

How can we love what we don't know?: Children and ecological care

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Introduction

In Peter Brown's book *The Curious Garden*, a child named Liam finds a small garden in an abandoned area of his city.² He learns to care for it, and eventually it begins to expand. The garden itself is curious and wants to see the city; Liam seems to understand this desire, and helps the garden explore. His initial acts of care grow into a sort of guerrilla gardening, and he establishes sections of the garden all over the city. But the real plot twist in this book is not that the garden spreads eagerly, but that gardeners do. Throughout the city, people respond to this garden by beginning to take care of it. In the end, the whole city has transformed from a bleak brown and grey landscape to a green, thriving community.

This story is instructive for several reasons. First, it begins with the wonder-filled and interactive response of one boy to a little patch of nature.³ Second, the growth of the garden and the greening of the city do not involve destroying the city or returning it to some pre-urban wilderness. Instead, the city itself becomes a garden, where there is space for both buildings and plants. Third, the people and the garden are not in conflict with each other, but instead enjoy mutual care, attention, and relationship.

These themes will appear throughout this article. Specifically, I will address the intersection of child ethics and ecological ethics: how we can think about nature and children *together*. It is crucial to consider nature and children together because the burden of ecological degradation and the current climate crisis will be borne most severely by children.⁴ Children



have no voice in halls of power or environmental ethics debates; we pay little attention to their experiences, knowledge, or agency. However, in this article I will argue that ecological care is a *shared endeavour* between children and adults, where each have something to offer to and learn from the other, but especially where childlike wonder and contemplation stand in prophetic challenge to adult utilitarian ways of thinking. Children need access to natural spaces, and we should specifically address this need when considering ecological design. But we do not simply have the moral responsibility to form and teach children. Children also teach us, in part because they are the ones who play in nature the most and who study nature in school, and in part because they approach creation not with utilitarian aims but with wonder-filled contemplation. This perspective provides a model of discipleship for adults, which I will characterise as a Rahnerian environmentally conscious second childhood. I contend that by recollecting, observing and mimicking children's relationship with nature, we can learn to become like them in our care for the earth.



Ecology and children's formation

Across the world, there are countless children like Liam, for whom close encounter with nature means finding a patch of concrete with a few determined plants pushing through.⁵ Others are not so lucky, and not only have little access to nature, but also suffer from high pollution levels and minimal access to clean water. Children are especially susceptible to this ecological damage in many different ways: biologically, developmentally, psychologically, and spiritually. This paper will focus slightly on the physical harm of pollution and ecological destruction, and predominantly on children's lack of intimate contact with their natural environs. This second kind of harm is more important than it may sound. Lack of pollution and access to clean water alone do not allow children to flourish. Instead, they need intimate, playful access to natural spaces, so that they can grow in knowledge and love of God's creation. In this section, then, my argument is simple: our children's developmental needs require that we foster their relationship with nature, which will then benefit nature, too. As adults, it is our responsibility to partner with children to create the environments which will allow them to flourish and enable their formation – including their moral formation in creation care.



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Ecological damage physically harms children in several ways. Their bodies are more vulnerable to toxins and pollutants in the water, and to malnutrition from climate-related food shortages. In both the UK and the USA, toxic exposure and air pollution are strongly correlated with race and poverty.⁶ But while these situations should not be overlooked, they pale in comparison to those of children in the majority world, whose lives and landscapes have been shaped by ‘parallel oppressive systems of violence, wealth extraction, and environmental destruction.’⁷ In many countries, there is not even a ‘right to know’ about ecological damage and toxins from companies operating in the area, and few requirements that corporations reclaim damaged areas.⁸

These effects of exposure to pollution and toxins among children are fairly well recognised, but there is a subtler harm to children’s development when they are denied access to a relationship with nature. Children require intimate access to nature for their emotional, psychological, and moral formation.⁹ This need is so strong that scholars have linked the rise of childhood obesity, depression, isolation, and attention-deficit disorder to lack of outdoor play.¹⁰ Yet this intimate access is being lost:

Modern political economies [...] have led to promiscuous industrial pollution, junk diets that corporations foist on children through insidious advertising, capitalist consumption that works best when children stay indoors in malls and in front of televisions or computer screens, the subjugation of children to hundreds of harmful chemicals that threaten children’s future ability to procreate, the conditions by which children on average can recognize over 1000 corporate logos but only a handful of plants and animals native to their places, biotic impoverishment, climate change, [...] and the demise of children’s rightful heritage to live intimately with the natural world.¹¹

Adults’ continual subscription to the demands of capitalism and blindness to children’s ecological needs are forcing children away from the natural world.

This separation is only compounded by the types of outdoor places that children can access, like parks and schoolyards, because they are not built for the developmental needs of children. Studies show that children prefer



natural refuge settings, such as tunnels, caves, groves, and other small enclosures; however, most schoolyards have open green space and playground equipment.¹² In natural refuge settings, children engage in much more dramatic/imaginary play than they do on playgrounds.¹³ Imaginary play has ‘high social and cognitive payoffs’ for children’s development, yet secluded natural places are still overlooked.¹⁴ (In contrast, video game developers intensively research what captures and sustains a child’s development.)¹⁵ Furthermore, mundane and intimate encounters with nature are more important to a child’s development than high-quality programming or highly-structured encounters with nature: ‘A face-to-face encounter with a banana slug means much more than a Komodo dragon seen on television.’¹⁶ Indirect natural experiences, such as zoos, nature centres, and nature shows, do not have the same long-lasting ‘effects on children’s character and personality development.’¹⁷ Children need to be able to interact with nature in an intimate way and, like Liam, participate in modifying their environment. ‘For special places to work their magic on kids, they need to be able to do some clamber and damage. They need to be free to climb trees, muck about, catch things, and get wet—above all, to leave the trail.’¹⁸ Children need uncontrolled and unmanaged places, where the unexpected can happen, and where they can make it, in a way, their own.¹⁹

These types of places must be ubiquitous. Even a well-built play area designed especially for children can present a problem of access. If children cannot access the space on their own – for example, if it is not close to where they live – they will not be able to benefit from it. An adventure play park that requires a drive, even of a few miles, will exclude the children who need it most: those whose socioeconomic position means their parent(s) do not own a vehicle, or work too many hours to be able to drive to the park.

Children’s lack of access to natural spaces reinforces a lack of knowledge. ‘Few students (or teachers) have even the most basic acquaintance with their local fauna and flora when they graduate.’ Similarly, few students at primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels have any idea that ‘their personal prospects are intertwined with the vital signs of the earth [...] Nor is ecological illiteracy limited to the cities.’²⁰ Most troublingly, when children do learn about ecology, they learn about it in the abstract, echoing analytic theories of morality that prize abstraction over embodiment, and autonomy over relationship. Children



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thus lose an intimate, affective relationship with nature – the kind of relationship that motivates people to take moral action. So how do we reverse this trend? Pyle names three elements necessary to develop a proper relationship of ecological care: play, nature literacy, and intimacy.²¹

Abstract ecological knowledge learned in the classroom is no match for the cultural education in individualism and resource possession that children receive in countless ways. Evolutionary scientists have found evidence that children have a natural predilection towards biophilia, the ‘tendency to affiliate with natural things’ which is a predisposition similar to language or culture. However, as in the case of language, severe neglect can hamper biophilia’s development.²² The life patterns of adults are value-laden,²³ and the life patterns of Western culture do not encourage biophilia. Instead, children are taught

individualism [... which] establishes a worldview of self in competition with others instead of considering the well-being and interdependence of all. Under this belief, it is possible to develop or instill apathy, aversion, distrust, distain [*sic*] or hatred toward other people, animals, and even plants or forests (viewed as being “in the way” of a desired outcome) rather than a sense of interconnectedness, care, and compassion.²⁴

Children suffer from capitalist attitudes that encourage them to see property as private, not as a collective responsibility, and to see themselves and others – including creation – as entities in competition with each other.²⁵ Even ecological ethics can reinforce this perspective. For example, contemporary rewilding projects often imply that ‘true nature’ belonged to the pre-human era, thereby emphasising to children the divide between human and nature. This cultural miseducation is compounded by the breakdown of multigenerational transmission of ecological knowledge and care. We are no longer fostering children’s natural sense of the interconnectedness shared by all life on this planet.²⁶

Moral response to nature and the impetus to care do not come from abstract notions and competitive individualism, but from affective responses – we are motivated to care for creation because we love it. An embodied, intimate relationship with nature is key to children’s moral development, including their morality of ecological care. It is crucial that we cultivate this relationship. ‘As children’s play becomes increasingly



virtual, we need to know more about the consequences for the development of environmental knowledge and values and, ultimately, the willingness to protect the natural world.²⁷ Children's lack of experience and knowledge leads to a lack of value – we cannot expect them to love what they do not know. This means that human passion for ecological protection is also lost.

Studies showing that children are predisposed to biophilia, love to play in nature, and require a close relationship to creation should come as no surprise to Christians, whose biblical texts teach that humans and non-human nature are both the loving creation of God. Non-human nature is also in relationship with God, and included in God's plan of redemption.²⁸ Many Christians hold that creation is part of God's self-communication: through creation we can learn about God and love him. Thus, this 'relationship creates the potential for love to be fully known. In this way, relationships are grounds for moral knowledge.'²⁹ The goodness known in creation is God's goodness, which contains the 'natural integrity between a creature's love of self and love of the other'.³⁰ We grow in this love for God's creation specifically through gaining intimate knowledge of it. Therefore, the conclusions of evolutionary and psychological studies about the role of creation in children's formation, including moral formation, agree with a long tradition that sees nature as part of God's self-communication.

Children, then, are made for loving relationship with God's creation, yet are harmed by pollution, ecological degradation, lack of access to nature, and education that turns away from the natural world and towards consumption and individualism. In turn, children are losing the fundamental moral formation that will lead, among other things, to ecological care. Thus, both nature and children are harmed by this situation. But despite this harm, children are largely absent in theological ecological literature, in broader environmental literature, and in political decision-making processes. Children's abilities are under-researched in evolutionary science and psychology as well.³¹ Their abilities to investigate, discover, and speak authoritatively on what they need are the most overlooked of all.³² Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* contains a list of one hundred ways to help facilitate children's relationship with nature, but his otherwise excellent list does not include any mention of directly involving children in town planning and design, or even in planning their own outdoor activities.³³ Contemporary movements in



green urbanism and sustainable cities have also generally failed to pay attention to the specific needs of children, nor have they involved children in the design and decision-making processes.³⁴

More concerningly, children are largely overlooked in theology of creation and ecological ethics.³⁵ The modern moral anthropology is a significant part of the issue, for it sees the ‘autonomy of the child as active, self-determination’ instead of set within the ‘basic relational network as a responsibility.’³⁶ Under this view of the atomised individual, children only ever have partial share in the moral world.³⁷ Against this moral anthropology, I situate myself among childist thinkers, who believe that children are already moral agents in relationship who powerfully shape the moral response of those around them. This is not to say that we should leave children to solve their own problems. They are more vulnerable than adults, since they are less able to avoid harmful situations and relationships, and less equipped to bring about sweeping changes. But, as I will discuss in the following section, we should see children as *partners in the shared quest* to restore the broken relationship between humans and the natural world.



An ecologically wise childhood

Children are properly our partners in knowledge and love of creation because they have something to teach us. Children profoundly shape the moral lives of adults. They see things that we are no longer able or willing to see. They ask leading questions. Like nature itself, children confront and decentre us, causing us to re-evaluate ourselves and the way we live our lives. This final section, then, is an invitation to seriously consider what children can teach us about caring for the earth through their experiences, encounters with nature, stories, and observations. By paying attention to children’s relationship with God’s creation, we adults can learn how to properly love and care for it; we must become *like children* in our relationship to the earth. I illustrate this idea using Rahner’s argument that the goal of Christian discipleship is a second, mature childhood. Here, children show us a model for a Rahnerian ecological second childhood, a restored relationship with creation. In this way, children are our partners in the human endeavour to live in harmony with creation.



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For Rahner, childhood is not a time of life that we leave behind, but rather it persists into eternity.³⁸ Our childhoods, which he describes as playful and beautiful, are not a prelude for ‘real life’, but are a valuable time in themselves, in which certain gifts flourish. Children are already fully human, and already moral.³⁹ Rather than growing out of childhood, we should ‘adopt [...] and maintain it as [our] basic attitude and outlook, and allow it to develop to the full and without limitation.’⁴⁰ Thus, the life of discipleship aspires to what Rahner calls a second childhood: ‘In the child a man [*sic*] begins who must undergo the wonderful adventure of remaining a child forever, becoming a child to an ever-increasing extent, making his childhood of God real and effective in this childhood of his, for this is the task of his maturity.’⁴¹ To enter a second childhood, we must develop the gifts of childhood in wisdom and in relationship to God. As Rahner says, children are *already* in relationship with God. I suggest they are also already in relationship to God’s creation as well, and this relationship is morally formative for us, too.

This childhood is defined by openness and wonder – that is, contemplation.⁴² Children’s contemplation is playful and interactive, and so sometimes fails to be seen for what it is. But contemplation does not require inactivity; it requires a non-utilitarian approach. Contemplation is the fertile ground in which biophilia can grow, because it occurs through joy, wonder, and sustained inquiry.⁴³ Children’s wonder invites us to wonder as well:

The child’s enraptured sense of wonder in response to the [...] world trains the parent to become more attentive to detail, more full of awe, and more awakened to a future that extends beyond the parent’s own life through the life of the child. The child’s deep need to be physically close [...] reminds the caregiver of the corporeal intertwinement that lies at the root of subjectivity, which often becomes forgotten in an isolated and individualistic world of work cubicles, fenced-in homes, and head phones.⁴⁴

Their questions – What is this animal called, this tree, this bug? Why does it do this or that? – are an invitation to knowledge for adults as well. When children imaginatively ‘hear’ trees talking to each other, we can choose to dismiss it as frivolity, or to investigate and find that trees do, in fact, communicate.⁴⁵ As Gareth Matthews explains, ‘A child’s naïve question



can awaken our sleeping imagination and sympathy, and even move us to take moral action.⁴⁶

This move to wonder-filled contemplation is precisely what we need in our relationship to creation, according to Andreas Nordlander in a recent issue of *Studies in Christian Ethics*.⁴⁷ Here, he is concerned not as much with relationship as with the *telos* of nature, correctly arguing that teleology and the perception of value are closely related. Contemplation challenges the utilitarian attitudes that think of nature in terms of resources. Christians have long held that living organisms exist for human beings, not because of material utility, but because creation leads us to knowledge and love of God: 'creation manifests the glory and wisdom of God'.⁴⁸ Nordlander writes that contemplative knowledge changes 'our dealings with fellow creatures',⁴⁹ but here I am suggesting that, in relationship, children both provide an example of contemplation for us adults, and can change *our* dealings with *other* fellow creatures. That is, children's 'receptive delight'⁵⁰ is communicative, and can lead us to new insights and even provide moral motivation.

Children do not only model wonder-filled contemplation. They also powerfully reveal where we have strayed from the goal of mature childhood, reflecting our own attitudes, however unpleasant, back to us.⁵¹ Adolescents especially have an incredible ability to see through the veneer of adult justification and to raise questions about norms.⁵² Annoying as we may find them, these challenges invite us to consider the ways we have fallen short.⁵³ In their lack of self-sufficiency, children help their seemingly self-reliant elders remember their creatureliness before God. Observing and recollecting childhood presents us 'with an image of the relationship with God to which all human beings are called'.⁵⁴

Once we accept this premise, turning our attention to children yields practical benefits, as well. Ethnobiology studies which treat children as equal participants, 'exploring children's perspectives from children's points of view and challenging conventional adult-led research processes',⁵⁵ have found fruitful results in explicitly intergenerational projects, allowing the gifts of both older and younger community members to be exercised together. This approach strengthens human and non-human community relationships. In Susanne Grasser, Christoph Schunko and Christian Vogl's study,⁵⁶ children often transmitted knowledge to their parents, siblings, and peers, and their ecological work was valued. Children's interest in nature is also not limited to what we may demarcate



as ‘ecological’ or ‘biological’ knowledge: in the same study, children also wanted to know how their elders became wild plant experts, who they learned from, their significant experiences with nature, and other stories of their ties to the local area.⁵⁷ Environmental preservation is not simply about biology, but about social and cultural relationships in communities between older and younger members.⁵⁸ Since children often spend more time outside than adults and regularly study nature and natural processes in school, they may also possess more actual knowledge about creation than their parents and older community members.

Children, then, are our partners in developing a Rahnerian ecological second childhood. Rahner himself talks about childhood as recollected and observed. Recollected, we can draw on our own formative encounters with nature, and the fascination and even love we felt for everything from a household spider to a nearby forest. But observing children around us, attending especially to their relationship with the natural world, will teach us transformative wonder-filled contemplation and receptive delight. We must allow children to call us to attention and shape us in this mutually impactful relationship between adults and children.⁵⁹



Creating shared spaces

To learn to become like children in relation to the earth, and to support their relationship with God’s creation, we must work with children to create ecological spaces that foster their love and knowledge. In ecological space creation, we must involve children as genuine participants who have ‘decisional power’, can express their point of view, and can challenge ‘conventional adult-led [...] processes.’⁶⁰ Because of the way these spaces will reintroduce natural areas, and facilitate love for nature, they will benefit creation, too. This approach will mean rethinking the types of spaces we create and maintain: cities, schoolyards, parks, churchyards. And it means seeing children’s love for natural areas as not simply a childish romantic fancy, but a morally significant apprehension of value. In this way, we will properly see ecological care as a *shared endeavour* between children and adults, where each have something to offer to and learn from each other.

But where many ecological thinkers advocate for a Wendell Berry-like return to the countryside or the destruction of current landscapes in an effort to re-wild natural spaces, I join the growing number of ecologists



and ethicists advocating for ‘green’ cities.⁶¹ We need to face the practical limitations of ruralisation and address the prejudice against urban spaces. We cannot empty our cities into the countryside, even if it were desirable (and that is by no means certain). Among other advantages, cities provide opportunities for children and adults from different cultures to share their environmental heritages and work together to find innovative intercultural solutions. We should also recognise that most schemes that put children into idyllic woodlands and facilitate intimate access to nature are limited to the children of the upper classes. For example, Louv describes several ecovillages across Europe, but does not mention socioeconomic status at all.⁶² Yet children’s needs for intimate access to nature do not require comparative wealth or a move into nature reserves. Instead, like Liam in *The Curious Garden*, we can look for ways to turn our cities into spaces where humans and creation can live in harmony, where children have ready access to plants and animals, and where they are partners in the design and flourishing of cities, towns, and villages. Copses, gardens, wild spaces, natural grasses and shrubs could replace lawns and fill schoolyards, churchyards, and parks; we would teach children to respect them as *shared* areas. Wilderness spaces and bucolic countryside would not be an escape from our hellish cities, but two other models (among many) of ways we can encounter God’s creation.

I am not suggesting that a few more well-designed parks will magically fix our ecological damage, or that all children who have this type of access will grow up to be conservationists. We have a way of ignoring our childhoods, of thinking that they should be left behind and forgotten – rather like we have a way of ignoring the natural world. If the life of discipleship requires us to constantly learn how to be children, then it will be a struggle, and the pulls of the modern world are hard to fight. But if we attend to children’s ecological needs, and if we shape our cities, schoolyards, churchyards, and most importantly, our time and energy, to foster loving relationships of wonder-filled contemplation, then we will have begun to learn how to be like children in relation to God’s creation.



Notes

- ¹ A special thank you to Annie Smith for her helpful feedback, and to Rachel Robinson for her editorial work.
- ² Peter Brown, *The Curious Garden* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009).
- ³ I will use nature here in the broadest term to mean people, plants, animals, and all other creatures not made by humans. Theologically, I view nature as synonymous with God's creation.
- ⁴ Robin McKie, "Children Will Suffer Most as Climate Change Increases in Coming Decades, Say Scientists", *British Medical Journal* 347 (2013), *BMJ* 2013;347:f5799.
- ⁵ Pyle defends vacant lots as a special place of free discovery for children, countering the narrative of 'wasted' city space. See Robert Michael Pyle, "Eden in a Vacant Lot: Special Places, Species, and Kids in the Neighborhood of Life", in *Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations*, ed. Peter H. Kahn, Jr. and Stephen R. Kellert (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 305–27.
- ⁶ In the US, 'race was the most significant variable associated with the location of hazardous waste sites'. Yvette V. Lapayese, "(Re)Imagining New Narratives of Racial, Labor, and Environmental Power for Latina/o Students", in *Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education: Transformative Standards*, ed. Julie Andrzejewski, Marta P. Baltodano, and Linda Symcox (New York; London: Routledge, 2009), 163; Daniela Fecht et al., "Associations Between Air Pollution and Socioeconomic Characteristics, Ethnicity and Age Profile of Neighbourhoods in England and the Netherlands", *Environmental Pollution* 198 (January 2015): 201–10.
- ⁷ Julie Andrzejewski, Marta P. Baltodano, and Linda Symcox, "Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education: Global and Indivisible", in *Social Justice*, 13.
- ⁸ Lapayese, "Environmental Power", 164.
- ⁹ 'The child's direct and ongoing experience of accessible nature is an essential, critical, and irreplaceable dimension of healthy maturation and development.' Peter H. Kahn, Jr. and Stephen R. Kellert, introduction to *Children and Nature*, xiii; Stephen R. Kellert, "Experiencing Nature: Affective, Cognitive, and Evaluative Development in Children", in *Children and Nature*, 126.

- ¹⁰ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009).
- ¹¹ Kahn and Kellert, introduction to *Children and Nature*, xvi–xvii.
- ¹² Kellert, “Experiencing Nature”, 134.
- ¹³ Judith H. Heerwagen and Gordon H. Orians, “The Ecological World of Children”, in *Children and Nature*, 45–46.
- ¹⁴ Heerwagen and Orians, 52.
- ¹⁵ Heerwagen and Orians, 53.
- ¹⁶ Quoting Pyle, in Kellert, “Experiencing Nature”, 144.
- ¹⁷ Kellert, 144.
- ¹⁸ Pyle, “Eden”, 319.
- ¹⁹ Kellert, “Experiencing Nature”, 128.
- ²⁰ Pyle, “Eden”, 310.
- ²¹ Pyle, 311–12.
- ²² Peter Verbeek and Frans B. M. de Waal, “The Primate Relationship with Nature: Biophilia as a General Pattern”, in *Children and Nature*, 1. Louv defines biophilia as the ‘life-enhancing sense of rootedness in nature.’ *Last Child*, 246; See, for example, the story of Genie, who after severe abuse and neglect could not learn to speak. Failing to exercise capacities can result in their loss: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/14/genie-feral-child-los-angeles-researchers>.
- ²³ Brock Bahler, *Childlike Peace in Merleau-Ponty and Levinas: Inter-subjectivity as Dialectical Spiral* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2016), 20.
- ²⁴ Julie Andrzejewski, “Education for Peace and Nonviolence”, in Andrzejewski, Baltodano, and Symcox, *Social Justice*, 103.
- ²⁵ Graham H. Smith, “Mai i te Maramatanga, ki te Putango Mai o te Tahuritanga: From Conscientization to Transformation”, in *Social Justice*, 21.
- ²⁶ Antonia Darder, foreword to *Social Justice*, ix.
- ²⁷ Heerwagen and Orians, “Ecological World”, 56.
- ²⁸ Cf. Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 143; Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 131–39.
- ²⁹ Chad Michael Rimmer, *Greening the Children of God: Thomas Traherne and Nature’s Role in the Ecological Formation of Children* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2019), 2.



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- ³⁰ Rimmer, 87.
- ³¹ See Kahn and Kellert, introduction to *Children and Nature*.
- ³² Verbeek and de Waal, “The Primate Relationship”, 9.
- ³³ Louv, *Last Child*, 357–83.
- ³⁴ Louv, 261.
- ³⁵ There is no substantive discussion of children in notable texts on Christian environmental ethics and theology of creation, such as Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*; Mark Manolopoulos, *If Creation Is a Gift* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2009); Northcott, *The Environment*; and Kevin J. O’Brien, *An Ethics of Biodiversity: Christianity, Ecology, and the Variety of Life* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010). A notable exception is Rimmer’s recent book *Greening the Children of God*. While the book is mainly a historical study of Traherne, Rimmer does engage some contemporary literature regarding children and ecological formation.
- ³⁶ Roger Burggraeve, “The Ethical Voice of the Child: Plea for a Chiastic Responsibility in the Footsteps of Levinas”, in *Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education*, eds. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 271; see also Bahler, *Childlike Peace*, xiv.
- ³⁷ Cf. Harry Adams, who describes children as animal-like beings who have only imputed dignity until their abilities are realized.
- ³⁸ Karl Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8, *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life 2*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 35–36.
- ³⁹ Rahner, 39–40.
- ⁴⁰ Rahner, 48.
- ⁴¹ Rahner, 50.
- ⁴² Rahner, 39; Rimmer, *Greening*, 110.
- ⁴³ Verbeek and de Waal, “The Primate Relationship”, 2.
- ⁴⁴ Bahler, *Childlike Peace*, 34.



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- 45 Cf. Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate; Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. Jane Billinghurst (London: William Collins, 2017).
- 46 Gareth B. Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 65.
- 47 Nordlander, “Green Purpose: Teleology, Ecological Ethics, and the Recovery of Contemplation”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 34, no. 1 (March 2020): 36–55.
- 48 Nordlander, 45.
- 49 Nordlander, 53.
- 50 Nordlander, 52.
- 51 Bahler, *Childlike Peace*, ix.
- 52 Cynthia Thomashow, “Adolescents and Ecological Identity: Attending to Wild Nature”, in *Children and Nature*, 266.
- 53 Cf. John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 41.
- 54 Edmund Newey, *Children of God: The Child as Source of Theological Anthropology* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2012), 34. Newey finds this approach in the theology of Thomas Traherne. Cf. *The Works of Thomas Traherne I*, ed. Jan Ross (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 440–45.
- 55 Susanne Grasser, Christoph Schunko, and Christian R. Vogl, “Children as Ethnobotanists: Methods and Local Impact of a Participatory Research Project with Children on Wild Plant Gathering in the Grosses Walsertal Biosphere Reserve, Austria”, *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 12, 46 (2016): 1.
- 56 Grasser, Schunko, and Vogl, 11.
- 57 Grasser, Schunko, and Vogl, 9.
- 58 ‘Social justice, peace, and environmental preservation are integrally connected’, Andrzejewski, Baltodano, and Symcox, “Social Justice”, 1.
- 59 Cf. Wall, *Ethics*; Bahler, *Childlike Peace*.
- 60 Grasser, Schunko, and Vogl, “Children as Ethnobotanists”, 2.
- 61 Cf. Louv, *Last Child*, 247–54.
- 62 Louv, 251–54.