" that "offers practical help and reflections" (Kriewald 2000; Schlegel 2001; McMahon 2003; Mercer 2003; Magrini 2003a, 2003b; Yust 2003a; Johnson 2003; Schut 2007; Branigan 2007; Turner 2010; Everett 2011; Langdoc 2013; Rodkey 2013; Edie 2014; at least 12 more articles on children and worship were published before 2000). These articles present worship suggestions. They often include arguments for intergenerational worship, which is generally understood as children's participation in the congregation's collective worship. I highlight three examples. Based on their experiences in a small Baptist congregation in Australia, Alison Sampson and Nathan Nettleton (2016) offer many ideas for worshiping with children that underline the importance of sensory experiences, like baking the Eucharistic bread with bitter herbs during Lent and with milk and honey for the Easter service. Bryan Langdoc (2013), based on an introverted musical experience with his children, argues for "turning down the volume on children's spiritual formation" instead of offering children entertainment and fast-paced children's worship programs. Fred Edie (2014, 35), mirroring the arguments of other authors, draws on various studies and theologians to argue that worship is formative and urges a reintegration of "liturgy and education for faith formation of children and youth with adults in the assembly's worship."

The writings of academics are often partly based on practitioner knowledge as well. They are regularly published in popularized academic books aimed at an informed audience of volunteers, church professionals, and theology students (Miller-McLemore 2003; Yust 2004; Mercer 2005; Grobbelaar and Breed 2016; May and Lawson 2019). Particularly in religious education, scholars approach liturgical rituals with children through learning and curriculum design (Burton

et al. 2006 reviews some of this research; see also Kuindersma 2013; de Kock 2014; Roebben 2014; de Kock 2015). Some studies exist based on quantitative data (for example, Petersen 2003; Freathy 2006). A handful of works are based on qualitative research (May, Stemp, and Burns 2011; Howell and Pierson 2010) and increasingly include observations of and interviews with children (Mercer, Mattews, and Walz 2019; Magrini 2006; Kilpeläinen and Ruokonen 2018; Hood 2019; Morris 2020; Csinos 2020). In the Netherlands, academic studies exist on communion with children (Sinia 2018; Zegwaard 2006; Hermans 1986) and communication patterns in children's churches (van der Veen 2009).

In fields related to practical theology, two notable examples of qualitative research with children are Cheryl Magrini's (2006) research of children's interpretations of meal stories in three United Methodist congregations in the United States and David Csinos' (2020) recent book *Little Theologians* based on research with children in four United Church of Canada congregations. Magrini closely reflects on her methodology and its theological implications. She notes the importance of attending to and accounting for the different ethnographic voices because "the theological conclusions, implications for ministry in the church and religious education in the academy, are influenced by the formation of the ethnographic text" (Magrini 2006, 80). Csinos bases his book on both interviews with children and participation in the congregations. This approach alerts him to how children's theologizing is not only an individual act but a collective process that reflects the theologies and (cultural) practices in their congregations. One of the great merits of his book is that Csinos extensively quotes the children he researched and thus includes both data and analysis in his work. Both works are based on ethnographic fieldwork in the context of worship, but Magrini and Csinos are more concerned with children's theology than with describing practices of worship with children.

Extensive qualitative research on worship with children mostly comes from outside practical theology or its related fields. The book *African-American Children at Church* (Haight 2001) combines observational approaches from anthropology and developmental psychology. A sociological dissertation and subsequent book assess how children perceive children's church as separate from regular worship (Zonio 2014, 2017). Finally, below, I return to a dissertation on children's interpretations of first communion (Ridgely 2005).

Here, I give a further impression of the field and theoretically ground this research. I discuss three prominent scholars who have written about worship with children: Karen-Marie Yust, Joyce Ann Mercer (along with whom I briefly discuss Bonnie Miller-McLemore), and Susan Ridgely.

Theoretical Orientations

Yust and Mercer are both theologians. Though they share an interest in children's spirituality, each adds a different emphasis. Ridgely approaches children in worship from a religious studies perspective.

Yust is a systematic and practical theologian, whose interest in children's spirituality sometimes intersects with the context of worship. She solidly grounds her argumentation in various theological and psychological theories (c.f. Yust 2003b, 2019). I particularly appreciate how Yust takes children and their faith seriously in ways that emphasize the role of the community and acknowledge God's involvement (see also Mercer 2009). Yust (2003a) observes that congregational worship services rarely include very young children. Using examples from observations made during the *Faith Formation in Children's Ministries* project, she argues that young children's participation in worship services is formative for them.

Mercer is a feminist practical theologian. Her book *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* is a reaction against the influence of consumerism on worship with children (Mercer 2005, 31-32). Mercer shares many of her arguments about the idealization of children and against consumerism with Bonnie Miller-McLemore, who also self-identifies as a feminist practical theologian, in her book *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (2003). Miller-McLemore (2003, 19-20) notes that the postmodern image of the "knowing child" is more complex than earlier idealized images of children. She rethinks childhood through theological and feminist concepts of children as sinful, gifts, labors of love, and agents. Similarly, Mercer (2005, 4) eloquently distances herself from "scholars who see their task in terms of the recovery of a supposedly more natural and authentic childhood," and I agree with her that "accounts of children as theological or moral innocents lack credibility" (11).

Whereas Miller-McLemore is mostly concerned with the relation between parents (mostly mothers) and children, Mercer focuses on children in the context of the congregation. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus embraces children who are poor and dirty. Taking these stories as a point of departure, Mercer argues that worship offers things to children and that children are gifts, whose needs should impact worship (Mercer 2005, 227-8, 230, 235). Like Yust and the authors who published in *Liturgy*, Mercer prefers intergenerational worship. However, I find it helpful that Mercer (2005, 225) nuances that while the shape of the practice matters, God can also work through segregated worship. Based on the *Children in Congregations* project, which included extensive ethnographic

research on children in worship, Mercer (2005, 236) argues that "adults often fail to recognize children's ways of participation in worship as such."

Religious studies scholar Susan Ridgely (2005, 2) researched children's first communion experiences in two Catholic parishes. In her book *When I Was a Child: Children's Interpretations of First Communion*, Ridgely wonderfully intertwines descriptions and analysis. She shows how much effort the children put into mastering a successful performance of the ritual (Ridgely 2005, 173, 180). Moreover, she pays close attention to children's meaning-making but never loses sight of the context—parish, family, ethnicity—in which this happens. Ridgely (2005, 181) suspects that children are "oriented much more toward the sensory aspects of religion than many scholars of religion realize" (see also Chapter 5 and Conclusion). Her research makes Ridgely a strong proponent of including children's perspectives in research (c.f. [Ridgely 2011]). She argues that children have concerns of their own and "have never simply [...] played the role that adults have created for them" (Ridgely 2012, 245).

Research Gap

Most empirical research leans on practitioner knowledge or a limited number of researched practices. Practices described in theological works are almost always either examples of good practices or idealistic representations instead of actual practices. For example, Mercer bases her practical theology on the *Children in Congregations* project. A chapter based on this project (Mercer, Mattews, and Walz 2019) includes descriptions of both methodology and practices. However, in her book, rather than describe and analyze the observed practices in depth, Mercer (2005, 243) values aspects of various good practices by bringing them together in one "eschatological dream," that children are fully welcomed into worship. Some authors pose questions about worship practices with children but only interview adults (NN 2015) or exclude practice-based research altogether. For example, Hancock (2020) explores challenges and strategies for children's engagement in worship, based entirely on a literature review.

Few scholars clarify their methodology. Ideas and suggestions are probably grounded in practice. Often, however, data and its analysis are missing in the written work. Therefore, much theorizing about worship with children reads like either a sermon or idealization. The existing practical theological research leaves a gap in describing and analyzing what happens in worship practices with children, not only "behind the scenes" but in the academic work itself.

The normative view that in worship, all generations should contribute and worship together characterizes the field. I wonder what the inclusion of different

types of practices will add to this debate. Also, because professionals' normativity is a dominant voice in reflections on worship with children, I want to include the perspective of Dutch youth work professionals.

The more extensive qualitative studies with children primarily study children's perspectives on liturgical rituals. Rather than compensate a focus on adults with a focus solely on children, Yust advocates and Csinos and Ridgely illustrate the need to research children as agents in context (see García Palacios and Castorina 2014). Additionally, various scholars note the importance of senses for children's participation in worship, which shows the potential usefulness of approaching the topic from a material religion perspective. Finally, the existing Dutch studies leave many practices unstudied and theoretical perspectives unexplored.

In sum, there is a need for qualitative data on a range of worship practices with children: including long-existing practices and fresh expressions, liturgical rituals designed for children's participation and those that are not, and congregations with different theologies and liturgical traditions. The following research design aims to respond to the gap in the existing research.

Researching Worship with Children

In this section, I describe the research methods, the research population and locations, the research procedure, my position in relation to the research, and the chapter outline.

Methods

To answer the research questions, I used the methods of participant observation and interviewing.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a helpful method to use in practical theology because, as Miller-McLemore (2012b, 1) puts it, "the living human document [is] a valid 'text' for theological study." For researching worship, participant observation is particularly fitting (Barnard 2000), as "the most direct way of studying ritual is to attend and absorb the event with our own human senses" (Comeaux 2016, 51-52).

To participate as an observer means immersing yourself in the field while keeping some analytical distance. It is "the attempt to understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing" (Ortner 2006, 42). Participant observation is an intersubjective process: The ethnographic data result from encounters between the researched and the

researcher. Therefore, the researcher's identity leaves a mark on the data (Robben and Sluka 2012, 90) and deserves attention (see Positionality). In the field, I participated and engaged in casual conversations. I wrote down any thoughts, impressions, and questions I had. I also intentionally made notes about what I saw, felt, heard, and smelled.

I conducted participant observations of worship and youth work events over a period of three years (2016-18), though most of the participant observations took place in the first half of 2017. The exploratory nature of this research meant that I visited most research locations one to three times. I do not consider this research an ethnography, which in my understanding, involves long-term and in-depth participant observation in a community. However, the extended period of participant observation in the broad field of Dutch Protestant worship with children certainly makes this research ethnographic.

In support of the actual participant observations, I researched websites, made photos, collected documents, and made audio recordings. To prepare for a field visit, I used website information to formulate specific questions in advance. I often photographed the setting where the liturgical ritual would take place. I collected documents related to the children's participation in worship, such as orders of service, newsletters, examples of children's church methods, and sermon booklets. Audio recording during events allowed me to focus on the location, sensations, and the (inter)actions of children and adults. I also recorded all the interviews and most conversations.

Interviews

As part of participant observations, listening and asking questions go on all the time. I refer to such "unstructured interviews" (O'Reilly 2012, 118) as conversations.

I used semi-structured interviews (O'Reilly 2012, 120) to openly explore topics with the research participants while also asking specific questions. I first interviewed experts and professionals about the broader field of worship with children in the Netherlands. Interview topics included definitions and examples of liturgical rituals with children and trends in the field (see Chapter 2).

During the participant observations, I held individual and group interviews. Interview topics were the character of the congregation, the position of children, and the history, current organization, and experience of a particular liturgical ritual with children. We also discussed related topics that came up.

In interviews with children, I asked less about contextual information and more about their experience of the worship and congregation. Just as in

interviews with adults, I clarified the subject I wanted to talk about (Delfos 2010, 41, 96) but additionally explained my role as interviewer, explicitly stated that I wanted to learn their opinion, and said that there were no right or wrong answers (Delfos 2010, 40). This meta-communication proved to be very helpful. The following sections describe the research procedure, reliability, validity, ethics, and analysis.

Procedure

Through the interviews in the first research stage, I wanted to access the practice-based knowledge of two types of organizations in the field of Dutch worship with children: youth work organizations and method developers or publishers (see the list below). I arranged interviews and participant observations beforehand through e-mail.

To select the research locations, I listed organizations, practices, methods, and formats that were related to worship with children. This list was based on a document about various children's church methods and worship practices composed by a research assistant, the initial interviews, online searches, and a question in a Facebook group for youth workers. As a team, we selected practices with different theological backgrounds, liturgical traditions, and targeted age group. Based on the list of selected practices, I contacted research locations.

For worship practices that were not limited to one locality, I googled the names of methods and formats to search for possible research locations. Often, congregations' websites listed the e-mail address of the minister, youth worker, youth elder, or secretary. In two cases, I used the website's contact form. Erik Idema, the developer of the Easter Vigil with children, helped me find a research location for that practice because these were difficult to find online. With their consent, Erik gave me e-mail addresses of congregations that had organized these services in the past. Congregation 3 was initially contacted for participant observation of this practice but did not organize it in 2017. Therefore, I instead included their baptism service, for which I still had to find a research location. The added benefit was that I could also ask them about their previous experience with the children's Easter Vigil service. I used practices that were more wide-spread to achieve differentiation in geographical location, size, theology, litugical tradition, and number of children. In total, I researched twenty-one distinct liturgical rituals with children in fifteen congregations. The practices and locations are described below.

Whenever possible, I arrived early at the research location to talk to people in advance, photograph the ritual space, and arrange interviews. With the

research participants, I made some last-minute decisions, for example, about which children's church group I should join. Before going to each research location, I arranged focus group interviews, asking the contact person to approach people who held positions relevant to worship with children, like youth deacons, ministers, youth workers, and volunteers. I arranged interviews with children during the visit itself. In general, to observe a liturgical ritual with children, I was present at a research location for at least three hours. At three congregations, the coordinator's family invited me to lunch, adding another two to four hours of conversation, interviews, and participant observation of the continuation of their Sunday liturgical rituals at home. For three practices, I attended preparation meetings. For Your!Church, I included two evaluation meetings. For the church-and-school service, I attended a church-and-school network day. Finally, for the children's choir, I participated in the choir practice and general repetition.

I wrote down my first reflections on my way home or later the same day. Field notes were written in Dutch and translated into English upon digitalization, but transcriptions were in Dutch. These data were then analyzed, as I describe below.

Analysis

In this iterative-inductive research (O'Reilly 2012, 180), I set out with specific questions in mind, but the field influenced subsequent questions. Parts of the analysis took place while other data was still being gathered. "Flashes of insight" (O'Reilly 2012, 181) led to new questions or refocused observations. During the research, I focused on actors: youth work professionals, adults, children, the space, and God. The coding processes differed because the data and my objectives for the chapters differed as well. I started with descriptive coding. In later rounds of coding, I rearranged earlier codes into new categories (see Saldaña 2009). The analysis processes are detailed in the corresponding chapters.

Here, I highlight some differences. For Chapter 2, I coded the methods, practices, and liturgical elements. The theme of being intergenerational was connected to so many different practices that I chose to focus on this topic. Therefore, I excluded some of the other themes. However, based on the participant observations, themes like youth work trends, faith, and children in community re-emerged in Chapters 3, 5, and 6. For Chapter 4, my normative starting point was that children have agency, which steered the data analysis. Through coding, I tried to find where and how that agency became tangible. In the analysis for Chapter 5, the descriptive codes about embodiment, location, and architecture only led to a specific focus on sound during the writing process.

In terms of data coverage and representation, this research pursues both overview and in-depth descriptions of worship practices with children. Therefore, Chapter 2 used interviews with youth work professionals to get a broad overview of the field. The interviewees gave information about practices, which helped select research locations (see Procedure). The interviews resulted in an overview of contemporary worship practices with children in the Dutch Protestant context. Moreover, the analysis of these interviews brought professionals' normativity into view. Subsequently, in Chapters 3 and 4, examples are included from all the researched practices. Chapter 4 includes vignettes (focused descriptions of data sections) of fewer practices. Chapters 5 and 6 focus entirely on two and four practices, respectively. Including fewer practices in later chapters allowed me to show more of the dynamics within the practices. Taken together, Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 include examples of all the researched practices. Chapter 6 integrates the two datasets (interviews with youth work professionals and participant observations).

Producing data for scientific analysis raises questions about the reliability and validity of the research and about research ethics, which I discuss below.

Reliability and validity

Validity means that as a researcher, I found out what I wanted to know. Thus, it is about whether I used fitting methods for the questions I had. Validity is also about whether the answers resonate with the actual practices and whether the data I present "support the argument" (O'Reilly 2012, 226). Reliability in social science research has to do with making sure that I reflect on my influence on the research outcomes and that others (notably my supervisors and colleagues) can check the integrity of the research process and the quality of the findings (O'Reilly 2012, 227-8).

For the validity of Chapter 2, I felt it was important that the interviewees read a draft of the chapter because they had agreed to the inclusion of their real names. In response to reading the draft, the interviewees assented to the inclusion of the selected quotations. Also, one interviewee suggested adding the perspective of another children's church method, which I did by including an additional interviewee.

For the research as a whole, there are different ways in which I tried to make this research both valid and reliable: Firstly, I kept a research diary to reflect on the findings, explore thoughts, consider choices, ventilate frustrations, and chronicle breakthroughs. In essence, this was a continuing practice in reflexivity. When relevant, I included these reflections in the dissertation. Secondly, I audio-

recorded conversations and interviews to make sure that what people said would not be transformed by my memory (regularly, I remembered a quotation differently from how people had actually said it). Thirdly, I relied on multiple data sources. I accessed professional discourse through interviews and by attending youth work events. I did participant observations at different locations. In most cases, I visited those at different points in time, made photographs, and collected additional information through websites and church bulletins (see Participant Observation). Fourthly, I regularly discussed methodological choices, coding, and initial analysis with my supervisors and fellow Ph.D. students. Chapters 2-6 were submitted as peer-reviewed research articles, which added a further layer of feedback and sharpened my argumentation. Fifthly, I checked whether my observations and the topics I raised about worship with children resonated with youth workers, youth work professionals (notably Nelleke Plomp), and other people involved in worship practices with children through ongoing conversations with them.

Ethics

In this research, I worked in line with the Dutch privacy laws (AVG). I observed the following procedures regarding research ethics. Before interviewing, I asked the interviewees' permission to record the interview, explained the research and its purposes, and allowed them to read and decide whether they wanted to sign the informed consent form. When I contacted a congregation, I explained my research, asked for permission to include them, and sent them the informed consent form. The church council then decided whether to grant permission. In one case (congregation 14), the youth worker was the gatekeeper and signed the form after consulting the participants. All the approached congregations were willing to participate in the study.

During fieldwork, after asking for consent, I made audio recordings using my mobile phone. When I digitalized the field notes and transcribed the audio, I always directly anonymized the names of people and locations. Field notes were kept in a personal cabinet at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam. All the produced digital data files were stored exclusively on my personal folder at the server of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The anonymization key was in a separate file from the field reports and was deleted at the end of the research project. The anonymized data will be kept through a safe storing service provided by the UBVU (darkroom storage) for ten years. As noted in the informed consent form, the anonymized dataset is accessible for related follow-up research by PThU-researchers.

With their permission, I included the names of the interviewed youth work professionals in Chapter 2. I repeat these in the following section. Then, I describe the practices and research locations.

Interviewees

The following list includes the interviewees' names, their function, and the organization they worked for at the time of the interview.

1. Nelleke Plomp, specialist worship with children at JOP, the PCN youth organization
2. Leantine Dekker, youth work team leader and method editor at HGJB, Reformed Youth Association
3. Erik Renkema, developer of *KIEM* at a local congregation
4. Sandra Kooij, intern at MissieNederland
5. Corjan Matsinger and Marian Timmermans, independent youth workers at Young&Holy
6. Vincenza la Porta, director of JOP
7. Erik Idema, editor at Kwintessens
8. Harmen van Wijnen, former director of JOP and HGJB
9. Dorina Nauta, relations manager at MissieNederland
10. Dullyna van den Herik-van der Weit, editor at Narratio

Practices

The descriptions of the twenty-one researched practices in this section are brief because of their number. When the practices are described more in detail elsewhere, I refer to the corresponding chapters. I ordered the practices according to their type: services, special services like family and church-and-school services, crèche and children's church, and Sunday school. Chapter 2 lists most of the methods used in liturgical rituals with children in Dutch Protestant contexts.

Services

Particularly in many strictly Reformed congregations, children participate in the regular services. Therefore, I included a morning service and an evening service in two different congregations. In both, the children attended church with their families and sang along, used sermon booklets with puzzles or coloring pages, leafed through hymnals, and in some cases played with toys. In the morning service, some parents waited for the start of the sermon to bring their young children to crèche. While preaching, the minister hardly addressed the children and used difficult words. In contrast, in the evening service, the minister used easy language and gave examples that children could relate to (see Chapter 5).

The PCN has two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. I intentionally included one location for each but experienced each sacrament two extra times in other congregations. Baptism in the PCN is often infant baptism. In the researched congregation there were many different views on infant baptism. For example, two parents thought that baptism was needed because children are sinful, another couple emphasized that children belong to the community and God's promise to care for the child, and an elder noted that baptism is following Jesus Christ downward through the water and up into new life. The former minister remarked: "I'm inclined to say that it's just an initiation rite." There is variety in whether children participate in the Lord's Supper. In more strictly Reformed congregations, children are often present during the sacrament. In many other congregations, children take part. In the researched congregation, the whole community, including crèche children, was present and invited to participate in the Lord's Supper.

In various congregations, children sing in choirs during the service. I researched such a children's choir (see Chapter 5). As part of the various services, I witnessed nine children's moments, one of which was during the children's choir service; I discuss it in a footnote in Chapter 5.

Special Services

I included various special services: two *Kliederkerk* services, an Easter Vigil with children, a Seder meal on Maundy Thursday (on the use of the word "Seder" for this Christian practice, see below), Your!Church, a church-and-school service, and Church on Lap. *Kliederkerk* is the Dutch variant of Messy Church. More than its English equivalent, it centers on Bible stories, through messiness (i.e., crafts and games), a message, and a meal. In one congregation, there was a monthly *Kliederkerk* that had a core of regular attendants. A special team thought about and cooked the meals, taking care to match them to the story (see Chapter 3). In the other congregation, the children's church leaders felt that children learned too little about the Christian meaning of Good Friday at school. Therefore, they looked for an activity with children. They heard about *Kliederkerk* and used its format in combination with material published in *Kind op Zondag* (Child on Sunday), the most-used children's church method in the PCN and follows the lectionary. This second Messy Church was more *for* the children but encouraged interaction between people of different generations.

The Easter Vigil with children used the same material as the Messy Church on Good Friday. However, rather than have adults lead the worship, in this service the children performed most of the roles in the liturgy. Children welcomed

people, prayed, enacted the stories, lighted candles, and spoke the blessing. It is described more in-depth in Chapter 6.

The Seder meal with children functioned as a Lord's Supper catechesis. Some would note that this is a "Seder" between air quotes, reserving the word to refer to the Jewish ritual. However, I chose to follow participant terminology "Seder meal," but here put it in quotes to indicate that I am aware of the discussion that the use of this terminology in a Christian context may provoke. During the meal, the children asked questions, listened to the story, tasted the food, and competed to eat horseradish and parsley. Afterward, they took part in the Lord's Supper. See Chapter 2 (Directing Roles) and Chapter 4 (Children's Negotiation and Appropriation).

Jouw!Kerk (Your!Church) was a service with older primary school children. Triggered by a child's critical question, a local congregation developed it as a follow-up to the toddler and pre-schooler service. It is discussed in Chapter 4.

Church-and-school services are collaborations between churches and schools, sometimes held in the school building but more often in church buildings. In the observed church-and-school service, the school children gave input in the liturgy. For example, the children determined where the collection money go, illustrated the sermon, and sang in the service. In turn, the ministers made an effort to connect the liturgy to children's daily life experiences and explain the different liturgical actions. I analyze the sermon and some of the children's accompanying illustrations in Chapter 4. This practice was added later as a result of the analysis in Chapter 2.

Kerk op Schoot (Church on Lap) is a service for young children and their parents. It uses songs made to the melodies of well-known children's songs and alternates key liturgical actions with experiential elements. A minister and child psychologist in a local congregation developed it. Youth work professionals helped disseminate it to other congregations. The observed Church on Lap took place in the context of crèche rather than the main church hall. It had simplified the format to lighting a candle, singing Christian children's songs, reading from a children's Bible, praying, and blowing out the candle (see Chapter 6).

Crèche and Children's Church

I researched two more liturgical rituals that focused on younger children. I discuss these with the children's churches because, similarly, they are parallel to regular services. *Opstap* (Step) is a method that is used in strictly Reformed congregations. Its distinguishing feature is that it uses a hand puppet to reinforce the Bible story told to the children later on (see Chapter 6).

Kom in de Kring (Join the Circle) is a method that has a strong rituality. It starts with a welcome song and uses children's picture books to reflect on existential themes like sharing and loss. Join the Circle is an anomaly in the data, as it is based entirely on an interview and does not include participant observation. I arranged the interview as one of the conversations I had with youth work professionals (see Reliability and Validity) but it ended up being almost entirely about the method and practice of *Kom in de Kring*. Therefore, I asked for consent to add it to the dataset. However, I decided not to do participant observation because the interviewee's congregation had replaced crèche and children's church with a monthly all-age service. That service did use some of the method's principles, but I estimated that including this service would not add significantly to the already selected practices. Thus, in fact, I did participant-observation of twenty practices in fourteen locations. However, in the following chapters, I treat it as a research location for the sake of brevity and clarity.

I researched six different children's churches: a Bible class using *Vertel het Maar* (Just Tell It) and children's churches using Westhill, *Kind op Zondag* (Child on Sunday), *Kerk in Elke Maat* (KIEM, Church in Every Size), Godly Play, and a variety of methods. *Vertel het Maar* was used in Bible class and provided different stories for children of different ages. As with the other participant observations, I focused more on the practice of Bible class than on the used method. Bible class involved a gradual increase of children's attendance in the service (see Chapter 3 [Design] and Chapter 5).

Westhill originated as a Sunday school method. It was based on the ideas of Fröbel and Montessori. *Bonnefooi* (Random or Spontaneous) is a current children's church method that uses Westhill principles. It follows the ecumenical lectionary by distilling a central theme into a contemporary children's story. It aims to bring Bible stories closer to children's daily life experiences. The congregation that I researched had long used Westhill. During children's church, the volunteer and the children related the story of the stiff-necked pharaoh to current topics like climate change and political strife and wrote a prayer together.

During the children's church that used *Kind op Zondag,* the volunteers read the story about Pentecost and then put marbles on the floor, which were supposed to roll in all directions but didn't. The children, therefore, surmised that the marbles illustrate that the disciples had to stay together. A child suggested that the one marble that rolled away and back toward the rest could be Jesus, who later sent the Holy Spirit. During the craft, children drew Bible stories they knew. However, one child chose to draw a historical figure (see Chapter 4).

Kerk in Elke Maat (KIEM, Church in Every Size, the acronym means "Sprout") is a children's church format developed in a local congregation based on the idea that there are different learning styles and faith expressions. It involves adult congregation members who share their hobbies or professions in children's church (see Chapter 2). The KIEM that I witnessed was the first in a series on freedom leading up to Pentecost and was about birds. A teacher from a nature club hosted it. She organized games surrounding stuffed birds and nests with eggs that the children could see and touch. Later on, more theological meanings would be added. KIEM was thus always different in format and content. However, a clear structure surrounded this flexibility: KIEM always started with the children seated on cushions around a gong that they sounded and then listened to until it died out, after which they shared prayer intentions. It ended with everyone standing in a group, holding hands, and singing a song of blessing.

Jerome Berryman developed Godly Play. It has a clear structure, starting with welcoming the children. Then, the storyteller shows a physical object related to the story and tells the story with her focus turned towards the physical objects and gestures. A time of wondering about the story follows. Then, the children determine their (often creative) response. In the observed practice, the chidren then shared about their response in the group. This is an addition to the Godly Play format, introduced by practitioners to mimic other group setting expectations. Then, the participants share a feast, which in the observed Godly Play session included a flower-shaped cookie (related to the Parable of the sower) and lemonade. The Godly Play teacher affirmed the children's agency, therefore, I discuss a part of the interaction in Chapter 4.

Many congregations use various methods. A liberal congregation was a case in point. They had binders with V-link, that as far as I know is no longer published. Instead, they used a children's Bible that a congregation member had written and various ways to process the story. In the observed children's church, the adults and children discussed the story of Moses and the burning bush through Bibliodrama (see Chapter 6).

Sunday School

Finally, I researched one Sunday school that took place after a morning service. The method was developed by the *Zondagscholenbond* (Sunday Schools Association). It focuses on Bible stories, emphasizing the historical accuracy of the Bible. It distills the stories into lessons for the children's lives today. I describe this practice in Chapter 3.

Locations

Broadly speaking, the research location includes all the places and people concerned with how worship practices with children are performed (see Context). However, I selected specific practices and locations to visit. To research the twenty-one practices described above, I did participant observations in fifteen congregations. These congregations are described in the Appendix.

Additionally, I visited three events organized by youth work organizations: the yearly members' meeting of the HGJB (Reformed Youth Association), a training event organized by JOP (Young Protestant, youth organization of the PCN), and a celebration of JOP's 10th anniversary. These events and the conversations I had there with youth workers and other professionals helped me get to know the field.

Positionality

Every research is influenced by the person of the researcher (Robben and Sluka 2012, 85), especially in the social sciences and humanities. In practical theology, "what we see and describe is shaped by specific confessional sensitivities and religious context" (Miller-McLemore 2012a, 24). My positionality in relation to worship with children is influenced by my experiences growing up in Mozambique and Angola and my theological context in the Netherlands.

My parents worked for a Christian aid organization, supported by a congregation of the Reformed Congregations (*Gereformeerde Gemeenten*). In rural Mozambique, where I lived from age one to six, children's activities during the service mainly consisted of sitting in the pews or climbing in the trees outside when the service went long. In Angola, later on, some congregations had Sunday schools. From others, I remember the whole-body worship services. These early worship experiences may explain why the work of academics in the field of material religion (e.g., Birgit Meyer [2009, 2006]) resonate with me. Because of the experience abroad, my families' values and practices, although (neo-)Calvinistic, incorporated evangelical and charismatic elements. Back in the Netherlands, my family and I were subsequently members of the Reformed Congregations and the Netherlands Reformed Churches (*Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*). With my husband, I joined the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN). Through my work at the Protestant Theological University, I became aware of the breadth of the PCN. Reflecting on my position as researcher in this study, on the one hand, I am an outsider who is unfamiliar with Dutch Protestant worship with children and new to the PCN but, on the other hand, as a Dutch Protestant and member of the PCN, I am also an insider.

Academically, I am an anthropologist by training. Through this research, I developed myself as a practical theologian. Therefore, I actively contribute to the practical-theological tradition to borrow from other disciplines, especially from the social sciences (Miller-McLemore 2012a, 21). I am interested in social dynamics. I engage with theories from practical theology and its related fields (see Conceptualizing Worship with Children). I combine anthropological and theological perspectives when I engage with topics like intergenerational worship (Chapter 2), spirituality (Chapter 3), agency (Chapter 4), liturgical-ritual space (Chapter 5), and performance (Chapter 6).

Belief and academic work interact: I feel a responsibility to do good academic research, inspired and supported by my faith. Such a committed position is similar to how researchers engage with the field in the compassionate turn and engaged fieldwork in anthropology (Robben and Sluka 2012, 23-27). I want to acknowledge the messiness of being church with children and affirm the faith and creativity of both children and adults as they seek to worship God together. I hope this research will encourage people to reflect on how and why they worship with children, whatever their type of practice, and to involve children as much as possible.

Outline

The five middle chapters of this dissertation present the research findings. Each chapter builds on the previous ones but can be read separately because I wrote them as peer-reviewed articles.

Chapter 2: Deconstructing Ideals of Worship with Children is a further introduction to the research field, as it describes historical and contemporary practices of Dutch Protestant worship with children. It highlights a tension between worship aimed at children and worship with the whole congregation. The chapter explores underlying theological and pedagogical concerns.

Chapter 3: Setting the Stage for Children's Participation shows how adults largely determine the performance of liturgical rituals with children. The way adults relate to the worship's design, the kind of roles they perform, and the intentions with which they do so influence how children participate. However, the chapter highlights that the children's participation sparks adults' spirituality.

Chapter 4: Children's Agency in Worship continues the study of actors with a focus on children. It illustrates how children contribute to worship and negotiate the extent and content of their participation. Children's influence on worship increases when they get to decide how they want to participate in worship and decision-making.

Chapter 5: Sounds of Children in Worship engages the field of material religion to investigate sounds that children make in the environments where worship takes place. Two practices located in a similar building but with different liturgical traditions show that the sounds children make are managed and interpreted differently to help create a particular liturgical-ritual space.

Chapter 6: Performing God with Children explores how worship with children "performs" God, how God is staged through performative acting. In the four analyzed performances, affective knowledge of God is emphasized and God is performed as a God who accepts children as children, who resurrects, and who helps but whose existence can be discussed.

Chapter 7: Conclusion answers the research question and sub-questions. It reviews the main findings, connects these to the existing literature, and reflects on practical implications. The concluding chapter also notes the limitations of the research and gives suggestions for future research.

Summary

The variety of worship practices with children in Protestant contexts in the Netherlands can be traced back to the introduction of differentiated worship for children and the appropriation of practices and methods (curricula) from abroad. Since then, tension exists between worship with the entire congregation (intergenerational worship) and worship aimed at children (target-group worship). However, the portrayal of practices as intergenerational or target-group hides the normativity inherent in those concepts. The chapter, therefore, deconstructs ideals of worship with children to open up other ways of understanding the variety of worship practices with children.

Published as

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. 2019. "Deconstructing Ideals of Worship with Children." *Studia Liturgica* 49 (1): 26-43, Thousand Oaks: Sage. https://doi.org/10.1177/0039320718808945.

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Deconstructing Ideals of Worship with Children

Worship practices with children span a huge variety, ranging from full participation in regular services to separate children's church programs. Practical considerations are often crucial, such as the wish of parents to listen to the sermon undisturbed or the availability of volunteers and other resources. From a pedagogical perspective, people argue that they can adapt children's church activities to children's needs, while others insist that children's full sensory immersion in services provides irreplaceable learning opportunities. Furthermore, from a theological perspective, choices about worship with children are informed by the premise that every person experiences faith differently and the notion that the congregation is the body of Christ. These arguments reveal tension between intergenerational and target-group worship. However, this opposition is problematic; we, therefore, seek to go beyond it and investigate the complexity of normativity in worship with children. Thus, we contribute to international debates on children and worship in youth ministry research, religious education research, and liturgical studies.

Studying any social phenomenon requires choosing a context because, as Morin (2007, 19) points out, "contextualization ... is a principle of knowledge." The context of worship with children matters. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church the reference point for worship with children is an official church document called the Directory for masses with children (1974). The Anglican Communion and the Lutheran World Federation lack such documents. Nevertheless, the members of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation on Liturgical Formation (Anglican Communion 2003, 14-18) discussed the liturgical formation of children, teens, and young adults. Church members and professionals of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America can resort to its

website for an answer to the frequently asked question: how do we involve children in worship? (2013) and to the website of LivingLutheran (n.d.) for various articles on worship with children.

The context that we choose is Dutch Protestantism. Specifically, we study worship with children in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN), the second largest Christian denomination and the largest Protestant denomination in the country by membership (Katholiek Sociaal-Kerkelijk Instituut 2015, 2014). Formed in 2004, the PCN includes evangelical, liberal, (strictly) Reformed, and Lutheran congregations and congregations that mix these strands of theology (van Eijnatten and van Lieburg 2005, 313, 341-3). In the PCN, there are many resources available but no official guidelines on worship with children. Youth workers of various organizations and professionals at the church's national service center may set trends, but they mainly play a mediating role as they serve the congregations that employ their services. Therefore, there is a great variety in practices of worship with children. This variety reflects the theological diversity. Because of this theological breadth and diverse range of practices, we expect that our descriptions and analyses resonate in other contexts.

Previous research on worship with children in the Netherlands generally focused on a specific type of practice, like youth camps, children's church, or children's participation in the Lord's Supper (e.g., Vreugdenhil and Buitenhuis-Schoenmakers 2016; van der Veen 2009; Zegwaard 2006; Hermans 1986). Similar research conducted internationally frequently takes one type of practice or one event as the basis for findings and recommendations (e.g., Sampson and Nettleton 2016; Langdoc 2013; Sledge 2005; Mercer 2003; Kringle 2001; Kriewald 2000). In contrast, the authors of *Infants and Children in the Church: Five Views on Theology and Ministry* detail how theologies on sin, child death, baptism, the church, and instruction influence children's ministry in five Christian traditions and argue that "Christians need to give more attention and thought to the theological principles underlying this topic and to their implications for ministry practice" (Harwood and Lawson 2017, 17, 179-80). In line with this, we want to get a broad understanding of a variety of worship practices with children. Yet we start with practices as they are present in the field rather than with theological reflections.

We understand practices of worship with children as liturgical rituals. This means that we approach these practices from both a theological and an anthropological perspective. Rather than giving a fixed definition of liturgical ritual, Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014, 47) state that "liturgical ritual is a complex and layered phenomenon," and "the research on it results in

descriptions and analysis, in which theology, culture and anthropology cannot be 'logically' distinguished." Therefore, liturgical ritual allows us to analyze ecclesial practices with children that we do not consider worship but that do have liturgical and ritual qualities.

The central question in this chapter is, How can we describe and understand the variety in practices of worship with children? To answer this question, in the methodology, we first specify the sources and tools used. Second, we trace the history of worship with children in the Netherlands, which exposes the origins of the tension between intergenerational and target-group worship in Dutch Protestant contexts and shows that the variety of worship with children in the Dutch case is influenced by international developments. Third, we explore the tension between intergenerational and target-group worship in contemporary practices of worship with children in the PCN. We conclude that these labels are not merely descriptive but also normative. Fourth, we describe other normativity that influences practices of worship with children. Thereby, we deconstruct the opposition of intergenerational and target-group worship and open up other ways of understanding the variety in worship with children. Finally, in the conclusion, we argue that more ethnographic research is necessary to do justice to the complexity of worship practices with children.

Methodology

We base the argument in this chapter on empirical data and textual sources. For our empirical data collection, we conducted interviews with reflective practitioners and did participant observation in fifteen congregations. In this chapter, we primarily draw from the interviews, but the initial insights we gained from participant observation resonate in our argumentation.

We held nine semi-structured interviews with ten people with network functions in the field of worship with children: six youth work advisors, an editor and a developer of two different children's church methods, and two directors youth work organizations. The interviews took fifty to eighty minutes and were conducted between June 2016 and January 2017. We asked interviewees to describe worship practices with children in the Netherlands and to characterize the field of worship with children in the PCN. We analyzed the interviews with ATLAS.ti software. We used in vivo codes to preserve pointed descriptions (Saldaña 2009, 74-77) and descriptive codes to capture the topics, practices, types of service, and methods discussed (70). We then performed axial coding to create a code structure that both abstracted general themes from the

data and reflected its nuances (159-60). All the codes appear in the description of contemporary practices of worship with children.

To verify whether we included all of the relevant practices of worship with children, we posted a question in a private Facebook group for Dutch youth workers: which practices should be included in research on worship with children? The answers confirmed that we had reached data saturation.[1] We also sent the manuscript to the interviewees to obtain their ongoing consent and receive feedback. As a result, we made some minor changes and conducted an additional interview with the editor of a children's church method.

Our textual sources were archival data and academic literature. For the historical analysis we drew from books on Dutch church history and the digital archives of cities and provinces. In the discussion on normativity we refer to relevant literature from the fields of youth ministry, religious education, and liturgical studies.

Finally, we made the methodological choice to include two images that illustrate intergenerational and target-group worship. Although images are not better representations of complex social phenomena than texts, they offer a complementary way of understanding the variety in worship with children.

Mapping Historical Worship with Children

Major historical features of worship with children in the Netherlands include the prevalence of children's baptism and children's participation in church services, along with Sunday school, children's church, and services for children. We focus on the last three practices, which are all organized specifically for children. The emergence of these practices can be understood in light of changing attitudes toward children in society (see Lancy 2015, 5-6).

The Emergence of the Sunday School

Sunday school appeared in the Dutch landscape in the nineteenth century as part of the elite's efforts to counter social inequality and was initially aimed at educating poor, working-class children. Working-class children commonly received little education back then because they worked on farms or in factories to contribute to the family income. Only in 1874 did the Netherlands prohibit factory labor by children younger than twelve years old under the Children's Law, the country's first national social legislation (van Eijnatten and van Lieburg

[1] We do not include one initiative new to us which involves workshops on making and using a prayer nut, because this commercial activity is not embedded in a congregational setting and, moreover, is used on a very small scale. See www.gebedsnoot.nl.

2005, 290-1). As early as the 1830s, physician Abraham Capadose opened his house to educate working-class children. Many other Sunday schools followed suit, so in 1853 and 1867 two Sunday school unions were formed. One Sunday school method was Westhill, which was inspired by the ideas of Fröbel and Montessori and, like the Sunday school movement itself, originated in England.[2] Marie van Voorst van Beest brought Westhill to the Netherlands. Because of her enthusiasm, many Westhill Sunday schools were founded and the Timotheus Sunday schools took over its ideas (Cossee-de Wijs 2006, 327).

In England, the initial focus on education and moral guidance for illiterate children gradually shifted to "Sunday, rather than school, and Bible rather than other kinds of knowledge" (Cliff 1986, 78). A similar transformation took place in the Netherlands. As Sunday school increasingly attracted the children of regular church-goers, it was conveniently rescheduled to take place during the service or replaced by children's church.

The First Children's Churches

Sunday school methods thus form the historical grounding for some methods still used in children's church today.[3] Possibly the first children's church was organized in Amsterdam in 1959 by minister G. R. Visser. It consisted of a parallel sermon for children so that instead of "storing the children away," families could attend the service together (Andrea 2013). In the appendixes to the minutes of the 1967–8 General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Schippers (1968, 365-9) noted the growing number of children's churches and youth services but cautioned that organizing parallel liturgical activities for children and youth would not solve the more broadly felt longing for liturgical renewal. However, Schippers (1968, 369) did not reject children's church as long as "in the differentiation the unity with the existing congregation was promoted." Some strictly Reformed congregations resisted the emergence of the children's church due to this same concern for unity in the congregation.[4]

2 This research is financed by the OJKC (Research Center for Youth, Church and Culture), which owes its existence to a passionate Westhill teacher, Rachel Brandenburg. According to Brandenburg, Westhill "gives to children what is theirs." In other words, Westhill is tailored to their development in an atmosphere of devotion and reverence.

3 Some of the children's church methods currently used in the Netherlands are developed by Kwintessens (*Kind op Zondag*, Child on Sunday); Westhill and Narratio (*Bonnefooi*, Random or Spontaneous); Timotheüs, which is closely linked to Opwekking and Willow Creek (*Parel*, Pearl, and *Promiseland*); V-link (*Verhalenverteller*, Story-teller, and *Kom in de Kring*, Join the Circle); and Stichting Vertel het Maar (*Vertel het Maar*, Just Tell It). The Alliance of Reformed Sunday Schools (*Bond van Hervormde Zondagsscholen*) develops the method used by most Sunday schools.

4 Some congregations introduced a form of children's church but call it Sunday school to avoid the suspicion evoked by the term *kindernevendienst*.

The Precursor of Family Services

From the late eighteenth century, even before the founding of the first Sunday schools, services for children existed in Protestant contexts in the Netherlands. Similar to Sunday schools, these services were initially aimed at enlightening pauper children but soon attracted children from all social classes. Called *kinderkerken*, or children's churches,[5] they, unlike Sunday school, were meant to be church. They were official services that followed the order of normal services—although somewhat modified for the target-group[6] and were open to other participants.[7] According to early practitioner Cornelius Rogge, the reason for holding children's churches, ideally weekly or twice a month, was that children became bored during regular services which, consequently, did not help children become accustomed to going to church (Houtman 2013, 11-13, 17, 20, 51-53).

These historical arguments show that the relation between regular services and worship specifically aimed at children was tense from the start. In other words, tension emerged between intergenerational worship and target-group worship. Moreover, the Dutch case was not isolated from international developments and a century ago, there already existed different formats of worship with children.

Mapping Contemporary Worship with Children

In this chapter, we aim to describe and understand the variety in practices of worship with children. We do not concentrate on the methods (curricula) for children's worship because we have found that those are used selectively, adapted,[8] combined, discarded, and completely re-invented.[9] Also, the extensive use of Internet sources calls the adequacy of focusing on methods into question. Instead, we further explore the tension between intergenerational and target-group worship in the current practices of worship with children. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the difference between intergenerational and target-group worship.

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5 In the singular, *children's church* refers to a service for children run parallel to the main service held in another room. It usually includes prayer, songs, Bible stories, crafts, and games. Only in this historical analysis, *children's churches*—in the plural—refers to *kinderkerken*: Complete church services organized for children in the more formal setting of the church hall.

6 For example, in the sermons lessons were drawn from Bible stories about children.

7 Parents often accounted for a substantial number of the participants.

8 For example, some congregations adapt methods such as Godly Play, Bibliodrama, and catechesis materials (for example, *On Track,* published by the HGJB) to use in children's church.

9 Examples of newly invented children's worship include *Kerk in Elke Maat* (Church in Every Size) and *Jouw!Kerk* (Your!Church).

Current liturgical rituals with children from birth through age twelve in the Netherlands include children's participation in regular services, often (but not always) in combination with crèche, children's church,[10] Sunday school, and family services. We include practices with babies and toddlers: They may not be able to worship consciously but it is probable that their presence in worship forms their spirituality. Also, adults often find the presence of young children meaningful for their worship experience.

The tension between intergenerational and target-group worship persists, and the main question in the Netherlands regarding worship with children is whether children should worship separately or with the rest of the congregation. In practice, this debate pits children's church against children's participation in regular services. At one end of the continuum lies the argument that children belong in the church and are excluded from the congregation when sent away to children's church. The opposing viewpoint holds that children need a different language (in a broad sense) than adults, so they can only be appropriately addressed in a parallel service attuned to their needs. We, however, show that many nuanced positions lie between these views as congregations combine intergenerational and target-group worship.

Children's Participation in Services as Intergenerational Worship

Children's participation in church services happens at least occasionally in all PCN congregations where there are children. Babies and toddlers up to four years old almost always go to the crèche, where they are engaged in play and sporadically in prayer, Bible stories, and songs. Sometimes crèche children are brought into the service immediately before the blessing. Older children who go to children's church often are present in the service up to the scripture reading or sermon and then return for the blessing.

However, when research participants use the term *intergenerational*, they generally refer to children being present throughout the service. This occurs most often in strictly Reformed congregations. Also, "letting children participate in the service is a solution for congregations that have few children left as it is a bit demotivating to keep the children's church going with only two or three children" says Nelleke Plomp (JOP specialist for worship with children and families, interview, June 13, 2016). Next to children's presence, worship that is intergenerational requires "moments during which children can relate to the liturgy" according to Leantine Dekker (HGJB team leader and youth work

10 We label all practices that run parallel to the regular service other than crèche as children's church, regardless of their Dutch names.

advisor, interview, August 23, 2016; she used the word "*haakmomentjes*", a moment when a person hooks onto something).

In Protestant contexts, it is important to appeal to children "not only in visual form … but also in the spoken word, *especially* in the sermon" says Harmen van Wijnen (former JOP and HGJB director and author of a PhD thesis on faith in small groups of adolescents, interview, November 11, 2016). This can take the form of telling a story or explaining liturgical rituals (Nelleke Plomp, interview, June 13, 2016). In addition, some congregations hand out coloring pages related to the sermon topic, offer worksheets with sermon bingo, and give children sermon booklets with puzzles and questions about the sermon (Leantine Dekker, interview, August 23, 2016). Another way to engage children is to give them tasks in the liturgy, such as collecting the offering or singing in the choir. A much-debated topic is children's participation in the Lord's supper. Various interviewees struggle with children's exclusion from the Lord's supper, as is the practice in some PCN congregations, because they believe it signals that children are not fully part of the community.

Combinations of Target-group and Intergenerational Worship

Sunday school takes place separately from the morning service, so children may attend both the entire service and this target-group activity. Historically, Sunday school was meant to be school and not church, therefore, it cannot be properly

Figure 1. Children sing along during an intergenerational worship service.

understood as worship. Yet, it does include liturgical and ritual elements like Bible stories and related prayer and psalms or hymns, as well as games and crafts. However, most Sunday schools have been closed because "parents had to drive all the way to Sunday school and back," says Sandra Kooij (MissieNederland intern, interview, November 21, 2016) and "people have increasingly come to see Sunday as a family day and a day of rest" (Leantine Dekker, interview, August 23, 2016).

To fill the gap left by closed Sunday schools, strictly Reformed congregations in particular have sought ways to teach Bible stories to children at their own level of understanding during the service. The results are hybrid forms of worship with children that combine children's participation in the regular service with children's church. For example:

> In the more really orthodox Reformed congregations, where the children are in the church during the whole service, and there are relatively little to no efforts to address them, the age of attending crèche is stretched by the parents themselves so that children … go to church … from, for example, six years old. So we went along with that trend, and this method, apart from telling a number of Bible stories, offers a look ahead toward the church service. That is why it is called *Opstap*; it is like a stepping-stone toward sitting in the service so that you know and recognize a number of things already. (Leantine Dekker, interview, August 23, 2016)

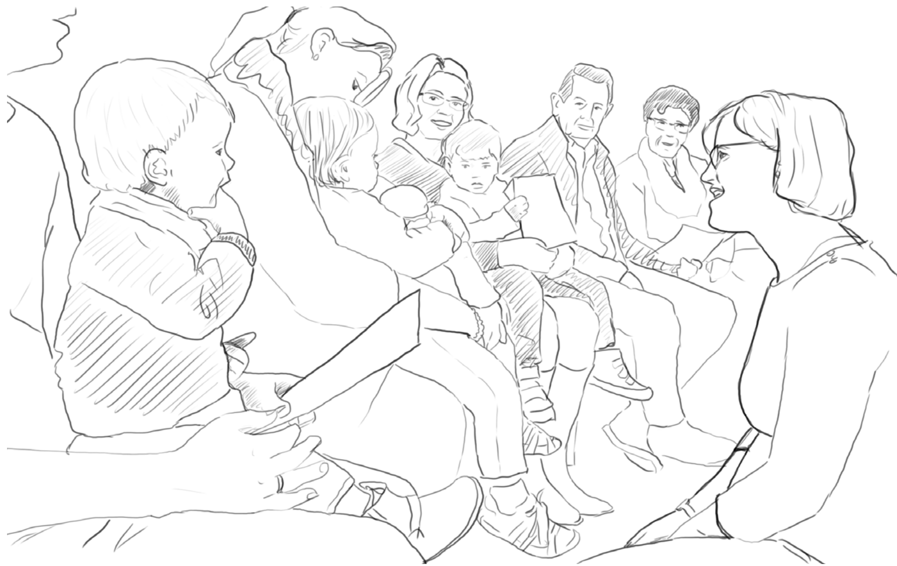


Figure 2. Toddlers receive all the attention during Kerk op Schoot (Church on Lap).

Similarly, some congregations use *On Track*, a catechesis method for children ten to twelve years old "during the Sunday afternoon or evening service as a form of children's church" (Leantine Dekker, interview, August 23, 2016). More widespread are practices that involve gradually increasing children's attendance during the service, so that, by the time they leave primary school, they are used to attending the entire service, says Vincenza la Porta (JOP director, interview, November 8, 2016; in Dutch, this is called an *ingroei-model*).

Children's Church as Target-group Worship

Children's church, at the other end of the continuum, "gives full attention … to *their* [children's] questions, to *their* stories, to *their* answers, on *their* level as well, and to *their* styles [of learning and experiencing faith]," says Erik Renkema (*Kerk in Elke Maat* [KIEM, Church in Every Size] co-founder, interview, September 8, 2016). Various interviewees mention that catering to everyone during regular Sunday services is difficult because every person is unique—not only are there various styles of learning, there are also many spiritual pathways. In children's church, teachers can pay attention to the needs of each child, and children have more opportunities to learn from peers.

An oft-heard objection is that children's church excludes children from the liturgy. Children's church is described as a symptom that the church has taken target-group thinking too far ("*doorgeslagen doelgroepdenken*"). Other interviewees address this objection, saying that although intergenerational worship may be the ideal, children (and teenagers) in practice often feel alienated from the regular service (Nelleke Plomp, interview, June 13, 2016). Marian Timmermans and Corjan Matsinger (Young&Holy owners and youth workers, interview, November 2, 2016) connect this alienation to difficult church language and to social norms like having to sit still and listen. Moreover, as in the example of *Opstap,* target-group worship may actually prepare children for intergenerational worship (Nelleke Plomp, interview, June 13, 2016; she used the word "initiation" to describe this process). Thus, offering target-group worship does not necessarily conflict with achieving the ideal of intergenerational worship (e.g., Sonnenberg et al. 2015, 5-6). Adult members of the congregation may be asked to organize activities in children's church related to their talents or expertise (Erik Renkema, interview, September 8, 2016; this happens at KIEM). Finally, in most congregations, except for the scripture reading and sermon, which are "too difficult [for children] to understand, … the rest of the worship you experience together," says Erik Idema (*Kind op Zondag* [Child on Sunday] editor at Kwintessens, interview, November 9, 2016).

Although in theory the worship continues in children's church—symbolized by the light of the Easter candle that children take to children's church—the children's church teachers often have didactic aims (Erik Idema, interview, November 9, 2016). It is interesting to note that whereas *Kind op Zondag* (Child on Sunday; the most widely used children's church method in the PCN) explicitly follows the ecumenical lectionary, for their method *Bijbel Basics* the Dutch Bible Society (email, June 7, 2017) promises that "at the end of [their] children's church trajectory, children will have heard and processed the 200 most essential Bible stories twice." Thus, children's church sometimes is more akin to the classroom than to a liturgical celebration. Yet, children that attend children's church almost always start and end in the worship service, so children's church is embedded in the worship service. Moreover, it is the children's alternative for the part of the worship service that they miss. This lends children's church a quality that is different from, say, catechesis. Below, we elaborate on how the preference for worship or religious formation results from differences in normativity (see Mapping Normativity).

Other Forms of Target-group Worship

We now consider worship with children of a slightly different order and also place it on the intergenerational–target-group continuum. Church-and-school services and family services, as discussed in the following, are occasional rather than weekly events. The children's moment (also called "children's sermon" or "children's time" in the literature) might be considered a particular form of children's participation in the regular service. We treat it separately because it is a common and clearly distinguishable part of the service that is, additionally, hotly debated. During the children's moment, the minister invites the children to the front of the sanctuary and asks them questions, gives them a task, or shows them an object to illustrate a story or theme. In some congregations, it is a weekly practice, often including lighting a candle which is carried to children's church. Other congregations reserve the children's moment for special events, such as baptism services.

During the children's moment, all generations are present, and children often visibly participate. Yet it is often critiqued as not truly intergenerational. The main argument is that addressing children in view of the rest of the congregation sets children apart rather than naturally includes them in the worshiping community. Also, the moment is often unidirectional because "the minister wants those kids to get to his theme and it's simply a sort of … err … funnel" (Corjan Matsinger, interview, November 2, 2016). Consequently, children's

contributions are limited and even regularly mocked (see Plomp 2016; laughing at children's "cute" answers should be avoided because it makes them feel insecure). Older children often resist going forward; however, the inclusion of play or competition might change that attitude (Nelleke Plomp, interview, June 13, 2016).[11] Although the critiques point to good reasons to eliminate the children's moment,[12] this practice can also be improved by adults taking children more seriously, including more movement and open-ended questions, and making "the connection between what happens in the 'main service' and what happens [in children's church]" (Erik Idema, interview, November 9, 2016).[13]

Church-and-school services are mainly a target-group activity and are usually the end product of a school project in collaboration with a local congregation. The service is prepared together, with direct liturgical participation by children, school staff, and the minister or youth worker. These services are often attended by the children's parents and sometimes other church members as well.

Family services may be seen as a way to occasionally hold intergenerational worship. These services, however, mostly attract families and not people without (grand)children in the targeted age group. We, therefore, agree that "in many cases, it would be better to say, 'It is a family service,' than to say, 'It is a service for young and old'" (Erik Idema, interview, November 9, 2016). Across the PCN, family services occur at special times of the liturgical year but may also be organized more regularly. For example, *Kerk op Schoot* (Church on Lap) services for children (from infants to age four) and their parents, which include key liturgical elements, meet parents' wish to be with their children on Sundays, instead of bringing their children to the crèche as they do all week. In liberal contexts, families make a special effort to attend monthly services that sometimes focus on picture books to explore existential themes. The use of picture books is derived from *Kom in de Kring* (Join the Circle), originally a method for crèche or children's church. Another initiative, *Jouw!Kerk* (Your!Church), answered children's requests for a follow-up to the services for toddlers and preschoolers and was developed together with them. Finally, *Kliederkerk* (the Dutch variant of Messy Church) centers on a Bible story, which is experienced through messiness (i.e., crafts and games), a message, and a meal.

11 She tells about her son who rushed to the front when the minister held a quiz because "a child his age likes competition and likes showing off his knowledge, so the activity … suited his age."

12 Variations of these critiques are also mentioned by Kriewald (2000, 16); Mercer (2003, 28); and Dillen (2014, 147).

13 Note that this echoes the argument of the 1967–8 Synod that differentiation is fine as long as it promotes unity with the existing congregation.

Problematizing the Opposition Between Intergenerational and Target-group Worship

We described various practices of worship with children by exploring how they lie along a continuum from intergenerational to target-group worship. However, this opposition itself is problematic, which we illustrate by reflecting on our code structure. Our data show that children can be excluded when they do not understand church language, their questions and stories are neglected, and they are addressed only at specific moments, sent away, or told to sit still and be quiet. In contrast, children are included through accessible stories, sermon booklets, age-differentiated activities, inclusion of movement and sensory experiences, assignment of responsibility, explanation of ritual actions, gradual acclimation to attending services, and inquiries into what they want. The interviewees also make normative comments, such as "Children belong in the service," "It is more important that children *feel* included than that they understand everything," and "Including children should not become childish."

Yet an interesting pattern emerges in the interviewees' statements: they relate children's church to both "exclusion through sending children away" and "inclusion through age-differentiated activities" and the regular church service to both "exclusion by letting children sit still and be quiet" and "inclusion because children belong in the service." That research participants see the same practices as both intrinsically inclusive *and* intrinsically exclusive shows that we are dealing with normativity rather than objective description. In practice, many congregations combine both types of worship. The particular ways in which they do so reflect more complex normativity. Although denominational differences provide some grounds for anticipating congregations' normative viewpoints, normativity cannot be fixed to denominational boundaries. In the next section, we map normativity beyond the opposition between intergenerational and target-group worship, referring to both Dutch practices and literature from the fields of youth ministry, religious education, and liturgical studies.[14]

Mapping Normativity

In this section, we argue that the dichotomy of intergenerational and target-group worship is not useful because it conflates normative notions with one extreme or the other. In reality, various pedagogical and theological views and aims inspire a plurality of worship practices with children. Before moving on, though, we

14 Although most literature on worship with children is grounded in somewhat narrow ethnographic descriptions, it is rich in the normativity on which we want to elaborate.

want to stress that this argument results from our own normativity as researchers. We take as a starting point the meta-theoretical conviction that our research participants' practices are relevant to formulating theory. Based on our reflection on those practices, therefore, we critique the ideal of intergenerational worship as expressed both in liturgical studies literature (Kriewald 2000; Edie 2014; Branigan 2007; Sledge 2005; Brelsford 2016; Mercer 2006; Rodkey 2013) and by many professionals in the field of worship with children in the Netherlands. We seek not to dismiss the advantages of either intergenerational or target-group worship but, rather, to show that because of differences in normativity, neither form of worship is desirable for every situation, congregation, and child. Idealization of a particular type of worship leads to neglect of the complexity of practices of worship with children. From this normative stance, we deconstruct both the ideal of intergenerational worship and its opposite, to open up other ways of describing and understanding the variety in worship with children.

Child-centeredness as an Overarching Normativity

We showed that normativity is at work in worship with children. We will argue that ideal images of the congregation and ideas about children's spirituality, formation, and liturgy influence liturgical rituals. An overarching normative standpoint in much of the literature on worship with children and much of our data, though, is that children are important. Across the PCN, congregations are increasingly rethinking and reshaping the way they worship with children. Practices such as children's church and the children's moment are becoming more common in strictly Reformed congregations, a development that various interviewees welcome because it shows increasing awareness of children's needs. They recount that the call for more intergenerational worship arose in the middle and liberal wings of the PCN, in which children (and teenagers) often never participated in the entire church service. Interviewees find recognizing children's needs more important than the choice for target-group or intergenerational worship. "Attention … has shifted from teenagers to children; the idea used to be that 'teenagers make the choice,' but now it is 'when we haven't invested in the childhood years …'" says Dorina Nauta (MissieNederland networker for youth, interview, January 26, 2017). These developments mirror the international child-friendly church movement and, more broadly, fit with the characterization of contemporary Western society as a neontocracy, which "views children as precious, innocent and preternaturally cute *cherubs*"[15] (Lancy 2015, xii).

[15] This view of the child is unique. Throughout much of human history and in many contemporary societies, children are seen as either *changelings* (not fully human yet) or *chattel* (assets in the home and farmhands).

Normative Views on Children, Formation, and Liturgy

While the theological notion that influences worship with children is the congregation as the body of Christ, it makes a difference whether people stress the totality of the body or the individuality of its members. In the first view, being church means being together (Harmen van Wijnen, interview, November 11, 2016), talking and learning to talk the same (liturgical) language (Vincenza la Porta, interview November 8, 2016), and making a commitment (Sandra Kooij, interview, November 21, 2016). This view is strongly connected with the ideal of intergenerational worship: as children are also members of the body of Christ, the worshiping community is incomplete without them. In contrast to the totality, emphasizing the uniqueness of each member supports differentiation in styles of learning and worshiping and—as adults and children generally have different needs—the view that both adults and children may benefit from at least partly separate worship.

Worship with children is also influenced by different approaches to the development of children's spirituality. On the one hand, children's own spiritual potential is approached with trust, so spiritual formation is aimed at letting children develop their own spirituality, which aligns with the method of Godly Play (Minor and Campbell 2016, 131; Langdoc 2013) or a particular Dutch children's church initiative that offers children various ways of experiencing faith (e.g., through stories, dance, theatre, and painting) (Erik Renkema, interview, September 8, 2016). On the other hand, children's spirituality may be steered toward specific confessional convictions. For example, although children may be seen as gifts of God and part of the covenant, they also need to learn about Jesus' sacrifice and love for them (c.f., Ridgely 2012, 241).

From the previous discussion, it follows that there are different types of formation (c.f., de Kock 2015, 7-8; an overview of normativity in learning). We distinguish between formation through reflection and formation through liturgical participation, although they also blur together. Through reflection, children can develop their cognitive, emotional, and moral faculties. This can be done through the use of children's picture books as with *Kom in de Kring* (Join the Circle), but more often it joins with the aim to teach children Bible stories. For example, Bonnefooi's *sleutelverhalen* (key stories) are based on Westhill principles: a story centers on a theme in the ecumenical lectionary reading to bring the Bible stories "closer to children's daily life experiences," says Dullyna van den Herik-van der Weit (Bonnefooi editor at Narratio, interview, October 25, 2017). Bible stories may be crucial in forming children into Christians or may be seen as cultural heritage with which children should have familiarity.

Formation through liturgy attributes relatively little importance to reflection, knowledge, and personal acceptance of doctrine. This aim focuses on doing first and understanding later (mystagogy). Especially for children, embodied learning is crucial (Barnard and Wepener 2012; Ingersoll 2014, 28). Indeed, adults learn from children that "the [g]ospel is not merely cognitively grasped in stillness but that kinesthetic forms of knowing are included in how we experience and proclaim the good news" (Mercer 2003, 30).

Views on worship also differ. For example, in a Surinamese Lutheran congregation in Amsterdam, children chat, run around, and yell during the service without being taken out of the room. This corresponds with the view that worship is "not an aesthetics exercise but ... for everyone to take part in" (Klomp 2011, 123). In contrast, some Dutch Protestant interviewees express concern that efforts to include children quickly become childish, even according to children themselves (Corjan Matsinger, interview, November 2, 2016; Leantine Dekker, interview, August 23, 2016), and they contend that what happens in church should be "set apart from the world" (Harmen van Wijnen, interview, November 11, 2016). Erik Idema (interview, November 9, 2016) states, "I also come to church for my own spirituality. ... It would be good to keep taking care of the sacrality in the service, and the unnamable, the inconceivable, which sometimes suffers from the attempts to lower the threshold." Adults in a small Baptist congregation in Australia where children participate in most of the worship have similar concerns (Sampson and Nettleton 2016). In these concerns we hear an echo of Lancy's (2015, 71) argument that "the neontocracy has, lately, gotten out of control." The Australian congregation strikes a balance by recognizing that "children, too, are members of the body of Christ" but also does not simplify the liturgy to accommodate children and accepts occasional boredom among them (Sampson and Nettleton 2016).

Deconstructing Ideals of Worship with Children

We can now deconstruct ideals of worship with children by showing that they hide other forms of normativity that may well be more relevant for understanding which practices exist in a congregation. Two cases serve as illustrations. In one strictly Reformed congregation, the leading opinion holds that children belong in the church, but the church also set up a Bible class, attended weekly by the four- to five-year-old children and twice a month by the six- to seven-year-olds. The pedagogical and theological notions that children need to become acquainted with Bible stories on their own level of understanding applies to the age group of four- to seven-year olds, whereas the image of the congregation as the body

of Christ leads to the wish to integrate the older children into the regular service. Another congregation, which has moved from orthodoxy to liberalism in recent decades, holds an unusually long children's church due to the conviction that children have a right to their own space and time of worship. Nevertheless, the children start and end in the main service, and every two months, there is a family service instead of children's church, through which the older members reaffirm that the children belong to the congregation.

Thus, the diversity in worship with children cannot be properly described or understood through the notions of intergenerational and target-group worship. An appraisal of the complex normativity within and beyond these ideals of worship with children is more useful. To name a few examples, gathering together as the body of Christ and formation through Bible stories come together in the practices of telling a children's story in the sermon, combining children's participation in the service with Sunday school or gradually increasing church attendance. When the liturgy is seen as formational, children's participation in regular worship may be desirable or, as in some family services, the essential liturgical elements may be adapted to the way children experience the world. In sum, differences in pedagogical and theological normativity inspire a plurality of ways to worship with children.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the variety in practices of worship with children, specifically within the context of Dutch Protestantism. The descriptions of historical practices of worship with children showed that tension arose between intergenerational worship and target-group worship. This tension is still present in current practices of worship with children, but we argued that there is no clear-cut way to divide practices into either target-group or intergenerational worship and that these notions themselves are largely normative.

To better describe and understand the variety in worship with children, we searched out other forms of normativity and observed that many professionals find taking children seriously and recognizing their needs most important. Furthermore, two theological notions influence how the relation between the individual and the congregation is seen. On one hand, the image of the congregation as the body of Christ supports the wish to worship together as much as possible, while on the other hand, the notion that each individual is unique before God warrants differentiation in worship. Moreover, children's spirituality may be approached with trust or the desire to steer it in a particular direction.

Regarding formation, many forms of worship with children have the aim to teach children Bible stories, while the contrasting position of mystagogy focuses first on doing and understanding later. Finally, worship may be shaped by the views that it should be open and accessible or set apart from the world. The argument that the sacred character of worship should not suffer from attempts to lower the threshold for the sake of the children adds nuance to the assertion that children are important and that their needs should be recognized. Children's needs do not dictate everything that happens in worship, and as the many critiques of the children's moment illustrate, giving children special attention is not always beneficial. In practice, congregations combine intergenerational and target-group worship in different ways according to the norms and notions they find most important.

In conclusion, academic and church debates should go beyond characterizations such as target-group or intergenerational and take into account the complexity of the normativity that influences practices of worship with children. Ethnographic research can play a pivotal part in this process by showing the nuances in practices of worship with children and clarifying that formation and worship are not mutually exclusive.

Summary

Adults set the stage for children's participation in worship: They shape the physical environment, determine the subject matter, and perform different roles. The intentions that inform these choices revolve around faith, liturgy, community, and experience. Adults' intentions point to the significance of spirituality. When adults perform directing roles, children's spirituality can find a point of reference in stories and traditions. When adults facilitate exploration, this nourishes both children's and adults' spirituality. Finally, joint participation in worship practices contributes to a community where faith can be lived and shared.

Published as

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. 2019. “Setting the Stage for Children's Participation in Worship Practices.” *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24 (2): 166-82, Abingdon: Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2019.1619533.

3

Setting the Stage for Children's Participation in Worship

What worship with children looks like—whether it is a Sunday morning service, family service, children's church, or Sunday school—largely depends on the choices and actions of adults. This statement comes across as self-evident, but how exactly do adults shape worship with children? Most visibly, adults set the stage for worship when they arrange chairs, tables, and objects. Children can rearrange these or climb on something that is meant for another purpose. This, however, is reactive behavior. Adults largely determine the physical, social, and spiritual setting. Insights into how adults set the stage for worship with children may help practitioners reflect on their own contexts, enabling them to better align their intentions, the design of the worship practices, and the roles they perform.

Various publications offer glimpses into how adults shape worship with children. The book *Infants and Children in the Church* (Harwood and Lawson 2017) shows that different teachings have structured or at least influenced when and how children participate in the liturgy. Choices about worship with children are informed by complex pedagogical and theological normativity (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, Chapter 2). The asymmetry between adults and children implies that adults have both the power and responsibility to set the stage for children's participation in worship. Yet, in recent years, researchers are positing that children not only adopt but also change the religious traditions they grow up in (Ridgely 2012). Similarly, we found that being involved in worship with children has spiritual significance for adults.

We approach practices of worship with children as liturgical rituals (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 47). In line with Grimes' (2000, 4-5, 12) concept of ritualizing, we see these practices as social constructs that draw from traditions

and are innovated and changed by every re-enactment. The concept of liturgy connotes that worship is "the work of the people" (Mercer 2003) and, through this concept, we also allow for the possibility that something more is at stake: Liturgy may be a liminal space where God is the initiator and is inviting a human response (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 356-63).

To establish how adults set the stage for worship with children in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN), we investigated what adults do and what they say about worship with children. In particular, adults' intentions alerted us to the significance of spirituality in liturgical rituals with children. The way adults in our research spoke about faith and spirituality resonates with respondents' self-definitions in the long-term sociological study *God in the Netherlands*: respondents linked faith to convictions and spirituality to (special) experience(s). Some respondents saw faith and spirituality as extensions of each other, while for others faith and spirituality were unrelated (Bernts and Berghuijs 2016, 98). Used as "a vaguer synonym for 'religion', [for] the personal side of religion, [and for] the 'existential core human dimension' [...] of humanistic psychologies," Bregman (2004, 166) notes that spirituality works so well "precisely because these different and separable meanings and uses flow into one another." In our context, different meanings resonate with different respondents.

These descriptions and definitions, however, are based on adults, whereas our study also touches on the spirituality of children. This raises two questions, Is children's spirituality different from adult spirituality? And how may worship with children ignite or deepen adults' spirituality? We will return to these questions in the discussion.

In this chapter, we answer the question of how adults shape liturgical rituals with children. In the methodology, we explain how we constructed our findings. Then, we present our findings of how adults' decisions, roles, and intentions shape worship with children. In the discussion, we answer our main question and elaborate on the relevance of spirituality for worship with children.

Methodology

This study is based on data from fifteen congregations of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. We did participant observations at twenty-one distinct liturgical rituals with children. Each liturgical ritual was witnessed once, accompanied by at least one in-depth individual or group interview. Topics included the history of the liturgical ritual, the character of the congregation, and children's and adults' roles in the congregation. Often, interviewees mentioned their aims or

intentions for the worship with children spontaneously. We transcribed and analyzed these data using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data-analysis software.

In the terminology of Saldaña (2009), we pre-coded by reading our data and reflecting on passages that drew our attention. For each section, we summarized the topic or action and whether the actors were adults or children. We coded the data involving adults in two coding cycles.

The first coding cycle began with creating models to conceptualize adult involvement. We decided on three categories: preparation, role, and intention. We then coded all the data on adults. Using process codes, we coded everything about the planning and organization of liturgical rituals with children as preparation. Our coding of adult roles was descriptive, although it was more theory-laden than our other coding; this was due to the fact that before we entered the field, we believed performance-related concepts would help characterize what people said and did (see Goffman 1956). We coded adults' motivations for organizing and participating in liturgical rituals using value coding.

The second coding cycle involved axial coding: we grouped codes in order to define the different dimensions of each category. These category dimensions directly translated into the subheadings below. At this stage, we reconsidered the category of preparation. We recategorized the underlying codes as the different ways in which adults relate to the design of worship with children.

We wrote vignettes to narrate analytic insights and to represent the range and depth of the practices we investigated. Vignettes are focused descriptions representing a selection of our qualitative data that we found typical or representative (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2013, 182).

Findings

> Ten-year-old Otte does not have much to say about the Sunday morning service and Sunday school. Yet, she becomes enthusiastic when she starts talking about scouting and later about helping her mother, Hanna, who is a custodian, "we [the daughter of another custodian and I] know where to find everything, so that is nice, we can help!" (Congregation 2, participant observation, January 29, 2017)

In the vignette above, Hanna's role as both mother and custodian offers Otte an opportunity for involvement in the congregation that suits Otte's active nature. Helping her mother seems unrelated to the service and Sunday school, yet it presumably influences the way Otte participates in those liturgical rituals. Thus, there is a broader social context in which adults fulfil roles as parents and

congregation members that indirectly shape children's participation in worship. In this chapter, however, we limit ourselves to designs, roles, and intentions that are directly related to worship with children.

Design

Adults shape liturgical rituals with children by having them attend and deciding what children can do during worship time. Children may participate in the existing worship or have their own time and place for worship (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, Chapter 2). Such design decisions largely determine the roles adults can perform. These decisions were often made long ago. Yet, adults in their current roles often relate to the set format of a liturgical ritual or take the values that inspired a practice into consideration when they change its design.

Adults may consciously align their performance with the intentions that inspired a particular method. For example, Berryman (2013) designed Godly Play (see https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/) with the aim of providing children with language to express their spirituality. Little variation is possible in this format, so adults process the story personally to decide the extent to which they want to follow it:

> The story The Faces of Easter recounts that "Jesus saw the sign of the cross on Mary and Joseph's foreheads," and the storyteller makes a sign of the cross over Mary and Joseph's brows and noses on the picture-cards. Two Godly Play teachers struggled with this. Diana has a great aversion to the cross and decided to leave the passage out. Linda has come to appreciate that everything is in the story for a reason; thus, she examined her own hesitation until she could tell the story as prescribed. (Congregation 9, interview, May 7, 2017)

In other cases, adults have more leeway to experiment with the design of liturgical rituals. Messy Church aims to be a form of church for all generations. It involves creativity, worship, and a meal, however:

> Inspired by a theatre-weekend with teenagers, the youth worker decided to divert from the usual format of Messy Church: participants made the décor, practiced acting, and designed sounds to accompany the story. During worship, the story was performed as a theatre play with the minister reading one line at a time while the participants acted it out, arranged the décor, and made accompanying sounds. The dedicated participation, creativity, autonomy, and fun made it such a success that more Messy Churches were planned with a similar setup. (Congregation 14, interview, March 28, 2017; focus group, July 9, 2017)

Redesigning may also follow a more formal route:

> An evaluation of the Sunday school showed that parents only sent their children because "otherwise the teachers would sit there alone." Consequently, Sunday school was closed. Now, during the morning service, four- to seven-year-olds attend Bible class, where they hear Bible stories, pray, and sing. The adults value the children's presence in the service; therefore, children of six and seven attend the service every other week, and those eight years and older remain in the service. (Congregation 1, focus group, January 15, 2017)

Furthermore, design changes may have to be negotiated:

> Three Protestant churches and a local Protestant-Christian primary school collaborate on a Bible project with a concluding church-and-school service. At a time when a child in class was ill, and the theme was "heroes," the children decided the collection money should go to Make-A-Wish[16] but the diaconate wanted it to go to a Christian charity. A discussion followed, "Does an organization need to be Christian before you give it money, or is it really a Christian thing to imagine who needs it?" (Congregation 15, participant observation, June 2, 2018)

In the vignette above, two groups had different desired intentions fitting with different designs; whereas the diaconate wanted to support Christian charities, the teachers wanted the liturgy to be relevant to the school children. By redefining what "being Christian" meant, the diaconate was persuaded to use the design that supported the teachers' intentions.

Sometimes, an inconsistency between design and intentions remains unrecognized, or no consensus is reached about whether the design should change:

> Sunday school takes place in a Reformed primary school after the Sunday morning service. "*That* is what we learn today," Brigitte concludes a story, "You may trust that when you are afraid, Jesus helps you." Naomi practices a Bible verse with the older children. After class, Youp comments that the children already know everything. Naomi agrees. "I just really enjoy being in contact with the children," she says. "That is also a part of being a congregation, you know?" In the focus group, the consensus is that Sunday school helps build peer groups that may keep children involved in the congregation. "Some years ago, there were plans to reshape the Sunday school," the coordinator later recounts, "but the church council opposed the changes." (Congregation 2, participant observation and interview, January 29, 2017)

16 This charity strives to fulfil wishes of children who are very ill. See https://makeawishnederland.org/

Sunday schools were established with the aim of educating working-class children (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, Chapter 2). In the vignette, the classroom setting and the method's focus on teaching reinforces this legacy of the school-like structure of Sunday schools. Yet the schooling model seems out of place because the children already know so much. Thus, the adults' intentions have evolved: Rather than focus primarily on learning, they hope to build community. Thus, the design may guide intentions but adults may also develop intentions that seem unrelated to the liturgical-ritual format.

In this section, we illustrated various ways in which adults relate to the design of liturgical rituals with children. Over time, the intentions that inspired a liturgical ritual's design may gain or lose relevance; thus, adults regularly attempt to align the design with their intentions or vice versa.

Roles

To recapitulate, adults shape worship with children through design, roles, and intentions. The design aspect concerned how adults relate to the *format* of liturgical rituals. In this section, we investigate the roles that adults perform within these formats, grouping them according to the *effect* that the role has. A role may contribute to the liturgical ritual, modelling involvement in the faith community, and may direct or facilitate children's behavior and understanding. In the next section, we discuss intentions, adults' *motivations and aims* for liturgical rituals with children.

To clarify the distinction between directing, facilitating, and contributing roles, we compare three ways in which adults ask questions. In a directing role, adults ask questions as examiners, having a desired answer in mind. When this answer does not come, the question is posed differently, to another child, and finally, the adult supplies the desired response. In a facilitating role, adults, as inquirers, ask open-ended questions that invite exploration and reflection. In a contributing role, adults-as-storytellers may ask questions to get children's attention and activate their foreknowledge. This comprises both facilitating and directing elements but mainly helps participants focus on the story. Contributing roles, therefore, transcend the distinction between facilitating and directing roles because they relate more to the worship and the community than to interaction with children.

Contributing

Contributing roles model a kind of involvement in the faith community. For example, adults who are present during liturgical rituals with children as fellow participants communicate and embody that this worship practice is embed-

ded in a social and religious community. Participants may also share about their spiritual experiences. A crucial contributing role is the role of organizer: Organizers ensure the very existence of liturgical rituals with children. They are often involved in the design process but more importantly, organizers translate the design to a specific place, time, and group of participants.

Adults may contribute to the worship because of the role or function they have in the congregation—like a deacon and elder who were present in a service as representatives of their office, to make a service with children official (Congregation 10, participant observation, May 31, 2017), or custodians who arrange access to buildings, furniture, and/or technological equipment for the organizers or liturgical ritual leaders. Liturgical ritual leaders are adults who initiate and lead the proceedings in worship. At particular moments, liturgical ritual leaders may take on specific directing or facilitating roles.

Directing

In directing roles, adults provide a framework for children's behavior and reflections. Directing roles are used in situations where adults want children to learn something or, in the case of the role of policer, to behave in a certain way. Thus, all directing roles could be called teaching roles. Most facilitating roles, however, also encourage learning. The distinction is that, in directing roles, adults employ strategies to exert more influence over what children learn. Thus, the activities they involve children in often illustrate a specific lesson.

A striking directing role is that of the mystagogue. Adult performances are mystagogic when they initiate children into the sacraments or into the mystery of God's relationship with people. A minister takes on the role of mystagogue a service when children leave Bible class:

> "I stand with the children at the baptismal font" the minister recounts, "nowhere but at the baptismal font.… Most of them were baptized here.… Bible class … isn't just a nice thing; it has everything to do with that baptism! I use that occasion to keep the baptismal remembrance alive and shape it. To teach those children, you know, 'I have been baptized, what does that actually mean?' And they get a book." The Bible class coordinator specifies that the children receive a Bible study book, "to read before going to bed, with the idea that … they may keep holding on, that it is beautiful to get to know God better, by reading the Bible." (Congregation 1, interview, January 15, 2017)

In this vignette, the baptismal font creates a framework for teaching. In two other cases, adults-as-mystagogues frame a story in a certain way to initiate children:

> The minister recounts that Jesus celebrated the Seder meal with his disciples.

> After he tells the Exodus story, the children ask the Seder meal questions and we taste the food. Then, we make our way to the chapel to share the Lord's Supper. "So, we now are in church, right?" the minister resumes. "It is a bit different now.… But the altar is like the table and, actually, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper in church—and you are often there, too—we actually do the same as we did just now." (Congregation 6, participant observation, April 13, 2017)

In this practice, the minister uses Jesus' celebration of the Seder meal as a framework to connect children's experiences of two liturgical rituals. He thereby initiates children into the history and meaning of the Lord's Supper. As such, it is a form of catechesis. Another minister speaks about creation:

> "On a certain day, people looked around and wondered how the world came into being," the minister says at the start of the Messy Church service. Then, he tells the Genesis story. The service ends at a hut the children built. "So, when God had finished making everything, the human he had made started to make things as well. A home, art, musical instruments, words. And so, the humans lived in the land God had made. And we still live there. *That* is how everything started, at the very earliest beginning. And that is the story of creation." (Congregation 14, participant observation, July 9, 2017)

The minister incorporates the children's crafts and world experiences into the story of creation. Simultaneously, he presents the creation story as an explanation that people told each other. "I don't want to get in the spheres of 'God created that tree and that one,'" the minister had said beforehand. The theology of each mystagogue is different. Yet, in all cases, the frame creates distance, makes the current practice of worship credible, and initiates children into these rituals, stories, and communities. In sum, the role of mystagogue is an example of a role that steers children towards specific behavior and understandings.

Facilitating

Adults who facilitate let participants influence the format and content of the liturgical rituals:

> "Can we draw now?" a boy asks. At this point, a girl says "but God doesn't really exist!" "But in the story he does," children's church leader Esmee responds. "Yeah, but you are good at this because you are good at philosophy…" the girl says, sounding a little annoyed. The adults and children take out the drawing materials. Within the minute, the children are busily drawing. "Often while they draw, they just fall back on what we did *before* that," Esmee comments. "You know, we don't need to steer that.… If you

steer too much, you have the biggest fights, which you have to resolve before you can go on." (Congregation 4, participant observation, February 26, 2017)

Children do not learn less when adults facilitate. In the above vignette, children continue to process the story and activities of their own accord. Similarly, in Godly Play, children may fashion their own response to the story (Congregation 9, participant observation, May 7, 2017). Adults still set the stage and initiate interaction but they are more open to the input of participants. However, adults do have less control over *what* children learn. Rather than offering answers from a particular faith tradition, adults encourage children to find their own answers. As a result, however, children may be left with no idea how to handle their questions. We will elaborate on this in the discussion.

Adults' roles also affect kinesthetic and experiential forms of knowledge by inviting children to act or move in certain ways. The role of the comforter illustrates this. The comforter is most often a parent who puts a child at ease, when they are in distress or feeling uneasy, by taking their hand or having them sit on their lap. The adults' safe presence enables children's participation in liturgical rituals.

The various roles that adults perform help children relate to the liturgical ritual and its content, but why do adults perform these roles?

Intentions

Intentions are adults' hopes for what the liturgical rituals with children may accomplish and relate to adults' motivation for participation. We grouped the intentions as being related to faith, liturgy, community, or experience. Faith is communally practiced and individually experienced through liturgy. Thus, intentions are intricately intertwined, as the following vignette illustrates:

> "The goal is, of course, to bring children closer to, er … the Lord God," Desiree says. "That they may experience His love!" "Yes," Elise responds, "I actually was thinking more of the goal that I want them to be together, have the connection with each other." "Those actually really belong together," Desiree observes, "they touch." (Congregation 10, participant observation, May 21, 2017)

Intentions Related to Faith

Adults hope that children's faith will grow or that their spirituality will develop. These intentions show very diverse language:

> The most important is the moment we are able tell them about, er … God. (Congregation 13, interview, June 25, 2017)

> That children might feel a spark of … of God, of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, that He really is present … in the here and now. (Congregation 10, participant observation, May 31, 2017)

> We hope this child picks up faith, "That he listens to your voice and confesses your name," but also does something with his faith, "That he receives your gifts and does not keep them to himself." So that, for this child, faith really has something to say. (Congregation 3, interview, February 16, 2017; the minister cites a baptism prayer)

> For children … I think that it means … the mystical side, there is more than what you see—touchable—around you. (Congregation 4, interview, February 26, 2017)

> … it really is about the spiritual development of children. Starting from the premise that it is already *there*, that children are naturally spiritual beings. (Congregation 9, interview, May 7, 2017)

> Raising children has to do with socialization. So, you take your children to communities that are important to you. You bring them into contact with philosophical questions. (Congregation 7, interview, May 28, 2017)

> We take themes, children's experience of the world, and their way of believing, as a point of departure. (Congregation 5, participant observation, January 11, 2017)

People often search for words and pause or hesitate right before they mention God or faith. Faith-related intentions seem difficult to express in language. For some adults, faith is related to experiencing God's presence. For others, faith has to do with confessing God's name and living out that faith in daily life. Some mention the mystical. Others focus on actions and want to teach children to do good, share with others, and care for creation. Still others speak about children's spiritual development and about relating to existential questions. Almost all the intentions relate to the conception of spirituality as something to do with experience, faith practices, or the existential aspects of life.

Adults also sometimes struggle to answer children's questions:

> They had all these questions, like, er … I said tomorrow is Easter, so Jesus is alive again. "Oh, so tomorrow He will be in church? Will Grandma be there too?" You know, she died, so … they also don't understand it. It is *so* difficult to explain it well! (Congregation 8, interview, April 15, 2017)

Despite the difficulties, adults make the effort to talk about faith with children. This shows that they value children's spiritual growth.

Intentions Related to Liturgy

Adults want children to participate in the liturgy so that they gain liturgical knowledge but also because they value children's presence. Intentions concerning liturgy are often linked to faith-related intentions such as initiating children or acquainting children with their Christian heritage. Knowledge and inclusion are strongly connected because learning about liturgy often takes place through participation: "The aim is to make a worship service, together with the children, so that they learn by doing, by fulfilling a role in it *themselves*" (Congregation 3, interview, February 16, 2017).

The extent to which participation is possible does vary. For example, in one congregation, children receive the Lord's Supper (Congregation 6, participant observation, March 26, 2017), whereas in another they watch the adults participate (Congregation 1, interview, January 15, 2017). Yet, in both cases, children learn by being in the liturgy together with other church members. This ties into the intentions related to community.

Intentions Related to Community

Adults hope that children become part of the community. In the Sunday school vignette, Naomi remarked that, for her, being in contact with children was an important aspect of being a congregation member (Congregation 2, interview, January 29, 2017). Doing things together, both within and between generations, is valued highly. Others stress the value of peer relationships, developed during liturgical rituals with children, for children's long-term commitment to church activities. The mere presence of children in the liturgy feeds the hope that the Church will continue to exist:

> There is a need for having a children's choir. It's another vibe. Some people say it is happier, lighter. Jesus said you have to become like a child to enter the Kingdom or something, right? So, … they have a kind of exemplary function. The very fact that there are children in church gives some hope that there will be a generation that picks it up. (Congregation 11, interview, June 13, 2017)

Moreover, children's participation adds something to the liturgy: It provides experiences for adults as well as children, experiences that are transformative and may lead to long-term commitment. This brings us to the final set of intentions: experience.

Intentions Related to Experience

Most intentions related to experience are concerned with wanting what is best for children: Promoting their wellbeing; ensuring that they enjoy attending church;

providing a safe environment for them; encouraging their feelings of belonging, safety, autonomy, and self-belief; and supporting them in their personal choices.

In almost all congregations researched, children's enjoyment of liturgical rituals served as a major factor in supporting the existence of the practice. Conversely, when children did not enjoy a practice, it served as a critique:

> It now feels like we are playing church. It feels very wrong. You go to church, sit down, hear it, go away again, and everything you heard you leave at church and just do your own thing. [It doesn't resonate] because the enthusiasm … I can't bring it up. Also the children: It is difficult to enthuse them. (Congregation 10, participant observation, May 31, 2017)

This comment exemplifies a much smaller number of intentions about what adults personally gain from their participation in liturgical rituals with children. In this case, the interviewee hopes to gain enthusiasm but finds it lacking. Rather than actually *being* church with the children, it feels like they are *playing* church: Adults and children remain unaffected. Without enthusiasm, it becomes hard to keep investing in worship with children. As a result, this practice was evaluated and changed, which points back to the design section. Because we are interested in how worship with children impacts adults, we further explore the intentions related to adults' own experiences of liturgical rituals with children.

Adults' experiences vary across the different roles. In directing roles, adults' spiritual nourishment seems private:

> André mentions his preparations for telling a Bible story in Sunday school. "I always read the story that the method publishes and then study the Bible and additional sources. It almost becomes a Bible study … but the insights are worth the while." (Congregation 2, interviews, January 29, 2017; Doing a personal Bible study is encouraged by the developers of the Sunday school method [Editorial office of the *Bond van Hervormde Zondagscholen*, personal communication, June 12, 2018])

Some adults in directing roles became involved out of a sense of duty. Performing that duty, however, may be seen as a spiritual exercise, and one adult called it a form of talent enrichment (Congregation 2, interviews, January 29, 2017).

Although spirituality in directing roles may seem private, adults also mention they enjoy sharing their faith with children and participating in practices like reading the Bible, praying, and singing with children (Congregation 1, interview, January 15, 2017). Especially in worship formats that steer adults toward directing roles, such activities allow adults to step out of the directing role and into the contributing role of participant. This allows adults to experience and

express their faith together with children, without having to specify what that faith comprises.

In facilitating roles, adults are often inspired by children's contributions:

Figure 3. The children's artwork of the seven days of creation.

> Inspired by the previous Messy Church, the one revolving around a theatre play, Suze left the artwork up to the children's imagination [see Figure 3]. "I told them the story and then they started to think of what to make. … Now there is something of each day in there. I find it so clever! There is light and dark because of our shadows. There is the sky, and the earth, and the clouds. The birds. The sea with the beach. And the trees and plants. A fish in the water and there is the human. That is also the day of rest because he is lying on the beach." (Congregation 14, participant observation and interviews, July 9, 2017)

The creativity that results when adults take facilitating roles often touches the adults themselves. Their enthusiasm shows in their facial expression, gestures, and animated talk.

Inspired by children's contributions, adults sometimes respond, retell, and incorporate the children's creations into their story or teaching so that the other participants can share in them, as the minister in the mystagogue role did during the Messy Church worship. In this way, facilitating roles, directing roles, and contributing roles enrich each other. In the discussion, we further discuss the value of including all roles in worship with children.

Finally, some adults expressed that they trusted that "in the end, it is God's work." These adults came across as more relaxed, perhaps because they set realistic expectations without letting go of their intentions and high hopes for

what worship with children would accomplish. In one interview, two comments regarding the adult's personal enjoyment enclosed a comment about trusting in God (Congregation 1, interview, January 15, 2017). In sum, the language of faith, liturgy, community, and experience that adults use to express their intentions shows the need for and significance of spirituality in liturgical rituals with children—for children and adults alike.

Discussion

Adults' intentions show that spirituality is not only a hoped-for effect for the children: It is also crucial for how adults themselves experience and motivate their participation in worship with children. Earlier, we wondered whether children's spirituality is different from adult spirituality. Throughout the ages, and in many different societies, children were seen as more connected to the spiritual than adults in both negative and positive senses (Lancy 2015, 42-47). The recent tenet is that children's spirituality is neither more nor less but mainly different from that of adults, precisely because children themselves are different from adults (Surr 2017, 188-9). Sayings from different world religions testify to how children have often served as a source of inspiration for adults' spirituality (Surr 2017, 187-188). Children's being-in-the-world teaches adults the value of sensory sensitivity to the world around (Champagne 2003, 46) and of embodied spirituality (Trousdale 2013). Children's being-in-relationships, their connecting and relating to others, teaches adults selfless love and forgiveness (Surr 2017, 190-2) and "corresponds to the basics of interpersonal faith" (Champagne 2003, 50). Finally, children's existential mode of being, through "games, imitation, symbolism or imagination" (Champagne 2003, 51-52), teaches the value of "wholly living in the present" (Surr 2017, 192).

Worship with children may ignite or deepen adults' spirituality precisely because adults involved in worship with children experience that children's difference. Adults often need to perform some form of translation to involve children in the worship of a particular faith community. Some adults alluded to the private preparation this requires as a form of spiritual nourishment. Conversely, attending to children's being-in-the-world in worship gave many adults inspiration and hope. Both translation and inspiration may lead adults to re-examine their own beliefs and practices. This echoes Waaijman's (2002, 364) definition of spirituality as "the spirit of God and spirit of man which interact with and impact each other" and is close to experienced or lived faith. A different take on spirituality is Bernts and Berghuijs' (2016, 94) 'new spirituality', a term

they use to describe how people pick and choose elements of different religious traditions, newly interpret 'faith truths' and look for direct connections with personal experience. Involvement in worship with children may trigger the last two processes. We found no direct evidence that children's worship leads adults to find inspiration in other traditions, but personal experiences did prove important. These results are not conclusive, however, as the theme of spirituality arose in the analysis phase; we did not specifically ask adults about how their involvement in children's worship related to their faith or spirituality.

Conclusion

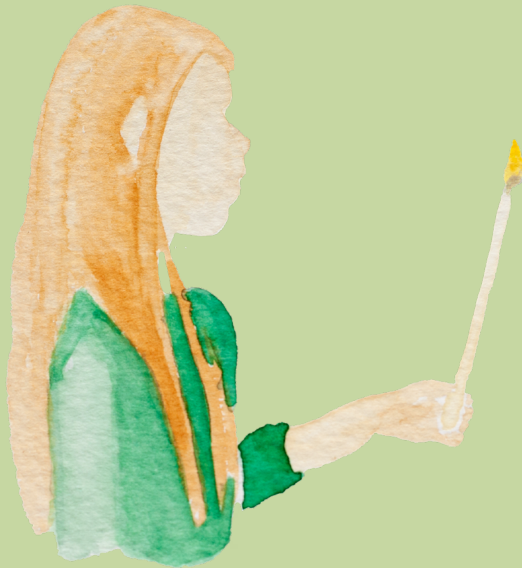
In this chapter, we explored how adults set the stage for worship with children. The determining factor lies in adult's *intentions* for worship with children. Adults hope that participation in liturgical rituals brings children faith or spiritual development, knowledge of the liturgy, connection to the community, and good experiences. Seeing some of these hopes and intentions materialize is what nourishes and motivates adults. When intentions do not match the design of liturgical rituals, adults try to change the design of liturgical rituals or highlight how the roles they play nevertheless contribute to their intentions. Based on our findings, we argue that in any particular congregation, adults need to provide children with a framework for acting and thinking (direct), encourage children to explore in activities and reflections (facilitate), *and* participate in the faith community together with children (contribute).

Within a short liturgical ritual, we suggest practitioners might align their role with a particular intention. Is the aim to transmit ideas, to enable children to theologize about a particular subject, or to worship together? In the whole of a congregation's worship, however, adults should perform directing, facilitating, *and* contributing roles. We see a parallel between these roles and de Kock's (2014, 276-9) distinction between the behavioral, developmental, and apprenticeship models in catechesis. The behavioral model posits catechesis as a form of instruction in the knowledge and skills needed to lead a Christian life. In the developmental model, the catechist, mainly through questioning, guides children in their reflections concerning religious issues and experiences. In the apprenticeship model, learning takes place in the faith community. De Kock seems to prefer the apprenticeship model. In another publication, de Kock and Sonnenberg (2012, 12) note a shift from the behavioral to the developmental and apprenticeship models, which "mirrors a shift involving leading learning theories." Moreover, various authors argue that, when objectives lean

more toward instruction than enquiry, this does not contribute to children's spirituality (Petersen 2003, 68; Ingersoll 2014, 167-8). In our study, however, we highlighted how adults in directing roles help children relate to their faith tradition. For example, all three mystagogues encouraged spirituality, though they came from different traditions: strictly Reformed, liberal, and mainline Protestant. Each initiated children into a way in which people can relate to God and nourish that relationship.

We agree with the mentioned authors (De Kock, Sonnenberg, Petersen and Ingeroll) that adults should learn with and from children. Therefore, we argue that adults should perform facilitating and contributing roles next to directing roles. By performing facilitating roles, adults help children to express their own ideas and creativity. Attending to children's contributions in turn provides spiritual nourishment for the adults themselves (Surr 2017; Ingersoll 2014). In contributing roles, adults participate in ministry with children as fellow believers (Ingersoll 2014, 174-5) and respond to children's desire to hear what adults really think and believe (Champagne 2010, 392). In turn, children's participation in worship helps create and maintain a sense of identity, place, and meaning for adults (Gallagher 2007). Thus, we conclude that adults should initiate children into the richness of their traditions, encourage children in their explorations, and model a relationship with God and the worshiping community.

In sum, adults have the privilege and responsibility to explain, practice, and share faith with children in worship, while being open to the possibility that children's spirituality is different from their own. Future research will need to investigate children's perspectives on worship in order to contrast and supplement the perspective of adults that is presented here.



Summary

How do children contribute to worship? Children help create and shape their social worlds, including that of worship. This chapter explores how children negotiate and appropriate worship practices and incorporate their own values, understandings, and creative ideas into their worship. Recognizing that children have agency in worship encourages practitioners and practical theologians to identify how children already help shape the worship they take part in, and enhance opportunities to strengthen their agency.

Published as

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. Forthcoming. "Children's Agency in Worship." *International Journal of Practical Theology*, Berlin: De Gruyter.

4

Children’s Agency in Worship

> A congregation in a suburban area in the Netherlands already had a service for toddlers and preschoolers when a seven-year-old girl commented “why isn’t there a service for children my age?” This led to Your!Church, a service for older primary school children (aged seven to twelve years old) which children helped prepare. During the service, children performed the liturgical tasks of elders and deacons. The sermon was a dialogue between the children and the minister. After four years, the organizers discontinued Your!Church due to low attendance relative to the invested time and effort. “However, this is the children’s church,” the minister said, “so we need to consult them.” (Congregation 10, participant observations, 21 and 31 May, 2017)

Children are agents in worship: They appropriate a repertoire of beliefs and bodily knowledge while co-constructing the worship environment. In our data on Dutch Protestant worship with children, Your!Church most clearly demonstrated children’s agency: The service was set up in response to a child’s comment, children helped prepare the service, and children performed roles in the liturgy. Your!Church prompted a closer analysis of children’s agency in worship. Therefore, we aim to answer the question, How do children show their agency in worship?

To answer this question, in this chapter we analyze qualitative data of Dutch Protestant worship with children. After defining children’s agency in worship, we discuss the methodological consequences of approaching children as agents and present our methodology. In our findings, we describe how children express their agency in worship practices. Children appropriate and negotiate worship practices and bring their own values into worship. Children’s impact on worship partly depends on how their agency is recognized. We then discuss our findings alongside insights from practical theology, particularly engaging the field of

children's theology. We conclude that children already negotiate and appropriate worship practices, but adults can support children's agency by creating opportunities for children to collaborate in worship and decision-making processes.

Defining Children's Agency in Worship

We explain what we mean by children, agency, and worship to define children's agency in worship. In our research, *child* primarily refers to a person in the first stage of life. Children move along a continuum of dependence towards increasing autonomy. Most of the children in our study were between three and twelve years old.

What does it mean to claim that children have agency? The dialectic between agency and structure reveals a key tension in sociological and anthropological theory: To what extent are people influenced by the circumstances of their lives and social surroundings (structure), and to what extent do they create and change their lives and circumstances, thereby (re)producing and transforming society (agency) (Appelrouth and Edles 2008, 13)? Agency remains juxtaposed with structure: People need to know the rules to navigate society, but through acting, they also change and re-interpret the social rules over time (Ortner 2006, 129-31, 186). Change becomes possible as inconsistencies inherent in the structure afford scope for re-interpretation (Ortner 2006, 8). Focusing on the concept of agency constitutes a deliberate move away from determinism to enable the analysis of resistance and transformation in social structures by elaborating on "what people do and how they use, transform, and manipulate cultural forms in everyday life" (Moore and Sanders 2014, 8).

We understand worship as liturgical ritual (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 47). Worship practices draw on human traditions and are innovated with every re-enactment (Grimes 2000, 4-5, 12). At the same time, liturgical rituals may be liminal spaces in which God is the initiator and invites a human response (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 356-63). In this study we focus on worship with children, for the most part in the context of a congregation and during services on Sundays. These liturgical rituals can be roughly divided into five categories: regular and special church services, children's church, crèche, and Sunday school (see van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, Chapter 2).

Ascribing agency to children presumes that they are at least partially knowing subjects (Moore and Sanders 2014, 187). It also implies that what children say and do involves meaning and intention (Moore and Sanders 2014, 205-6) and affects themselves and others. Children carry at least partial responsibility for

the consequences of their actions (Duranti 2005, 453). However, for much of history and in many parts of the world today, children are granted personhood only after they survive their first year or when they reach the age of "sense." In many cultures, children reach the age of sense when they pass a flexible milestone (e.g. showing personality, exercising control over emotions, being responsible, or being able to complete certain chores), commonly at the age of five to seven years old (Lancy 2015, 38-40). Likewise, agency may become more apparent as children grow older. Nevertheless, claiming agency for children highlights how they "creatively reinterpret and reconstruct available cultural resources [...] to build their own culture-laden social world" (Ahn 2011, 294): By the time they begin kindergarten children have already gone beyond simply copying adults' concepts of friendship and begin to use "friendship" in more strategic, short-term ways. Thus, children's agency highlights how children interpret, appropriate, and transform their social contexts, including worship.

In sum, children's agency in worship refers to how they co-construct worship by bringing their wishes, behaviors, interpretations, and beliefs into worship and its social context. Children's participation always affects worship, albeit sometimes only slightly.

Methodology

Ascribing agency to children has methodological consequences. Our definition of children's agency is based on the sociological and anthropological theories that the first author brought to the research, including that of agency. This normative starting point is clarified in the following historical sketch of children's agency in empirical methodologies.

Writing in 1973, Charlotte Hardman was among the first ethnographers to insist that children should be seen not only as objects of ethnographic research but as informants in their own right.[17] Hardman focused so completely on children that she portrayed them as forming their own subcultures (Montgomery 2008, 38). In contrast, contemporary scholars have argued that researchers should also interact with adults to situate children's agency in its broader social context (García Palacios and Castorina 2014, 465-6; Levey 2009, 321).

In the context of worship, children are part of social structures that include both adults and children (e.g. the family and the congregation). Children's embeddedness in larger structures is reflected in our research setup: We first

17 Informant indicates that people are sources of information. We prefer research participant, to indicate that the data are the result of encounters between the researcher and the researched.

mapped the historical and current practices of worship with children in the Netherlands (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, Chapter 2) and the roles of adults in shaping worship with children (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019b, Chapter 3) before turning to the current analysis of children's agency in worship. We chose the method of participant observation to study children in worship.

We conducted participant observations during twenty-one distinct liturgical rituals with children in fifteen congregations of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN). We visited each location one, two, or three times over a period of six months. In our observation and analyses, we paid particular attention to how the children participated with their bodies and verbal language. During each visit we had informal conversations with children who were three to twelve years old. We conducted ten interviews with children five to twelve years old. The children we talked to helped us understand how they felt about worship and church. We also held conversations, interviews and focus groups with the children's parents, ministers, fellow worshippers, and Sunday school and children's church teachers.

We analyzed our transcribed field notes and interviews using ATLAS.ti. We coded the children's participation using a mix of descriptive (Saldaña 2009, 70) and process codes (77). The codes describing children's participation supported our descriptions of how children express their agency. Values coding (89-90) helped characterize the children's comments about worship; these codes are used and referred to in the findings.

Our research was iterative-inductive in nature: We moved continually between theory and data. For example, the specific practice of Your!Church led to our reflections on Roger Hart's ladder of participation (see the Discussion) and theory on agency shaped our methodology. The method of participant observation may suggest that we constructed knowledge based on sense experiences. However, making sense of experience is a normative process: Children are persons whose doings we can observe, but approaching them as agents forwards the claim that they deserve attention, possibly more than they currently get. This theory steered and colored our observations, thereby influencing not only analysis but the process of data production itself. In writing this chapter, we also made the (normative) choice to present data that revealed the relevance of treating children as having agency in worship.

How individual children expressed their agency depended on the situation, the broader social and religious contexts and the child in question. Therefore, we supplemented the general analysis with focused descriptions of selections of our data (vignettes).

Findings

We found that children's agency showed up in three ways: Firstly, in how children negotiated and appropriated worship practices, including the knowledge regarding social structures and faith contents contained in those practices; secondly, in the children's values, things they found to be important in worship; and thirdly, in how children impacted the way worship services took place during worship performances and through decision-making processes.

Children's Negotiation and Appropriation

When children participate in worship, they start to relate to existing social norms and theological contents. Children's (re)actions can be approached from the two angles of appropriation and negotiation: Appropriation draws attention to how children's performances and interpretations are similar (though not identical) to the encountered practices, beliefs, and values, while negotiation emphasizes how the children adapt and at times challenge existing practices, beliefs, and values. Appropriation and negotiation are both expressions of agency.

Children's mere presence is a form of influencing the physical and social context of worship, but primarily their actions demonstrate their agency. In one congregation where the adults commonly took notes during the sermon, a boy was drawing on a notepad (Congregation 2, participant observation, January 29, 2017). The boy's imitation was an appropriation of the social context, while it also allowed him to make movements rather than sitting completely still. In a similar setting, a girl brought her teddy bear to church (Congregation 1, participant observation, January 15, 2017). The teddy bear gave her something to play with during the service. Neither the children nor the adults in this congregation made bringing teddy bears a regular practice, so this example involved negotiation. The girl altered the physical environment and the social setting, making the church feel more like home. Her participation, though, still sufficiently fit the social context to make her actions acceptable. Thus, her action also illustrates appropriation. The fact that these examples of negotiation and appropriation involve movement and play is significant: both are key children's values (see Children's Values).

Children know the social rules and are able to express and nuance those rules. In the following conversation, six-year-old Diederik talked about the Seder meal:

> Diederik: "Well, it is very cosy.[18] There are a lot of people, talking, talking, talking."

[18] Often translated as cozy, *gezellig* connotes having a good time in good company.

Figure 4. The flags spell out the theme, “eating together” or “sharing a meal.”

Figure 5. Someone cannot come because they just bought an animal (Luke 14:19).

> Interviewer: "So it's not only the minister talking?"
>
> Diederik: "No, no! [laughing]. Not when the minister is telling [the story]. When he is talking you need to be quiet [laughing]."
>
> Interviewer: "Do you sometimes say things during the meal? Like asking a question?"
>
> Diederik: "Mm… For example, when I sit next to a friend then I also chat [smiling]. So…but when [the minister] tells something new, for example, I don't know that yet, then maybe I can ask a question if I don't understand. […] That's allowed, of course, because if you don't understand something, that's a bit annoying. […] But I do it when the minister gives the opportunity, when he says 'are there any questions' or something. Because if you ask questions in between the story it's a bit disturbing." (Congregation 6, participant observation, April 13, 2017)

The interview itself revealed Diederik's agency: he was fully confident when he effectively explained some of the social rules during worship. Simultaneously, Diederik knew the rule of being quiet was flexible, as he pointed out that he would also chat with a friend. Moreover, Diederik's comment that asking questions is allowed because "if you don't understand something, that's a bit annoying" illustrates the finding that asking questions is central to how children negotiate and appropriate the liturgical ritual form and content.

Many methods allow children to respond to a story or teaching, verbally or through crafts, games, or sports. Children's responses often show their negotiation and appropriation of liturgical content.

> During the church-and-school service, drawings are projected that children made at school. Especially the children regularly switch between looking at the screens and the minister. The theme of the service is eating together [see Figure 4] based on Luke 14 verses 1 and 7-24, in which Jesus tells a story about a feast [see Figure 5]. The minister explains what happens when you want to give a party. "First, you invite people. […] Then, you think about what you want to eat." The drawing accompanying this comment shows restaurant logos and a pizza slice, a doughnut and French fries [see Figure 6]. Some adults respond with amusement. "[…] today is the party. But how awful if nobody comes!" Here, the drawing shows an app-screen with lame excuses [see Figure 7]. (Congregation 15, participant observation, June 12, 2018)

The drawings enabled children to participate using their auditory *and* visual senses, and their graphic interpretations also drew the adults' attention. For all

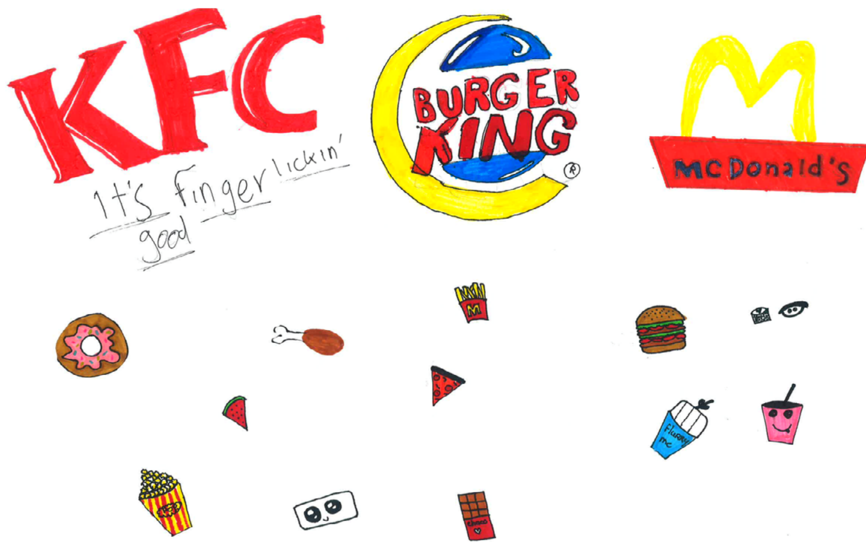


Figure 6. Deciding what you want to eat at your party.

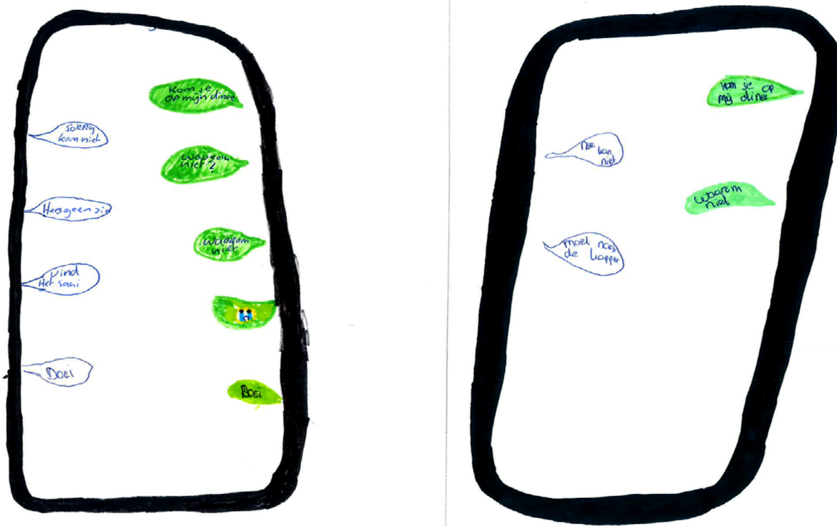


Figure 7. An app screen showing excuses. Transcription:

Will you come to my dinner?
Sorry, won't come
Why not?
Don't feel like it
Why not?
I think it's boring
(crying face)
Bye
Bye.

Will you come to my dinner?
No, I won't come
Why not
Have to go to the hairdresser.

participants, the drawings provided another means of engaging with the subject matter. In the sermon, the minister described what Jesus' story might look like today. The children's creativity made this translation even clearer: The illustration of "deciding what you want to eat" referred to the practice of inviting other kids to a meal at a favorite restaurant, and the drawing which illustrated the disappointment of cancellations showed an app-screen with someone's excuse that they had to go to the hairdresser. The drawings also revealed the children's negotiation of the subject matter; those who made humorous drawings in particular added an element of play to the church-and-school service. The illustrations and the audience's interaction with them gave a dynamism to the liturgy that it would otherwise have lacked.

The two following vignettes offer further demonstrations of how children clearly negotiate worship practices and their faith-related contents:

> During children's church, after the story about Pentecost, the exercise is to draw as many Bible stories as you can recall. Kasper, age six, decides to draw Dutch naval hero Michiel de Ruyter instead, "as," he says, "I don't believe." (Congregation 7, participant observation, May 28, 2017)

Throughout this children's church, the children over five years old positioned themselves in relation to the other participants, using belief and non-belief as social identity markers. Kasper negotiated the content of his participation to fit his expressed non-belief. Instead of drawing Bible stories, Kasper drew a Dutch historical figure. He nonetheless appropriated the relevant social norms, participating in the activity and using the provided materials.

Sterre negotiated her participation even further:

> Twelve-year-old Sterre attends Messy Church for the first time "but I have been here before with my grandmother [indicating the church hall]."
>
> Interviewer: "What was that like?"
>
> Sterre: "Well, I think it's good that you can just…think what you think but…I don't really believe it myself. When I come here, I do think 'it does have a meaning' and I also get a feel for the way my grandma actually lives. [The stories about] Jesus, how he lived and what he did for the people, […] I think [Messy Church] will have *something* to do with that. My grandma told me it's not really about that, that it's mostly for the fun of being together."[19]
>
> Interviewer: "How do you listen to [those stories], then?"

[19] The word used here was *gezelligheid*—see footnote 18.

> Sterre: "Well, at times I find it interesting but it can take too long because they are long stories. And because I don't really *believe* in it…well…yes [she turns her shoulders left to right]. My grandmother really believes in it, for those people it doesn't take long. […] Sometimes I think 'it's always about *that*,' but I don't think 'I don't belong.' My parents are not Christian either, but my grandma is. And she likes it when I do something with her, for example, coming along." (Congregation 7, participant observation, April 14, 2017)

Sterre positioned herself in relation to believing people—including their practice of going to church—and her parents. Like her parents, she did not believe. However, she motivated her participation by saying it helped her understand her grandmother and because it pleased her grandmother. It seems Sterre's grandmother persuaded her to come this time by saying that Messy Church was mostly about having fun. However, Sterre astutely suspected that Messy Church would have to do with faith anyway. Sterre had come to help with the crafts but eventually took on the task of babysitter. She effectively placed herself outside of the service while making herself useful in an activity that she enjoyed. Thus, Sterre negotiated how much she participated and how far she went along with practices that were about something she "didn't really believe in."

A last example concerns how children negotiated the format of a liturgical ritual. In the Introduction, we described Your!Church as a service organized with older primary school children. The following conversation was observed during the evaluation meeting:

> The minister explains that Your!Church is going to stop and proposes to do "a kind of Your!Church on Sunday morning, but with all people of the church." The children are surprised and propose ways to raise the attendance of Your!Church, such as distributing flyers or administering a questionnaire. "[People who have never attended] don't know how awesome Your!Church is!" eight-year-old Floortje exclaims. The children also want to merge Your!Church with children's church. Floortje explains, "so that they…that the *parents* can do grown-up things […] and the children can do…the real children's church.[20]" (Congregation 10, audio recording, July 5, 2017).

Various research participants in this congregation noted that both parents and children enjoyed worshiping together in the toddler and preschooler service (Congregation 10, participant observations, April 19 and May 31, 2017). However, the idea to merge Your!Church with children's church suggests that

20 The Dutch word used here, *kinderkerk*, connotes a church of or for children, rather than the word for children's church as a parallel service, which is *kindernevendienst*.

at Your!Church services, the parents' partial absence contributes to the children's sense of control over the content of the service. In an earlier interview, Floortje said that "it is the *Your!*Church and then *actually* the children are the boss. And then the parents go to the parents' church" (Congregation 10, interview, April 19, 2017). This corresponds to the finding that children perceive children's church as separate from "adult church" (Zonio 2014). The children appropriated Your!Church as *their* church. Perhaps, this is more important for older children. In sum, how children's agency manifests in worship depends on the situation, context, and the child or children in question.

Children's Values

In our data, children's agency was especially highlighted when something was at stake for them. We called these things that children find important in worship "children's values" and grouped them thematically.

First, children want to participate bodily. Embodied participation includes moving, having something to do, actively participating, and seeing what is going on. Second, all children enjoy particular activities before, during and after worship. Many children like playing and doing crafts. Children also mentioned that they enjoyed singing, listening to stories, learning and discovering new things, eating tasty food, and doing outdoor activities. Note that children connected activities during both "liturgical time" and "free time" to their experience of going to church.[21] Third, children value relationships. Their behavior and comments showed how they value friendship, getting attention, being with family members and peers, being known, being addressed personally, the use of *kinderwoorden* (child-friendly language, literally children's words), receiving help and support, doing things together, and others' enjoyment. Fourth, children want to give input. The children value getting responsibility, being free to choose an activity, having variety in activities, being taken seriously, suggesting ideas, and feeling competent. Fifth, the children value well-organized worship: They want attention to be paid to clarity, quality, and safety. Some children valued worship which felt festive and suggested using pompons during songs or hanging flags in the worship space.

The evaluation meeting of Your!Church was a rich source of children's values because the children were explicitly asked to reflect on worship. The following passages highlight various children's values:

21 In his thesis, Zonio similarly concluded that children valued learning and fun in children's church but that these two things are not necessarily related. Zonio found that if either aspect was lacking, the children would start thinking of going to "adult church" (Zonio, '"Having fun about Jesus"', 69).

> The minister formulates theses; the six children and three adults take positions on the floor ranging from "I totally agree" to "I totally disagree." "The nice thing about Your!Church is that children themselves are allowed to do a lot," the minister says. Everyone completely agrees! Saar comments, "I help preparing and the parents go to parents' church and the children don't go to children's church. And most children do crafts, I also like that." Elza reacts, "You can see a bit how it works, really. In the real church service, you don't know about what the elder and custodian and all those people who have to do something do…and now you can see it for yourself."

This passage illustrates the children's desire to participate and take responsibility. Elza recognized that doing organizational tasks provided learning opportunities. Preferring not to go to children's church and wanting time away from their parents suggest an emphasis on the desire to be taken seriously and the value of being competent. Crafts in particular were mentioned: Apparently, activities in worship helped the children experience "being allowed to do a lot themselves."

> In response to the thesis "I am sad and would like more people to come to Your!Church," Saar says "With such a small group […] you know everyone you do things with. But it's a pity that there are no others…who are enthusiastic [and] start to participate."

Saar's comment highlighted the importance of relationships: knowing others, being known and doing things together. Saar also wanted others to be enthusiastic, pointing to the value of her personal and other peoples' enjoyment.

> Later, the minister asks, "What things [of the current Your!Church format] need to reappear?" […] "Well," Floortje says, "that children are still able to do a lot regularly. […]. For example, to dance or really participating with a song. Otherwise you only sit on your chair all the time and that's boring." "Or walking around while you listen to the…to the minister. No chairs needed!" Olivia says, and later adds, "We could play tag!" (Congregation 10, audio recording, July 5, 2017)

The suggestions of walking, playing tag, doing interesting crafts, dancing, and even the comment 'no chairs needed!' all point to the importance children place on activities and embodied participation.

The five categories of embodied participation, activity, relationships, input, and well-organized worship are closely interrelated, and each highlights children's agency in a different way. Movement, activity, and participation were correlated with many of the other children's values. Physical movement is crucial to children's expression of agency. It matters to children what kind of activities they

do during worship. Children regularly demonstrated their agency by requesting particular activities during worship. At the same time, the personal preferences of individual children were clearest in the activity-values—for example, some enjoyed crafts while others preferred sports-like activities.

The relationship values show how children enjoyed their connections with others and liked doing things with others. They highlight how children develop their agency in relation to others. At the same time, children's desire to give input underlines that they have their own opinions, likes, and dislikes and want to express themselves. Children like having responsibility and there is often a responsible role that a particular child is enthusiastic about: welcoming people, reading scripture, demonstrating the movements to songs, preparing the worship space, babysitting, or helping the custodian. Giving input also connects with the value of relationships: We observed that having good relationships with adults often enabled children to give input (see Recognizing Children's Agency).

Children also have ideas about the form and content of worship as it exists and as it could be. Older children in particular are able to participate in decision-making. Children pay attention to how worship is organized and explicitly reflect on how to improve the quality of their own contributions; some even pay attention to issues such as fire safety. This insight is important, as our data gave the impression that adults often do not expect children to be interested in safety regulations or the quality of worship. In sum, the children's values reflect the particularity of children's agency in worship.

Recognizing Children's Agency

In worship, children's agency shows up in their values and the way they negotiate and appropriate the social norms and liturgical content. The children's values and their (appropriated and negotiated) practices and beliefs became especially apparent when their agency was acknowledged by the people around them. In this section, therefore, we focus on some of the ways in which adults encouraged children's agency.

Throughout our data, adults' supportive comments and enquiring questions elicited the children's agency. During a Godly Play session, three children chose their own response to the story and then returned to their cushions:

> Storyteller Linda addresses five-year old Diana: "you may throw away the handkerchief if you like. You may also keep it if you want to." Diana decides to throw it away. The children have all brought their creation with them to the circle. Fee, who is three years old, is poking at her clay. Linda gives each child a red-and-white checkered napkin and Fee may hand out the cookies.

> Linda asks Diana to ask the others if they want water or lemonade and serve the drinks. Diana first puts a glass of water next to her own napkin. Then she looks at Fee, who does not seem to notice. Linda vocalizes the question, first asking Fee and then Vera what they want to drink. Diana hands out the requests. Then Linda prays, "Lord God, thank you for all that we could share and for all the beautiful stories that exist. Amen. Enjoy your food and drink." Diana walks away. Linda asks whether the cookie [shaped like a flower] has some connection with the story [about the parable of the sower]. The children nod. Vera says a flower also comes from a seed. She then asks "may I wash my hands too?" She and Fee look at their hands. Linda asks Fee if she wants to wash her hands and Fee nods, so both Vera and Fee follow Diana to wash their hands. When Diana returns, Linda comments "it is nicer, right? To eat cookies with clean hands." (Congregation 9, participant observation, May 7, 2017)

In this passage, a very shy girl who rarely speaks nevertheless took the freedom to wash her hands before eating. The method and Linda's execution of her storyteller role enabled Diana to show her agency: Godly Play is designed to enable children to develop their own meaningful language (in the broad sense of the word). Moreover, throughout the Godly Play session, the storyteller made supportive and encouraging comments: She gave Diana the option to throw away her handkerchief or keep it, she helped Diana by asking the others what they wanted to drink, and she validated Diana's actions by saying that eating cookies is nicer with clean hands. The other children would probably not have followed Diana's example without Linda's supportive comments and questions. In sum, giving children the opportunity to contribute to worship has effects beyond an individual comment or action—it enables children to express their agency more freely.

Next to eliciting children's agency during worship, parents who organized worship with children were significant in enabling the children's agency to impact worship performances at the level of decision-making:

> A comment Elza made when she was seven years old led to the start of Your!Church. Now, at age thirteen, Elza recounts, "I was deacon, for example, but now I am busy with school and when I have free time now I want to use it differently. But suppose I have an idea, then… my mother does take that seriously. Now that I'm older I'd like to do more…"
>
> Interviewer: "You'd like to organize things yourself?"
>
> Elza: "Yes, but not everything. That's too much, but […] for example, having

everything clear: who plays piano and who sings so that all is arranged before the service starts." (Congregation 10, participant observation, May 21, 2017)

Elza trusted her mother to listen to her ideas. She used to be an active participant and co-organizer but, being older, she now wanted to take a different kind of responsibility. "Having everything clear" connects to Elza's value of well-organized worship and is a reaction to the miscommunications that transpired in the Your!Church service just before this conversation took place. Importantly, the development of Elza's agency and the way she wanted to express it in worship seem related to the fact that the adults around her took her seriously in the past. The children's participation in decision-making and the habit of adults and children to share ideas and opinions increased the ease with which children talked about worship. Taking the whole dataset into account, not all children felt like participating in decision-making—some thought it would be boring and long-winded. Many (grand)parents who organized worship shared their (grand)children's ideas during decision-making processes. Thus, the children's agency influenced worship through both official procedures (e.g. preparation and evaluation meetings) and informal social structures (e.g. family relationships).

The children's agency especially impacted worship when they were treated as agents, raising the question of how children's agency relates to adult responsibility. We will discuss this question below.

Discussion

In the findings, we described how children's agency manifests in their values and when they negotiate and appropriate worship practices and their theological content. However, children's agency is especially pronounced when children are treated as agents. Thus, adults need to recognize and validate children's contributions to worship. The interdependency between adults and children is important from a theological perspective, because agency becomes possible only through dependence: It is adult responsibility that enables children to "grow into a humanly dignified active agent" (Burggraeve 2010, 274). Mercer (2005, 236) observed that, especially in regular worship, "adults often fail to recognize children's ways of participation in worship as such." Various children's theologians have rightly noted that children teach adults about the kinesthetic nature of faith through their movement and embodied participation (Mercer 2003, 30), the importance they attribute to their activities (Burggraeve 2010, 383), and the value they attach to relationships (385, 388-9). Each of these "teachings of children" are supported by our findings.

Adults' responsibility also lies in giving children opportunities to take responsibility (Burggraeve 2010, 290). As Hart (2008, 23-24) argued, involving children in decision-making does not automatically make a practice better than others. However, it makes a difference when children know that they have the option to participate and take on more responsibility if they want to.[22] Indeed, not all of the children wanted to participate in decision-making, but our findings suggest that the children greatly valued being taken seriously and knowing they could give input and take on responsibility if they wanted to (see the Your!Church vignettes). The interaction during Godly Play and our analysis of it recalls the finding by Houen et al. (2016, 259) that "I wonder" formulations were sometimes used by teachers to "create a space for agency for children to make decisions regarding their participation." In fact, both in worship and decision-making processes, adults, especially parents, often take on multiple roles when they try to verbalize what children express through body language, posture, or facial expressions (Carnevale, Teachman, and Bogossian 2017). Thus, adults become translators instead of speaking "in lieu" of children, for themselves and for the community as a whole. As such, adults may actually encourage children to express their agency in worship.

Above all, our findings show that agency was most clearly revealed when the organizers acted on the premise that the children had something to add to worship. "The worst thing that can happen to a child is an indifferent teacher, who does not allow that children make a difference," theologian Bert Roebben wrote (2019; translated by Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede). Developing "a *hospitable space* for children" (De Mey 2010, 395; citing Kimes Myers [2002], italics in original) can take many forms, such as the use of the children's illustrations in the church-and-school service, the gently enabling comments during Godly Play, and the children's participation in decision-making at Your!Church. Examples of worship practices from recent research in other contexts which parallel our analysis include inviting children to shadow a worship leader, thus letting children "co-curate" worship (Morris 2020), enabling individual children to participate in the way they want to (see Modéus 2011; a project with child facilitators in the Church of Sweden), and allowing them to explore a worship space on their own terms (see Champagne 2015, 91-93; in the described project the children each had different but meaningful responses to being in a chapel). Listening to children impacts worship; for example, the ministers incorporated children's creations into the service (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019b, 172-

22 Hart's ladder is sometimes used as an evaluative instrument in worship with children in the Netherlands (JOP Coach Live, participant observation, September 22, 2016).

3, Chapter 3), the organizers made decisions based on their recollection of the children's enthusiasm (169, 177), and two custodians delegated parts of their tasks to their children (168-9). Finally, children's expressions of agency enrich worship: Research findings emphasize that some adults feel spiritually nourished after worshiping with children (168-9, 177). In sum, we encourage practitioners to enable children to express their agency in worship. It is worth the effort.

Conclusion

To answer our question, How do children show agency in worship?, we described how children appropriated and negotiated the liturgical rituals in which they participated. The children's values were another expression of the children's agency: These clustered around embodied participation (movement), activity, relationships, giving input, and well-organized worship. The children already contributed to worship through their presence, but their impact on worship became greater when they were approached as agents. We therefore discussed how children's agency relates to adult responsibility and invited practitioners to enhance children's agency by offering them the opportunity to participate in worship performance, design, planning, and evaluation.

In conclusion, our research shows that children can and do contribute to worship. The findings add an inductive perspective to the arguments for greater inclusion of children in worship made by theologians, including Joyce Ann Mercer, Karen-Marie Yust, and Heather Nicole Ingersoll. Furthermore, we hope our findings reverberate with practical theological methodology, so that children can have a greater influence on research: establishing a research project and its agenda, negotiating the limits of their participation, and contributing to member checks. Future research on children in worship would improve with the use of ethnographic and collaborative designs: investigating topics that interest children together with them. Finally, we hope our research inspires practitioners to experiment with ways of involving children in worship and decision-making for those children who want to take part.

Summary

How does materiality play a role in worship with children? This chapter explores how adults and children manage sounds of children in worship. The concept of affordances denotes the possibilities an environment offers a person. Liturgical-ritual space comes into being through people's participation in an environment with imagination and anticipation. The analysis of children's acoustic participation in two pre-Reformation church buildings shows how sounds made by children contribute to the creation of a liturgical-ritual space. It also brings to light tensions in how the sounds that children make are interpreted by adults. Sound matters in Protestant worship, not only for the cognitive messages it may convey but for its affective qualities as well.

Published as

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Martijn Oosterbaan, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. 2021. "Sounds of Children in Worship: Materiality and Liturgical-Ritual Spaces," *Material Religion* 17 (5), Abingdon: Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2021.1996941.

5

Sounds of Children in Worship

> With a baptism, once, there was a minister who allowed the children to feel the water. They just won't forget that anymore! Was that water cold or warm? [...] If they [children] can sort of really use their senses in the ritual, then it has even more impact, right? (Interview with Leantine Dekker, team leader and youth work advisor at HGJB [Reformed Youth Alliance], August 23, 2016)

In the opening quotation, the minister recognizes that touching the water is a meaningful way for children to participate in the liturgy. Feeling the water is an example of an *affordance*, a possibility for action that an environment offers a person (Gibson [1979] 2015, 119). Church practitioners in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands increasingly acknowledge that "children's full sensory immersion in services provides irreplaceable learning opportunities" (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, 27, Chapter 2). Studies in sociology and pedagogy underline the centrality of embodiment in cultural transmission (Vásquez 2011, 234-5). Moreover, research into religious education and children's spirituality affirms that children learn about the (religious) world around them through their bodies (Delfos 2010; Champagne 2003; de Kock and Sonnenberg 2012). Worship in old (pre-Reformation) church buildings provides ample opportunities for sensory interaction with their environment, which may give children "the experience that there is something bigger than themselves," as one respondent reflected. "It is not like you can only meet God in a beautiful old church... but it does do something!" At the same time, the way children act in worship impacts the sensory landscape and affects how worship is envisaged and experienced by other participants. Children thus participate in the creation of worship spaces, which in turn, contributes to their own religious formation.

Our study on children's participation in environments of worship adds to literature in the fields of material religion and liturgical studies. Until now,

child-related research in material religion has mainly focused on the production of religious objects and images for children, such as children's Bibles (Lindquist 2014), a cartoon figure used for evangelization (Bellotti 2010), and Sunday school pictures (Brewer 2005). Recent research on architecture and the arrangement of furniture for worship (Barnard and Post 2001; de Jonge 2002; Post 2010; Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014; Pons-de Wit et al. 2019) hardly ever considers how children affect or are affected by worship spaces. Our research on children in places of worship aims to extend childhood studies and child geography research, which mainly focus on educational settings, the home, and the urban environment (Nairn, Kraftl, and Skelton 2016, 4).

Because we produced our ethnographic data in the context of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, we situate this study within the growing body of research on how materiality "matters" within Protestantism (Wharton 2014). Specifically, we share an interest with Hackett (2021) in the role of sound in religion. With Novak and Sakakeeny (2015), we consider sound as a material given. We situate sound in its material environment to stress that worship is "a full sensory experience" (Engelke 2011, 224). Hearing is one of the senses through which people experience worship. In Protestantism, hearing remains an important faculty through which to connect to God. Thus, we find it useful to approach worship through sound and to enquire into the "anthropological and theological […] meanings of sound in the performance of worship" (Klomp 2011, 40). Like Klomp (2011), we move beyond the literature on liturgical and church music,[23] as studying sound broadens research into how "music-making in and by congregations reflects and shapes the performance of theology, the interplay of identities and religious experience" (Ingalls, Landau, and Wagner 2013, 1). We bring to this growing field of scholarship our specific interest in the sounds of children in worship.

The main question we want to answer is how adults and children manage the materiality of sound in worship with children. We employ James Gibson's ([1979] 2015) theory of perception; in particular, we make Gibson's concept of affordances sensitive to socialization so we can analyze the sonic interaction between children and church buildings. We also refine the notion of liturgical-ritual space as developed by liturgical studies scholars Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, and Cas Wepener (2014, 297). After describing our methodology, we analyze sound-related affordances in two church buildings. Adults manage the sounds children make, and the children manage their own sound production

[23] Next to melody, dynamics, and tempo, studying sound in worship broadens the possible parameters of study to include loudness, timbre, pitch, form, and silence (Klomp 2011, 40).

to fit with the characteristics of the liturgical-ritual space. Children may also respond to affordances that produce sounds, which adults interpret as dissonant or disturbing in the context of worship. We conclude that children's sounds help to create liturgical-ritual spaces, but we also highlight some tensions in how adults interpret children's acoustic participation.

Affordances and Liturgical-Ritual Spaces

Affordances

Gibson ([1979] 2015, 119) coined the concept of affordances to describe what the environment offers, provides, or furnishes a particular person. Affordance is a concept used widely in a range of fields, from psychology to anthropology and from design to STSS (science, technology, and social studies). It is part of a broader theory of perception. Perception, for Gibson ([1979] 2015, xxi), is multisensory and grounded in the environment.

The environment consists of material components, including objects and people when they are present.[24] For our analysis, it will suffice to say that the environments we investigate, pre-Reformation church buildings in the Netherlands, consist mostly of hard stone and wood (the substances) and air (the medium), with surfaces between the two (Gibson [1979] 2015, 27). Considering that "sound is vibration that is perceived and becomes known through its materiality" (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015), the characteristics of the environment affect its affordances in relation to sound production: stone affords sounds to bounce off it; an uneven floor surface affords tripping and falling to a person running across it, producing a thump; a building with a large volume of air and hard surfaces affords amplification of voices.

Because an affordance has to do with the complementarity of environment and person, recognizing an affordance has as much to do with the characteristics of the human as with those of the environment (Gibson [1979] 2015, 121):[25] "Knee-high for a child is not the same as knee-high for an adult, so affordance is relative to the size of the individual" (120) and "a stream or a lake […] may afford floating or swimming, but you have to be equipped for that, by nature or by learning" (124). We perform actions like swimming through the particular

24 People's presence in the environment creates affordances because a person can then undertake actions with or in response to those others; Gibson ([1979] 2015, 126) even states that "behavior affords behavior."

25 Recognizing an affordance occurs automatically, like a reflex (Gibson [1979] 2015, 130). In our view, therefore, recognizing an affordance is akin to how Michael Schiffer defines registration: "the way that the human sensory apparatus responds to the world around it" (Dant 2005, 17).

"techniques of the body" (Mauss [1934] 1992, 71) that we have learned in our cultural context. Thus, bodily characteristics and socialization affect affordances.

Vásquez (2011, 14) sums the point up nicely when he writes that "our bodies and the environment in which we act 'afford' each other, they make each other available. Our bodies, which have been shaped by the surrounding environment, which includes cultural artefacts of various kinds, allow us to perceive, transform, and accommodate to the environment."

We now consider how environment and people interact in the creation of liturgical-ritual spaces.

Liturgical-Ritual Spaces

Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener draw on the work of Soja to describe worship through three kinds of space (the material, imagined, and lived-in). Of these, lived-in space represents a "way of thinking beyond the binary oppositions that characterize Firstspace and Secondspace, as the material and the mental, respectively" (de Haardt 2010, 175). Barnard et al. (2014, 297) propose that worship becomes a fourth kind of space, a liturgical-ritual space, which "incorporates [...] physical [material] and existential [lived-in] space, but liturgical ritual wants to transform and transcend these spaces into [...] imaginative and anticipatory places." Creating a fourth category for worship risks a seeming separation from the material.[26] However, Barnard et al. pay close attention to worship as embodied and material. For example, they describe anticipation as "an attitude of expectation"[27] (Barnard et al. 2014, 304) and note that worship both effects the imagined change in reality and feeds the sensory experience of reality as being changed (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 296-7; Meyer 2009, 6). Meyer (2009, 6) similarly describes the interplay between the material and the imagined and speaks of participation in worship as "per*form*ative" (Meyer 2009, 7).

We think Barnard et al. cast liturgical-ritual space as a fourth kind of space to capture the "otherness" of worship, as they approach worship from a distinctly theological perspective. Citing Long, they see worship as accomplishing "more than its context would suggest" (Barnard et al. 2014, 1). Nevertheless, precisely because worship is embodied and material but also comprises "something more," we think it fitting to characterize liturgical-ritual space as lived-in space (Thirdspace). Soja draws on Lefebvre and Foucault to emphasize that

[26] For example, Barnard et al. (2014, 296) write that for entering liturgical-ritual space "you need a transcending spirituality that lets you believe and anticipate such a transcendent space."

[27] This implies a bodily posture as well as a mental state (e.g. prayer positions, a concert audience right before a performance).

Thirdspace always denotes "something more" than the sum of its parts and is per definition elusive and hard to pin down (Borch 2002, 113-4). Therefore, we think characterizing worship as lived-in space leaves room for a theological interpretation of worship.

Affordance helps to further theorize liturgical-ritual space. Every place is a possible liturgical-ritual space (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 303), independently of whether the space is used for a one-time event or has been a place of worship for centuries. However, the notion of affordances helps us understand that the location of worship is not arbitrary. People need to perceive that liturgical-ritual activities are possible in a particular environment. Some places are more inviting for (particular types of) worship than others, precisely because of their affordances.

A place may be more inviting for worship due to earlier changes: Gibson ([1979] 2015, 122) states that humans alter their environment to change what it will afford. People change an environment for worship by imagining what actions a changed environment will enable.[28] Good examples of large-scale changes to the environment are the initial building of a church and later renovations and adaptations. Small-scale changes may be how people rearrange chairs, bring in musical instruments, flowers, or craft supplies, or open windows or doors. These changes influence the social dynamics and atmosphere in worship. The connection to outdoors is significant for worship spaces because, in the Northern hemisphere, the liturgical year is linked to the cycles of sun and moon and therefore to the turn of the seasons (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 281). Furthermore, furniture and other arrangements reflect decisions about the location of particular groups of people in the environment. These changes create social boundaries and influences how, for example, adults and children will experience worship.

Sound-related affordances influence the creation of a liturgical-ritual space. Following Novak and Sakakeeny (2015, 1), we define sound as vibration and add that sound is more than materiality: The metaphors and "conceptual fields used to define sound—for example, silence, hearing, or voice—[…] inform experience." Thus, it is significant how adults interpret the sounds of children in worship. Adults also manage the sounds that children make in the environment, which underlines that "childhood is not merely a social construction […] but a

28 Dant (2005, 76) notes that "imagination and mind create affordance at the immaterial level and continually mold and remold the material world to achieve that effect." We agree but would stress the interdependence of imagination and materiality: The notion of 'occluding edges' helps illustrate that people imagine affordances based on the information that is available in the environment (Gibson [1979] 2015, xxii, 31, 149-50).

spatial one" (Nairn, Kraftl, and Skelton 2016, 4). Before going deeper into the relation between children's acoustic participation in worship and the creation of liturgical-ritual spaces, we present our methodology.

Methodology

The analysis we present in this chapter is based on participant observations, interviews, photos, and sound recordings. We researched twenty-one distinct liturgical rituals with children, all in the context of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. In our reports, we took care to note sensory information and to describe the architecture, furniture, and spatial arrangements.

We started our analysis by using the field reports and photos to note the characteristics of each worship environment, such as (building) materials, (liturgical) furniture, and ambiance. We then selected two cases and analyzed those in depth. We noted why and how people planned to use an environment and the way we actually saw them use it, focusing specifically on sound-related affordances.

The two practices we selected were both situated in Protestant congregations that celebrated their liturgies in buildings that were built before the Reformation as Roman Catholic churches. We selected cases from two different theological and liturgical traditions. Therefore, despite the similarities in environments, the children's sounds were interpreted and managed differently in each case. The church interiors reflect these different traditions (see the abstracted illustration that accompanies each case).

Old church buildings have long been the locus of liturgical ritual studies and have found renewed interest as "iconic" places of worship in material religion scholarship (Knott, Krech, and Meyer 2016; Verkaaik, Beekers, and Tamimi Arab 2017; Beekers and Tamimi Arab 2016). However, children's participation in these buildings is largely overlooked. We wanted to analyze children's participation in the main halls of old church buildings, particularly because there is a tendency to think of worship with children as something that happens in the side rooms, an annex building, nearby school, or even in playgrounds or park spaces. Such spaces were indeed among our research locations. They had in common with the analyzed pre-Reformation church buildings that adults made attempts to integrate the children's sensory interactions with their surroundings into the liturgy, using existing affordances or creating new ones by changing the environment.

Children's Sounds in Two Liturgical Settings

In this section, we analyze two practices of worship with children, focusing on the sounds that the church building affords children to make, the orchestration of the children's sound production, and the interpretations of the sounds children make in worship. The first case focuses mainly on the children's singing and the second on the sound of children's movements during other parts of the service. In each case, those particular sounds were the main topic of discussion.

A Children's Choir in a Congregation Influenced by the Liturgical Movement

In the center of a large town in the Netherlands, a pre-Reformation building is open to tourists throughout the week. The church nave, the high arched ceilings and stone floor afford superb acoustics, enhancing the Sunday services, evensongs, and vespers held there. The building is also often hired for concerts.

The congregation that uses this building is influenced by the Liturgical Movement.[29] The set-up of the liturgical space is illustrative: The pews in this building face each other, and the pulpit and raised choir section are situated at either end of the pews (see Figure 8). This enables the seated congregation members to hear and see the pulpit and choir equally well. It grants similar importance in the liturgical-ritual space to the Bible reading and sermon at the one end and the choir's singing and the Eucharist at the other. Indeed, the congregation values music highly and employs conservatory-schooled church musicians. A choir or musical ensemble participates in the service each Sunday. Once a month, it is the children's choir's turn to sing.

High Quality Sound

Participating in a choir in this congregation requires time and effort: the adult choir practices twice a week and sings in the service almost weekly, and the children's choir practices weekly and sings in a service about once a month. Wytze, the cantor, directs both choirs: "I didn't distinguish between the song-material of the adult and children's choir," he recounts, "but now I make sure to give them more understandable pieces and shorter melodies." The current group has had less musical training than previous choirs, so Wytze reduces the difficulty of the music (language, melody, length) to maintain the quality of the performance.

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[29] The influence of the Liturgical Movement in the Dutch Protestant context involved liturgical renewal and experimentation, based on both a re-valuation of pre-reformation liturgical traditions and an emphasis on the participation of lay people (in the Roman Catholic context, this culminated in the Second Vatican Council) (Barnard and Post 2008, 9, 12, 19).

Figure 8. Church interior with pews facing each other. The choir section is the platform at the far end.

However, easier pieces become boring more quickly, and the choir children "feel less inclined to go again and invest in something that can be improved *just* that little bit more." When the children do not master a song sufficiently, the cantor decides not to perform it in the liturgy "because if we do something, we need to do it well" (Congregation 11, interview, June 13, 2017). Thus, the children's choir has to live up to high standards.

Something is at stake in attaining such a high quality of sound. During the week, when the church is open to the public, a television screen in a side aisle features a story about the choir. In it, the cantor says that "the color of the robes of the choir is red, which symbolizes passion, fire, and also—if you want to put it religiously—the Holy Spirit." Thus, the choir music is central to the liturgical-ritual space of this congregation.

Managing Affordances to Train Children's Voices

The cantor, Wytze, encourages the children to practice at home. The children reflect on their home practice in comparison to singing in church:

> Gaby and Renate, both six years old, recount how they use their parents' mobile devices to record themselves. Being in church building is "as if I am in a jungle," Renate says, "very different from at home. And then really a lot of people come to listen." "At home, I don't sing like in a church," Gaby agrees. "[At home] I sing at leisure," Renate adds, "just la la la, and then it doesn't really have to be beautiful, [but in church] it just has to be… just…" I ask, "In church it just has to be good?" "Yes," Renate answers, "yes, because then [at home] I am also not nervous." (Congregation 11, interview, June 18, 2017)

Children's homes afford them the opportunity to practice at leisure. In contrast, the image of the church building as a jungle is cryptic but seems to convey something about the space as big, uncontrollable, and full of sensations. The children are aware of the affordances of the environment and the (lack of) audience, and they modulate their voices accordingly.

A closer look at the choir practice in the church building gives further insight into how Wytze uses the building to ensure that the choir will produce good quality sound:

> Halfway through the practice, Wytze leads the children's choir from the side room to the choir section in the church hall. The children stand on wooden chairs in a semi-circle in the choir section of the church hall. Wytze makes the practice a bit of a game. The children get a number and have to sing along with Miranda when Wytze calls their number. Wytze sometimes points at

> another child than the number he says, but the children are not distracted; they are good at this! Gerdina, a young girl who arrived late, gets a turn but stays silent so we only hear Miranda singing. Gerdina starts crying a bit. At Wytze's request, Miranda takes her to the pulpit. Wytze follows and walks toward the middle of the church. The children find this exciting and a bit scary. Quite a number of the tourists have taken a seat to listen to the singing. They seem surprised as suddenly the sound comes from the opposite direction, where Miranda is standing with Gerdina. (Congregation 11, participant observation, June 13, 2017)

The children's choir affords the tourists actions that were not evident before and vice versa. When the children start singing, the building rebounds and carries the sound of their voices across the space. The tourists amble around the church building-as-museum but the children's singing encourages them to sit to listen, facilitated by the pews. Conversely, the listening tourists afford the children's choir with an audience, creating a setting similar to a general repetition. The presence of tourists and children's choir creates new affordances, but note that the church building brings these two groups together.

Wytze uses the furniture and spatiality of the building to train the children and help them deal with their emotions. When Gerdina starts crying, Wytze gives her time to recover by sending her to the more sheltered spot on the pulpit with Miranda. Furthermore, Miranda's position on the pulpit affords the children (and the audience) to spatially experience the call-and-response form of the psalm. This contributes to the children's formation in antiphony, an important musical genre for this congregation. When Wytze walks into the main aisle, the children's singing voices, in order to reach him, have to fill the vaulted cathedral with sound. The children find this scary. Wytze uses the affordance of creating distance between him and the children to build the children's confidence. Having more confidence, in turn, leads to better voice projection. "The children really improved" one of the parents observes, "At first, they were really shy and didn't sing very well, but now they stand there with much more confidence." Thus, the choir practice is a form of training that creates the affordance of singing in front of others in this large space. What the children's singing contributes to, however, is a topic of discussion.

Negotiating the Interpretation of the Children's Vocal Participation

The church building amplifies the sounds of the children's voices. Thereby, it reinforces the aesthetic quality of the children's trained voices. However, how people interpret the children's voices partly depends on the imagination with which they approach this environment.

At key points in the liturgical year, the children's voices help create a celebratory atmosphere through the sound qualities they add to the liturgy. Miranda, a member of the adult choir and formerly of the children's choir, explains:

> There is a need for having a children's choir. There are special moments in the year—Palm Sunday and Christmas, of course—when, well… it's really a loss when [the children's choir] is not there. […] It's another vibe. Some people say it is happier, lighter. The mere fact that there are children in the church kindles the hope that there will be a generation that picks it up. (Congregation 11, interview, June 13, 2017)

In Dutch, as in English, "lighter" may mean both "less heavy" and "brighter." The combination of both meanings shows how the sound quality and the affect of the children's voices are connected: children's voices are less heavy than those of adults. Children's short vocal cords produce short airwaves so that they have high-pitched voices. Affectively, the children's voices have a different timbre; their bright voices help listeners experience the lightness at special liturgical moments. Thus, the children's vocal participation helps create a particular liturgical-ritual space.

Children's bodily presence also makes a difference: it "kindles hope." We interpret the presence of the children's choir in worship in light of a specific view on participation: This congregation is influenced by the Liturgical Movement, in which participation is a keyword that relates to the active, bodily participation of lay or non-ordained people in the liturgy (Barnard and Post 2008, 19). There is an understanding that participation itself may constitute faith and understanding. Thus, it is significant that the cantor makes sure that the children learn about and experience key services throughout the year:

> I try to include a bit of liturgical catechesis. So I try to explain why on some days we sing "the shepherds lay at night" while on others we sing "the Lord has risen" and everything in between. Help them distinguish why we do what we do. […] It is important that they are there at the crossings of the church year, the big festivals, that they experience those. The Lent period is six weeks, so they always have a service then. I make sure it is their turn on Palm Sunday because then they have a large role with an actual grand entry. There is much to experience in that. So I always search for services or make something myself that offers much to experience so they won't be bored.

The children's active, bodily participation throughout the liturgical year is an antidote to boredom. According to the cantor, it also facilitates embodied experience of something more:

> I find it *very* important that there is a substantial part of their culture that lets them experience bodily that there is more than the material. When they are twenty, they may decide whether to call that God or not. For now, for them, I think it is much more about feeling than about cognition.[30] If only they… well, if only they have had bread and wine, so to say. (Congregation 11, interview, June 13, 2017)

Indeed, all the children's choir members receive bread and wine during the Lord's Supper. Most of the children were not baptized and several of the parents were self-declared atheists but that was not a hindrance: Participation extends to children who are not members of the congregation. However, their role as choir members does make a difference, as we elaborate below.[31] The acoustic and embodied participation of the children makes them co-creators of a liturgical-ritual space where the cantor and congregation members assume that participation in itself constitutes a kind of embodied faith.[32]

The parents, especially those who know little about church, approach the participation of their children differently. According to Wytze, they find the role of their children as members of a choir in this building "an appealing prospect. It is of course a historical space that sounds beautiful and we have a large church music practice." A mother recounts that she likes to see the children's choir in church: "It's our heritage," she says, and she believes it is important that her daughter learns about this heritage through singing. For her part, however, she tries to temper the effect that the choir has on her daughter through critical discussions because "I wouldn't like it if she just one day turned around and said 'oh, I would like to…' you know, 'become a nun.'"[33]

The discussion between the parents and the cantor reminds us of Nicholas Cook, who writes that "music demarcates space and figures it with social values" (Born 2013, 225). Both the parents and the choir director appreciate the historic and acoustically beautiful character of the building. While the parents emphasize the beauty of learning to sing in this place and either do not mind or else try to mitigate the religious aspects of the choir, Wytze values how the building's qualities gets the parents involved:

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30 The word used for feeling, *gevoel*, may also be translated as "the sense of touch."

31 See also footnote 34.

32 Note how "expecting" refers to anticipation and imagination, both prominent aspects in the definition of liturgical-ritual space.

33 When the interviewer asked, "That would be too much?" the mother replied "that would be too much, far too much!" Despite this mothers' ambiguous relationship towards her daughters' participation in a religious practice, the church building seems implicated in the continued encounters between church members and people who identify as non-religious. This topic merits closer inspection.

> "When will we perform?" The children wanted this themselves but were also pushed by their parents. The parents wanted to say: "my child performs in the [name of this church building]." Well, we quickly have to suppress that because, of course, it is factually true but the context in which it happens does not validate such an attitude. [...] I try to change their perspective a bit so that they learn to see that the role of the choir—whether it is the children's or the adult choir—is within the Sunday service and actually has nothing to do with performing. (Congregation 11, interview, June 13, 2017)

The cantor tries to reframe how the parents interpret their children's participation. The Dutch word used, *optreden*, connotes performing in concerts and shows. Wytze frames the sounds children make in this building as a different kind of performance: "I told the parents about liturgy, church," he says, "They didn't know what they were getting themselves into with their child [but] a big part of it is just doing a service." Wytze recounts that regularly, the question arises whether choir members should give a financial contribution. He emphatically resists because "we are all serving the same whole, the worshiping community, and the children are part of that as much as everyone who has a service task. We all do so *pro deo*. End of discussion."[34]

The differing opinions of the parents and Wytze highlight the importance of imagination in Thirdspace. Wytze's management of the interpretation of the children's voices reminds us of the distinction Verkaaik (2017) makes between the iconic and habitual uses of a building. This building may be iconic, but Wytze frames what happens in it as a form of habitual use. For him, the children's acoustic participation is not a concert-type performance but a service that transforms the church building into a liturgical-ritual space.[35]

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34 The children's moment highlights the position of the children's choir in the congregation: "At that moment," Wytze commented, "they experience that they actually have a dual role because they are choir but they also just belong to the group of children that are there at that moment. So they step out of their role, into another... division, and when the children's story is finished they step back again." Spatially, the children traversed the church from the choir section to the minister at the other end of the pews and back again (see Figure 8)—another reminder that childhood is a spatial construction (Nairn, Kraftl, and Skelton 2016, 4). Simultaneously, the children's choir members are also different from the other children: they sit in an opposite pew, wearing choir robes, are accompanied by the cantor, and return to the choir section. Therefore, the socio-spatial division between the choir and the congregation seems more fundamental than that between children and adults.

35 We are reminded of Grimes' question "Are musicians sacred personages or only assistants?" in his book *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, cited by Klomp (2011, 41). The parents ascribe the children a more elevated position than Wytze.

Figure 9. Church interior with pews facing the pulpit from three sides. The side room is to the right.

Reformed Sunday Service with Bible Class

The second building is an old pre-Reformation church in the center of town. It has a light and spacious interior, with pews that face a pulpit from three sides (see Figure 9). The building is an important meeting place for the congregation. The congregation is influenced by the *Nadere Reformatie* (Dutch Second Reformation or Further Reformation), which differs from but resembles both English Puritanism and German Pietism. The individual believer's relationship with God is central. Participation in worship revolves around listening to the Word. Thus, the liturgical-ritual space has to afford concentration and reflection. We focus on how quietness in worship is created, maintained, challenged, and nuanced.

Creating a Quiet Atmosphere

The evening service illustrates the quietness that characterizes the liturgical-ritual space:

> In his sermon, the minister uses easy words, short sentences, and visual language. He employs silences and uses a lot of expression in his face, body

> posture, and movements. I notice that it is quiet in the church. A child has brought her stuffed animal to church and plays and cuddles with it. Her older sister later shows her mother her drawing book and whispers something in her ear. The mom looks, answers, and looks to the minister again as the child leans back and smiles, drawing up her knees and resting the drawing book on them to continue sketching. An older boy rests his head on his father's shoulder. The minister prays the evening prayer, tranquil, solemn, and beautiful. It adds to the atmosphere of calm in the church. (Congregation 1, participant observation, January 15, 2017)

The minister's clear articulation, use of easy language, and expressive embodiment help the people in worship, including the children, to listen and understand what is said. The children engage in activities that sustain the quietness needed for listening. Sitting in the pews affords the children with writing, drawing, cuddling a stuffed animal, or leaning against a parent. These activities are quiet but also allow some movement. Quietness here is not the absence of sounds but the management of their loudness: the small sounds—a pen on paper, a whisper to a parent, a child changing position—reinforce rather than disturb the atmosphere of quiet.

The building itself reinforces the quiet:

> The minister notes that the building stands out because of its quietness. "The distance from me to the congregation is rather big," he comments, "so I don't see and hear everything. [The distance] muffles [sound]. I think this church is always very quiet. […] Maybe the building aids this. Some congregations are much noisier. Often those are the newer church buildings where everything is closer together and a more informal atmosphere emerges. But here, in this building… I don't know, but the building may help for that quiet in the service." "When I first entered here," Zoe adds, "it felt very distant. I was indeed used to a much smaller congregation, closer together. Whereas here, you sit: many empty benches, grand, a small number of people in a huge church […] so I understand that that gives a more restful atmosphere [and] affects the [lack of] hustle and bustle you experience." (Congregation 1, focus group interview, January 15, 2017)

As the minister and Zoe indicate, small sounds in a more crowded, smaller, and lower ceilinged building would probably add up to a more audible level of background noise. In contrast, in this high ceilinged building, quiet sounds feel insignificant because of the size of people's bodies in relation to the huge building. This creates "a more restful atmosphere."

In the morning service, more and younger children were present. In addition to the activities of the children who stayed in the main church hall, children aged four to seven went to Bible class in two separate rooms at either end of the church hall. In terms of sound affordances, each room is separated from the main hall by two consecutive doors, affording the sounds to remain on either side of those doors. "Bible class," the former minister explains, "started from the wish to let the children grow into the service." In effect, however, young children go to other rooms. One elderly woman comments that the sermon "does feel quieter" when the young children are not present. Christel, another Bible class teacher, notes that "as a mother, it is practical [and] nice that the children go to Bible class, then they are simply not there! [...] I find that the service changes, there really ensues a sort of quiet, a peace. So you can really listen to the sermon." Christel describes quietness as more than the absence of sound: There is also less fidgeting. This quietness reinforces the affordance of listening to the sound of the minister's voice. As we noted, listening to the Word is central to the spirituality of this congregation. Thus, during the sermon and prayers, having the Bible classes in separate rooms creates a liturgical-ritual space in the main church hall that spiritually nourishes congregation members of eight years and older.

Managing the Sounds of Children in Worship?

The Bible class in the other rooms opens up new affordances that produce different and louder sounds. When Bible class started, the former minister recounts, people wanted to get involved, saying, "Oh! I would like to tell [stories], and pray and sing with [the children]!" Bible class is "more social and fun," as one teacher enthuses. "It is our passion to in whatever way—cognitive or just on the level of feeling[36]—help [the children] get closer to eh.. as a child of the congregation, as a child of God, closer to experiencing love." Telling (stories), praying, and singing also happens in the service. Yet, in the side rooms, these activities sound more vibrant and children's and adult's voices mingle more often.[37] Thus, the Bible class-rooms become separate liturgical-ritual spaces with their own social dynamics and atmosphere. This reminds us of the observation that childhood is a spatial construction.

[36] See footnote 30.

[37] Compared to the church hall, worship in side rooms more often draws from evangelical song repertoires. Together with the children's presence, these other worship spaces afford more movement, interaction, creative genres, and different media (e.g., a gong, CD player, toys, paint, no microphones, etc.). The insight that children's participation legitimates liturgical exceptions or changes merits further study.

However, the main hall of the church building also gives children more affordances than only sitting and listening, as becomes clear when the children return from Bible class:

> Leaving the Bible class-room, we walk around the middle section of the church. Some children are already running ahead. We sit on the benches near the pulpit. The children are restless. While the minister asks the children some questions about the stories they heard, two boys are running in front of the pulpit, laughing and taunting the others. (Congregation 1, participant observation, January 15, 2017)

Two boys respond to the affordance of running. The sounds made by their shoes hitting the stone floor reverberate across the church hall. The boys' laughter, taunting exclamations, and running afford looking at and listening to them rather than to the minister's conversation with the other children.

For Madelief and Chris, these affordances are in tension with their ideal liturgical-ritual space where everyone can listen to each other, both in Bible class and the service. Accordingly, they describe how they try to manage the children's interaction with the environment. In contrast, Edo challenges the emphasis on quietness:

> "I find it difficult because today two [of the children] started to run, in front," Madelief reflects, "I thought 'should I hold them and risk that they start yelling? Or…?' Those are difficult moments. We didn't have the time today to say, 'now we enter the church quietly,' [this time] we just went." "Yes, but," Edo counters, "sometimes I wonder whether we could embed [the return to the church hall] in a rowdy moment. […] Do we want children who… do we really want to emphasize that quietness? Or is that er… I'm thinking… see, the quiet is lovely, of course, maybe quietness is important in our time, but I wonder whether we want to keep the children quiet or whether they er… are allowed more. What do we think?" Others comment: "If only others can listen." Edo continues: "Yes, but in Bible class? Er… I also notice that I want quiet to make a point about my story and that sort of thing, that's important, but still, does it always have to be quiet?" The others note that quietness provides safety, also for children with autism. Edo continues, "Yes, maybe it is beautiful if it is quiet because maybe children experience safety and attention then […]. But anyway I was searching for that: what is the balance between correcting and er… er… not correcting, letting go a bit." (Congregation 1, focus group interview, January 15, 2017)

Madelief and Chris want to train children to make sounds that are within a decibel and frequency range that is reasonable for this congregation. Edo, however, wonders how to accommodate louder sounds in the service. "Not correcting, letting go a bit" remains closer to the lived reality. Edo proposes less management of the children's actions and sound production. He imagines a liturgical-ritual space that requires adults to be more accepting of the sounds that inevitably ensue when children "are allowed more."

Negotiating the Interpretation of the Children's Sonic Participation

Edo's call for less management of the children's sound-producing activities reminds us of the research done by Klomp (2011) on the sound of worship in a Surinamese Lutheran congregation in Amsterdam. There, the children chatted, ran around, and yelled during the service. Klomp (2011, 123) notes that this corresponds with the view that worship is "not an aesthetics exercise but [...] for everyone to take part it in." In that congregation, the sounds children produce added to an inclusive liturgical-ritual space. Similarly, in the Reformed congregation, the idea of inclusion sustained the argument to accept the sounds that accompany children's participation.

The church building affords the children the space to make quiet sounds and louder sounds that make their presence and participation more audible. Various congregation members, especially the parents, feel a tension between quiet listening and the children's audible presence. However, children's "noisy" activities in worship meets with more understanding than the initial impression of quietness in this liturgical-ritual space would suggest. The mother who said she enjoys the quiet when her children go to Bible class also reflects that "I wouldn't like it when someone else can't listen because my child is continually drawing, eating sweets, you know, but... I've really never been addressed about it." The elderly woman who said that the service is more quiet when the young children are absent also mentions that "One lady thought the children's return to the service was 'messy,' and that's true, but... that lady was eighty! Should you leave the children at home because of that? They do grow up with the tradition, [...] they just belong; they are part of it!" In sum, the tension between quietness and the sounds that children's participation in worship inevitably brings is sometimes intentionally left unresolved.

Discussion

The adults in our study were aware of the acoustic qualities of the buildings they used but managed the children's sounds differently. Although beautiful singing and quiet listening seem very different, both create a liturgical-ritual space where people may meet God. In the congregation influenced by the Liturgical Movement, the way the children talked about choir practice showed that they sang differently in the church building: The children were aware of their role and audience. During choir practice, the cantor used the affordances of the church building to train the children's voices. In turn, the children's voices helped create a celebratory atmosphere at important liturgical moments. In the congregation influenced by the Dutch Second Reformation, children made small sounds that helped maintain a quiet atmosphere in worship. During the morning service, Bible class for the younger children in sound-isolated side rooms afforded more quietness in the main hall. These modes of sound production and listening are central to the children's religious socialization.

On a more critical note, the voices of the children seemed to be more fully part of the liturgical-ritual space in the congregation influenced by the Liturgical Movement than in the Reformed congregation influenced by the Dutch Second Reformation. In the Reformed congregation, children's voices lent their tone color to the congregational singing. In the Liturgical Movement congregation, however, the congregation members recognized children's voices as a contribution to the liturgy, complementary to the singing voices of adults. The timbre of the children's voices was perceived as lighter and more joyful. The effort put into training the children's choir showed respect for children and their role. Yet, when they were not singing, the choir children made much the same sounds as their Reformed counterparts: the swish of swinging legs, scratching pens on paper, and occasional whispers. During most of the service, children who were not members of the choir attended children's church in another room. Thus, there was a similar dynamic of quietness in both congregations. In the Reformed congregation, the sonic contribution of children's participation was less evident. Paradoxically, the louder sounds that the building afforded the children to make triggered an awareness of children's participation. Various adults questioned to what extent the children had to be quiet and wondered whether louder sounds could be embraced in the interest of inclusivity. Children would certainly value more movement and activity in worship (van Leersum-Bekebrede, Sonnenberg, et al. Forthcoming, Chapter 4). Note, however, that the connection between children's presence and sound (or "noise") is made by the adults.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we developed and combined the concepts of affordances and liturgical-ritual spaces to analyze how old church buildings allow children to make a range of sounds during worship. We also examined how adults manage the affordances to create a particular sound in worship. In a similar physical location, sensory interactions between people and their environment produced distinct liturgical-ritual spaces. These differences were due to differences in liturgical tradition and theology. In the first case, the cantor managed the musical quality of the children's voices to add a "lightness" to the liturgy and let the children bodily experience that there is "something more," which they may or may not come to call "God" later in life. In the second case, the adults managed the loudness of the sounds that accompanied children's actions to ensure that others could listen to the Word. They also emphasized that some louder sounds were acceptable because children should attend church and "just belong."

Material religion scholars are fascinated by the observation that "in order to [...] be experienced as real, imaginations are required to become tangible outside the realm of the mind, by creating a social environment that materializes through the structuring of space, architecture, ritual performance, and by inducing bodily sensations" (Meyer 2009, 5). Many studies on material religion focus on objects, buildings, and visual culture. Our research into children's sounds in worship invites scholars of material culture to explore various new directions.

First, when approached as a material given, sound highlights how people, the material environment, and the imagined space are connected. Our elaboration of the concepts of affordance and liturgical-ritual space facilitates such analysis.

Second, sound is an avenue for studying affect in worship. Bialecki (2015, 97) defines affect as "the intensities and energies found in a particular moment or object that has consequences on others." He helpfully distinguishes affect from emotion: "emotion [is] that which follows affect once the moment is gone, and the 'affected' person finally becomes aware of the experience, framing it discursively." Bialecki reflects on the connection between embodied and linguistic language at an evangelical conference: different types of speech are all delivered in a certain way, each affecting the listeners differently. Reflecting on the training required to produce a particular emotional response, Brennan (2012) analyses how a Nigerian Christian choir uses existing recordings to perfect the emotional impact of their performance during worship. Similarly, we showed how children are trained to make certain sounds. The adults used the buildings' spatiality to manage the children's sound production and create

a particular affect in worship. Thus, attention to sound shows the effort that goes into managing sound and its attributed meanings.

Third, the management of sound highlights social power dynamics. Oosterbaan (2008) connects sound, religion, and space in Brazilian *favelas*. Through the metaphor of spiritual tuning, he describes how people self-censure the sound they produce (music they play) in relation to their environment. Similarly, we found that children self-regulated their sound production in keeping with the existing liturgical-ritual space. However, the children also carve out space for themselves by acting, moving, and speaking up (van Leersum-Bekebrede, Sonnenberg, et al. Forthcoming, Chapter 4). Thus, studying who is allowed to make sound, when and under what conditions, opens up questions about discipline and power.

Fourth, the sounds that children (are trained to) make are crucial to children's socialization and highlights lived theologies. Ingalls et al. (2013, 9) argue that "while music as part of ritual is an important part of the sensual experience of embodying worship, [...] worshippers must be socialized into particular traditions in order to experience transcendence." Hirschkind, in *Keywords in Sound* (2015, 168), writes about "an art of listening" and notes that "more than serving as a vehicle for a symbolic content, sound and aurality are part of the material-sensory world that human life must accommodate and respond to." Therefore, we propose that future research could further explore how children are trained to make certain sounds in religion. Moreover, we would be interested in the theological meanings that children attribute to sound. As Ridgely (2005) shows in her study of children's interpretations of first communion, children develop their theological understandings through their senses. We thus propose a collaboration between sound studies, material religion and children's theology (for example, using theologizing with children as a research method).

In sum, our analysis highlighted the affective side of sound in worship rather than focusing on the purely cognitive dimension. Even in congregations where worship seems word-focused, sound is much more than content. Like Ingalls (2015, 250-1) writes about congregational music, sound practices "can carry with them certain socially ascribed meanings, including theologies, beliefs and values." People's experience of religion is deeply rooted in how they affectively respond to sound (see Bialecki 2015). Thus, in Protestantism, although the messages that sounds convey remain important, sound in worship matters most for the experience it gives children. Children are socialized to interact with the environment within a space that provides the "possibility and mystery of an encounter event" (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 299). Moreover, children and the sounds they make actually help to constitute the liturgical-ritual spaces.

Summary

In worship, participants pray to God, act in ways that assume God's presence, play out Biblical stories, and speak about God. These are ways of "performing" God, staging God through performative acting. The four analyzed performances emphasize affective knowledge of God and perform God as a God who accepts, resurrects, and helps, but whose existence can be discussed. God is performed through story, ritual, and play. The performance of God is target-group related, contextual, and embedded in the interactions between adults and children. Above all, performing God with children is embodied theology.

Published as

van Leersum-Bekebrede, Lydia, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock, and Marcel Barnard. Submitted. "Performing God with Children."

6

Performing God with Children

> Why do people come to church? […] because we are inspired by the Word. That is what we want to celebrate and experience. […] I also go to church for my own spirituality. And I think children also have the right to attend church for their spirituality. The challenge in giving shape to services that are aimed more at children is to keep an eye on that spirituality; for adults, but also just for the children. Because I often see that a lot of fun happens, but at times I wonder "what was actually worshipped here?" (Erik Idema, children's church method editor, interview, November 9, 2016)

Per definition, worship revolves around an encounter between God and humans (Barnard 2016, 193). In this chapter, our starting point is empirical: a child who lights a candle, a parent who says "God is present." This kind of acting and use of language in ritual is symbolic. Symbolic acts and language are *performative*, they accomplish something. First developed in speech act theory by Austin and Searle, the concept of performativity is regularly used to study ritual (Bell 2009, 41-42, 73, 113). In worship, God is performed: staged, presented, and enacted. Therefore, we ask, How is God performed in worship with children?

Earlier, we presented findings on the roles of adults (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019b, Chapter 3) and children (van Leersum-Bekebrede, Sonnenberg, et al. Forthcoming, Chapter 4) in worship with children. We now focus on how adults and children perform God together. Based on those earlier findings, we presume that children's participation in worship practices influences the performance of God. Therefore, how God is performed with children affects the whole community because performance expresses and shapes faith.[38]

[38] Liturgical rituals entail both worship and formation. Barnard stresses that "Faith practices cannot be neatly divided into separate domains" but that "catechesis often has ritual-symbolic - or 'worship' elements [and] also the reverse is true: worship has several implicit and explicit learning moments"(Barnard 2016, 189).

Interest in the topic of children in worship is growing in fields like youth ministry, liturgical studies, and children's theology. We contribute to these fields by providing descriptions and analyses based on participant observations of liturgical rituals with children in Dutch Protestant contexts. Qualitative research commonly focuses on children's interpretations of God (e.g., Csinos 2020; Champagne 2010; Worsley 2006), but little published ethnographic material focuses on understanding how God is performed in worship with children. In this research, we take a practical theological perspective. Specifically, we are interested in the implicit and explicit theology in faith practices (see Miller-McLemore 2012b, 11).

Our title triggers the question, What do we mean by "performing God"? Below, we answer this question and describe our methodology. Subsequently, we explore how participants perform God in four practices of worship with children. We then discuss how these findings relate to the dataset as a whole. We draw out how God is performed with children through story, ritual, and play. The presented qualitative data and analyses aim to generate a deeper understanding of how adults and children perform God together.

Performing God

In the following, we define performance and elaborate on our use of the phrase "performing God".

Performance

In this chapter, we draw on Goffman's work. Erving Goffman's take on performance provides analytical language to study face-to-face interaction. Goffman was not the first to use the concept of performance in social science but his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) showed the versatility of theatre metaphors in the analysis of social life. Goffman attended to the physical setting, including scenery and props, and the performance (Appelrouth and Edles 2008, 486-7). Performance includes manner, how actors carry out their role, and appearance, how actors look (Goffman 1956, cited in Appelrouth and Edles 2008, 500-1). Actors can form performance teams (see Berreman [1972] 2012). Goffman's later work on mental hospitals and prisons focuses on subversive performances (Appelrouth and Edles 2008, 506-7), which shows that performance is more than a façade: How people perform shapes them.

Goffman's theory aided us during the participant observations and initial analysis. For example, we found performance teams helpful to reflect on how some children had different aims (getting attention) from the other children

and liturgical-ritual leaders (telling a Bible story). Also, people in worship regulate their manner and appearance. For example, a girl acted waking up from sleep (see Embodying a Resurrecting God), and a crèche leader used a different tone of voice when she interacted with children through a hand puppet from when she told them a story directly (see Showing Affective Knowledge of God). Furthermore, the observation reports described the physical setting and use of objects in the worship performances. Theoretically, we share Goffman's concern with how performance shapes people. So then, what do we mean by "performing God"?

Performing God

Performing God refers to how *people* perform God. Among other things, people "perform God" by addressing God in prayer, engaging with God by lighting a candle, relating to God's acts by telling Bible stories, and discussing their experiences of God. Worship derives from the verb "to worship:" Worshiping is to worship *something*. In her article "God in Youth Worship," Ronelle Sonnenberg (2014, 225) defines as her starting point: "without God no worship." In worship, "human effort and God's interest intersect" (Sonnenberg 2014, 227). Worship may reveal something about God (Sonnenberg 2014, 226). However, we agree with Sonnenberg (2014, 241) that God does not necessarily coincide with human communication or performance.

We agree with Sonnenberg (2014, 238) that we need to keep word and shapes together to understand God's involvement in worship. Mentioning God or Jesus in the liturgy is more than a description; it is a *performative*. Performatives are speech acts that have consequences in reality beyond the words themselves or, put differently, the words not only describe but perform an action (Sonnenberg 2014, 229). Next to performatives, symbolic substances may "represent (something of) God for many adolescents," which is often expressed "in terms of feeling" and experience (Sonnenberg 2014, 231). For example, lighting a candle in the context of liturgy symbolizes the light of God or Christ. Ritual theorist Catherine Bell (2009, 184) notes that "the obvious ambiguity or overdetermination of much religious symbolism may […] be integral to its efficacy." Embodiment in the form of applause, being silent and being together with many other Christians at a youth worship event also "communicate for adolescents something of the greatness and power of God" (Sonnenberg 2014, 228-9). Sonnenberg's findings underline that sensory immersion is key to appreciating worship, including its symbolism (Barnard and Post 2001, 35, 40). To sum up, the performing power of words and objects "perform God."

Researching how people perform God thus requires participation in worship.[39] Goffman's perspective on performance helps us observe interactions between people and the physical worship setting. Therefore, we now elaborate on how we researched how God is performed with children.

Methodology

To investigate how God is performed in worship with children, we did participant observations of twenty-one liturgical rituals with children within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Among others, we researched different children's churches, various morning services, a Sunday school, a church-and-school service, and a service that was co-organized by children.

All our empirical data show ways in which God is performed. Yet, we suspected that services with children would perform God differently from crèche or children's church. Also, we supposed that the mediating role of adults would be more significant with younger children and that older children would be more involved in performing God. Therefore, we selected four practices from across the denominational spectrum of the PCN with children of different age categories: Opstap takes place during crèche with children of two to six, Kerk op Schoot is a service for children of two to six and their parents, Bibliodrama takes place during children's church with children of four to twelve, and the Easter Vigil with children is a service with primary school children and teenagers.

In the analysis, we focused on the liturgical ritual performances (thus excluding interactions before and afterward). Additionally, we paid attention to moments when the researcher, as a participant-observer, noted how the atmosphere changed. For example, when worship grew quieter or livelier, when the participants seemed absorbed, and when the connection between people seemed to transcend the moment itself (see Performing God). Through conversations afterwards, we accessed people's narrated experiences of worship. We focused on passages where interviewees connected worship moments to (experiences of) God—searching for words like "God," "Lord," "Father," "Jesus," "Christ," and "Spirit." These conversations helped identify theological meanings that participants attributed to the worship (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 44-45). To present our analysis, we reworked the data into shorter descriptions of the worship.

39 Participating in the performance of worship counters Bell's (2009, 42) concern that the performance metaphor encourages "naturalization of the outside observer."

We sought to include children in the analysis. Method makers, organizers, and liturgical-ritual leaders steer how God is performed in worship with children (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019b, Chapter 3). Yet, we show that children contribute when they engage with stories, pray words that they wrote themselves, and ask faith-related questions.[40]

To get to know the broader field of Dutch Protestant worship with children, we interviewed ten youth workers and children's worship professionals. We use the interviews to reflect on how God is performed through story, ritual, and play.

Performing God in Worship with Children

In the following analysis of data from participant observations, we show how God is performed with children. We focus on four practices: Opstap, Church-on-Lap, an Easter Vigil, and Bibliodrama.

Showing Affective Knowledge of God

Opstap is a children's church-like method. Opstap takes place in the setting of crèche (involving baby-care and play), responding to developments in many strictly Reformed congregations that children remain in crèche up to the age of six instead of four (see van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, 80, Chapter 2). The name means "step," referring to its aim to be a stepping stone for children's participation in the service. Opstap shows that knowing God has an affective quality:

> Opstap leader Hilda puts on the glove of hand puppet Rik [see Figure10], "I've been to the forest! Have you been to a forest?" Hilda asks, using a higher and raspier voice as she performs Rik. "I went with the forester—now I know a lot about the forest! And I find the forest even more beautiful than before!" "So if you know something," Hilda replies in her own voice, "you like getting to know more about it, and that makes you happier. It's like that in the Bible. If you know something about God, you get happy… learn even more, so talk to others about God or read a story from the Bible. Then, when someone asks you 'do you know who God is?'" "I do know!" a girl exclaims. "Then you can just tell about it!"
>
> We sing *Jesus' Love is for You and Me*, not very simultaneously. "Dear Father in heaven, Lord God, we want to thank you," Hilda prays, "a sister was born… in Hugo's family! […] Lord God, will you please be with us, because

[40] Children "have particular concerns of their own, concerns that agree with, diverge from, and challenge what adults have taught them" (Ridgely 2011, 2).

you know us inside and out. Also in our little heart.[41] We ask this in Jesus' name,[42] amen." Hilda starts singing *Happy, my Heart is so Happy*.

Then Hilda tells about the Biblical Cornelius. Towards the end, the children help fill in what the three men tell Peter, repeating earlier parts of the story. "Just like the forester told Rik a lot, so Peter goes to tell Cornelius about God. Then Cornelius is… a very happy man," Hilda concludes. The craft is a booklet with Cornelius, Peter, and other people in between. "That means that the Lord God loves all-kinds-of-people: you, you, and everyone!" (Congregation 13, participant observation, June 25, 2017)

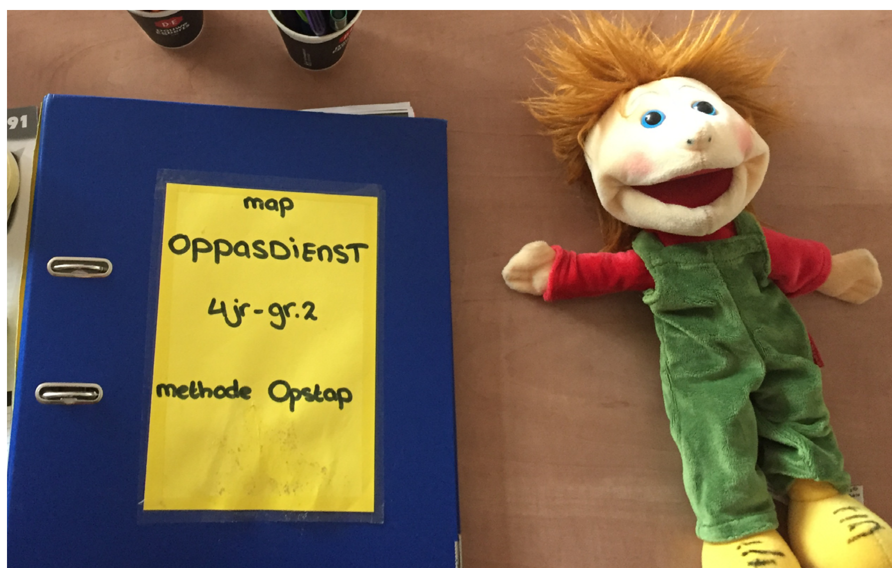

Figure 10. Opstap-binder with Rik, the handpuppet.

The Rik puppet (see Figure 10) draws the children into the interaction. The children connect to his experience of going to the forest. Hilda compares Rik's enthusiasm about the forest to learning about God. Theologically, comparing learning about God to exploring a forest evokes rich connotations. A forest's vastness can be overwhelming, but there are also endless new things to discover. Pedagogically, the metaphor fits with the children's love for learning. Some of the children spontaneously react—they do know about God!

The puppet play, story, and interaction focus on knowledge about God. In the context of this congregation, "knowing" is not only cognitive but intimate and emotional as well: Note the emphasis on being happy when you know God.

41 In Dutch, *hartje* (little heart) is often used to refer to the location of children's faith in God.

42 Literally, "because of Jesus' will." This phrase puts more emphasis on Jesus' mediating role.

"Talking to others about God" and "reading a story from the Bible" are routes that lead to discoveries about God. The songs, prayer, and craft reinforce the story's messages of knowing God, happiness, and telling others. The songs "Jesus' love is for you and me" and "happy, my heart is so happy" connect to the ideas of experiencing joy at God's love and sharing faith. The songs' upbeat rhythm and spontaneous performance underline their content. The prayer evokes the feeling that God knows these children intimately: Hilda lifts up the children's lives to God and connects God to the children. It also models confidence that learning about Bible stories helps to develop a relationship with God.

Driving the missional message is a representation of God as loving. "'God loves all children' and 'if you're full of something you want to share it,'" Hilda comments in the focus group interview, "You actually show that with the Rik hand puppet, and then it returns in the Bible passage. And also they just like him." Rik enthuses the children about the forest like they could enthuse others about God. Thus, Rik supports the message through Hilda's performance of his character.

During Opstap, despite the emphasis on knowledge, the whole practice is steeped in a "more-than-rational" spirituality: God's existence and God's love for the children are taken for granted. Hilda emphasizes that "If you know about God, you get happy:" Hilda and Rik perform an affective response to knowing God.

Performing an Inviting God

Church on Lap (*Kerk op Schoot*) is a service for young children and their parents.[43] It aims to "playfully introduce children (and their parents) to church" (see www.kerkopschoot.nl). Congregations with differing theologies use the format. The observed Church on Lap performs an inviting God:

> Five parents and five children between three and six years old go to the church's side room. The children start playing with the toys and balancing bikes. "You may continue playing," Sifra says. Walda asks her son Valentijn to sit on her lap. "Candle," he says. "Good morning and welcome," Sifra says, "[…] Mark, do you want to watch too? We're lighting a candle: look!" The children come forward. Once the candle is lit the children want to blow it. They all blow at once. Sifra lights the candle again and puts it on the table. "Why do we light a candle?" she asks. "To welcome God in our midst, right?

43 The described Church on Lap involves parents, young children, and occasional lap-sitting but only loosely follows the format. Originally, Church on Lap alternates experiential elements, a story, and songs made to the tunes of well-known children's songs.

> Because God is also present when we sing and read a little story together." Walda reads from a children's Bible picture book. She invites the children to look at the images to fill in more of the story. Regularly, the children respond with "oh, yes" and "yeah."[44] At one point, Valentijn, who stood parked at the entrance to the circle, drives his car to the story and points at something in the picture. Walda incorporates it. Evert sits on his father's lap, then goes off to play again. "We're going to pray," Sifra says. "We put our hands together. Close your eyes! […] And then we talk with God. Like sending a postcard. […] Dear God, thank you that you love us. That you love our parents and our family and that you hear from *everybody* because *everyone* belongs […]. Amen." […] The parents are the only ones heard singing the Christian children's songs. The candle is blown twice, first by the boys, then by the girls. (Congregation 11, participant observation, June 11, 2017)

The parents create the basic conditions for Church on Lap: singing, reading, praying, and talking. The leaders explain the connection between God and the rituals of candle lighting and praying. During the songs, story, and prayer the children keep playing. They move between story and play when their parents invite them to step into the ritual setting. The moments when the children interact show that they heard much of the story while playing. The prayer addresses God as caring and interested in the children's world, experiences, and relations. God hears everybody and wants everyone to belong.

The children participate most when the candle is lit and blown at the start and end of Church on Lap. Candles in this congregation have rich meaning. "Always, the Easter candle is alight here," the minister says in the focus group interview, "as a sign of Christ, light of Christ, who is our host." The candle is a sensory symbol-play that marks the ritual space. If the candle symbolizes God's presence, it seems strange—even liturgically impossible— that the children may blow out the candle. However, inviting the children to experience the candle up close—including its possibility of being blown—welcomes not only God but also the children. The children may experience the symbol through its material aspects by being near it, rather than at a liturgical holy distance.

Church on Lap balances between giving explanations and sensory experiences of the rituals and symbolism. In Church on Lap, God is performed as a God who cares for children and accepts children as children: the children do not have to sit and listen but are allowed to play and invited to interact with the story and ritual. "God is also present when we sing and read a little story together:" The parents perform a God who invites the children into the interaction.

[44] The children's audible reactions were noticed during the transcription process.

Embodying a Resurrecting God

On the night before Easter, the Easter Vigil takes place. During the twentieth century, Easter vigils were re-discovered by Roman Catholics and adopted by many Dutch Reformed congregations. Various congregations started organizing Easter Vigils after a children's church method began publishing a yearly Easter Vigil with children.[45] In the observed service, the stories and play perform God as a God who wakes people up:

> A boy and girl of about thirteen years old play disciples who are downcast after the death of Jesus. Seeking comfort, they tell each other stories of other times when everything seemed dark. The third story is about Jonah in the fish's belly. In the fourth story, the disciples remember that they woke Jesus up in the boat. "If only we could wake up Jesus now as well," Peter sighs. After a song, various adults pick up blankets and tuck under the children. His older daughter shushes Tom. All is quiet until the alarm clock sounds. One girl is playing her part of waking up very well: she acts as if she is mildly surprised at being woken from her sleep, looks around herself with lazy half-closed eyes, and then simulates shock, rubs her eyes, and stretches out her arms. We sing *Morning has Broken* in Dutch. (Congregation 8, participant observation, April 15, 2017)

Throughout the service, the children perform the liturgical tasks, aided by the liturgy booklet. The booklet contains all the text and instructions. The children helped write some of the texts. For example, the girl who said the word of welcome had written it herself and the boy who did the blessing had suggested singing "amen" afterwards, just as in regular services.

Most of the theological meaning resides in how the children perform the stories and interactions. The waking up-play gives the children a sensory experience of the stories about Jesus. The children sleeping under their blankets had an experience entirely different from that of Jesus sleeping on a rocky boat or in the tomb. Yet, the children's performance connects Jesus' story to their own experiences of waking up. The alarm clock wakes up the children like the disciples woke up Jesus. It resonates with the disciples' wish for Jesus' resurrection. As they wake up using their own bodies, the children's performance even takes on eschatological overtones and points to their eternal resurrection. The imagery of *Morning has Broken* connects to a new morning at creation and recreation. The image is rich and hopeful—after night, a new day comes—and contrasts with the theme of darkness.

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[45] The service is pulished yearly by Kwintessens along with its method *Kind op Zondag* (Child on Sunday).

Organisers Bianca and Geertje reflect on the Easter Vigil. Bianca's words clarify that she experienced God during the wake-up play and possibly the candle-lighting (both moments were quiet):

> "There always can be made a new start… And I don't know if… this little they understand that completely but I do think that… if you experience the silence that exists…" "They were extremely quiet, yes," Geertje agrees. "… and the way they are involved and how they… um… well, right? For example: 'wake up!' […] Isn't that lovely to see?! That they can sing along and er. Yes, then I feel that God is very close! And then well, yes, then I hope that they just feel that too. So that is the motive, right? Happy: that it makes you happy! So, luckily I had an interpreter for Pip. She is sixteen but also intellectually impaired, so she is actually a toddler. But *this* is *very* easy to follow, of course! She was continually cracking up when something went wrong! (laughs) But that then I think is so lovely that all of this is *possible,* you know? (sounding emotional) And that there is a place for everyone!" (Congregation 8, focus group interview, April 15, 2017)

The organizers experienced God in the silence and blunders, which showed how involved the children were. Right next to reflecting on the wake-up play and commenting on feeling God close, Bianca recounts how her daughter Pip could participate. During other services, Pip's hearing and intellectual impairments limit her participation. However, the fact that she laughed at hiccups showed her involvement and that this service was "easy to follow."

Words are used not to explain but to give an experience. The lack of explanation is deliberate: The editor commented, "We explicitly said to people 'now don't explain the meanings of those stories, do not talk about it too much but experience it with the children.' We have several stories in which it is first dark and then light dawns. And those are the stories with which we wait for […] the light of Easter" (Erik Idema, editor of Kind op Zondag, interview, November 9, 2016). In all the stories, God is setting things right, and hope grows lighter. God rescues Jona from the whale, Jesus calms the storm, and, in the end, Jesus is resurrected. The activity of waking up resonates with these stories and gains the meaning of resurrection and renewal. The embodiment points forward to the story of Easter.

In sum, in the Easter Vigil, God is mainly performed through ritual, stories, and play-acting. God wakes people up and touches them through others. "The way [the children] are involved, […] for example, 'wake up!' […] Then I feel that God is very close!:" The children embody a God who resurrects people.

Discussing God’s Help and Existence

In a congregation in which various members belong to the liberal Protestant association within the PCN (called *Vereniging van Vrijzinnige Protestanten*), the children’s church leaders use numerous sources and methods, including Bibliodrama. Bibliodrama refers to a range of ways to performatively engage with the Bible, searching for a connection between personal experience and the Biblical characters and text. In this way, the children can explore God’s existence in Bible stories and their own lives:

> After reading about Moses and the burning bush, children’s church leader Esmee explains the Bibliodrama. “You stand in front of [the chair],” Esmee shows, hand on her chin. “‘Moses, what did you feel when God started talking to you?’ Then I sit down, […] ‘I found it a bit difficult and a bit scary.’” […]
>
> “Did any of you,” Esmee asks, “it might be a strange question, but did any of you once have a feeling that God talked to you?” “Yes but I don’t remember,” five-year-old Ivo says. Four others say no and two answer yes. […] Petra, the other children’s church leader, recounts how she once heard God’s voice when she was small. “That’s funny,” Fenna says. “And you heard a normal voice then?” Esmee asks. “Yes […].” “You have that in your head,” eight-year-old Roos says. Petra agrees. “If I fantasize something and then I act as if I call someone, I can really hear the voice in my head. That’s cool,” eleven-year-old Davita reflects. Esmee asks the children to imagine they get a task but feel they can’t do it. “You won’t do it if you can’t,” “you should just try,” “get someone to help,” various children respond. Esmee says that with Moses, his brother helped and God.
>
> They decide to go drawing. “But God doesn’t even exist!” Davita interjects. “But in the story he does,” Esmee responds. “Yeah, but you are good at this because you are good at philosophy,” Davita says, sounding annoyed. (Congregation 4, participant observation, February 26, 2017)

During this children’s church, the adults create a setting for theologizing with children. The ten children of different primary school ages continually interact and give input. This liveliness illustrates the children’s involvement. The children come to grips with how God spoke to Moses and, through Petra’s story and Esmee’s questioning, relate this to their experiences of hearing voices, fantasizing about calling people, doing difficult tasks, and asking for help.

However, Davita feels frustrated. Therefore, earlier (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019b, 173, 179, Chapter 3), we reflected that “children may be left with no idea how to handle their questions” and emphasized that adults need

to perform facilitating *and* directing roles to "help children relate to their faith tradition." However, we want to add that Davita is Esmee's daughter, and her question is part of an ongoing conversation:

> "One moment they feel like 'God doesn't exist [...],'" Petra says, "but when something happens like a child is helped, well: 'see? God exists!'" "In this congregation, it differs a lot," Esmee says, "and I think that… God exists in stories. And in the congregation. And in the liturgy. Yes. So when the children say 'God doesn't exist,' I don't find that shocking. My husband never comes to church, and there are also other children whose fathers don't come. So they are used to the fact that you can think about it differently. Because, well, their father also doesn't believe in God! I like how in this congregation, there is room for that." (Congregation 4, focus group interview, February 26, 2017)

Fitting with the diverse range of beliefs in this congregation, God is performed as a subject open to discussion. Biblical stories, like Moses and the burning bush, are a way of providing faith content. The Bibliodrama setting lets children reflect on spiritual experiences they may have had and whether they want to attribute those to God. Thus, the children figure out whether and how they believe in God.

In Bibliodrama, God is a God who exists in (Biblical) stories. "[Moses'] brother helped and God," "But God doesn't even exist:" God helps but God's existence can be discussed. Imagination, belief, and reality are fluid concepts: people may imagine that God speaks to them or helps them. However, these very experiences of God, whether in stories or real life, frustrate efforts to pin God down to existence or non-existence.

Story, Ritual, and Play

Professionals in the field sometimes raise questions like, In worship aimed at children, does the preoccupation with songs, crafts, and stories distract from (performing) God? (Sandra Kooij, intern at MissieNederland, interview, November 21, 2016) On the contrary, in the observed practices, rather than distract from performing God, the songs (not only children's songs, see the Easter Vigil), coloring pages, and recounted and enacted stories helped perform God. Indeed, what the observed practices have in common with the other seventeen researched worship practices is that they all perform God through story, ritual, and play. These same themes were part of our interviews with youth work professionals. Therefore, we explore how the performance of God through story, ritual, and play in the practices described above relates in our complete dataset of interviews and participant observations.

Story

The practices described above use Bible stories in different ways: to teach children, to let children experience those stories, as a frame narrative (the reminiscing disciples), and as a basis for embodied reflection. Stories were central to all the researched practices. In two children's church-like practices, the Bible and stories were used but deemphasized.

> Theologically, we [the organizers of KIEM, *Kerk in Elke Maat* (Church in Every Size)] underlined that faith, spirituality—Christian faith in particular—is not just a task of listening, of telling stories… but can also be experienced in other ways. Very physical: drama, dance, music er… and visual. (Erik Renkema, KIEM co-founder, interview, September 26, 2016)

KIEM used Bible stories to explore themes like freedom or dreams of a better future (Erik Renkema, interview, September 26, 2016; Congregation 5, participant observation, March 5, 2017). *Kom in de Kring* (Join the Circle) used children's picture books rather than children's Bibles to explore "existential themes," like sharing, being good at something (talents), or friendship. The reason for this was that adults did not want their young children to take Bible stories literally. Likewise, in this congregation's Christmas service, the storyteller would dress like a Biblical character so "it's easier for the children to get it [that it is a story]" (Congregation 12, interview, June 20, 2017).

Stories are powerful because people can connect to them in various ways: their content, sensory aspects, the ritual environment, and other people's interpretations and experiences. The interviewees often focused on the sensory possibilities of stories:

> We try to make the stories more sensory, […] which entails making the story your own [as a storyteller] and thereby more tangible. (Dullyna van den Herik-van der Weit, Bonnefooi editor at Narratio, interview, October 25, 2017)

> [During a workshop] we started with Jacob and Esau, that is full of smells, colors, touch […] and say "think of what you could do with children, which senses?" (Leantine Dekker, HGJB youth work advisor, interview, August 23, 2016)

One interviewee stressed that people should be slow to explain stories because a "story has so much more to say than you could even imagine!" And, "you can only start to explore the richness of those stories when… well, you create a ritual environment for it" (Erik Idema, interview, November 9, 2016). The attention to ritual brings us to the next theme.

Ritual

All the practices made use of ritual acts like praying and lighting candles. The presence of children influenced how adults addressed God in prayer: Prayers with children were generally shorter than other prayers, used easy language, connected to the children's experiences, and often appealed to God's love and care for children. In Godly Play and Messy Church, eating gained the character of ritual (Congregation 9, participant observation, May 7, 2017; Congregation 14, participant observation, July 9, 2017). KIEM made use of sounding a gong and listening to it until the sound died out before collecting the children's prayer intentions (Erik Renkema, interview, September 26, 2016; Congregation 5, participant observation, March 5, 2017). Regular services also gave children opportunities to help perform God through ritual. For example, children blew on the water in the baptismal font to symbolize that the Holy Spirit made it into living water (Congregation 11, participant observation, June 11, 2017). They helped pour the water into the baptismal font (Congregation 3, participant observation, February 12, 2017; Congregation 5, participant observation, March 5, 2017). Or they said a line in the Prayer of Preparation (*drempelgebed*) (Congregation 6, participant observation, April 13, 2017).

In the interviews, eight out of ten youth work professionals mentioned a longing for new ways of being church. Why does worship with children evoke this longing? To explore this, we use the concept of ritualizing. Ritual scholar Ronald Grimes (2000, 4-5, 12) uses ritualizing to describe how people invent new rituals by drawing on existing repertoires. Grimes makes a distinction between ritualizing and existing rituals. However, we mainly find the concept useful to describe a *process*: "Unlike some other forms of creativity," Grimes (2000, 4) writes, "imagining ritually cannot transpire merely 'in the head' but is necessarily embodied and social." To imagine ritually, people need space. Worship with children provides a space for liturgical experimentation.

Various examples of locally developed formats (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019a, Chapter 2) show that ritualizing results in new liturgical rituals, which fits with the observation that liturgical renewal depends "ever less on ecclesial and academic authorities or organizations" (Barnard 2016, 185). However, what is it about worship with children that facilitates ritualizing? Firstly, worship with children often takes place in a different environment than the regular service. These spaces may be less engrained with the ritual acting that people are used to (van Leersum-Bekebrede, Oosterbaan, et al. 2021, Chapter 5). Secondly, maybe children enable the ritual imagination of adults. Adults associate children with learning and flexibility. The criticized but powerful hope that children will be

"the future of the church" may make adults want to renew the worship. Thirdly, children themselves catalyze liturgical change. Children's questions sometimes set the process in motion that results in a decision to give children access to the Lord's Supper (Sinia 2018) or develop a service for children (Congregation 10, participant observation, May 21, 2017). Also, children ask to be bodily involved in worship through their questions and acting (van Leersum-Bekebrede, Sonnenberg, et al. Forthcoming, Chapter 4). Existing worship regularly literally provides little room for children's need for movement. The importance of embodiment leads to the theme of play.

Play

Children often explored rituals and stories through play. The playful conversation with Rik, children who pointed at things in the children's Bible, the wake-up game, and Bibliodrama enabled embodied interaction with Bible stories. The children who blew the candle and their playing during Church on Lap show how children's playing can become part of the ritual. Children's play also showed up at other research locations. Children played among the pews while their parents drank coffee (Congregation 2, participant observation, January 29, 2017). A child noted that one of the best things about church was playing soccer after the service (Congregation 6, participant observation, April 13, 2017). Also, some children arranged play dates among themselves (Congregation 4, participant observation, February 26, 2017). One interviewee noted that liturgy is "not bound to the formal moments [like] a church service." However, he argued, "if children *have* to participate in regular worship, then be playful about it" (Harmen van Wijnen, former JOP and HGJB director, interview, November 11, 2016).

There seems to be a tension between play from the perspective of children and liturgical play. For children, "play is a form of knowing and a way of seeing and engaging the world" (Miller-McLemore 2012b, 47). From a liturgical studies perspective, liturgy as play is bound by rules (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 251-2). In many settings, children cannot play during the liturgy because of the rules of the liturgical game. In contrast, during the Church on Lap, the liturgy was built around children's play, which raises questions like, Do children need to cease their play to learn the rules of the liturgical game? In part, the answer depends on how much room the liturgy allows for spontaneity, which points back to the ritualizing discussed above.

In sum, children influence the performance of God. Children alert adults to the importance of the sensory aspects of (Bible) stories. Worship aimed at

children enables ritualizing because it allows room for spontaneity. Also, children highlight a tension between children's play and liturgical play (although Church on Lap shows that the two may coincide). The conclusion summarizes our findings and relates them to existing research.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this chapter, we asked how God is performed in worship with children. People perform God through symbolic acting and speaking. With Barnard (2016, 189), we noted that people shape worship performances, and at the same time, worship performances shape them. Opstap emphasized affective knowledge of God. In the Easter Vigil, the embodied experience of the wake-up play gained overtones of the resurrection. The sensory aspects of the Easter Vigil made it accessible to children, including to a girl who was visually and intellectually impaired (Sampson and Nettleton 2016; a service that is accessible to children is often more inclusive generally). In Church on Lap, the setting performed God as inviting. The children could play and interact with the symbolic language and acting. The Bibliodrama and the reflection afterward performed God as a God who speaks to people and helps people. The children also discussed God's existence. The analyzed practices shared with the complete dataset that God was performed through story, ritual, and play. Regarding those topics, youth work professionals stressed the importance of experiencing stories sensorially and creating a ritual space, and they noticed a tension between children's play and liturgical play. In the following, we discuss how the findings of the current study result in four insights. The first two confirm, and the third adds to existing research, while the fourth insight provides a corrective.

In the first place, the performance of God is contextual. Our data highlight that a congregations' theology influences how God is performed with children: In Opstap, during the interaction with Rik, two children called out that they knew "loads" about God, which fit the methods' emphasis on knowledge. In contrast, in Bibliodrama, the children theologized about hearing God's voice as both real and imagined, which suits a theology that cherishes ambiguity and questioning. These observations resonate with the research of David Csinos (2020). He found that the congregational context influences how children theologize.

In the second place, the performance of God is target-group related. God is performed as loving, caring, accepting, inviting, renewing, and helping. These verbs remind us of Sonnenberg's (2014, 233) findings. In general, in youth worship, "the experience of the *fascinans* (of [God's] love and care, overflowing

affection) is dominant [...] over the *tremendum*, the 'object of fear' (awe, acknowledgment of God's majesty, overriding power, and energetic experience of the mystery of a totally different and completely strange God)." Younger children are developing trust. Therefore, it may be important to emphasize God's love and care for them. Older children, like those in Bibliodrama, may benefit more from discussing God (Sonnenberg and Barnard 2012).

In the third place, our research shows that the interaction between children and adults performs God. Sonnenberg (2015, 8) found that "the quality of being together in youth worship may be described as having the potential of being a sacred quality." Csinos (2020, 199) argues that "research into children's spirituality and theology needs to consider not just individual theology, but communal theology as well." To explore how this works, in the methodology, we hypothesized that children's involvement in how God was performed would grow as they got older. It proved both true and untrue. In Opstap and Church on Lap, the worship practices with younger children, the adults' acting determined the way God was performed. Hilda performed God through the play with the hand puppet, storytelling, and prayer. However, in Opstap, the children participated in singing, their experiences informed the prayer, and their interjections brought the puppet play and story to life. In Church on Lap, the adults created the basic conditions for performing God as inviting. However, the children were crucial to this performance precisely through playing and responding to invitations to interact with the story and candle. Without the children's presence, God would not have been performed as inviting. In the Easter Vigil and during Bibliodrama, children and teenagers more actively performed God. The Easter Vigil revolved around the stories told by two teenagers playing disciples of Jesus and a girl colorfully enacted awakening during the wake-up play. Bibliodrama gave a stage to the children's theologizing and their questions. In both cases, the children also influenced the worship by giving suggestions or requesting activities. However, at the same time, the Easter Vigil format and Esmee's questions during Bibliodrama largely steered the children's contributions. Thus, in all the observed practices, adults and children performed God together: adults develop the method or format, organize the worship, ask questions, and generally set the stage for worship with children (van Leersum-Bekebrede et al. 2019b, Chapter 3). Children are, however, crucial as co-performers (van Leersum-Bekebrede, Sonnenberg, et al. Forthcoming, Chapter 4).

In the fourth place, our findings create awareness of children's theology in *performance*. At least in the Netherlands, there is increasing attention to "embodied faith," which balances the tendency to want to explain in words,

to give children knowledge *about* God. Embodied faith refers to how bodies express beliefs and to bodily experiences that generate religious experiences and knowledge (de Kock and Sonnenberg 2012, 7-8). For example, children learn by listening to stories, performing liturgical rituals, and experiencing how others embody their faith (de Kock and Sonnenberg 2012, 19-20). Additionally, "play can embody faith" (Miller-McLemore 2012b, 44). However, "this emphasis on materiality [...] should not be taken as evidence that young people cannot and do not think abstractly and deeply about their beliefs" (Ridgely 2011, 11-12). The interaction during Bibliodrama shows that next to the bodily, emotional, and experiential, cognitive information is useful when given "with a view to creative imaginative reflection on the part of the worshippers" (Barnard 2016, 192). Performing God through story, ritual, and play is fruitful because instead of producing a freeze-frame (see Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 56-57), their interpretation is dynamic. Theologian Bert Roebben (2016, 102) similarly calls for providing content to stir children's imagination and open up "new horizons of thinking and acting." In sum, performing God is contextual, target-group related, interactive, and embodied. Together, these insights provide a corrective to the disproportionate focus on children's verbal theologizing as individuals.

Our analysis of performances of God in worship with children opens up new lines of inquiry for youth ministry research. First, comparative research may investigate the similarities and differences between how God is performed with children, adults, and older people or at different diaconal and missional activities. Second, the ritualizing that takes place in worship with children begs further research into these processes. How are "new" rituals imagined, developed, and tried out? How do children influence ritualizing? Third, the relation between children and play in liturgy needs further theological reflection. Fourth, the realization that children's theology is embedded in performance calls for researchers to use their bodies to become aware of how theology entails perceiving and acting in space.[46] In conclusion, this research demonstrates that performing God with children is embodied theology.

[46] Susan Ridgely observed children and participated in the activities they engaged in, and only then started to ask questions. "Including children's voices in the study of religion will continually shift the conversation to new areas of focus, areas that are generally overlooked because they are often embodied, sometimes fun, and usually not part of the official script for worship" (Ridgely 2011, 93). For reflections on why researchers need to experience liturgical ritual performances through all their senses, see Nugteren (2013).

7

Conclusion

> Five-year-old Pepijn shows his favorite game on the tablet. His mother says that he built a church in the game. Pepijn tells how he made the church. He gets into the technical details of the blocks and the clicking and says that the church had pews and a table. "I didn't know where the pulpit is," he says, "but upstairs there is also a pew. But you can't get there because there was no door so I couldn't build a staircase." (Congregation 2, participant observation, January 29, 2017)

The above vignette shows that young children engage with their own participation in church and are able to share their experience of worship. It underlines that the building, furniture, and other objects impact children's worship experience. In Pepijn's church, the pews were crucial pieces of furniture. His focus on the pulpit and pews reflects the liturgical hierarchy in his context: the minister preaches while congregation members sit and listen.

However, there may be another reason why Pepijn finds the pews important. André, Pepijn's father, said that the children play among the pews after the service when the adults are drinking coffee. Other research participants told similar stories. Children who play tag across the pews could be seen as reclaiming the space where during the service, they had to sit still. More importantly, however, it illustrates that the social setting surrounding worship is part of the children's experience of worship. I will elaborate on this but first, I will answer the main question and summarize the findings. Then, I will discuss my methodological choices and theoretical contributions, give suggestions for further research (at which point I return to the children's play among the pews), raise two points of discussion, and share my thoughts on the practical implications of this study.

Answering the Research Question

The main question was, How are liturgical rituals with children performed in Dutch Protestant contexts, how do they contribute to children's agentive participation, and what is the theological significance of these practices?

There is a great variety in how Dutch Protestant liturgical rituals with children are performed: in varying settings, with and by different groups of people, and using a wide range of methods and formats. Children worship with peers and adult liturgical-ritual leaders. Their parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, classmates, or the wider congregation may also be present. Most practices include singing, praying, and listening to a Bible story. Often, the interaction with the Bible includes verbal and embodied elements. Adults set the stage for worship with children through how they (re)design worship, the roles they perform, and their intentions. Simultaneously, children influence the worship performance through their values (the things they find important in worship). Children appropriate and negotiate the social norms, the worship content, and the extent of their participation. Next to human actors, the material environment influences the performance of liturgical rituals with children. For example, when children sing, it sounds different in a cathedral than in a small room, and when children run across a stone floor, the sound is much louder than if they would be running on grass.

Worship allows children to participate in something bigger than they are. At the same time, worship takes place in a social context in which children are actors. Children claim space for themselves, for example, by making themselves heard (see Chapter 5), negotiating how they participate (see Chapter 4), asking theological questions (see Chapter 6), or turning the worship space or its surroundings into a playground (see the opening vignette). Adults contribute to children's agentive participation when they show interest in the children's values, ideas, and theology and stimulate children to give input during worship and the surrounding decision-making. When adults recognize children's agency, it validates children's worthiness as participants in worship.

Theologically, liturgical rituals with children are significant because of children's uniqueness and children's membership of the congregation. In the first place, children enrich worship with their agency, spirituality, and theology through the movement, reflections, creativity, and the values they bring in. Children's participation points to the theological significance of sensory experience. In particular, the study of the sounds that children make shows that the lightness of children's singing voices and their rustling in the pews help create the liturgical-ritual space. Children's participation sparks discussion

about liturgy and enables liturgical experimentation, which regularly leads to new liturgical rituals with children. Also, meeting children in their difference nourishes adults spiritually. In the second place, children's mere presence in worship is theologically significant because children are part of the congregation as the Body of Christ. Children showed and said how they valued being together with peers and family in worship. In worship, adults and children co-perform God, embodying theology by the way they interact and engage in story, ritual, and play. In sum, worship with children is theologically significant because it generates enthusiasm, provides lessons, and creates a playground for adults and children to meet and worship God together.

Rethinking Worship with Children

The answer to the main question shows that performances of both adults and children help create liturgical-ritual spaces that regularly ignite ritualizing—the crafting of new rituals based on existing repertoires (Grimes 2000, 4-5, 12). It prompts reflection on children's agentive participation and the performance and theological significance of Dutch Protestant liturgical rituals with children. Therefore, I review the sub-questions I asked about the variety of practices, the participation of adults and children, the role of materiality, and how God is performed.

Mapping Practices and Normativity

In response to the research question, my first priority was mapping the field. Therefore, I asked, How can we describe and understand the variety in worship practices with children? In answer, Chapter 2 sketched historical and contemporary worship practices and explored how they are loaded normatively. The historical sketch showed that Dutch worship practices responded to international developments and that the relation between regular services and worship aimed at children was tense from the start.

A literature study revealed that contemporary writers still often treat regular worship and worship designed for children as opposites. Ideally, many theologians argue, the whole congregation should worship together in one service, children included. Proponents of intergenerational worship critique worship aimed at target groups because children are excluded (Sampson and Nettleton 2016; Mercer, Mattews, and Walz 2019, 256), compartmentalized (Rodkey 2013, 21; Swart and Yates 2012, 10), and segregated (Mercer 2005, 225).

In the interviews with youth work professionals, interviewees defended children's church or family services based on their intergenerational qualities.

The analysis of contemporary liturgical rituals with children in the Netherlands illustrated that liturgical rituals with children are "target-group" and "intergenerational" to different degrees. It established the inherent normativity of these terms. Theologically, the intergenerational worship ideal draws on the metaphor of the congregation as the Body of Christ, which is incomplete with some of its members missing. In contrast, proponents of target-group worship noted that the uniqueness of each child is a theological given that necessitates practices of worship that are more attuned to children.

Dutch worship practices with children are diverse because they respond to changing individual, familial, and congregational needs. Consequently, developments are irregular. In some parts of the church, congregations were only starting to introduce children's church (often in a hybrid form, like a bi-weekly children's church). In other parts of the church, children's church existed for decades. In those congregations, practices like Messy Church, monthly family services, or a children's church involving adult congregation members attempted to connect children to the larger church.

In sum, Chapter 2 showed that particularly intergenerational worship functions as an ideal of worship. However, to understand worship practices with children, it is helpful to see target-group and intergenerational worship as complementary.

Adults' Involvement

Adults determine much of what happens in worship with children. Therefore, Chapter 3 answered the question, How do adults shape worship with children? The analysis showed that adults performed contributing, directing, and facilitating roles. Adults also adapted methods and formats for use in a local congregation. When unable to make changes, some adults changed their intentions. For example, in congregation 2, the Sunday school teachers used a method that emphasized learning but instead, they focused on creating community.

Intentions were the hopes that motivated adults' involvement in worship with children. Adults hoped that the worship would lead children to faith or encourage their spiritual development. They hoped that children would learn about the liturgy, become part of the faith community, and have (good) experiences. The analysis of the experience category also revealed the importance of spirituality in adults' own experiences of worship. Worship with children may ignite or deepen adults' spirituality because adults involved in worship with children experience children's difference (Surr 2017; Champagne 2003).

Some adults talked about their intentions for worship with children but also trusted that God was at work. They trusted that worship and children's faith were not solely dependent on them. These adults seemed more relaxed despite the demands that organizing worship with children put on them. Their trust may have lifted some of the burden of their hopes, wishes, and expectations for worship with children. "For a religious person," Miller-McLemore (2003, 157) writes, "perhaps the hardest spiritual lesson, or the most difficult virtue, to acquire through care of children is entrusting oneself and those most loved to God's care and protection. [This trust] thwarts the temptation to over-identify and overinvest." Trusting that God is at work may help people be open to children's spirituality (c.f. Yust 2004, see Theoretical Orientation).

Thus, adults set the stage for liturgical rituals with children, but precisely the focus on adults showed that children and God are other important actors.

Children's Agency

Chapter 4 further explored how children contribute to worship, asking, How do children show agency in worship? Children show their agency through their participation and by negotiating and appropriating the worship content and social norms. During the worship, children's presence altered the worship space. A data fragment in Chapter 3 already illustrated that children influence adult roles: One Messy Church organizer explicitly linked her awareness of the children's creativity to her readiness to take on a facilitating role. Chapter 4 described how children take on contributing roles and perform responsible tasks. Children influenced the decision-making surrounding worship through official procedures, like preparation and evaluation meetings, and informally through social structures, for example, when a parent shared their child's idea with other organizers.

Chapter 4 detailed that children have particular concerns about and motives for their participation in worship. The children valued embodied participation, activity, relationships, giving input, and well-organized worship. They expressed these values in words and through their participation. The children's values sometimes seemed unrelated to the worship but proved crucial to the children's worship experience. For example, some children remembered the theme of a particular Messy Church service through the food they ate. In addition, the children's value of well-organized worship revealed that children are aware of their and others' performance. Children want to be well-prepared and practice their roles. In Congregation 6 (focus group interview, March 26, 2017), a parent shared how she practiced participation in the Lord's Supper

with her active five-year-old (compare Ridgely [2005], who describes how the first communicants were continually practicing their ritual movements). Elza even wanted to help coordinate with the various worship leaders to prevent miscommunication between them.

Chapter 4 established that children's participation impacts worship. Children have ideas about worship and theology and are able to share those. This insight echoes earlier studies (e.g., Ridgely 2005; Csinos 2020; Champagne 2003). The findings showed that the extent to which children's agency was recognized made a difference to whether children felt they could have a say in the faith community in general and in the liturgy in particular. For example, Your!Church gave children a sense of ownership. The regular meetings encouraged children to share their ideas and opinions and adults to listen to those. The children's value of giving input underlined the importance of, at least, being able to share their ideas and opinions and take responsibility, even when they did not use that possibility. From a theological perspective, children's agency rests on the interdependence of adults and children: Adults should give children opportunities to take responsibility (Burggraeve 2010, 290). The conclusion challenged adults to act on the premise that children can contribute to worship. Practitioners should offer children opportunities to participate in the worship performance, design, planning, and evaluation.

A crucial contribution of children is how they value embodied participation. Other researchers have also remarked how children experience ritual through their bodies and senses (Mercer 2003, 30; Ridgely 2005, 181; Champagne 2010, 383), which was an important reason to engage with the field of material religion.

Materiality

Chapter 5 wondered, How does materiality play a role in worship with children? During the analysis, materiality proved too broad. Therefore, the question became, How do adults and children manage the sounds of children in worship? The chapter combined concepts from liturgical studies and material religion to reflect on worship with children. James Gibson's ([1979] 2015, 119) concept of affordance denotes the possibilities offered by an environment or object. The concept of liturgical-ritual space, coined by Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener (2014, 297), is reframed as lived-in or Thirdspace. Developed by Soja, Thirdspace is where imagined space and material space intertwine and comprise "something more" (Borch 2002, 113-114). Liturgical-ritual space theorizes that a place becomes a space of worship when people use it with a sense of imagination and anticipation (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 297).

The analysis of children's sonic participation in two pre-Reformation church buildings brought out how sounds that children made contributed to the creation of a liturgical-ritual space. At the same time, people interpreted sounds differently. In Congregation 11, the trained children's voices gave a lighter sound to turning points of the liturgical year. Some of the children's parents felt that the service revolved around the children's performance, but the cantor contended that the children had a service task. In Congregation 1, listening to the Word characterized the liturgy. The small sounds that children made during an evening service sustained rather than distracted from that contemplative spirituality. In the morning service, the young children's attendance of Bible class reinforced the quiet. However, the children's louder sounds caused discussion about the tension between "not correcting, letting go" and maintaining the quietness; thus, between inclusivity and the spirituality characteristic of this congregation.

The chapter listed various implications of the analysis. First, people, the material, and the imagined are closely intertwined: The creation of a liturgical-ritual space depends on people who enter and use a material environment with anticipation and imagination. Second, studying sound gives access to *affect*, conceptualized by Bialecki (2015, 97) as the bodily response that precedes emotion. Third, the contestation of children's sounds brings out power dynamics: Children often self-regulate the sounds they make but may make louder sounds on purpose. Fourth, also in Protestant contexts, sound, besides its content, also creates emotions and spiritual experiences. The analysis revealed feelings about how a worship space should sound. The affective qualities of sound teach children how to interact with an environment that provides the "possibility and mystery of an encounter event" (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 299).

The topic of sound as it rebounds in a particular space or building revealed new aspects of themes from earlier chapters, like power relations between adults and children and how children's church and congregational worship relate to each other. Adults tried to manage the quality and volume of the sounds that children made in worship and debated the interpretation of those sounds. Conversely, children showed their agency when they regulated their sound production and made more disruptive sounds. How the space is arranged and how people move in the space has theological implications. For example, side rooms open up new possibilities for the worship that takes place there: "worship in side rooms more often draws from evangelical song repertoires [… and] afford more movement, interaction, creative genres, and different media" (footnote 37). The theme of theological implications of material and embodied aspects of worship returns in the following chapter.

Performing God

Chapter 6 answered the last sub-question, How is God performed in worship with children? This chapter started from the premise that in worship, people perform God: They act in ways that assume God's presence, pray to God, and talk about God. Worship may reveal something about God, but God's acting may not coincide with human acting (Sonnenberg 2014, 226, 241). Ervin Goffman's work helped drew attention to the physical environment and actors' manner and appearance (Appelrouth and Edles 2008, 486-7).

The analysis included four practices: two services with children and two children's church-like settings. In the different performances, affective knowledge of God was emphasized and God's existence was discussed. God was performed as a God who loves, invites, resurrects, and helps. In all four practices, God was performed through story, ritual, and play.

Story, ritual, and play returned in the dataset as a whole, including the interviews with youth work professionals. Various interviewees reflected on how Bible stories can be made tangible for children. The theme of ritual highlighted a longing for new ways of being church. In recent years, various new formats for worship with children were introduced and developed locally (see also Chapters 2-5 and Appendix). These new initiatives show that ritualizing is "necessarily embodied and social" (Grimes 2000, 4). Play accentuated that children's play and the rules of liturgical play may be at odds. Exceptionally, during Church on Lap, the children's free play was enveloped by the liturgical play and helped to perform God as inviting and accepting of children as children.

Chapter 6 illustrated that worship aimed at children provides children with opportunities to bodily and verbally reflect on God and Bible stories. Like Chapter 4, it showed that children's presence impacts the social dynamics of worship, but also argues that children's participation highlights particular theological meanings in the performance of worship. The chapter reached four main conclusions. Firstly, congregational theology influences how God is performed with children. Secondly, developmentally, emphasizing the love and care of God may suit younger children whereas older children may benefit from discussing God's help or existence. Thirdly, how God is performed depends on the interaction between adults and children. Finally, the chapter argued that next to children's individual theologizing, scholars need to pay attention to how children theologize with others in the context of worship.

Further Reflections

Methodological Considerations

In this section, I consider the limitations and contributions of methodological choices I made: focusing on congregational practices, a possible geographic bias, not filming, and coding in English.

A methodological strength of this research is its broad selection of data. I researched a range of twenty-one liturgical rituals with children (see the Procedure and Practices sections in the Introduction). At the start of the research, in my interviews with them, the youth work professionals mentioned practices that remained outside the selection of research locations. Specifically, I did not include liturgical rituals that took place outside of congregational contexts. Examples are Vacation Bible Schools, other clubs and activities for neighborhood children, collaborations between churches and schools that extend beyond jointly organized services, and Christian children's camps. Congregational worship practices were sufficiently numerous and diverse to explore the differences in performances and children's participation.

Simultaneously, the included practices illustrate that church walls do not contain worship (see Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014). For example, Godly Play repeatedly crosses over from educational to congregational contexts and vice versa. Sunday schools represent a blend of school and worship formats. Messy Church may function as a congregation but may also be a special event for children. Also, some organizers drew inspiration from their experiences with youth and children's camps to design worship with children.

Despite the geographical spread of the research locations, the research has a slight *Randstad* (central area of the Netherlands) bias: I did not include congregations from the provinces of Zeeland, Limburg, Groningen, or Friesland. The *Randstad* is also associated with urbanization. However, I did select various congregations situated in rural villages. Based on conversations with youth workers and two recent dissertations (Renkema 2018; Gelderloos 2018), I suspect that particularly in Limburg, Groningen, and Friesland, congregations generally have fewer children than those in the areas I researched. Such demographics create both limitations and possibilities for practices of worship with children. Congregations with few children could find recognition and inspiration in the ideas about children's participation in the liturgy of a small congregation provided by Sampson and Nettleton (2016) and about liturgy that departs from the "schooling model of church" described by Belsford (2016).

> "[In congregations] where there are often very few children and older youth […], those are the places where children's church doesn't work anymore. […] Especially for those congregations, *really* worshiping together, when children are involved in the church service, may participate… that would be very valuable." Nelleke Plomp (specialist for worship with children at the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, interview, June 13, 2016)

Nelleke expresses a sentiment that echoes academic theories of practice (see Introduction) (de Kock, Sonnenberg, and Renkema 2018). In line with the current study, I suggest that future research in these areas could explore how worship performances differ when children are present or absent and whether and how children's participation in these congregations leads to ritualizing.

Initially, I wanted to film the liturgical rituals with children. Videoed data would have helped to more closely analyze materiality in worship. For example, through questions like, What objects are present and how are they used? How do people move around the worship space? However, with the number of locations that I wanted to include in my research, this method would have become unwieldy. Navigating the bulk of extra data and attaining consent of the involved children, their parents, and other participants in all twenty-one researched practices would pose real administrative problems. Instead, I chose to pay extra attention to interactions, my sensory perceptions in the field, and the environment of worship, which in the end proved ample to answer the questions I had. For future research on materiality and embodiment, I would suggest selecting a more limited set of research locations and using the method of collecting audio-visual data.

Finally, language has implications for qualitative analysis. For Chapter 2, I transcribed and coded the interviews in Dutch, my native language. When I did the participant observations, I thought it would advance the writing process if I transcribed field notes and created codes in English. However, I repeatedly got stuck when coding the participant observations. In part, this had to do with the amount of data, but the extra effort it took to read the data and create codes in English also hindered the coding process. I warmly advise researchers to code in their native language because it facilitates creative, associative, and analytical thinking.

In the following, I consider the theoretical contributions of this research.

Theoretical Contributions

In the Introduction, I reviewed existing research on worship with children. Apart from a study on speech acts in children's church (van der Veen 2009) and two studies on children's participation in the Lords' Supper (Sinia 2018; Zegwaard 2006), there is no recent empirical research on worship with children in the Dutch Protestant context. Internationally, among the few empirical studies, the comprehensive inclusion of practice descriptions and analysis is rare. Therefore, the current research contributes by providing qualitative data of worship practices with children from a previously under-researched context. Further, the research contributes by bringing those data into conversation with the debate about intergenerational worship, the topic of children's agency, and the field of material religion.

First, in this research, I nuanced the debate about intergenerational worship. The Introduction and Chapter 2 show how "the professional theory of practice," the normativity of volunteers, ministers, and youth work professionals, is closely intertwined with "the academic theory of practice," scholarly reflections on worship with children (de Kock, Sonnenberg, and Renkema 2018). In practical theology and its related fields of liturgical studies, children's spirituality, and children's theology (less so in religious education), authors argue for intergenerational worship and react against target-group practices. An oft-mentioned reason is that children are members of the congregation as the body of Christ (the theological argument). Also, intergenerational worship socializes children in communal worship (the pedagogical argument). Regularly, authors make it seem like "real" intergenerational worship shuts out target-group worship: Children's church would be obsolete if children could fully participate in the Sunday morning service.

Reflecting on my research, de Kock, Sonnenberg, and Renkema (2018, 94) observe that I aim "to develop a theory of practice rather than a theory for practice." Therefore, I agree with Ingersoll (2014, 174) that "the movement away from adultism to intergenerational ministry does not require pure abandonment of age-segregated ministry." On the contrary, abandoning worship aimed at children would be a shame. These practices create a space for children's verbal and embodied theologizing. They ignite creativity and ritualizing. My position is that "idealization of a particular type of worship leads to neglect of the complexity of practices of worship with children" (Chapter 2). For example, Chapter 2 established that target-group and intergenerational worship are often complementary. Chapters 3 to 6 show that different types of worship allow for different worship possibilities. Additionally, the ideal of intergenerational

worship is applied arbitrarily: At least in the PCN, the argument that children should participate in the Sunday morning service is hardly ever extended to babies and very young children. In practice, the best course of action is often unclear. For example, I question whether the adults' ideal of intergenerational worship should prevail when the children want to maintain a service as a service for children (see Chapter 4). Thus, while the discussion about intergenerational worship reacts against certain worship practices, its core concern is that children are agents in context.

Second, this research had as a central premise that children have agency. This perspective celebrates that children are already agentive participants in worship. Also, "respect for what children do or do not want to do is important" (de Kock, Sonnenberg, and Renkema 2018). Various authors in practical theology have drawn attention to children's agency (e.g., Karen-Marie Yust, Joyce Ann Mercer, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, and Heather Nicole Ingersoll, see Theoretical Orientation, see also the book *Children's Voices* [Dillen and Pollefeyt 2010]). David Csinos (2020) argues that the context influences children's theologizing and Elaine Champagne (2003, 2010, 2015) pays attention to children's intersubjective theologizing. However, the existing research often focuses on children's narrative and individual theologizing.

My contribution is that I researched children's agentive participation in liturgical rituals. I shifted the focus from the words of individual children to the verbal, interactive, and embodied theologizing of children in the worship. Children's agency blossoms in relation to others: Theology sheds light on how agency can only grow out of dependence (Burggraeve 2010, 274). Chapter 4 agreed that "adults often fail to recognize children's ways of participation in worship as such" (Mercer 2005, 236) but also highlighted the difference it makes when adults do recognize children's agency. Additionally, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 show that paying attention to agency makes scholars recognize the theological importance of children's embodiment and ways of sensing in worship (for example, the meanings children give to the First Communion lean on their immediate sensory experience of it [Ridgely 2005, 181]). This brings me to the next contribution.

Third, throughout the research process, I paid attention to materiality. Particularly Chapter 5 (and to a lesser extent Chapter 6) includes the perspective of materiality in the analysis. These chapters approach worship as a spatial, material, and embodied practice. The way people organize the space, how they move their bodies, and which objects they use are not "just materiality" but "express and form the faith community in liturgy" (Magrini 2003b, 57).

The participation of the children's choir, for example, was significant in a congregation where participation constituted faith. Church on Lap performed God as inviting because the children were allowed to play while the adults built a liturgical-ritual space around that (Chapter 6).

Children make adults aware of the (lack of) sensory aspects of worship. Children value embodied participation: they want to see what's going on, move, and have something to do. Children love activity: some enjoy sports while others prefer singing or making crafts (see Children's Values, Chapter 4). Therefore, when children participate in worship, adults often try to create liturgically meaningful sensory experiences for them. For example, the catering team of Messy Church put a lot of effort into creating meals that would help bring the story to life (Congregation 14, interview, March 28, 2017). Leantine Dekker told of a minister who let children touch the baptismal water (Chapter 5). Also, many congregations perform Christmas plays with children (Congregation 9, interview, May 7, 2017; Congregation 12, interview, June 20, 2017).

Materiality opens up new perspectives on worship with children. The analysis of sound resulted in unexpected insights. Reflection on the sound that children make in worship transformed background noise into the sounds of children's activities that sustain a quiet liturgy while meeting their own need for movement. It drew attention to the difference in the size of children's bodies in relation to adults. Children have shorter vocal cords, resulting in a higher sound. Sound also resounded existing themes in new ways (see the Materiality section above). All this brings me to the conclusion that in building theory on materiality in worship with children, sound is only the first step on the road to further discoveries.

Suggestions for Further Research

The presented data and analysis about liturgical rituals with children in the Dutch Protestant context leads to suggestions and questions for further research. I discuss these suggestions in the same order as the theoretical contributions above.

Future empirical research should make an effort to include descriptions and analysis of worship practices with children, as is indeed increasingly happening. Liturgical rituals with children outside of congregational contexts merit further research. Two studies exist on contemporary Christian children's camps (Otten and Noordmans 2017; Yust 2006) and I included some reflections on the experience I had with a youth camp in a Colombian evangelical church in Spain in my Master's thesis (Bekebrede 2016). These studies give a taste of what future empirical research on liturgical rituals outside of congregational

contexts could bring to the table. Especially interesting would be a study that combines the perspectives of liturgy, ritual, and materiality. For example, a church-and-school network day (participant observation, June 2, 2018) gave me the impression that collaborations between churches and schools have entered a phase of new creativity. Future research on outreach activities for children, children's camps, and church-and-school collaborations might highlight differences in how recreation (see Sonnenberg and Barnard 2015) and learning processes play a role in liturgical rituals (de Kock 2015).

The topic of normativity in worship will continue to be relevant, as both practices and norms change over time. Researchers could approach normativity in worship with children through comparative research. For example, the book *Infants and Children in the Church: Five Views on Theology and Ministry* (Harwood and Lawson 2017) details how, theoretically, different doctrines relate to practice. It may be a point of reference for research on how discourse in practice and professional and academic theories of practice are interrelated (de Kock, Sonnenberg, and Renkema 2018).

Also, continued attention to agency is necessary. Various scholars have noted the importance of children's bodies and sensory experiences for their theology and theologizing. In the vignette that opened this chapter, the pews proved important church furniture during the service and became the children's play area afterward. I agree with Ridgely (2005, 184) that scholars should consider how the playground may affect the religious realm. Playing with peers and having family members close by who are drinking coffee is as much part of children's experience of worship as the song, the stories, prayers, etc. In answer to my questions about church and worship, some children talked about playing soccer with peers outside the church. Children regularly remembered a previous liturgical ritual by the food or drink they got, the activity they did, or the craft they made. In Chapter 6, the analysis of Church on Lap showed that children's play became part of the worship space. Children's play thus intersects with their experience of worship. Therefore, I wonder how liturgy and rituality play a role in children's lives. I suggest studying children in their daily lives at home, sports, school, etc., and from there, follow them back into worship. Such research could reflect further on children's embodied theologizing. For example, are there differences between how active and quiet children theologize? How does a body's shape, size, and training influence experiences of liturgy and ritual?

On a methodological level, the increased awareness of children's agency calls for brave researchers who approach children as collaborators despite the

practical, logistical, and ethical challenges this poses (see Weber and De Beer 2016; Peile 2004; Ridgely 2011, 93). Collaborative research suits practical theology's engagement with both the church and the academy. Therefore, through this research, I have become eager to see this method used more. Determining the research topic together with the children would in itself provide data for practical theological reflection. Especially researching children's liturgical lives (see above) would benefit from a collaborative approach, as it would require intensive ethnographic research with children in different contexts (see Flewitt 2005 for ethical considerations).

Finally, the focus on the material aspects of sound leaves many topics open for study. The concept of affordance may be helpful to analyze material aspects of worship besides sound. Remember how affordance describes the possibilities offered by an environment or object. For instance, in the preliminary analysis, I noticed a difference when children sat on cushions on the ground or chairs or pews. Sitting on the floor literally grounded children, resulting in less fidgeting (you can't swing your legs on a cushion), even with a large group of children between three and twelve. At other moments, the choice to let children stand around tables gave them a freedom of movement that increased attention on what they were doing and generated more interaction between participants. Researchers may analyze more closely how faith and environment shape each other. For example, various interviewees mentioned the evocative power of old church buildings for children. How does it matter to children's theology when they worship in buildings with different architectures or even in places like parks or schoolyards?

Points of Discussion

Next to the suggestions for further research, I would like to raise two points of discussion. First, the debate about worship with children should refocus on actual worship practices with children rather than normative or idealized concepts of worship. The current discussion about intergenerational worship seems to be at a dead-end. Various authors argue more or less the same thing while at the same time everyone interprets differently what exactly constitutes "intergenerational worship" (see Allen [2004] for an overview of various definitions). It is often unclear what situation or practice authors condemn because of a lack of empirical descriptions. The way forward is empirical research that highlights children's agency. Not to nullify adults' needs, roles, or contributions, but to show children's agentive participation is a mutual process that from a theological perspective, it is the adults' responsibility to foster.

Second, scholars currently focus on how theology is translated to children and on children's theology and spirituality. Instead, the data I generated for this research showed that theology is embedded in the material environment, worship performance, and interactions between adults and children. This research illustrates the importance of doing qualitative research and paying attention to children. Representing research participants, particularly children, in all their complexisty, is "a holy responsibility" (Magrini 2006, 79). Before coming up with questions, arranging interviews, and writing theological treatises, researchers should look around at the angle from which children see the world. They should take to heart that doing ethnographic research can be deeply theological. Such research validates that practical theologian Richard Osmer (2008) calls this research phase "priestly listening."

Practical Implications

During this research, I have noticed an interest in children among youth workers and professionals in Dutch Protestant contexts. These people enthused me for worship with children and highlighted the need for research on the Dutch context. Hopefully, this research will provide a starting point that resonates with the people I interviewed, presented to, and conversed with—including the children—and with many others besides. In this section, I give the first impulse to reflections on practice.

This research ignites a whole range of reflective questions for practitioners. Chapter 2, for example, helps to ask questions like, How do we combine different types of target-group and intergenerational worship? What do I find convincing arguments? Are those theological, pedagogical, more practical, or something different? Chapter 3 raises questions like, Does our practice align with what we want for worship with children? Does the role I perform at a particular moment fit the intention I have? Chapter 4 poses questions like, How do we consider the faith of children? What is the position of children within the congregation? What do children tell us about their values in worship, through the way they act and by what they say? If children hear or read about these findings, they may ask questions like, What do I find important in worship? How do I contribute? How do I want to participate in worship? With who can I share ideas about songs, sermon topics, and interactive worship moments? Chapter 5 leads to questions like, What sounds are children allowed to make? What does the way we try to manage the sounds that children make tell us of our ideas about worship? How are other ways of sensing important for worship? How do we manage and interpret the worship environment? When is it better to

"let go" (for example, let the children run in church) and when do we intervene, and why? Chapter 6 provokes similar questions but more clearly shows that the way we perform worship teaches children things about God, How do we perform God in liturgical rituals with children? What theology is embedded in the worship space and our interaction with children?

The research as a whole invites reflection on how the shape of liturgical rituals with children matters for children's religious formation. The theme of materiality opens up theoretical implications and practical possibilities for liturgies with children. This research, particularly the chapter on children's agency, underlines and magnifies previous encouragements to people involved in worship to create more possibilities for children's participation in the organization and performance of worship. Making children a vital part of the worshiping community recognizes how children contribute to worship now and—though it does not act as insurance—inspires hope for the children's future and for the faith communities of which they may remain or become a part. However, children are only a part of their worshiping communities. As such, the dissertation poses the question, How may worship sustain not only children but also teenagers, adults, and older people in their religious development and faith? Taking children seriously means being sincere about both struggles and joys in faith, listening to children, and, in any type of practice, focusing on worshiping God together.

Finally, on a more personal note, after five years of research into liturgical rituals with children, I feel a new appreciation for the Bible. I could say similar things about music, the sacraments, and drama, but personally, I experienced the power that Bible stories have. My appreciation arose not in spite of but because of the different theological ways of dealing with Bible stories I encountered (*Lectio Divina*, literal, prophetic, narrative, etc.). I especially enjoyed witnessing young people and adults moving and talking together to discover what happens in the story and what it might mean. Joint discovery of Bible stories speaks to the trust that God works in people, even in very different theological contexts. Wherever and however children participate in liturgical rituals, I hope that they will get the chance to truly explore the Bible with peers, family, and fellow congregation members.

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Appendix: Congregations

The following characterization of the fifteen researched congregations, focuses on liturgical tradition, theology, demographics, and the children's positions within the congregation.

Congregation 1 has roots in the *Nadere Reformatie* (Dutch Second Reformation), in which the individual believer's relationship with God is central. That focus translates into its worship with children. The former and current ministers address children specifically at various points in the service. The congregation has attracted many young families in the last twenty years. Children seem part of the community, and congregation members take their presence for granted.

Congregation 2 is similar to congregation 1, but the building, size of the congregation, and possibly theology make it feel stiff. There are many children, but they seem invisible. Most children know each other from attending the same schools. Families are central units in the congregation. Consequently, their parents' position and involvement in the church largely determines the extent and content of the children's participation.

Congregation 3 attracts people of various strands of theology, mostly liberal but some more orthodox. Thus, there are diverse views on liturgy. The congregation depends on a couple of families for the attendance of a handful of children. The minister and a few involved adults, however, pay special attention to children. For example, they have a children's catechesis class and regularly organize special services for children. However, these efforts seem somewhat fragmented and ad-hoc, mirroring the liturgy and the congregation as a whole.

Congregation 4 exists as a collaboration between different groups of liberal Protestants. It has a biweekly children's church with children of different ages in one group. The children know each other well. Mostly their mothers attend. Their fathers are not believers or don't attend church. The organizers have a laid-back approach that results in a sometimes rowdy but flexible children's church with in-depth discussions. They value the opportunity to teach children about Biblical stories and want them to know about their Christian heritage. The children give input, and adults challenge them to form their own opinions.

Congregation 5 is called *midden-orthodox* (literally, middle-orthodox) in Dutch. The congregation has moved from orthodox to a mix of more liberal theologies. Liveliness and experimentation characterize this congregation. There are many children and several devoted adults with pedagogical skills who know

each other well. There is often an object on the liturgical table that connects with the children's church' theme. Crafts from the children's church projects are sometimes shown in the church hall.

Congregation 6 sports a rich liturgical history, influenced by the Liturgical Movement. Children's work has been a part of that history. Therefore, a sense of continuity characterizes the worship with children in this congregation. Children take part in different types of congregational and age-graded liturgical rituals. For example, everyone is present and may participate during the Lord's Supper, including teenagers, children's church, and crèche children. The children's church addresses themes like politics and environmental justice.

Congregation 7 is another congregation where people with different theologies attend, making it hard to define the congregation. It has a history of collaboration in children's work that resulted in the current merged congregation. A similar process probably lies in its future. The organizers of worship with children are good at organizing but avoid talking about their faith. Regularly, children ask faith-related questions that are then not discussed. Consequently, the performances of worship with children seem a matter of following the method.

Congregation 8 lies in a rural area and is "middle-orthodox" (see above). It collaborates with the local school. There can be as many as thirty children, but many church members do not feel the need to come (regularly). The church furniture and liturgy seem to have inherited some stiffness. A handful of involved people are trying to update those. They openly reflect on the liturgy and children's role in the congregation.

Congregation 9 has a liturgy influenced by the Liturgical Movement, with room for liturgical experimentation. There are very few children, but the minister and volunteers are eager to listen to children and include them. For example, the minister prefers to call the children's moment an introduction because it introduces the sermon topic to everyone, not just children. He organized a theatre service on which people of all ages collaborated. Thoughtfulness and attentiveness characterize how the congregation performs worship with children.

Congregation 10 has a large membership, with many young families. The liturgy is a "bricolage" (Barnard 2016, 185; see also Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014): cut and pasted from various liturgical traditions. The atmosphere is informal. The volunteers are enthusiastic but lost some of their energy. The adults in this congregation have become accustomed to involving children in decision-making and the performance of worship. Consequently, the children often share ideas and opinions about the worship, and most of them seem at ease with performing tasks in the liturgy.

Congregation 11 shows a strong influence by the Liturgical Movement. Participation in worship constitutes faith. Being a city church, many parents and children attend irregularly because of their many other commitments. At the same time, the congregation communicates an openness towards newcomers, passers-by, and long-time members. Next to children's church, various overlapping practices exist to initiate children into the liturgy. The worship practices are somewhat isolated, but the youth coordinator and volunteers attempt to create more continuity.

Congregation 12 is a liberal congregation. It has very few children. Therefore, the congregation replaced the crèche and children's church with a monthly all-age service. However, the organizers take care to offer meaningful liturgical interactions to children of all ages. They make sure that children do not take Bible stories literally by, for example, not telling Bible stories to very young children, dressing up as characters in the story, or starting stories with phrases like "once upon a time." In the worship with children, morality is an important theme.

Congregation 13 is influenced by the Dutch Second Reformation. It has a large and active membership—there is an abundance of volunteers—and many families with children attend. The limited amount of space in the church building itself for things like crèche and children's church poses a practical problem that enables liturgical experimentation. Not everyone welcomes changes, but loyalty to the congregation motivates those same people to invest in the children. The volunteers share the wish to teach children the gospel message.

Congregation 14 is a Messy Church that leans on its initiating congregation but seems almost a congregation on its own. It involves a team of professional people, both volunteers and paid staff. Everyone has a role and is well prepared. At the same time, the organizers' flexible attitude allows for a lot of social interaction. The organizers develop the liturgical rituals with the children in mind, who are the primary participants, although some adults also actively participate.

Congregation 15 works together with two other congregations and a school to organize a church-and-school service. During the two weeks preceding the service, the school has a Bible project. Each week has its related theme. The service ties those in with a third topic. Close ties between congregation 15 and the school facilitate collaboration and generate mutual appreciation. Collaborating with the church affirms the official Christian identity of the school and the teachers' ideals.

Samenvatting

Kinderen participeren in liturgische rituelen (vieringen), bijvoorbeeld tijdens zondagse erediensten, andere diensten zoals familiediensten of kerk-en-schooldiensten, kindernevendiensten, crèche en zondagsschool. Deze praktijken staan centraal in dit onderzoek. De hoofdvraag is: Hoe worden liturgische rituelen met kinderen *performed* (uitgevoerd) in Protestantse gemeenschappen in Nederland, hoe dragen ze bij aan de actieve participatie van kinderen, en hoe kunnen deze praktijken theologisch worden geduid?

Om deze vraag te kunnen beantwoorden heb ik elf jeugdwerk professionals geïnterviewd en participerende observaties gedaan bij eenentwintig liturgische rituelen met kinderen in vijftien gemeentes binnen de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN). Voor de leesbaarheid kies ik vaak voor het Nederlandse woord *viering* en het Engelse *worship*, maar het achterliggende concept van liturgisch ritueel is breder. Liturgisch ritueel begrijp ik vanuit twee perspectieven: die van de antropologie en van de theologie. Vanuit verschillende antropologische definities blijkt dat een ritueel bestaat uit acties, een bepaald patroon volgt en iets communiceert. Dat ik van een *liturgisch* ritueel spreek, geeft aan dat er een ruimte wordt gecreëerd voor een ontmoeting tussen God en mens. Dit is het theologisch aspect van de dubbelterm liturgisch ritueel. Liturgisch ritueel wordt *performed*, het wordt “uitgevoerd,” zoals een toneelstuk of een muziekstuk wordt uitgevoerd, en daarmee doet het ook iets: het creëert een alternatieve werkelijkheid binnen de bestaande werkelijkheid. Met dat mensen het ritueel vormgeven met hun handelen, worden zijzelf door die rituele handelingen gevormd.

In de bestaande literatuur vanuit de praktische theologie en aanverwante velden zoals kinderspiritualiteit, kindertheologie, godsdienstpedagogiek en liturgische studies is er nog weinig kwalitatief empirisch onderzoek gepubliceerd over vieringen met kinderen. Wat er is geschreven is veelal gebaseerd op de praktijkervaring van de auteur, ook als er wel interviews en observaties gedaan zijn. Praktijken worden vaak niet beschreven en de analyse wordt maar summier getoond. In plaats daarvan nemen normatieve standpunten een prominente plek in. In het Introductiehoofdstuk beschrijf ik een handvol uitzonderingen op deze tendens, waarvan de helft bovendien van buiten de genoemde aan praktische theologie verwante velden komt. Bovendien gaan die studies vaak over een of maximaal vier praktijken en bijna nooit over meerdere soorten

vieringen met kinderen. In Nederland is er enkel een bescheiden empirisch onderzoek verschenen over vier verschillende vormen van talige communicatie in kindernevendienst en er zijn onderzoeken over avondmaalsvieringen met kinderen. Het huidige onderzoek baseert zich op kwalitatieve data en analyses van verschillende liturgische rituelen met kinderen in de Nederlandse context en voorziet daarmee in een behoefte aan meer systematisch onderzoek naar praktijken van vieringen met kinderen.

In de vijf hoofdstukken waarin de resultaten van het empirisch onderzoek centraal staan behandel ik vijf sub-vragen die helpen om de hoofdvraag te beantwoorden. Als eerste bespreek ik in hoofdstuk 2 de vraag: Hoe kan de verscheidenheid aan vieringen met kinderen beschreven en geduid worden? Vanaf het ontstaan van separate vieringen voor kinderen worden daar vragen bij gesteld en ontstaat een spanning tussen enerzijds de wens intergenerationeel te vieren en anderzijds juist vieringen voor kinderen te houden. De noties *doelgroep* en *intergenerationeel* zijn dus normatief geladen. Het pleidooi voor intergenerationele vieringen met kinderen wordt theologisch gemotiveerd door de metafoor van de gemeente als Lichaam van Christus, dat incompleet is als er leden missen (in dit geval kinderen). Pedagogisch wordt hier de formatieve kracht van samen vieren aan toegevoegd. Uiteindelijk is de geschetste ideale praktijk een gezamenlijke dienst waarin iedereen, van jong tot oud, tot hun recht komt. Aan de andere kant is er in doelgroep vieringen meer ruimte voor de uniciteit van kinderen en voor hun spirituele ontwikkeling. In de praktijk vullen verschillende soorten liturgische rituelen met kinderen elkaar echter aan en de meeste praktijken hebben zowel doelgroepgerichte als intergenerationele aspecten. Zowel in de praktijk als in de literatuur is er gebrek aan eenduidigheid over wat er wordt bedoeld met “intergenerationeel vieren.” Als term om de praktijk te beschrijven is intergenerationeel vieren daarom ongeschikt.

Het derde hoofdstuk gaat over de vraag: Hoe dragen volwassenen bij aan vieringen met kinderen? Het laat zien hoe volwassenen liturgische rituelen met kinderen vormgeven. Als eerste doen ze dat door verschillende rollen aan te nemen die kunnen worden ingedeeld in drie categorieën: ondersteunend (bijvoorbeeld als organisator, mede-participant, koster), sturend (bijvoorbeeld als steller van vragen die een juist antwoord hebben, onderwijzer, mystagoog) en faciliterend (bijvoorbeeld als steller van verkennende vragen, luisteraar, trooster). Als tweede doen ze dat door zich te verhouden tot de methode die ze gebruiken. Volwassenen passen methodes aan voor gebruik in hun gemeente en wanneer dat niet kan verandert voor een volwassene vaak de reden waarom ze toch in het liturgische ritueel blijven participeren. Die redenen, motivaties of intenties

zijn de derde manier waarop volwassenen vieringen met kinderen beïnvloeden. Volwassenen willen graag dat vieringen met kinderen bijdragen aan het geloof of de spirituele ontwikkeling van kinderen. Ze hopen dat kinderen gevormd worden door de liturgie, deel uitmaken van de geloofsgemeenschap en dat kinderen en de volwassenen zelf (goede) ervaringen hebben. De analyse van deze laatste categorie maakte duidelijk dat het enthousiasme en de bijdragen van kinderen volwassenen zelf voedt in hun spiritualiteit. Een houding van vertrouwen op God zou volwassenen meer openheid kunnen geven voor de spiritualiteit van kinderen. Deze bevindingen over spiritualiteit laten zien dat hoewel volwassenen veel bepalen van wat er in vieringen met kinderen gebeurt, kinderen en God ook belangrijke "actoren" zijn.

Het vierde hoofdstuk stelt daarom de kinderen centraal en heeft als vraag: Hoe laten kinderen *agency* zien in liturgische rituelen? *Agency* is een sociologisch-antropologisch concept. Dat kinderen *agency* hebben is de vooronderstelling dat kinderen niet alleen gevormd worden door hun sociale en religieuze context en de praktijken waaraan ze deelnemen, maar zelf ook die contexten en praktijken beïnvloeden. Kinderen beïnvloeden liturgische rituelen tijdens de viering door hun lichamelijke aanwezigheid, als ze een verantwoordelijke taak hebben, of door te onderhandelen over hoe ze participeren. Ook heeft wat kinderen doen en zeggen direct en indirect effect op het niveau van besluitvorming, bijvoorbeeld als hun enthousiaste deelname het ontwerp van een volgende viering bepaalt of als kinderen betrokken worden bij de organisatie van de viering. Kinderen hebben beduidend meer invloed op een praktijk als volwassenen zich ervan bewust zijn dat kinderen zelf keuzes kunnen maken en eigen belangen hebben, oftewel als de *agency* van kinderen erkend wordt. Als er vaker naar kinderen wordt geluisterd en er aandacht is voor hun bijdragen delen kinderen vaker hun mening, idee of verzoek en maken ze vaker hun eigen keuzes. Die geuite meningen en keuzes laten zien wat kinderen belangrijk vinden in vieringen. Kinderen hechten waarde aan lichamelijke participatie, activiteiten en relaties en willen graag meedenken. Zeker oudere kinderen vinden het ook belangrijk dat er aandacht is voor de kwaliteit van vieringen.

Het vijfde hoofdstuk behandelt de vraag hoe materialiteit een rol speelt in vieringen met kinderen. Meer in het bijzonder werd nagegaan hoe de geluiden die kinderen maken in vieringen getraind en geïnterpreteerd worden. De analyse verbindt concepten uit de materiële religie en liturgische studies. *Affordance* duidt de handelingen aan waar een omgeving toe uitnodigt. Liturgisch-rituele ruimte is een term voor hoe mensen een ruimte gebruiken tijdens vieringen. Het is geleefde ruimte, een combinatie van de fysieke omgeving en het voorstellingsvermogen

en de verwachting waarmee mensen die ruimte betreden. De analyse van twee diensten met kinderen in oude kerkgebouwen laat horen hoe de geluiden van kinderen bijdragen aan de totstandkoming van de liturgisch-rituele ruimte. In de ene gemeente geven de getrainde koorstemmen van de kinderen een eigen geluidskleur aan de liturgie. Het "lichtere" geluid van kinderstemmen kan worden ingezet om een feestelijke tint te geven aan speciale diensten in het liturgisch jaar. Voor deze gemeente is de kwaliteit van de muziek in de dienst belangrijk en is participatie op zichzelf een vorm van geloof. De participatie van het kinderkoor wordt door sommige ouders als optreden gezien maar de cantor houdt vol dat kinderen een dienende rol hebben in de dienst. In de andere gemeente draagt het geritsel en gefluister van kinderen tijdens de preek bij aan een liturgisch rituele ruimte waar luisteren naar het Woord centraal staat. Tegelijkertijd zorgen de hardere geluiden die kinderen maken ervoor dat gemeenteleden in gesprek raken over de spanning tussen rust en luisteren aan de ene kant en inclusief zijn in de eredienst aan de andere kant. Deze analyses hebben verschillende implicaties. Ten eerste laat geluid zien dat mensen, de fysieke en de verbeelde ruimte nauw verweven zijn. Ten tweede is het bestuderen van geluid een toegang tot *affect*, de lichamelijke respons die aan emoties vooraf gaat. Ten derde belichten kindergeluiden en de interpretatie daarvan machtsdynamieken, kinderen reguleren vaak zelf al hun geluid dat ze maken in een viering maar maken soms ook expres harder geluid. Ten vierde is geluid duidelijk meer dan inhoud, ook in Protestantse gemeenschappen. De affectieve kant van geluid is belangrijk voor hoe kinderen leren ervaren dat de liturgisch-rituele ruimte de mogelijkheid biedt voor een ontmoeting met God.

In het zesde hoofdstuk gaat het dan ook om de vraag: Hoe wordt God *performed* in vieringen met kinderen? Met andere woorden: Hoe stellen mensen God present? Wie God is valt niet samen met menselijke *performance* van God maar dat laatste laat misschien wel iets zien van God. Om te begrijpen hoe God betrokken is in vieringen is het belangrijk te onderzoeken wat mensen zeggen en doen en aandacht te geven aan de ruimte waarin de viering plaatsvindt. In de vier beschreven praktijken wordt achtereenvolgens benadrukt dat kennis van God blij maakt, dat God uitnodigend is richting kinderen, dat God mensen opwekt en een nieuw begin geeft, en dat God mensen helpt maar misschien ook niet bestaat. Deze *performances*—hoe kinderen en volwassenen interacteren tijdens verhalen, rituelen en spel—zijn belichaamde theologie. Liturgische rituelen die op kinderen zijn gericht gaan regelmatig samen met het experimenteren met nieuwe vormen van kerk-zijn. Tegelijkertijd bieden deze praktijken kinderen de ruimte om God te ontmoeten op manieren die aansluiten bij hun leefwereld.

In de Conclusie wordt de hoofdvraag van dit onderzoek beantwoord: Hoe worden liturgische rituelen met kinderen *performed* in Protestantse gemeenschappen in Nederland, hoe dragen ze bij aan de actieve participatie van kinderen, en hoe kunnen deze praktijken theologisch worden geduid? Liturgische rituelen met kinderen worden door verschillende actoren *performed*, daarbij zijn de bijdragen van zowel volwassenen als kinderen belangrijk. De actieve participatie van kinderen wordt vooral bevorderd doordat volwassenen zich ervan bewust worden dat kinderen al op allerlei manieren bijdragen aan vieringen, en zich via die weg realiseren hoe die bijdragen van kinderen kunnen worden versterkt. Het is theologisch relevant dat kinderen mogen participeren in vieringen, aangezien kinderen deel uitmaken van de gemeente als het Lichaam van Christus. De ontmoeting tussen kinderen en volwassenen en tussen kinderen onderling, hun gezamenlijke *performance* van de liturgische rituelen, is belichaamde theologie. Liturgische rituelen met kinderen bieden ruimte aan ritualiseren, voor liturgisch experimenteren met behulp van bestaande rituele repertoires. Dit ritualiseren leidt ook daadwerkelijk tot nieuwe manieren van vieren met kinderen. Dat beïnvloedt de kerkgemeenschap als geheel, aangezien de *performance* van vieringen geloof tegelijkertijd tot uitdrukking brengt en vormt.

De bijdrage van dit onderzoek is dat het vieringen met kinderen nauwkeurig beschrijft en diepgaand analyseert. Drie dingen vallen daarbij op: de nuancering van het ideaal van intergenerationeel vieren, het aan de orde stellen van de actieve participatie van kinderen—ook als volwassenen die niet altijd als zodanig herkennen, en het belichten van de theologie in de materialiteit van vieringen met kinderen. Deze bijdragen tonen de waarde van kwalitatief theologisch onderzoek en nodigen uit tot vervolgonderzoek waarin er aandacht blijft voor de *agency* van kinderen en materialiteit. Ten slotte stelt dit onderzoek verantwoordelijken in kerken en gemeenteleden een aantal vragen om reflectie en gesprek op gang te brengen over lokale praktijken van vieren met kinderen.

Curriculum Vitae

Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede was born on May 7, 1992, in Vianen, the Netherlands. Together with her husband Hans van Leersum and son Joas she lives in Hilversum. She grew up in Mozambique and Angola, where her parents worked for ZOA (a Christian NGO providing refugee care), and moved back to the Netherlands when she was almost ten. After finishing secondary school in 2010 at the Driestar College in Gouda, she completed a bachelor's degree in Latin American Studies in 2014 at Leiden University. In 2016, Lydia obtained a *Master of Science* (MSc) degree at Utrecht University for the research master Cultural Anthropology: Sociocultural Transformation. She wrote a Master's thesis about religious belonging and sensory memory, based on five months of ethnographic fieldwork at a Colombian Evangelical church in Madrid. Between May 2016 and May 2021, Lydia worked on her dissertation as a Ph.D. student at the Protestant Theological University (PThU) within the Research Centre for Youth, Church, and Culture (OJKC).

Children take part in liturgical-ritual activities. In Sunday services, children's church, Sunday school, and special services, children sit in pews, respond to Bible stories, and perform liturgical actions like singing in a choir, welcoming people, saying a prayer, or participating in the Lord's Supper. Based on participant observations and interviews, this dissertation describes and analyzes the variety of worship practices with children in Dutch Protestant contexts. A central concern is how people adapt worship to suit children and how children contribute to worship. The conclusions show children as agentive participants in worship. In addition, the conclusions nuance the debate on intergenerational worship, highlight the importance of spirituality for both adults and children, and explore how the material environment influences worship. This practical theological research gives a better understanding of Dutch Protestant liturgical rituals with children and their theological significance.

Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede studied cultural anthropology at Utrecht University. She wrote this dissertation at the Protestant Theological University.

ISBN 978-94-6416-903-4