

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Intergenerational Formation and Children's Spirituality in Dialogue with Jerome W. Berryman

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This article chronicles the ways Jerome Berryman's work influenced the author's own academic and professional work over the past thirty years in the areas of intergenerational Christian formation and children's spirituality. The article concludes with a tribute regarding Berryman's enduring legacy: first, most recognizably, his development of Godly Play as a spiritual practice; second, his call to radically welcome children; and third, his role as a change agent toward more contemplative practices in children's ministry in the twenty-first century.

In 2014 I had the extraordinary privilege of researching and composing the Jerome Berryman entry for the Christian Educators of the 20th Century database.¹ This extensive database article (9300 words) initially offers a biographical sketch including Berryman's personal, educational, and professional history. That brief biography is followed by a substantive discussion of Berryman's contribution to Christian education, first chronicling the development of Godly Play over many decades, and then addressing its historical, pedagogical, philosophical, and theological foundations. Along the way, the article explicates themes repeated in Berryman's writings about children's spirituality, religious language, welcoming children, the role of wonder, imagination, creativity, and play.² The article concludes with a tribute regarding Berryman's legacy that highlights two things in particular: Godly Play as a spiritual practice and Berryman's call to radically welcome children.

As I wrote that database entry ten years ago and as I reviewed it for this Festschrift, I was struck by the ways in which my journey has intersected with Berryman's. For thirty years, two areas of academic interest have captured my mind and heart: nurturing spiritual development in children and bringing the generations back together in our churches. Berryman has been a kindred

¹ The Christian Educators of the 20th Century database project covers approximately 215 Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox educators who have helped shape Christian religious education since the founding of the Religious Education Association in 1903. Designed to help facilitate research in this broad field, entries include biographical essays, bibliographies, excerpts, and assessments of each person's influence on Christian education. This project has a peer-review board and is funded by the Lilly Endowment.

² The database article also includes an exhaustive bibliography of the books, chapters, and academic articles authored by Berryman, along with book reviews he penned, publications for children, works about Berryman, and other professional publications.

spirit on both the intergenerational journey and the journey toward seeing children as spiritual beings. I have interacted with Berryman through his published works on Godly Play, his theological writings, and his videos, as well as in person and electronically, over the past twenty-five years. This article chronicles how Berryman's work has influenced my own academic and professional work; it also offers my perspective on his rich and enduring legacy.

The Intergenerational Journey

From 1993 to 1997, my husband and I, along with our three children (ages seven, nine, and sixteen at the time) were part of a church plant that met each Sunday evening in cross-generational home gatherings. Our group of twelve children and thirteen adults soon began to expand—to two groups, then three, four, and more. These groups included children, teens, college and graduate students, young families, middle adults, and older adults. We listened, laughed, shared, sang, prayed, played, cried, ate, and hoped together—and blessed one another. Over four years, this small church plant grew from one group of 25 participants to around 700 people across 25 groups.

During those years I experienced something I had not seen in my decades of teaching Sunday school and leading children's church: The children in these all-age small groups began to pray with and for their parents and other adults; they began to minister to each other and to their parents and other adults as well. My understanding of Christian education for *both children and adults* began to change.

I was not aware of the word *intergenerational* at the time, yet after a couple of years I began to ask one burning question: What is it about these settings that uniquely and especially fosters growth and development in all ages? A few years later, this very question propelled my doctoral work.

As I began perusing the literature and envisioning my dissertation research, I encountered an immediate obstacle. In designing my doctoral research, I planned to interview children who participated in intergenerational gatherings as well as those who participated only in age-segregated settings (e.g., separate worship or Sunday school). My intent was to assess the differences I noticed between the two groups of children. The difficulty was that I wasn't entirely sure what I was trying to measure.

In academic terms, the question before me was this: What construct am I actually examining? Is it faith development? Belief? Commitment? Had the children (and adults) in those intergenerational small groups grown in their faith, believed more strongly, or become more deeply committed to God? I suspected all of these were true. Yet the changes I had observed and

experienced seemed broader, deeper, and more complex—more holistic than any single category of faith, belief, or commitment. Until I could clarify what I was assessing, I could not design an effective interview protocol.

Two books published in 1998, *The Spirit of the Child* by David Hay and Rebekah Nye and Catherine Stonehouse's *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, gave me the language I needed to describe the change I had witnessed and experienced: The construct I was seeking was *spirituality*.³ While the term may sound commonplace now (thirty years later), at the time, it was difficult to find a concise, functional definition of children's spirituality, or even a rich and accessible description, in the existing literature. Sorting through the scholarship of the late 1990s to arrive at a clear and simple definition proved to be a demanding task.

Moving Toward a Foundational Understanding of Children's Spirituality

Stonehouse's text on children's spirituality was my beginning point. Stonehouse develops the theme of children's spirituality throughout her book, describing the concept in various enlightening ways: "Children think deeply about God" and "A genuine knowing of God is open to children."⁴

I first encountered Berryman's work in Stonehouse's text. Stonehouse's winning description of Godly Play and her experiences sharing it with children captured my imagination, and I promptly located several of Berryman's publications available at the time. I found an early description of children's spirituality in Berryman's 1991 *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education*. Berryman says the purpose of Godly Play is "to give children the means to know God better amid the community of children and with caring adults as guides."⁵

Berryman's writings introduced me to Sofia Cavalletti's major work, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, for which Berryman wrote the preface to the English translation. The heart of Cavalletti's work lies in her emphasis on the ineffable God-child relationship. As Cavalletti says, "An interpersonal relationship is always about mystery; it is more so when it involves a relationship with God; when the relationship is between God and the child the mystery is greater still."⁶

3 David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child* (London: Fount/HarperCollins, 1998); Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998).

4 Stonehouse, *Joining Children*, 133, 174.

5 Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991), 137; emphasis mine.

6 Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, trans. P. M. Coulter and J. M. Coulter (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 30.

At this point, my search for a succinct definition of children's spirituality began to coalesce around the basic idea from Stonehouse, Berryman, and Cavalletti that children can have a relationship with God; they can know God. The operational definition of children's spirituality for my dissertation was the child's "awareness of relationship with God."⁷ Since that time I have continued to seek a fuller and deeper understanding of children's spirituality, eventually expanding my first definition to include other relationships: "a quality present in every child from birth out of which children seek to establish relationship with self, others, world, and God (as they understand God)."⁸

How to Nurture Children Spiritually

I completed my doctoral dissertation in 2002 and moved into my first tenure-track position as a professor at John Brown University, a Christian university in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. My new course preparations included children's ministry, spiritual development in children, and creating curriculum for children in Christian settings. I wanted to incorporate my new understanding of spirituality into these courses, but I realized I lacked practical, experiential knowledge of what it actually looked like to foster spirituality in children. What I did possess was a deep, experiential knowledge of *Christian education* as it was understood and practiced at that time.

The prevailing paradigm that characterized Christian education in churches—and particularly children's ministry—during the latter half of the twentieth century can be described as a developmental approach. Ted Ward, Christian education professor, said in 1995, "As a field of academic study, Christian education has gradually come to accept developmentalism as its theoretical base."⁹ What this meant was that as the good work of developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson began to influence public education, church educators also leaned into cognitive and psychosocial developmental theory when creating curriculum for church educational ministries.

My first career as a public school teacher, along with my master's degree in educational psychology, prompted me to bring what I was discovering in the 1980s and 1990s about learning and cognitive development into my

⁷ Holly Catterton Allen, "A Qualitative Study Exploring the Similarities and Differences of the Spirituality in Children in Intergenerational and Non-Intergenerational Christian Context" (Ph.D. diss., Talbot School of Theology, 2002), 13.

⁸ Holly Catterton Allen, *Forming Resilient Children: The Role of Spiritual Formation for Healthy Development* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2021).

⁹ Ted Ward, foreword to *Nurture That Is Christian: Developmental Perspectives in Christian Education*, ed. James Wilhoit and John Dettoni (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 7.

Sunday school classroom and children's ministry.¹⁰ I created learning centers, incorporated movement, utilized all the senses, and accommodated short attention spans. And I was pleased with these innovations.

As I delved into Cavalletti, Stonehouse, Hay and Nye, and especially the Berryman publications available to me at the time, however, I realized that there was a problem.¹¹ I began to comprehend that spiritual development is not fundamentally cognitive development. That is, the way children (and adults) grow in their understanding of math or science is not fundamentally the same as the way they (and we) grow spiritually. Other factors are at work in spiritual development, and they are not solely cognitive nor wholly age-related. I recognized this insight most clearly when I considered the changes I first beheld in the children in the intergenerational small groups in the 1990s. The change in the children (and all of us in those small gatherings) was not essentially cognitive growth—it was spiritual growth. Though I was sure there was still an important place for cognitive growth, I began to ask how (besides participating together in intergenerational groups) we can help children grow spiritually.

Traditionally, one of the main goals of Sunday school has been to teach children the Bible. This is a very important and basic goal for Sunday school. However, a crucial question must be allied with this goal: *Why* do we teach children the Bible? For decades, I taught the Bible to children for two reasons: (1) so that they would come to know the Bible, and (2) so that they would know how to live. Indeed, those are good reasons to teach the Bible—but they are not sufficient. They intersect only tangentially with the definition of spirituality. That is, one can know many things *about* the Bible and *about* God, and one can learn to do good things and avoid wrong things without *knowing God*.

Therefore, as I prepared courses on children's ministry and the spiritual development of children, I began to seek intentionally and urgently ways to nurture children spiritually.

I first met Berryman in person at the inaugural Children's Spirituality Conference: Christian Perspectives at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois, in 2003. I was delighted to meet him and to hear more about his work and how he saw children as spiritual beings. At that conference, I also observed my first Godly Play story. I was intrigued by the unhurried pace, the soft voice, the slow, deliberate movement of the characters, the focus of the presenter on the story pieces, and the wondering questions. It was a very

¹⁰ My master's program from the University of Iowa (1983) was heavily focused on various developmental theories.

¹¹ Those Berryman works included his preface to Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child*; his book *Teaching Godly Play: A Sunday Morning Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); and his essay "Spirituality, Religious Education, and the Dormouse," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 2, no. 1 (1997): 9–23.

different approach to Christian education than I had experienced before. I wondered if this approach to telling Bible stories could nurture children's relationship with God. Indeed, Berryman and Stonehouse had suggested that fostering the God-child relationship is the intended purpose of Godly Play. However, no children were present when the story was presented at the conference, so I did not know how they would respond to this unique way of telling it.

Teaching a children's ministry course that fall, I decided to share a Godly Play lesson with the university students in the course. After presenting the Good Shepherd story, I asked for feedback. The responses were generally positive but restrained—even cautious. One student, Joel, proclaimed loudly, "If someone had told a story like that when I was a kid, it wouldn't have kept my attention for more than two minutes."

We were about to find out if what Joel anticipated would be true. The next Sunday, Joel and two other students presented the Good Shepherd story to ten children, ages four to ten. The children, as Stonehouse and Berryman had both claimed, were mesmerized—absolutely captivated—by the story and the wondering questions. Afterward Joel remarked, "I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

The children entered the story; they attended keenly to the wondering questions; they worried when the sheep was caught under a rock; they were relieved when the shepherd came back to retrieve him. When Joel and company distributed to each child their own miniature Good Shepherd set, most of the children were able to retell the story word for word. However, more was going on in their retelling than memorization. The children had not simply *heard* the story; they had *experienced* it. The university students and I had become witnesses to the difference in *being told* a story and *becoming part* of the story.

At this point, I recognized that I needed fuller, more complex language to describe the differences between cognitive development and spiritual development. One of Berryman's more philosophical writings gave me one way of conceiving these differences.

A Contemplative Way of Knowing

In his article "Spirituality, Religious Education, and the Dormouse," Berryman discusses three ways of knowing: the knowing of the material world by the senses, the knowing of the mind by using reason, and the knowing of the spirit by contemplation. He says that our body-knowing and our spirit-knowing develop first (since the mind-knowing needs language to flower). Because children are spiritual beings, they begin early to intuit spiritual knowing through contemplation, but this kind of knowing is sometimes diminished in school settings (and Sunday school settings) where

body-knowing and mind-knowing tend to be more valued.¹² “When the knowing of the spirit is overlooked by our child-rearing and educational practices,” Berryman writes, “the spiritual potential is not acknowledged and nourished.”¹³ All three kinds of knowing are a valuable part of religious education, Berryman says, but he posits that Christian educators may have neglected the knowing of the spirit through contemplation. And it is precisely in this kind of knowing that Godly Play shines—the knowing of the spirit through contemplation.

Over these past twenty years, I have sought—and found—dozens of specific ways that nurture the spirit-knowing Berryman describes; these practices help children come *to know God*. When I speak to parents, teachers, children's ministers, or others who work with children, I typically share several of the following participatory experiences: walking a labyrinth, speaking blessings over children (and receiving spoken blessings from children), writing a letter to God, praying in color, practicing *visio divina* and other spiritual disciplines, telling personal stories of God's work in my life, helping children take their place in God's metanarrative, and, of course, sharing Godly Play stories.

Now when I teach the Bible to children cognitively or contemplatively, my long-term, ultimate purpose is to help them *know God*; that is, my goal is to foster that ineffable child-God relationship. As I teach the Bible to reveal to children who God is, those other goals begin to come to fruition; that is, the children come to know the Bible, and they learn how to live—in response to who God is.

Children's Spirituality and Resilience

For twenty years I taught a course called “Nurturing Spiritual Development in Children”—ten years at John Brown University and ten years at Lipscomb University in Nashville. The coursework consisted of reading works by Jerome Berryman, David Hay, Scottie May, Rebecca Nye, Catherine Stonehouse, Karen Marie Yust, and, more recently, Jared Patrick Boyd and Lacy Finn Borgo. In class we discussed and experienced together a variety of activities that are designed to help nurture children spiritually—that is, to foster their relationship with self, others, world, and God. During the John Brown years, students shared these spiritually rich activities with children in churches where the students were interns.

¹² Examples of body-knowing in public schools could be tracing the alphabet in sand or demonstrating the concepts of “up” and “down” with one's body; in Sunday school, acting out a story or showing how a plant that God made grows from a tiny seedling to a large bush would be examples of body-knowing.

¹³ Berryman, “Spirituality, Religious Education, and the Dormouse,” 11.

When I moved to Lipscomb University in 2014, I transposed the John Brown version of the course into a service-learning venture in which faculty and students collaborated with community partners. The students met ten times during the semester with a child whom they mentored spiritually. The first year the students in the course mentored children whose parents were incarcerated; the second year we worked with children in an after-school program in a lower socio-economic neighborhood of Nashville; and the third year we worked with children in an after-school program for refugee children.¹⁴

As I prepared to teach this new version of the course, I perused the resilience literature related to each of the populations we would be encountering. I found research that connected several protective factors to resilience in children who had experienced trauma or hardship. Among those were family factors (e.g., capable parents), healthy relationships with other capable adults (other relatives, teachers, coaches, etc.), personal factors, (e.g., self-efficacy, emotional regulation, motivation to succeed), access to healthy community resources (good schools, safe neighborhoods, churches), and a global factor variously labeled “faith,” “hope,” “cultural belief systems,” “religion,” “prayer,” or “spirituality.”¹⁵ I was pleased to see spirituality described as a protective factor in much of the research I read.

I found Berryman's writing on children's existential limits to be particularly relevant to this course. In several writings, Berryman shares his belief that all children deal at some level with four existential limits: aloneness, death, the threat to freedom, and the need for meaning.¹⁶ Berryman first began to explore the idea of existential limits and the importance of religious language when he was working with chronically or terminally ill children at hospitals in Houston.¹⁷ As he notes, “It is hard to pretend that children are not aware of their existential limits in a pediatric hospital.” In fact, Berryman states that the first people who really saw what Godly Play could do for children were the child-life workers at Texas Children's Hospital, “because they had felt the limitations of the domain they worked in for helping children cope with the limits to their being and knowing.”¹⁸

14 The community organizations we partnered with were, respectively, Tennessee Prison Outreach Ministry, Cottage Cove Urban Ministries, and Nations Ministry Center. Thereafter we worked with children in Lipscomb Academy's after-school program on each of the populations we would encounter.

15 Ann Masten, *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 2015). In this text, Masten offers a meta-analysis of the resilience literature from the previous four decades.

16 See, for example, Jerome W. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children* (New York: Church Publishing, 2009).

17 Jerome W. Berryman, “The Chaplain's Strange Language: A Unique Contribution to the Health Care Team,” in *Life, Faith, Hope, and Magic: The Chaplaincy in Pediatric Cancer Care*, ed. Jan van Eys and Edward J. Mahnke (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 15–39.

18 Jerome W. Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future* (New York: Church Publishing, 2013), 77.

Certainly the children the Lipscomb students mentored—those whose parents were incarcerated, those living in generational poverty, and those whose families had fled war and famine—had faced these limits in a variety of ways. In each of the after-school settings, the university students employed the spiritually nurturing activities that we had discussed and experienced in class, such as praying in color, participating in a Godly Play story, writing letters to God, drawing their families, reading stories together, and walking a labyrinth. Along the way, the university students listened to the children's stories, shared their own experiences, and built trusting relationships. Over the years, as we mentored children coping with the losses and trauma they had sustained, I came to see that these rich, relational, participatory experiences formed a spiritual resilience that could buffer the effects of hardship and suffering.

I was able to witness firsthand what Berryman had observed at the pediatric hospital. He said that the silence, wondering questions, and stories of Godly Play help children “become more fully aware of the mystery of God's presence in their lives” and give them language to address their existential concerns mentioned earlier.¹⁹

Building on the earlier-mentioned review of the resilience literature, along with the qualitative data I collected over ten years with the children mentored by Lipscomb students in the spirituality course, I eventually wrote *Forming Children: The Role of Spiritual Formation for Healthy Development*. Interestingly, I wrote the chapters on trauma, grief, and loss during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I realized that many, perhaps most, children in the world (as well as teens and adults) were dealing with Berryman's four existential limits—aleness, death, the threat to freedom, and the need for meaning. According to Brendan Hyde, Berryman believed that the purpose of teaching, guiding, and mentoring children in our churches and Christian schools is to enable children to find meaning in their lives “by using religious language to confront and cope with existential issues and limits so as to know the Creator.”²⁰

Circling Back to the Intergenerational Enterprise

My original deep dive into children's spirituality derived from my attempt to identify the changes I had observed in the intergenerational groups I experienced in the 1990s. During the 2000s and 2010s, while I was creating

¹⁹ Howard Worsley, “Jerome Berryman,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Education*, ed. Thomas Kurian and Mark Lamport (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 127.

²⁰ Brendan Hyde, preface to part 3 of *The Search for a Theology of Childhood: Essays by Jerome W. Berryman from 1978–2009*, ed. Brandon Hyde (Brisbane, Australia: Modotti Press, 2013), 143; emphasis mine.

the children's spiritual development course (and other courses), I was also pursuing the intergenerational journey, encouraging churches to seek ways to bring the generations back together.

When I completed my dissertation in 2002, there seemed to be little interest in the intergenerational enterprise; this time period (late 1990s to early 2000s) was the height of the seeker-sensitive church world, and siloed ministries were the norm. Christine Lawton Ross, who had just completed her dissertation on intergenerational ministry, contacted me in 2006, and we recognized in each other a kindred spirit.²¹ Christine suggested that we write a book together that would merge our intergenerational research. I was unsure that there was enough interest in the subject, but we eventually wrote the first edition of *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*.²² In this book, we offer biblical, theological, sociological, theoretical, and empirical support for the idea that intergenerational Christian formation is about nurturing faith through the shared life and participation of all generations together—as one body learning, worshiping, and serving side by side. We did not know it at the time, but a tsunami of interest in all things intergenerational was just over the horizon, and eventually a second edition of the book was published.²³

Berryman's Radical Call to Welcome Children

During the years that I was intensely focused on the research for *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, I was also continuing to learn about children's spirituality, reading Berryman's works to glean all I could about Godly Play and about children as spiritual beings. In the process, I realized that though Berryman does not explicitly frame his work as intergenerational in the way that Christine and I wrote about in our text, his theology provides the necessary groundwork for an intergenerational ecclesiology, reminding the church that children are not objects of ministry but partners in it.

Berryman consistently insists that children are not “future Christians” but present participants in the body of Christ. This principle—articulated especially in Berryman's *Teaching Godly Play* and *The Spiritual Guidance of Children*—challenges the segregated model of age-based ministry and lays theological groundwork for mutuality across generations. He argues that adults must approach children as fellow pilgrims in faith, capable of

21 Christine Lawton Ross, “A Qualitative Study Exploring Churches Committed to Intergenerational Ministry” (doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University, 2006).

22 Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2012).

23 Holly Catterton Allen, Christine Lawton, and Cory Seibel, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2023).

encountering God directly. This redefines the adult's role—not as a didactic teacher but as a companion and listener. That mutual posture is fundamentally intergenerational, even if Berryman doesn't use that term.

For example, though the Godly Play circle does not itself represent a fully intergenerational praxis, the ethos that pervades Godly Play embodies several aspects of Berryman's broader intergenerational ecclesiology. The circle is a symbol of equality and shared wonder—not hierarchy—and adults are invited to enter the circle "as children." In that sense, the Godly Play space practices the intergenerational reciprocity to which the wider church is called.

Berryman's entire theological and pedagogical project can be read as a radical call to welcome children into the full life of the church. What Berryman offers isn't a complete intergenerational framework. However, it is a necessary piece of it—a theological reorientation toward children that, when expanded, makes intergenerational formation possible. It values the presence and voice of every generation as essential to the body's wholeness.

Conclusion: Berryman's Enduring Legacy

Impact on Children's Ministry

Behind Godly Play lie the foundational principles from which Berryman developed his distinctive curriculum. He has written extensively on the concepts and themes noted earlier in this article, and many of these well-articulated ideas have begun to shape the broader field of Christian education—even among those who have never encountered Godly Play directly. Berryman's insights have played a discernible role in moving Christian education beyond the predominantly cognitive approach that defined much of the latter twentieth century. His work also challenges the entertainment-driven model of children's ministry that gained traction in the 1990s and 2000s.

Children as a Means of Grace

In *Children and the Theologians*, Berryman likens adults in contemporary Christian communities to the disciples in Luke 18—those who sent the children away. He charges that adults, too, have sent the children away, revealing an attitude of ambivalence and indifference toward them.²⁴

As Berryman develops his theology of childhood in this work, he proposes that children themselves are a means of grace. Yet because children are so often marginalized or disregarded in faith communities (and in society more broadly), their potential to mediate grace frequently goes unrecognized.

²⁴ Jerome W. Berryman, *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 25, 203–213.

Berryman ends his book with a striking invitation to live out this theological vision. He recounts a brief story in which a child refers to him as “the man who is always glad to see me.” Then he turns to the reader with a challenge: “What if each time you saw a child, you stopped, focused on the child . . . , and said, ‘I’m glad to see you’?”²⁵

Berryman concludes with this compelling vision:

As your custom spreads throughout the congregation and people become warm, consistent, and attuned to children—I predict that your church will change and, as Jesus said, you will slowly over time discover that when you welcome a child you welcome him and the One who sent him. Such a fundamental discovery will enrich everything you do and show the way into the kingdom for you and the congregation. The congregation will become a healthy place, where unhealthy people can come to heal and all will thrive. The church will no longer be a place of ambivalence, ambiguity, or indifference toward anyone. It will be a place of grace.²⁶

Final Reflection

Assuredly, Godly Play as a spiritual practice and an approach to Christian education will be Berryman’s primary enduring legacy. However, it is my hope that his call to radically welcome children will emerge as a hallmark of faith communities globally, yielding a legacy that parallels the lasting influence of Godly Play.

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²⁵ Berryman, *Children and the Theologians*, 256.

²⁶ Berryman, 256.

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