

Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence

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Introduction

Perhaps no other domain of human development has resisted definition as much as has the domain of spiritual development. Like every term referring to human experience, the term spiritual is resistant to definition, in part, because it refers to something experienced personally – a sunset, a newborn’s cry, an act of kindness by a stranger – these and other observables may evoke a ‘spiritual’ experience in one person and nothing more than an interested glance in another. But to abandon the term spiritual because it refers to individuals having their own, personal experiences would be to abandon hope of capturing and understanding profound experiences in the lives and history of humans – including experiences of wonder, awe, moral purpose, and subordinating self to what is experienced as sacred. Furthermore, even if we agree on the meaning of the term spiritual, we are left still with the problem of defining what we should mean by development. On the one hand, in studying spiritual development many have used the term to mean change over time, with expressions of spirituality at different ages given their due and not compared in terms of one being more developed than another. This is how the term is often used within “child studies” and the spiritual child movement – where the aim is to give children and youth their voice and take

seriously what children and youth find to be spiritual. The other meaning of development refers to some ordering that defines what we should mean by maturity and to movement toward maturity or some ideal endpoint. This second meaning has often been criticized and discarded by those claiming it locks one in to a linear and culturally biased way of understanding spiritual development. The criticism is unfair because using this second meaning, we see models of development as not necessarily tied to changes over time but rather as providing way to evaluate the developmental *status* of persons and actions using explicit criteria for evaluating. And because the criteria are explicit, there is the possibility of meaningful dialogue between those with differing notions of maturity and ideal endpoints. This second meaning is also useful inasmuch as across cultures and across faith traditions, a great many implicitly or explicitly treat subordinating self to that which is “higher”, “central”, or “sacred” as an ideal and as something spiritual. In this bibliography, we will find both meanings being used as we review works whose main function is to bring out the special and valuable expressions of spirituality in childhood and youth (the first definition) and other works whose main function is to understand the emergence (or absence of emergence) of individuals subordinating self to that which is taken to be higher, central, or sacred.

General Overviews

General overviews of spiritual development come in different types, and here, the types represented are the following: an encyclopedia by Dowling & Scarlett 2005, two

handbook chapters in separate editions of a major reference for developmental scientists: one by King & Boyatzis 2015, the other by Oser, Scarlett, & Reich 2006, two edited handbooks on spiritual development in childhood and adolescence, one by Roehlkepartain et al. 2006, one by de Souza, Bone, & Watson 2016, two edited books: one by Lawson 2012, one by Yust et al, and finally, two journals: International Journal of Children's Spirituality and Journal of Religious Education.

De Souza, Marian, Bone, J. & Watson, J. eds. 2016. *Spirituality across disciplines: Research and practice*. Norwich, UK: Springer.

Here, spirituality is treated within various professions (education, business, health professions, etc.) and within both western and non-western contexts. The overarching theme is that spirituality has to do with connectness to others, to the Earth, and to transcendent mystery. The book is an essential read for understanding how spirituality is talked about today -- with its emphasis on individual experiences and individual disciplines and not on any one particular way of defining spiritual development.

Dowling, Elizabeth & W. George Scarlett. eds. 2005. *Encyclopedia of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The encyclopedia provides short discussions of concepts, practices, texts, traditions and other themes central to religious and spiritual development – a kind

of extended dictionary that can be useful for anyone doing research on religious and spiritual development but especially useful for those who do not have a background in religious studies or related fields.

International Journal of Children's Spirituality

In response to the UK's educational system requiring outcomes having to do with spirituality and children's learning, the journal was created to provide research and a forum for meeting the national mandate and for expanding the meaning of spirituality beyond its older, religious confines. The result has been a commitment to researching children's meaning-making and to children's rich expressions of spirituality as well as to being more sensitive to cultural differences and to explaining spirituality's connection to well-being.

Journal of Religious Education

While not focusing specifically on spiritual development in childhood and adolescence, this journal has published influential articles on spirituality in childhood and adolescence – particularly seminal articles expressing the child studies perspective on spirituality.

King, Pamela & Chris Boyatzis. 2015. Religious and spiritual development. In M.E. Lamb & C.G. Coll. eds., *Social and emotional issues*. 975-1021. Vol. 3 of the *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science*. 7th ed., Editor-in-chief: R. M. Lerner. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

This latest summary of the field provides an excellent overview of the empirical research focusing on religious and spiritual development, one that separates out research on children from research on adolescents, and one that reflects

commitment to explaining children and adolescents' development *in multiple contexts*.

Oser, Fritz, W. George Scarlett, & Anton Bucher. 2006. Religious and spiritual development throughout the lifespan. In R. M. Lerner, ed. *Theoretical models of human development*. 942-998. Vol. 1 of the *Handbook of child psychology*. 6th ed. Editors-in-chief: W. Damon and R. M. Lerner. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

Up until the sixth edition, the Handbook of Child Psychology had never had a chapter on religious and spiritual development. This inaugural chapter served, then, to introduce a good many to research on R-S development, but also to introduce the theoretical perspectives guiding that research. The chapter complements the King and Boyatzis 2010 chapter by providing more in-depth discussion of seminal works and theories guiding research on R-S development – particularly works inspired by stage-structural, constructivist theories.

Roehlkepartain, Eugene, Pamela King, Linda Wagener, & Peter Benson. eds. 2006. *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

While the two handbook chapters cited above provide summaries of theories and research on R-S development, this edited handbook provides essays written by leaders in the field of R-S development, essays that represent the various topics

and themes making up the field. In many ways, this handbook allows a reader to experience the field first-hand – rather than having to rely on a discussion of the field led by a single author or co-authors.

Spiritual Development and Religious Development

Defining spiritual development raises the question of how spiritual development relates to religion because, for centuries, religious traditions have claimed knowledge of what is higher, central, and sacred. Furthermore, religious traditions have shown that responding to and participating in a religious tradition's symbols and practices can provide important if not essential support for spiritual development as defined in terms of increasing commitment to or faith in that which is higher, central, and sacred. However, faith in what is taken to be higher, central, or sacred does not belong to religious traditions alone nor to particular cultures. It is there in secular, humanist traditions as well -- as, for example, when a non-religious ecologist sermonizes about the interdependence of all forms of life, in ways that imply that to experience interdependence is to experience something spiritual. And it is there in eastern as well as western cultures, as, for example, when a Tibetan Buddhist shows us something spiritual in a particular experience of "happiness" and an American Mormon does the same when showing us something spiritual in the experience of family as "eternal". In this bibliography, the focus will be mainly on development as defined in terms of movement toward subordinating self to that which is experienced as higher, central, or

sacred. To help us understand what this development entails and means, the bibliography includes works from both within and from without the social sciences, works that provide necessary frameworks for thinking about what develops in spiritual development at any age. We begin with a sampling of foundation works – works by James 1958, Tillich 1957, Hill et al. 2000, and Zinnbauer et al. 1997 that provide frameworks for understanding religion’s relationship to spiritual development -- as well as works by Cassirer 1995 and Scarlett 2006 that provide frameworks for understanding what develops in religious and spiritual development. The works by Lawson 2012, Mercer 2005, and Yust 2006 provide a look at religious and spiritual development within particular (religious) faith traditions.

Cassirer, E. 1955. The philosophy of symbolic forms: Volume two: Mythical thought. New Haven, Ct., Yale University Press.

Cassirer explains how in the course of developing religiously, individuals have to leave the feeling-rich and energized mytho-poetic world characterizing earlier times in human development (and, by implication, leave childhood) as they become aware that the myths and symbols of their faith tradition are just that – myths and symbols – a development that brings with it the dilemma of having to keep and make use of those myths and symbols if one is to participate in their faith tradition.

Hill, Peter, Pargament, K., Hood, R., McCullough, M., Sawyers, J., Larson, D., et al.

2000. Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 30 (1), 51-77.

In this oft-cited article, the authors make a number of important comments about the distinction between religion and spirituality – explaining, as they do, that “being spiritual” and “being religious” are not to be taken as incompatible opposites but rather as overlapping constructs –both invoking notions of the sacred.

James, W. 1958. *The varieties of religious experience*. New York: The American Library.

James’ classic lives on and is a must for anyone researching spiritual development. The focus isn’t on children and adolescents, but the discussions of the variety of personal, religious experiences provides any reader insights into the widespread phenomenon of spirituality. Most important, it provides a subtle developmental perspective in its explanation of ‘saintliness’ – which James shows is an extension of the ordinary experience of occasionally feeling positively connected to something larger than the self – a ‘reality of the unseen’.

Lawson, K. 2012. ed. *Understanding children’s spirituality: Theology, research, and practice*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

This edited book provides insights into supports given from a Christian faith tradition and perspective – supports for nurturing children’s developing their spirituality and relationship with God.

Mercer, Joyce. *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*. Annotated edition. St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2005

Here we find an excellent example of developed theology within a particular faith tradition (in this case, the Christian faith tradition) being applied to provide insight into what practices will support children’s spiritual development such that children become faithful as defined by that particular faith tradition. In this book it is a Christian sense of faithful being defined in terms of justice, care, and concepts such as kingdom of God.

Scarlett, W. G. 2005. Toward a developmental analysis of religious and spiritual development.

In E. C. Roehlkepartain, P.E. King, L. Wagener, & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. 21-33. Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage

This essay focuses on the meanings of development and, with respect to religious and spiritual development, the need to (1) describe and explain the development of persons and not just domain-specific achievements, (2) describe and explain religious and spiritual imagining and not just reasoning, and (3) provide ways to evaluate content (of

beliefs, imaginings, etc.) and not just structure. The essay also makes a case for faith being the central concept in the study of religious and spiritual development.

Tillich, Paul. 1957. *Dynamics of faith*. New York: Harper Brothers.

This classic provides a useful framework for defining and evaluating patterns of faith; the framework has been used in major empirical studies of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence –studies carried out by leaders in the field, including James Fowler and Fritz Oser.

Yust, Karen M. eds. 2006. *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

In keeping with the religious studies tradition, the authors give us the wide variety among various religious traditions of what it means to *nurture* (as distinct from *develop*) spirituality. As a result, the book provides a very useful way to promote and understand interfaith discussion on spiritual development.

Zinnbauer, B., Pargament, K., Cole, Rye, M., Butter, E., Belavich, T., et al. 1997.

Religion and spirituality: Unfuzzifying the fuzzy. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36 (4), 549-564.

Making the distinction between religious and spiritual might suggest the that for a good many the two are not linked. However, as reported in this study, the

opposite seems to be the case since three quarters of those surveyed said they were both religious and spiritual.

Paradigms for Explaining Relations Between Spiritual and Religious Development

Explaining relationships between spiritual and religious development rests on meanings given to religious development. In the literature, one can discern two paradigms for defining and explaining religious development, paradigms here referred to as *the belief-institution paradigm*, on the one hand, and the *faith-tradition paradigm*, on the other hand. The belief-institution paradigm is by far the most common paradigm used to define and explain religious development –at least among those from western cultures. Using this paradigm, scholars measure religiosity in terms of beliefs and in terms of participation in the practices associated with religious institutions. In doing so, what is gained are ways to readily measure religiosity and religious development and, in turn, relationships with positive and negative correlates of “being religious”. But when using the belief-institution paradigm, what is lost are the individual patterns of faith that develop from individuals’ personal responses to an institution’s practices and symbols – patterns that include beliefs but also other ways of expressing spirituality, including ways having to with showing character. And what is also lost are the dynamic ways that religious traditions change over time as a result of individuals replacing or modifying

older patterns – making it more accurate to speak not of “religions” but rather of “faith traditions” that are ever-changing. Therefore, a second paradigm is needed, one that may well be called a faith-tradition paradigm. In many ways, the faith-tradition paradigm better captures the phenomenon of experiencing what is higher, central, or sacred and developing faith commitments to live for or in accordance with what is experienced as higher, central, or sacred. The two books cited below by Wilfred Cantwell Smith: Smith 1991 and Smith 1998, provide extended discussions that have inspired this distinction between paradigms -- while the Scarlett & Albert 2010 handbook chapter provides examples of how the distinction works to understand the literature and research on religious and spiritual development in childhood and adolescence.

Scarlett, W. George, and Amy Alberts. 2010. *Religious and spiritual development across the lifespan*. In Michael Lamb & Alexandra Freund, eds. *Social and emotional development*. 631-682. Vol.2 of *The handbook of life-span development*. Editor-in-chief: R.M. Lerner. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.

The introduction to this handbook chapter provides an extensive discussion of the belief-institution vs. faith-tradition distinction as well as a discussion of the meanings of development as applied to religious and spiritual development in childhood and adolescence. In these discussions, readers are given a variety of

examples of research conducted using one paradigm or the other. The handbook chapter goes on to discuss major theories of R-S development, major developmental tasks and R-S development, and correlates of R-S development.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. 1991. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

This book provides two chapters that summarize the major thoughts underpinning the belief-institution vs. faith-tradition distinction. Furthermore, in this book Smith goes on to make the startling suggestion that we do away with the term religions – since the term has become so misleading. Faith, says Smith, is the essential concept, not belief, and cumulative traditions, not religions, is the way to define the context in which faith develops.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. 1998. *Faith and belief: The difference between them*. Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications.

Here, Smith provides an extensive and brilliant discussion of how and why faith is the central concept in spiritual development – and how it differs from the concept of belief – not just in western traditions but around the world in all traditions where spirituality is the focus.

Spiritual Development and Moral Development

The groundbreaking work of Lawrence Kohlberg as summarized in Kohlberg 1967 and Kohlberg and Power 1981 did much to establish moral development as a domain independent of spiritual development – at least in the eyes of researchers such as Nucci – as explained in Nucci and Turiel 1993 and Nucci 2003. However, as Kunzman 2003 and Walker and Reimer 2006 indicate, more recent research has established (or re-established) what is commonly experienced, namely, the interdependence of spiritual and moral development – an interdependence evident in the lives of a great many but especially in the lives of moral exemplars. Understanding this interdependence is, therefore, essential for understanding spiritual development. Mentioned here are scholars writing broadly about connections between spiritual and moral development. Later, in the section on adolescence, the scholars mentioned will be for providing details about those connections.

Kohlberg, Lawrence 1967. Moral and religious education and the public schools: A developmental view. In T. Sizer (Ed.), *Religion and public education* 164-183. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Here, Kohlberg lays out his constructivist approach to moral development – emphasizing that morality develops not as a result of divine commands or values transmitted by authority figures but as a result of children and adolescents (with the support of adult guidance) wrestling with everyday

experiences that have within them themes of justice and caring. At the time Kohlberg wrote this essay, he was still focused on establishing moral development as a separate, autonomous domain.

Kohlberg, Lawrence & Clark Power 1981. Moral development, religious thinking, and the question of a seventh stage. *Zygon*.16.203-258.

This essay continues Kohlberg's long-standing argument that spiritual development is not a necessary condition for moral development and may actually impede moral development when individuals blindly follow "divine commands". However, Kohlberg and Power go on to discuss how, at the highest stages, when individuals pose ultimate questions and experience their own finiteness, there is the possibility of progressing to a seventh stage, one that integrates spirituality and moral judgment and allows for moral behavior even under adverse conditions.

Kunzman, R. 2003. Religion, ethics, and the implications for moral education: A critique of Nucci's Morality and religious rules. *Journal of Moral Education*, 32, 251-261.

In countering Nucci's argument that religion and morality are separate domains, Kunzman adopts a faith-tradition paradigm and points out that, for the religious, religion provides motivation to act morally-- and for those from Abrahamic traditions, this motivation is inextricably bound up with having a relationship with

God. Whether or not religiously motivated ways of thinking about morality actually lead individuals to behave 'better' than non-religiously motivated ways is, for Kunzman, a separate question.

Nucci, Lawrence, & Eliot Turiel 1993. God's word, religious rules, and their relation to Christian and Jewish concepts of morality. *Child Development* 64, 1475-1491. Oaks, CA: Sage.

Here, Nucci and Turiel adopt a belief-institution paradigm and in doing so focus on moral knowledge being independent of religious perspectives on what is morally 'good'. It is moral knowledge, not moral action or moral motivation that is the issue.

Nucci, Lawrence 2003. Morality, religion, and public education in pluralist democracies: A reply to Kunzman. *Journal of Moral Education*, 32, 263-270.

Continuing with his focus on moral knowledge being independent of religious involvement, Nucci criticizes Kunzman for conflating moral knowledge and moral action – though he softens his opposition by acknowledging that the beliefs and precepts of religious institutions can serve as motivation for a child, adolescent, or adult to act morally.

Walker, L., & Reimer, K. 2006. The relationship between moral and spiritual

development. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, L. M. W. P. E. King & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. 252-265. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Here, the authors provide empirical evidence showing an interconnection between moral and religious domains such that (1) R-S development depends on moral development but not the opposite, (2) emerging adults who are exemplary for their moral conduct, ground and sustain their moral conduct in their spirituality, and (3) in many 'non-western' cultures, what is said to develop morally is defined in ways making it impossible to disentangle moral and spiritual development.

Theoretical Perspectives on Spiritual Development

Since the 1960's, empirical studies of spiritual development have been driven mainly by three distinct theoretical perspectives, namely, psychoanalytic, constructivist stage-structural, and sociocultural theoretical perspectives. More recently, developmental science has adopted a developmental systems theoretical perspective which has the potential to significantly integrate research done on a variety of contexts and domains. Oser, Scarlett, and Bucher 2006 provide lengthy overviews of theoretical perspectives – with a particular emphasis on stage-structural theories. Scarlett and Alberts 2010 do the same but provide a more extensive treatment of the developmental

systems theoretical perspective that has gained such prominence among those studying development.

Oser, Fritz, W. George Scarlett, and Anton Bucher. 2006. Religious and spiritual development throughout the lifespan. In R. M. Lerner, ed. *Theoretical models of human development*. 942-998. Vol. 1 of the *Handbook of child psychology*. 6th ed. Editors-in-chief: W. Damon and R. M. Lerner. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

This first-ever HCP chapter on R-S development complements the King & Boyatzis chapter cited previously, by its providing a more in-depth discussion of some of the major theories of R-S development (particularly theories adopting a constructivist stage-structural perspective) – and how these theories have generated empirical studies of R-S development.

Scarlett, W. George, and Amy Alberts. 2010. *Religious and spiritual development across the lifespan*. In Michael Lamb & Alexandra Freund, eds. *Social and emotional development*. 631-682. Vol.2 of *The handbook of life-span development*. Editor-in-chief: R.M. Lerner. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.

As mentioned above, this handbook chapter provides a more in-depth summary of developmental systems ways of explaining religious and spiritual development – and compares these ways to the other main theoretical perspectives that have dominated the field in the past.

Psychoanalytic Theoretical Perspectives

Psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives have focused on the internal lives of humans – on humans’ ways of managing anxiety and on the constant struggles to cope with inevitable intra-psychic conflicts and challenging life circumstances. As such, psychoanalytic perspectives on development have proven invaluable in clinical work and in spawning new theories that lend themselves to scientific inquiry – a prime example being attachment theory. Psychoanalytic perspectives have also proven invaluable for understanding spiritual development – as evidenced especially in Erikson 1958 and Erikson 1963 where Erikson’s ‘ego analytic’ perspective provides a positive view of spiritual development, one that rejects the negative view adopted by Freud 1961. Furthermore, psychoanalytic, ‘object relations’ perspectives on spiritual development have led to our better appreciating the functions of imagination in the spiritual development of humans. From a psychoanalytic, object relations perspective, not all imagination is useful-healthy. Usefulness or health depends on whether imagination supports healthy interpersonal relationships and a healthy attitude toward living – as Rizzuto 1979 and Pruyser 1991 show. In short, the psychoanalytic approach leads us to focus on the nature of an individual’s religious and spiritual imaginings and to whether those imaginings support thriving.

Erikson, Erik. 1958. *Young Man Luther*. New York: Norton.

In this case study of Martin Luther, Erikson lays out his theory of identity development and religion’s potentially powerful role in young peoples’ achieving

their own unique and positive identity -- identities differing from those of parents and others – while exploring ways to achieve his or her own special identity. In particular, we see here how a faith tradition’s ideology and practices can provide a temporary moratorium allowing an adolescent to distance him- or herself from imposed identities.

Erikson, Erik 1963. *Childhood and Society* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

This is Erikson’s classic which even today is used frequently to define stages of development in terms of polar opposites. The book’s most important section is on adolescence and the stage where achieving a personal identity is taken to be the main developmental challenge. Virtually every work that mentions identity and spiritual development in adolescence is apt to make reference to *Childhood and Society* – making it an essential read for anyone doing research on spiritual development in adolescence.

Freud, Sigmund 1961. *Future of an illusion*. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 21. 1-56. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

In this famous essay, Freud makes the case for religion serving as a prop that fixates adults at a child’s stage of development. While the Freudian view of R-S development has been largely discounted for its being biased by its not taking into account the nuances in mature R-S stages of development, it still captures

an attitude and understanding of religion that remains an obstacle to doing research on R-S development.

Pruyser, Paul 1991. Forms and functions of the imagination in religion. In H.N. Maloney & B. Spilka Eds., *Religion in psychodynamic perspective: The contributions of Paul W. Pruyser*. 170-188 New York: Oxford University Press.

Pruyser provides one of the best examples of a psychoanalytic, object relations perspective on religious and spiritual development, one that rejects the Freudian view by taking a positive view of illusion making – showing that illusion making in the spiritual lives of individuals can provide powerful wedges between impulses and meaningless “objective” reality. Pruyser also explains how certain religious illusion-making can promote the opposite of health – especially illusions supporting a sombre, punishment oriented way of experiencing life.

Rizzuto, Ana Maria. 1979. *The Birth of the Living God*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Rizzuto follows in the psychoanalytic object relations tradition by focusing on inner imaginings and how inner imaginings support or fail to support psychological health and development. Here, the discussion is about religious imaginings, particularly imaginings about God and one’s relationship to God. As such, it provides an important way for researchers to generate research

questions that have promise for leading to significant findings about spiritual development in childhood and adolescence.

Stage-Structural (Constructivist) Theoretical Perspectives

Stage-structural theoretical perspectives spiritual development became prominent in the 1970's -- following a decade when Piaget's constructivist, stage-structural theory of cognitive development dominated. At the heart of stage-structural theoretical perspectives is a way of defining development in terms of qualitative-structural changes that define changes in stages that can be organized hierarchically to define what it is that develops. Critics of stage-structural perspectives on spiritual development have attacked the implication that, over time, spiritual development proceeds in a linear way (from immature to mature as defined by a stage sequence) and in a way that ends with a universally agreed upon definition of what constitutes maturity (or perfection). However, developmentalists in the stage-structural tradition point out that stage sequences need not function to describe change over time. Rather, stage sequences can simply provide useful definitions of what should be meant by development and useful ways to evaluate actions and persons at any given time and under any given circumstance. As for the criticism that there is bias, especially cultural bias, in positing a highest stage, stage-structural theorists point out that such bias is unavoidable when adopting a developmental perspective, so that the best we can do is

make explicit our biases (our value judgments) and thus more honestly engage with others who may hold different biases. Among the many stage-structural perspectives on spiritual development – two stand out for their influence on the general field of study: the first is the faith-developmental theory and perspective of Fowler 1981. The second is the theory of religious judgment and its development – as found in Oser and Gmunder 1991. Included here is an essay by Reich 2005 – to dispel mischaracterizations of Piaget’s own view of spiritual development.

Fowler, J. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychological quest for human meaning*. San Francisco, CA: Harper.

Stages of Faith is a classic, in part, because it successfully combines thinking from a variety of related fields (theology, psychoanalysis, developmental psychology) to capture faith development – with faith development defined and described as developing ever-increasing decentering that makes possible meaningful connections with increasingly diverse groups of people with different patterns of faith.

Oser, Fritz & Paul Gmunder 1991. *Religious judgement: A developmental approach*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Here, a case is made for religious judgment serving as an autonomous domain that has its own developmental trajectory. Using hypothetical situations that

present children, teens, and adults with religious dilemmas faced in “contingency situations”, the authors explain how religious judgment develops as a way to navigate the challenges posed by having to both differentiate and integrate polar opposites (e.g., faith vs. doubt, transcendence vs. immanence, independence vs. dependence).

Reich, H. 2005. Jean Piaget’s views on religion. University of Fribourg.

Few realize that as a young adult, Piaget focused on the problem of how best to define religious development and how best to explain how spirituality and reasoning might be integrated. In this essay, Reich gives us the young, obviously brilliant, Piaget defining religious/spiritual development as a shift from transcendent to immanent spirituality – a kind of religion gone inward where there is reasoning but also where there is the “heart” (feelings and intuitions) and images of spiritual exemplars to guide and inspire.

Sociocultural Theoretical Perspectives

Sociocultural theoretical perspectives give us human development in the context of tremendous diversity – diversity found in the various communities and groups we call “cultures” and in the specific contexts (family, church, etc.) that can have profound effects on the content and character of spiritual development. While there are universals – for example, all human communities promote language - there are particulars that give groups and communities their distinctive identities, particulars such

as whether spiritual development is viewed as individuals developing in ways stressing their individuality or as individuals developing in ways stressing their obligations to family and community. Furthermore, from a sociocultural perspective, the particulars are at work both within and between individuals – making it impossible to entirely separate person, culture and context – and also impossible to fit any neatly defined, normative set of stages onto the diversity found in real life. Function, not stage is the watchword of a sociocultural perspective. With respect to spiritual development, this emphasis on culture, context, and function shows itself in ways having to do with acquired beliefs and practices – beliefs and practices that may seem strange and irrational, but nevertheless can serve as powerful ways to function and cope. Here, Mattis et al 2006 provide an overview of how a sociocultural perspective on R-S development works to study children and adolescents while Kwilecki 1999 provides lengthy narratives of highly religious individuals, narratives that show the strengths of taking a sociocultural perspective with its emphasis on spirituality's role in helping individuals function. These two will suffice as introductions to the sociocultural perspective – with this perspective being manifest in later reviews of publications focusing on children's and adolescents' spirituality in context.

Kwilecki, Susan 1999. *Becoming religious*. Cranberry, N.J.: Associated University Press.

Kwilicki provides detailed stories showing how individuals develop ways to function, even thrive, despite the stresses from being victims of racism and poverty -- through their participating in their culture's religious imaginings. Her sociocultural way of thinking helps explain the diverse ways that people come to cope and function using religious imagining.

Mattis, Jacqueline, Muninder Ahluwalia, Sheri-Ann Cowie, & Aria Kirkland-Harris 2006. *Ethnicity, Culture, and Spiritual Development*. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, L. M. W. P. E. King & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* 283-296. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The authors provide clarification on the meanings of ethnicity, culture, and race as these three relate to the study of spiritual development. They provide a succinct summary of how culturally determined meanings of "spirituality", "religious", "child", "adolescent", "self" – and other key terms make it necessary to adopt a sociocultural perspective on spiritual development, one that focuses on different meanings and one that requires qualitative analysis of the meanings given by representatives from different cultures.

Developmental Systems Theoretical Perspectives

As with sociocultural perspectives, developmental systems perspectives place development not within the person but in the person-context relationship. However, with developmental systems perspectives, one must think in terms of a multitude of layered

contexts - genetic, brain, mind, family, neighborhood, and cultural contexts – all working together as separate systems interconnected to form a greater system. Systems and interconnection are the watchwords – as is development. Furthermore, developmental systems perspectives define development not as a march toward perfection but as a constant movement to ‘thrive’ – with thriving defined as the adaptive fit between person and contexts whereby individuals contribute to the well-being of contexts (e.g., family, neighborhood, nation) even as contexts contribute to the well-being of individuals. Lerner et al 2008 provide an introduction and overview of what it means to take a developmental systems perspective on spiritual development.

Lerner, Richard, Robert Roesser, & Erin Phelps 2008 *Positive development, spirituality, and generosity in youth: An introduction to the issues*. In R.M. Lerner, R.Roesser, & E. Phelps (2008) eds. *Positive youth development & spirituality: From theory to research*. 3-22. West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation Press.

In this introduction to their edited book, the authors provide a concise summary of the developmental systems perspective on spiritual development, emphasizing as they do both the interconnectedness of spirituality with a variety of systems (including biological systems) as well as the positive youth development (PDY) way of defining development -- with adolescents acting to support and improve their environments even as environments act to support and improve adolescents.

Spirituality and Spiritual Development in Childhood

Across the globe one can find a common sentiment that there is something spiritual in children themselves, in their direct connections with the world, in their implicit faith in their caregivers and what their caregivers tell them about life, and especially in their experiencing wide-eyed wonder in the face of so much novelty – wonder that often dulls with age when life gets categorized neatly (see the poetry of Wordsworth) and when the illusion takes hold that we truly understand. This natural propensity of children to experience wonder and wondering is the subject of those scholars arguing for a natural-intuitive spirituality among children – a spirituality that shows itself in children’s concepts and thinking about the divine, concepts and thinking that are dictated by what is transmitted by trustworthy others, particularly by parents, but also by adult members of a child’s community. Here, then, we reference works by those explaining the ‘spiritual child’ and the child’s taking on the ideas and concepts first presented by trustworthy others. Coles 1990 provides a nice introduction to this subject of spirituality in childhood. Hay and Nye 1998, Nye 1999 and 2009, Hart 2003, 2006 and Yust et al 2004 continue this discussion of the rich, spiritual lives of children, often by challenging those stage theorists that miss the positive, strong, and rich spiritual experiences that can occur in childhood.

Coles, Robert 1990. *The spiritual lives of children*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Following in the psychoanalytic tradition, Coles explores the inner lives of children from different faith traditions – focusing on their thoughts, feelings, and imaginings related to their spirituality and faith tradition. The writing is both engaging and convincing as Coles works to tell stories showing how spirituality serves as a positive force in the lives of children.

Hart, Tobin. *The Secret Spiritual World of Children: The Breakthrough Discovery That Profoundly Alters Our Conventional View of Children's Mystical Experiences*. Makawao, Maui, HI : Berkeley, Calif.: New World Library, 2003.

Hart's book provides one of the best examples of the spiritual child movement with its perspective on children having a spiritual life that defies evaluative terms such as immature and undeveloped. In fact, there is in Hart's language an indication that children's spiritual lives may be richer than our own.

Hart, Tobin 2006. *Spiritual experiences and capacities of children and youth*. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, L. M. W. P. E. King & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* 163-178. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In this essay, the discussion is about how children's experiences of wonder and wondering as well as their natural 'wisdom' qualify as spiritual experiences and, by implication, as experiences setting the stage for later development.

Hay, David and Rebecca Nye 1998. The spirit of the child. London, U.K., Fount.

This book provides its own arguments against cognitive-stage theories of spiritual development and counters with the results of interviewing children and adults, results that the authors present as evidence for children's capacity for

experiencing moments that go beyond ordinary experience and that qualify as spiritual experiences.

Nye, Rebecca 1999. *Relational consciousness and the spiritual lives of children: convergence with children's theory of mind*. In H. Reich, F. K. Oser and W. G. Scarlett Psychological studies on spiritual and religious development. 57-82. Lengerich, Germany, Pabst Science Publishers.

Here, Nye shares examples from her extensive interviewing of children – and makes her case that there are moments in children's lives when they seem to “shift into another gear”, moments of intense connection and sense of wonder and wondering, moments that deserve the label spiritual. She admits that these moments are conveyed more by her interviewees' nonverbal cues than by what they say, but she argues that though children's spirituality may be difficult to measure, the phenomenon is quite real.

Nye, R. 2009. *Children's spirituality: What it is and why it matters*. London, U.K. Church House Publishing.

Continuing with the theme that spirituality is innate and natural to children, Nye offers her advice on how best to nurture children's spirituality – largely by taking care to avoid using adult language and avoid leaning heavily on religious doctrine. It is the language of nurturance that is preferred over the language of development.

Yust, Karen Marie. *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives*. 1 edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

While this book is meant primarily for parents, it serves the professional scholar as well – for its providing an excellent example of the child study perspective with its emphasis on children's ability to have a full spiritual and religious experience and life. That respect for the children's ability provides the starting point for explaining what nurtures and supports spirituality in childhood.

Concepts and Spiritual Development in Childhood

Following in the Piagetian tradition, stage-structural perspectives on children's concepts and thinking about spiritual matters lead to a predictable sequence, one that describes children's concepts (such as the concept of God) and thinking about spiritual matters as going from thinking concretely (e.g. God has workers who can receive all the prayers coming in at the same time and relay to God when he has the time.) to thinking abstractly (e.g. God is a name we give to a life force that is good.). Elkind 1964 and Goldman 1964 provide examples of this perspective. In contrast and adopting a sociocultural perspective, Boyer and Watson 2000 and Harris 2000, 2012 stress that children's religious thinking is more about accepting what they are taught by 'trustworthy others' – especially parents. Adopting a socio-cultural perspective, researchers have documented the ways that children, around the age of four and five, begin to learn from trustworthy others about gods, ghosts, ancestors, and whatever else a local culture takes to be religious and sacred. In doing so, children show a remarkable ability to keep a 'double booking', one that allows them to hold true to their intuitive

understanding of basic truths about life (e.g., that objects when let go in the air generally drop, that humans and animals can't be in two places at the same time) while also believing what they are told about gods, ghosts, ancestors, etc. That is, from a sociocultural perspective, children's religious thinking derives not from their immaturity but from what they have been taught. The findings from research guided by these two theoretical perspectives appear to contradict one another. However, the two sets of findings can be seen as complementing one another if the religious beliefs acquired through dialogue with trustworthy others are seen as taking on new meanings as individuals develop over time – meanings that allow for an integration of faith and reason.

Boyer, P., & Walker, S. 2000. Intuitive ontology and cultural input in the acquisition of religious concepts. In C. Rosengren, C. Johnson & P. L. Harris (Eds.), *Imagining the impossible* 130-156. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Challenging normative stage-structural characterizations of children's understanding of religious concepts, Boyer and Walker document how children develop intuitive understanding of physics, biology, and psychology and then are introduced, by trustworthy adults, to a culture's counterintuitive religious concepts – concepts that both adults and children hold in common.

Elkind, D. 1964. Piaget's Semiclinical Interview and the Study of the Spontaneous Religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (4) 40-46.

In this essay, Elkind, a student of Piaget and well-known for his experiments replicating and confirming Piagetian experiments and ideas, provides a thoughtful application of Piaget's methods and theory to unearth the meanings children give to conventional religious concepts and ideas.

Goldman, Ronald 1964. Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence. New York: Seabury.

Here, we get Goldman's view that cognitive structures determine a child's understanding of religious materials, such as parables. The picture painted is one of children going from entirely concrete-literal and unconventional understandings to abstract-metaphorical and more widely held understandings.

While this book has been widely read and is still often cited, it has, over the years, been widely criticized for being 'too cognitive' and for missing the essential emotional and social dimensions of children's positive spirituality.

Harris, Paul. 2000. On not falling down to earth: Children's metaphysical questions. In K. S. Rosengren, Johnson, C.N. & Harris, P.L. eds. *Imagining the Impossible: Magical, Scientific, and Religious Thinking in Children*. 157-178. Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Harris continues the sociocultural theme found in Boyer and Walker's work on children's religious concepts – and demonstrates how children are able to keep a 'double booking' – with their understanding of everyday phenomena continuing to develop from their experience alongside their understanding of religious and metaphysical ideas that are counter-intuitive (e.g., that God can be everywhere at once) and taught by trustworthy others (parents, teachers, etc.).

Harris, Paul L. *Trusting What You're Told: How Children Learn from Others*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2012.

Harris provides an in-depth discussion of the childhood phenomenon of "testimonial learning" -- learning that comes from the testimonies of "trustworthy others" as distinct from the learning that comes from direct observation and experience. For moral and religious matters, children rely a good deal on testimonial learning, which might make testimonial learning appear to be passive and uncritical. However, Harris explains that children do show skepticism and analytic thinking even as they show trust in what they have learned through testimonial learning. Harris gives us, then, the child as a kind of anthropologist – weighing and evaluating the testimonies of trustworthy others even as the child does the same with learnings from observation and direct experience.

Spiritual Development in Adolescence

Over the past several decades, one of the most positive developments to come from empirical studies of development has been the replacement of the old 'storm and stress' model of adolescence with a 'positive youth development' model.

The PYD model has several emphases relevant to the subject of spiritual development. First, it emphasizes that far from being rebellious and cut off from adult relationships, youth today are more likely to value their family relationships, become embedded in their cultural institutions, and concern themselves with finding purpose and contributing to society. Second, it emphasizes that spirituality can and often does play a major role in the lives and development of adolescents. Third, it emphasizes that though spirituality matters to adolescents, many adolescents today do not receive the guidance needed for them to understand and live according their own faith traditions. Lerner et al 2008 provide a good overview of the PYD perspective on spiritual development in adolescence while Smith and Denton 2005 provide the evidence for today's adolescents lacking spiritual guidance and understanding of their own faith traditions.

Lerner, Richard M., Robert Roeser, & Erin Phelps. Eds. 2008. *Positive youth development & spirituality: From theory to research*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Bringing together a variety of leaders in different fields, this book provides perhaps the best example of a positive youth development (PYD) perspective on spiritual development in adolescence – as well as an example of the developmental systems approach to spiritual development.

Smith, Christian & Melinda Denton. 2005. *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press.

Smith and Denton provide data showing that about 60% of American teenagers from the majority of faith traditions hold a faith pattern hidden from public view – one they call “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”. MTD is a watered down version of time-honored faith traditions. The authors blame the poor teaching going on in families and faith-based communities and the fact that parents are doing a poor job modeling a faith-based way of living.

Developmental Tasks and Adolescent Spirituality

Traditionally, developmental tasks have been distinguished from learning tasks by their taking a very long time (years and maybe even a lifetime) to accomplish – tasks such as developing capacity for intimacy, developing a unique and positive identity and developing ability to think as a scientist thinks. Here, the research cited focuses on this intertwining of spiritual development in adolescence with the developmental tasks associated with adolescence, in particular, the tasks of identity development, character development, and the development of capacity for critical thinking.

Identity formation and Spirituality in Adolescence

The sampling of research listed below provides a common message, namely, that spirituality in adolescence can provide a significant support for identity development. Markstrom- Adams and Smith 1996 provide research linking religious development and identity developmental status as defined by Erikson and Marcia. Chen 2005, Dykstra et al 2012. Juang and Syed 2008, Love et al 2005, and Parker 2010 provide discussions of gender, ethnic, and sexual identity – as they relate to spiritual development. Smith 2000 provides a study of American evangelicals which suggests that a faith-tradition model rather than a belief-institution model of spiritual development is needed to study the relationships between spiritual and identity development.

Chen, C. 2005. A self of ones own: Taiwanese immigrant women and religious conversion. *Gender & Society*, 19 (3), 336-357.

Chen's study provides a good example of the importance of adopting a faith-tradition paradigm for studying connections between spiritual and identity development. When looked at through the lens of a belief-institution paradigm, "religions" can appear to be bastions of prejudice when it comes to gender. However, when looking at patterns of faith held by individuals within the same faith-based community, a different picture emerges, one showing that women use religion to "do" gender in ways not predicted by looking at religious doctrines.

Dykstra, Robert C., Allan Hugh Cole Jr, and Donald Capps. *The Faith and Friendships of Teenage Boys*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.

Dykstra, Cole, and Capps provide a compelling picture of older adolescent males relying on their relationships with male peers to work through their spiritual identities that may challenge the identities found in orthodox versions of particular faith traditions.

Juang, L., & Syed, L. M. 2008. Ethnic identity and spirituality. In R. W. R. M. Lerner & E. P. Roeser (Eds.), *Positive youth development and spirituality: From theory to research* 262-284. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Juang and Syed's research is representative of the research on ethnic identity and spirituality – research that emphasizes the often intimate relationship between a young person's ethnic identity and his or her religious identity. This seems especially true for adolescents and young adults from minority and immigrant groups – where faith based communities (e.g., churches) provide a kind of sanctuary from the challenges of fitting into the larger society.

Love, P. G., Bock, M., Jannarone, A., & Richardson, P. (2005). Identity interaction: Exploring the spiritual experiences of lesbian and gay college students , 46(2). *Journal of College Student Development*, 46 (2), 193–209.

Adopting a faith-tradition paradigm and through interviews with gay and lesbian students, the authors provide evidence indicating that having a strong religious background often supports the sexual identity of many LBGT adolescents– a

finding that contradicts the stereotypes of religion, stereotypes fostered by belief-institution ways of understanding religion (e.g., focusing on religious doctrines).

Markstrom-Adams, C., & Smith, M. (1996). Identity formation and religious orientation among high school students from the United States and Canada. *Journal of Adolescence, 19*, 247–261.

Marcia's categories for describing different phases in Erikson's model of identity formation (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, achievement) have been used extensively in research on identity formation. Markstrom-Adams and Smith continue that practice and report, in their results, that identity diffusion is related to lower rates of religious attendance.

Parker, Evelyn L., ed. *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class, and Gender*. Reprint edition. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2010.

Here we see older adolescent girls using their understandings of God and spirituality to make sense of sexism, racism, and other difficult challenges they encounter in the course of trying to form positive identities.

Smith, Christian. 2000. *Christian America? What evangelicals really want*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Adopting a faith-tradition paradigm, Smith explains how the stereotypes of evangelicals don't match up with close-up views of individuals identifying themselves as evangelical – as exemplified in the way many evangelical women are empowered by their gender roles. While the focus of this book is on adults,

not children and adolescents, the lessons learned from interviews with adults can be assumed to apply to identity formation and R-S development early on.

Spirituality and Character Development in Adolescence

Moral development and the virtues that make up character development (caring, honesty, courage, etc.) rest on supports. In this sampling, we see how researchers have defined and explained the supportive role that spirituality can play in character development during adolescence. Donnelly et al 2006, Youniss et al 2006, and King 2008 provide a positive youth development perspective on how character development links to the individual-context interactions where spirituality is a major theme, while Mariano and Damon 2008 explain how spiritual development can work to support adolescents adopting a long-term 'purpose' that promises a life-time of meaningfully service to others.

Donnelly, T., Matsuba, M. K., Hart, D., & Atkins, R. 2006. The relationship between spiritual development and civic development. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, L. M. Wagener & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *Handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. 239-251. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

The authors' summary of research (conducted in the U.S. and Europe) continues the trend among research on R-S development in adolescence -- noting positive benefits to adolescents who involve themselves in faith-based communities and

in developing themselves spirituality. They emphasize the two-way influence of spirituality and civic engagement – each providing impetus and support for the development of the other.

King, P. E. (2008). Spirituality as fertile ground for positive youth development. In R. M. Lerner, R. Roeser, and E. Phelps (Eds.) *Positive youth development and spirituality: From theory to research*. 55-73. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

King provides the positive youth development perspective on spirituality as it relates to character development – a perspective that defines development in terms of the reciprocal relationships between person and contexts that define what it means to ‘thrive’. We see, then, how the PYD perspective follows from a developmental systems theory of human development, one that looks to interactions between systems to explain whether and how individuals “thrive”.

Mariano, J., & Damon, W. (2008). The role of spirituality and religious faith in supporting purpose in adolescence. In R. Lerner, R. Roeser & E. Phelps (Eds.), *Positive youth development and spirituality: From theory to research*. 210-230. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Defining purpose as long-term purpose with the intent to make a contribution to others, Mariano and Damon provide data showing that many adolescents who

begin to experience themselves as having a long-term purpose (e.g., to become a teacher, doctor, etc.) do so with a spiritual theme in mind.

Youniss, J., McLellan, J. A., Su, Y., & Yates, M. 1999. Religion, community service, and identity in American youth. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22, 243-253.

In this oft-cited article, the authors explain how churches and other faith-based communities are in the position of both delivering community services and recruiting volunteers, many who are adolescents. This makes faith-based communities rich sources of motivation for adolescents to involve themselves in community service – and for adopting spiritual motives that can sustain their continuing to volunteer long after their graduation from high school.

Thinking and Spiritual Development in Adolescence

While cognitive-developmental stage theories of R-S development were rightly criticized for being “too cognitive”, there remains the question of how best to think about relationships between intellectual and spiritual development. Scarlett and Perriello 1991 demonstrate that the decentering developmental process defining intellectual development applies to the R-S phenomenon of prayer. Reich 1991 demonstrates that the development of the critical thinking needed to address apparently conflicting explanations applies to thinking about conflicting explanations having to do with religion and spirituality – conflicting explanations that first become salient in adolescence.

Scarlett, W. G., & Perriello, L. (1991). The development of prayer in adolescence. In F. Oser & W. G. Scarlett (Eds.), *Religious development in childhood and adolescence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 63-76.

Using a model defining development in terms of decentring and locus of responsibility, the study found that the prayers of younger adolescents showed the egocentric assumption that the praying person's will and God's will are one in the same – with God bearing sole responsibility for change -- whereas the prayers of older adolescents indicated that God's will may not be the same as the will of the person praying and that the the person praying bears at least partial responsibility for making changes happen.

Reich, Helmut 1991. The role of complementarity reasoning in religious development. In F. Oser & W.G. Scarlett (Eds.) *Religious development in childhood and adolescence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 77-89.

Reich provides a “relational-contextual” model of what develops in the course of reasoning when faced with religiously meaningful dilemmas – such as the dilemma posed by competing accounts of creation in the Bible and in Darwinian evolutionary theory. These dilemmas can steer adolescents away from identifying with religious traditions. However, using relational-contextual, higher order thinking, adolescents can manage the dilemmas so as to continue to develop their identities as falling within a religious faith tradition.

Spirituality, Risk-Taking, and Resilience in Adolescence

The positive youth development perspective on spiritual development in adolescence derives, in part, from research showing positive correlates having mostly to do with avoiding temptations and pitfalls (e.g., risk-taking, drug use) and also having to do with coping and being resilient. Here, Cook 2000 discusses spirituality in adolescence as a protective factor against risk-taking and Regnerus and Elder 2003 discuss how attending church can protect adolescents at risk for dropping out of school. The PYD perspective also shows up in Pargament 2001 and others' research on individuals' (including adolescents) use of religion to cope with adversity.

Cook, K. V. 2000. "You have to have somebody watching your back, and if that's God, then, that's mighty big" The church's role in the resilience of inner-city youth". *Adolescence*, 35, 717-730.

Cook's article represents a focus on positive correlates having to do with risk-taking and religious affiliation. Here, the findings are that adolescents who participate in faith-based communities are less likely to take unhealthy risks (e.g., use drugs) and engage in delinquent behaviors than are their counterparts who do not participate in faith-based communities. They attribute this finding to their being around good role models.

Pargament, Kenneth 2001 *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*

Pargament has long been a leading researcher on how religion is used by children, adolescents, and adults to cope with adversity and difficult events. In this book, he lays out three different styles of coping, *self-directing coping* (e.g., using resources thought to be “God given”), *deferring coping* (e.g., giving up control to God in order to gain control) and *collaborative coping* (e.g., appraising God as a helping partner).

Regnerus, M. and G. Elder 2003. Staying on track in school: religious influences in high- and low-risk settings. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 42 (4). 633-649.

In this carefully designed study, Regnerus and Elder make the case for the benefits of church going for adolescents in low-income groups where there is risk of them dropping out of school. However, their explanation of these benefits rests mostly on the fact that going to church demands self-discipline and an openness to participating in activities that include their elders. Their explanation does not, then, explain the benefits as coming from the adolescents’ own faith.

“Bad” Cults and Religiously Inspired Violence

While there is a good deal of research showing positive correlates with spiritual development in adolescence, there is little research showing negative correlates. However, the research that there is raises questions about presumed negative correlates – in particular, joining cults and committing religiously motivated acts of

violence. Streib 1999 represents a significant number of researchers on cults, research that shows that joining a cult is not always a bad thing, that there are good and bad cults, and that being a member of a cult can serve as support for making a transition.

Silke 2003 represents researchers showing that adolescents committing politically and religiously motivated acts of violence do not differ significantly in mental and moral health from adolescents in general – that their actions should be taken as reflecting a group's fighting back against perceived or actual oppression.

Streib, H. (1999). Off-road religion? A narrative approach to fundamentalist and occult orientations of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22, 255-267.

Streib describes the occultist practices of groups of European adolescents he observed as "off-road religion," implying that they were age and stage appropriate for those who have yet to achieve an adult identity. Furthermore, and contrary to popular negative views, Streib reports that the overwhelming majority of studies have shown that only a minority of teenagers regularly perform occult practices, and for most in this minority, occult practices are performed out of curiosity and not from existential engagement.

Silke, A. (Ed.). 2003. *Terrorists, victims, and society: Psychological perspectives on terrorism and its consequences*. Southern Gate, U.K.: John Wiley & Sons.

Silke argues for taking the group, not the individual, as the unit of analysis when explaining religiously inspired violence – because individuals who commit violence for religious reasons are usually acting in ways similar to any soldier fighting a war for his or her country. Furthermore, says Silke, religiously inspired acts of violence by young people are caused more by perceived and real injustices to their group than by they are their religion or religious identity.

Spiritual Development and Children's and Adolescents' Connection to the Natural World

One of the newer, more promising areas of research having to do with spiritual development in childhood and adolescence is research on children's and adolescents' connection to the natural world. In the past, research on spiritual development in childhood and adolescence has only tangentially referred to the natural world – largely as a source of wonder and as a presumed emotional foundation for caring about the natural world. However, with the ecology crisis and the emergence of a world-wide environmental movement, there are signs that there will, in the near future, be more and more research on spiritual development and its role in developing 'earth stewards'. At present, there is enough to report on to indicate the common themes. As found in the books by Gustafson 1994 and Kahn and Kellert 2002, the first theme is supporting the development of a *decentering* with spiritual overtones -- away from old, anthropocentric

perspectives that have humans being the center of the world (if not the universe) such that humans rightfully have dominion over nature and toward bio-, eco- or gaia-centric perspectives that have humans being only a small part of the world such that humans participate in, rather than have dominion over, nature. Also found in the Gustafson 1994 and the Kahn and Kellert 2002 books is a second theme having spiritual overtones, the theme of *interdependence* – with humans, nonhuman animals (note the choice of words), plants, oceans, etc., all living together in a giant system that has evolved over millions of years – a system that worked wonderfully before the industrial revolution but a system that is now imperiled by human excess calling for our taking on enormous challenges that involve managing complex moral dilemmas. A third theme is represented most clearly in Gustafson 1994, Louv 2008, and Sobel 2008, namely, the theme of our needing to provide children opportunity to be in nature and experience wonder (again with spiritual overtones), so that later on while drawing from childhood memories, individuals might develop care for the natural world and become ‘earth stewards’.

Gustafson, James 1994. *A sense of the divine: The natural environment from a theocentric perspective*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press.

This book by a leading moral philosopher and theologian provides an excellent foundation for thinking about the ways in which the natural world can and does come to elicit experiences of the sacred, experiences that can fuel care for the

natural world. Gustafson artfully repeats a common theme in the children and nature literature – that children’s direct, “prereflective” experiences with the natural world lay the foundation for later experiencing the sacred in the natural world which, in turn, can sustain a caring for the natural world.

Kahn, Peter & Stephen Kellert eds. 2002. *Children and nature: Psychological, sociocultural, and evolutionary investigations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

This edited book provides chapters featuring empirical research on children’s and teens’ attitudes, responses, and connections (or disconnections) with the natural world. While the focus is on children’s and teens’ relationships with nature, not on their spiritual development, the book provides important introductions to theories used to explain the child-nature connection and to promising programs that make it more likely that children and teenagers will develop a spiritual perspective on nature.

Louv, Richard 2008. *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*, New York, N.Y.: Workman.

Louv’s book is probably the most influential in arousing concern over the disconnect with nature among today’s children and adolescents as compared to previous generations. Here, Louv explains the negative implications for this disconnect and some of its causes – and includes a disconnect from experiences providing a spiritual connection to nature.

Sobel, David. 2008. *Childhood and nature: Design principles for educators*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

David Sobel, a leading environmental educator, here provides not only wise advice for how best to get children excited and caring about nature and caring for nature, he also provides clear and convincing arguments for children being open to “transcendent nature experiences” when given the opportunity to play in nature and experience ‘wild’ nature. And while cautioning adults against being too didactic when trying to support children exploring and playing in nature, he says, “One transcendent experience in nature is worth a thousand nature facts.”