



PhD thesis

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**‘CHILD SPIRITUALITY AND HOLISTIC MINISTRY:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN WONJI SHOA, ETHIOPIA’**

TSEHAYWOTA TADDESSE WOLDETSADIK

Oxford Centre For Mission Studies (OCMS), PhD

April 2025

**‘CHILD SPIRITUALITY AND HOLISTIC MINISTRY:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN WONJI SHOA, ETHIOPIA’**

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative study of child spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia. The research project stemmed from observing divergent, categorical, skeptical, and restrictive views and actions on the spiritual dimension of children among stakeholders in positions of influence. The research focuses on an in-depth understanding of a group of Ethiopian children's perspectives and experiences of spirituality and the implication this may have on holistic child ministry run by churches and parachurch organizations. The study involved children as primary sources in seeking answers to the overarching research questions: How can a better understanding of children's views and experiences of spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia, contribute to holistic child ministry? A phenomenological case study was applied as a methodological framework, and primary data were collected using group and individual interviews. The key findings of the study include: 1) Children's understanding and experience of spirituality is multidimensional, including divine, religious, personal, worldly and evil spirituality; 2) Spirituality involves connectedness with the divine, religious and personal dimensions of spirituality and dissociation from evil spirituality, 3) Contextual factors influencing child spirituality are multifaceted, including people, religion, community and beyond community factors which are connected in weblike structure rather than the nested structure of the ecological theory. Through discussion of findings and review of contemporary theories, the concept of relationality' is adopted as an overarching theme to revisit holistic child ministry. The research findings enhance holistic child ministry with a broader view of spirituality and spiritual contexts. The research contributes to the body of knowledge, the practical field of child ministry, policy formulation and methodological input for researching child spirituality with children.

Key terms: child spirituality, holistic ministry, relationality

Declaration


This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed  TSEHAYWOTA TADDESSE WOLDETSADIK
Date March 31, 2025

STATEMENT 1


This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed  TSEHAYWOTA TADDESSE WOLDETSADIK (Candidate)
Date March 31, 2025

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if approved, to be available for photocopying by the British Library and for Inter-Library Loan, for open access to the Electronic Theses Online Service (EthoS) linked to the British Library, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organizations.

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Date March 31, 2025

Dedication

With a grateful heart, I dedicate this thesis:

To my late parents, W/o Abebech Wondimagegn and Ato Taddesse Woldetsadik, who permanently live in my soul.

To my late leader, brother and friend, Dawit Hailu, who had a tremendous positive influence on my life.

To the children of Ethiopia for whom I wish life in all its wholeness.

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List of abbreviations

ACRWC - African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

CAR – children at risk

CH – individual child interview

CHN – number assigned to individual child interviewed

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

CSA – Central Statistics Authority of Ethiopia

EECMY- Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

EKHC – Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church EOTC – Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church

EPUB – electronic publication

FGD – focus group discussion

HCD – holistic child development

HIV/AIDS: Human Immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

MKC – Meserete Kristos Church

NGO - non-governmental organizations

OCMS – Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

QDA - qualitative data analysis

UK – United Kingdom

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

1.1. Introduction

This research focuses on an in-depth understanding of a group of Ethiopian children's perspectives and experiences of spirituality and the implications this may have for holistic child ministry run by churches and parachurch organizations. The study involves qualitative research. It specifically considers the Ethiopian context with a particular emphasis on the children of Wonji Shoa. The research participants are twenty-six children between ten and fourteen years old selected from two schools in Wonji Shoa: twelve from a public school and fourteen from a church school. Of the participants, 11 are beneficiaries of a development project that addresses their holistic needs while they stay with their families.

The study's purpose is twofold. First, it intends to analyze children's perspectives and experiences regarding spirituality, including the contextual factors surrounding child spirituality in Wonji Shoa. Second, upon analyzing children's perspectives, experiences and contextual factors, the study draws insights and discusses them in light of more comprehensive theories surrounding children's spirituality. Ultimately, the research argues for bringing the spiritual dimension of children to the theoretical and operational attention of child-focused endeavors, for example, "holistic child ministry", primarily in the Ethiopian context.

The research is conducted under the discipline of child spirituality and examines various theories reflected in contemporary research on the subject. Child spirituality discourses position children's views and experiences as primary points of departure in their scholastic analysis, synthesis, interpretation and thought propositions.

Spirituality in the context of this study is understood as children's perspectives and experiences of the spiritual realities such as relationships with God and people in their context. With this understanding, I use 'child spirituality' and 'spiritual dimension' of children interchangeably. The words 'God' and 'the Creator' are also used interchangeably to represent the divine. In the Ethiopian context, public discourses that aim to address Christians and Muslims together often use the term 'the Creator' instead of 'God' with a consideration that the Creator applies to all religions. Participants of this research used 'God' and 'the Creator' to refer to the same thing. In some instances, I have noted the same child using 'God' and 'the creator' interchangeably. For example, CH6, when asked, 'If God did not exist, what would happen to you?', she replied, "We will all die...if your **creator** does not exist, we will all die". She used 'creator' in the place of 'God'. Similarly, CH10 said, "The **creator** meets people in the heart because he created us he leads", but when talking about prayer, he said, "Prayer is just begging God". In other instances, different children used God and the Creator in referring to the same thing: "The creator lives in heaven" (CH11"; "right here, God in heaven and above" (CH8). Noting the contextual reality and children's use of the words, words 'God' and 'the Creator' are also used interchangeably.

This chapter presents the research problem and questions, how the research was initiated and the research locations in the ensuing subsections. The discipline under which the study was conducted, the scope of the study and its envisaged contributions are provided in the subsequent sections. The chapter closes with a brief outline of the chapters of the thesis.

1.2. The research problem

While the growing discourse in child spirituality signals a positive future toward the discussions needed and practical actions in the field, there are gaps yet to be addressed. The presence of children's perspectives and experiences on spirituality is frequently neglected in the

growing discussions (Adams, 2009, p.113). Researchers often theologize and theorize about and for children without their participation (Weber & de Beer, 2016, p.4; Grobbelaar, 2019, p.3). Commenting on the works of two child spirituality movements, Weber and de Beer note, 'We [researchers] mostly still theologise and theorise over, about and for children, without children being with us in new and hospitable spaces, to be able to share their own experiences, knowledge and insights first-hand.' (2016, p.4). With the absence of children's voices, literature reflects adults' views of children (Grobbelaar, 2019, p.3).

Further to the missed voices of children, most child spirituality research and literature are of Western origin, while more needs to be done in the African context (Grobbelaar, 2016, p. xvii; Hyde, 2008, p.117). Apart from being scant, child-focused literature in Ethiopia and broadly at the African level does not adequately reflect contextual realities (Abebe, 2008, p.2; Gebru, 2009, p.28; Grobbelaar, 2016, p.61). Child-focused academic literature originates in America and Europe (Grobbelaar, 2016, p. xvii). Additionally, there is a sense that research and practices are disconnected; child spirituality research has little impact on policy and practices, including education, health, childcare and development (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, p.419; Hornberger et al., 2006, p.458; Scott & Magnusson, 2006, p. 445).

Zooming into the Ethiopian context, the above gaps and inadequate attention to child spirituality stifle the holistic nature and practice of child-focused endeavors. Child poverty—the deprivation of material, spiritual and emotional resources that children need for survival and development—is unfortunately a reality for millions of Ethiopian children. According to UNICEF and Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia report, 88% of Ethiopian children live in

multidimensional poverty¹, depriving themselves of three to six essential goods and services (2018, p.9). The report calls for an integrated approach to meeting children's needs and ensuring their development.

Another aspect of children's needs in Ethiopia is related to involvement in risky actions and behaviors. For example, a study on adolescent sexuality by Turi et al. shows adolescents' involvement in substance abuse, like chewing chat (or khat, a leaf used as a stimulant) and drinking alcohol, as well as in unsafe sexual activities, like early engagement in multiple sexual relations (2016, p. 269). Likewise, another study conducted on suicide ideation reported that among the sampled 573 adolescents, one in five experienced suicide ideation and one in six had attempted suicide (Amare et al., 2018, p.1).

The rampant child poverty and the complex problems Ethiopian children and adolescents face call for all actors (stakeholders), including the church, to implement an integrated ministry that addresses all dimensions of life. Research in child well-being and development indicates that appropriate attention to the spiritual dimension of children and adolescents plays a significant role in promoting well-being and bringing healing (recovery) from traumatic experiences (de Souza, 2009, p.182-183, Kennedy, et al., 1998, pp.322-328, Lerner et al., 2006, p.70). Therefore, bringing the spiritual dimension to the fore in child ministry is a matter of importance and urgency.

Considering the gaps yet to be addressed, the critical role spirituality plays in children's lives, and the emerging discourses on child spirituality, this research focuses on understanding children's views and experiences of spirituality and its implications for holistic child ministry,

¹ Multidimensional child deprivation in this report was defined as deprivation in 3 to 6 age-specific dimensions: physical development (stunting), health, nutrition, education, health-related knowledge, information and participation, water, sanitation and housing (CSA and UNICEF Ethiopia, 2018, p.12)

particularly in the Ethiopian context. Proper understanding of children's spirituality is of paramount importance mutually for children and adults; as the Canadian scholar Elaine Champagne claims in her study of spirituality with young children, 'Reflecting on the meaning of their being-a-child [child spirituality] can enrich us with renewed perspectives on our own being-in-the-world' (2003, p.52). 'The more we know about children's spirituality, directly from children, the better our chances to near the core of the issue [what spirituality looks like for children], being able to better describe it, better define and better understand it' (Mata-McMahon, 2016, p. 10). Learning more about children's spirituality from the children themselves requires intentional and humble listening to their perspectives and lived experiences in their context.

With the specific problems presented so far, this research is focused on listening to children. It seeks responses to pertinent questions about child spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia. How do children view spirituality? How do children experience spirituality? In what way does children's understanding relate or differ from the broader conception of spirituality at the community level? What ecological factors are at play around children's understanding and practices of spirituality? How and in what ways will the field of child ministry benefit from insights children share from their lived experiences? The research tries to get answers to these and similar questions.

1.3. The inception of the study

My interest in doing this research emanated from the divergent perceptions I have witnessed about the spiritual aspects of holistic child development programs through my engagement in the field for nearly three decades. Some people overemphasize spirituality, often prioritizing 'the child's soul' over the other dimensions. Others uphold reductionist or skeptical views about considering spirituality in development undertakings. For others, spirituality is nothing except religion. These divergent views and their practical implications that I have seen in

my journey in holistic child development programs underpin my motivation to investigate children's spirituality.

I have been involved in a holistic development program that addresses the physical and spiritual needs of children in poverty. My journey with the holistic child development ministry began when my church called me to coordinate a Compassion-assisted sponsorship project that registered 230 children between five and twelve years old. I led this project for three years.

With the sponsorship project, I mingled with families and a community I did not know. My role required me to walk around, visit children and families, and understand the community context to ensure the project reaches children in critical need. Besides, the project expected children to attend the center for activities like playing, tutorial classes, letter writing, bible lessons, and health education. That was an opportunity for me to get to know children closely. My interaction with children and their caregivers, as well as with various segments of the community where my church and the project were, immersed me in the space of holistic approaches to child ministry. Through this experience, children gave me invaluable insights into why, what, and how to serve other people in need. Children's openness, genuine trust, loneliness, hope, desperation, liveliness, messiness, and everything they have and do have educated me holistically.

Later, in 1998, I joined Compassion International as a program facilitator, which widened my exposure to other communities in different parts of the country. My role included facilitating project openings in places where children's needs were compelling for outside support in addition to what families and their communities were doing. Compassion works with churches, and my role as a program facilitator involved training and supporting church leaders and volunteers so that they run child development programs successfully. In this journey, I realized various issues and

challenges churches in different communities faced related to holistic ministry, particularly its spiritual dimension.

In some communities, there was resistance against incorporating spiritual content like bible classes into the project activities. This resistance stemmed from a claim that spiritual activities for children are religious; they do not fall into development endeavors. Some government officials prohibited spiritual activities from being included in child development projects. Later, in 2009, the Ethiopian government clearly demarcated between religious (spiritual) and development activities with the 'Charities and Societies proclamation No.621/2009'. The proclamation in article 2.16 states that religious institutions should not include organizations established for charitable purposes. The implication was that churches could not run development programs within their premises. If they wanted to engage in organized philanthropic activities, they were required to register an independent entity for that purpose. That proclamation delineated development endeavors from faith-based activities.

The clear implication of restricting the church from engaging in charitable activities was that development activities should not incorporate spiritual components. The premise behind this view was that spiritual activities belong to religion. This direction created contradictions in many ways. My personal experience, what I heard from children, and my exposure to the church's long-standing engagement in development work led me to believe that separating the spiritual from other aspects of life was problematic. Moreover, it contradicts what contemporary literature on the topic of spirituality reflects.

The spiritual aspect of my life has been a source of encouragement, protection from harmful engagements and creating a sense of hope and optimism. When I was a child, my father helped me to memorize some biblical texts like the *ābune zebesemayati* (the Lord's prayer),

meli'ikite yoḥānisi (the gospel of John). When I started reading, the bible was among the first books that I used to read now and then. I used to read it to family members and visitors. Later, I started attending a house church and enjoyed the fellowship and bible study. I believe that journey was indispensable in shaping me. My faith has been an anchor, including in the time of communism when reading the bible and affiliating with people doing the same was considered an offense and used to cause punishment. The idea of dropping the spiritual from ministry endeavors conflicted with my faith, which I could not reconcile with my experiences.

The second contradiction of separating spirituality from other development activities was related to the testimony I heard from children and families on the benefit of a development program that includes spiritual activities. For example, participants of group discussions in FGD7 said, 'the church is already doing something now. The church gathers the youth to focus on their God, not to get into addiction or harmful practices'. Similarly, commenting on the benefit of activities facilitated in the religious context, CH12, a 14-year-old girl, says, 'the way I am now is different from the way I was before going to church. For example, many things that humans cannot abandon, sin and evil things, I have abandoned some, if not all'. These tangible experiences contradict what the proclamation disparaged.

The third contradiction has to do with the mandate of the church. The bible safeguards the mandate of the church to help people in need without reducing her identity as often epitomized by the commandment, love your neighbor as you love yourself. The church is 'empowered to demonstrate the ultimate form of love: the agape — the sacrificial and unconditional love that heals and restores relationships' (Compassion, 2011, p.38). Supporting the poor, whether in the form of almsgiving or holistic development programs toward sustainable positive impact (e.g.,

schools, hospitals, clean water, economic empowerment and emergency aid) is the practice of the Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical churches.

These contradictory views around spirituality and holistic child development programs partly concern the actors'² understanding of the subject. Unlike the well-established and shared meanings actors exhibit in the physical and cognitive dimensions, they do have various understandings of the spiritual dimension. Hence, the gap ultimately boils down to being conceptual, which lies beneath my motivation and conviction to look into spirituality with a particular focus on children's perspectives and experiences.

1.4. Background to the research problem

The divergent views that undergird the initiation of my research on children's spirituality include conceptual, attitudinal and practical dimensions. Regarding the conceptual dimensions, the main issue lies in understanding spirituality in two extremes: conservatively as religion and liberally as all-inclusive, relative and individualized without necessarily considering shared standards. The all-inclusive view is a typical expression of the postmodern attitude, which 'involves the repudiation of any claims to normativity or nonnegotiable ultimacy by any institution or agency, a thoroughgoing relativism about religion as well as other institutions and authorities' (Schneiders, 2000, p.11). While the conservative view presumes that spirituality is under the ownership, authority and control of religion and religious bodies, the liberal view enthusiastically claims spirituality to be in everything beyond the monopoly of religion. Whether everything spiritual should be domiciled within the territory of religion or should everything unrestrictedly be

² I use the word actor to refer to people and organizations involved in facilitating holistic child development programs

counted as spiritual begs for a systematically analyzed response that surpasses simplistic and spontaneous answers.

The attitudinal gap comprises the biased and reductionist views toward spirituality in science fields, resulting in the limited presence of the subject in research and theories. Spirituality was long excluded from scientific investigations as ephemeral, mystical, theological, ineffable, or transcendent to be a researchable subject; logical positivists perceived it as 'nothing more than a verbalized reification or product of the human imagination' (Moberg, 2010, p.101). There were criticisms and hostile influences from the psychoanalysis school of thought (Hyde, 2008, pp. 49-50). The conceptual and attitudinal gaps directly affect the presence and practice of spirituality in child-focused undertakings, such as in intervention programs for children in need.

1.4.1. Child spirituality: Extreme views

The spiritual nature of children holds an honored place in religious beliefs. Yust et al. note that there is a rich and deeper view of children's spirituality and different religions in their sphere of faith relate children to divinity. They sometimes regard children as reflections of divinity. For example, in the Hindu tradition, there is a belief that the 'One Supreme Being takes the form of various children as gods and goddesses and objects of worship.' Some schools of Buddhism see a child as a being with the potential to become a "bodhisattva" –an enlightened one. The Jewish tradition cherishes children as the gift of God and the hope of the future. For the Jewish faith, children are pure and innocent and reflect divine beneficence. Similarly, the Qur'an upholds the essential innocence of childhood and the understanding of children as "gifts from Allah" as key concepts in Islamic belief (Yust et al., 2006, pp. 15-17; Surr, 2017, p.187).

Similarly, for Christianity, the God becoming man, God born as a child, is a core tenet of orthodox Christian theology. The story of Christianity begins with the birth of a child – Jesus. In the birth of Jesus, 'God took on all the powerlessness, weakness, and neediness of human childhood for the sake of our salvation' (Anderson & Johnson, 1994, p. 20). 'The child is a sign of God's kingdom', and 'Jesus welcoming the child to be 'in the midst' of conversation' are key concepts in child theology (White & Willmer, 2009, p.17). According to Bunge, a professor of Theology and Humanities, there is a rich and diverse Christian tradition and theology concerning children, which she summarizes under six perspectives: (1) children as innocent gifts of God and sources of joy; (2) children as inherently sinful creatures with the moral agency to take some responsibility; (3) Children as developing human beings made in the image of God and inherently worthy of dignity and respect; (5) children as models of faith and sources of revelation for adults; and (6) children as vulnerable victims of injustice, war, and disease (Bunge, 2001, pp. 562-569). While diverse, among these conceptions of children are recognitions of the spiritual aspects of their being.

Stemming from such long-held beliefs and rich traditions, religious leaders and the people in their influence consider child spirituality a religious agenda, 'spiritual development is a religious not scientific question' (Roehlkepartain, 2004, p.120). Commenting on Christians' reaction, Morberg says,

Christians were especially resistant to its [spirituality's] scientific study. Many of them, with others, believed it was too sacred for study by the mundane, cold, worldly methods of science. Others thought it was so inscrutable that it was far beyond the range of sensory observations (2010, p.101)

Similarly, Adams et al. note that religious circles claim ownership and authority over the spiritual dimension and 'argued that it is impossible for spirituality to exist outside of religious context'

(Adams et al., 2008, p.12). Religion's claimed monopoly over spirituality raises questions about the subject's conceptualization and practical actions related to it.

Contemporary perspectives deal with spirituality, considering its existence in and outside religion. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child -CRC (1989)³ and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child -ACRWC (1990)⁴ see child spirituality in terms of rights. Similarly, many scholars, for example, Robert Coles, David Hay and Rebecca Nye, Brendan Hyde, Elaine Champagne, and Lisa Miller, argue that children's spirituality predates their religious commitment and practices and can also exist outside of religious contexts. Child spirituality has to do with the survival and thriving of children (Sagberg, 2017, p. 1).

The religious view and the contemporary perspectives around spirituality have implications for the practical field of holistic child development programs. Specifically, equating spirituality with religion is problematic when it comes to serving children from families of different religious backgrounds. There is a need to look into these issues closely. To do so, assessing what we can glean from the existing research and practices in the field will be necessary.

1.4.2. Child spirituality in the research and development interventions

Despite the rich religious traditions and the recent developments regarding child spirituality, the spiritual dimension of children has been among the least researched areas in the

³ Convention of the Rights of the Child about spiritual aspects of children: Article 17 States that Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.; Article 27 sub article 1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

⁴ The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: Article 14: sub article 1. Every child shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical, mental and spiritual health; Article 15: sub article 1. Every child shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.

field of social sciences (Benson et al., 2003:206; Nye, 2009, p. 81; Haight, 2004, p. 108; Boynton, 2011, p. 110; Hart, 2004, p.38). There have been times when social scientists distanced themselves from the reality of religion and showed academic biases, underestimation, and reductionism of spirituality in research endeavors (Yust et al., 2006, p. 2; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, pp. 2-4). The reductionist view treated spirituality as unscientific and unworthy of academic discussions and research (Jacobs, 2013:1, 8). There were criticisms and hostile influences from the psychoanalysis school of thought and the compartmentalized view of children from developmental psychologists (Hyde, 2008, pp.49-50). Specifically, psychologists' emphasis on cognitive development has resulted in presuppositions of child spirituality as a later age reality at the stages of adolescence and adulthood (Hart, 2004, p.38).

Similarly, heavily influenced by 'secular reductionism' and 'materialistic determinism' (Clarke, 2007, p. 77), the field of development studies has tended to marginalize the spiritual dimension of people and has been guiding development interventions in the exclusion of religious and spiritual dimensions of human needs. Development fields used to see spirituality as a taboo topic, avoiding it from development discourses, practices and research endeavors, and because of this, development practices failed to give people 'opportunities to reflect on how their development and their spirituality will and should shape each other' (Beek, 2000, p.31). Secular approaches to development often hesitate to consider intervention programs that include spiritual elements. 'The vocabulary and approach of spirituality seemed, often though not always, inimical to the technical, hard-nosed approach of development practice' (Marshall, 2001, p. 4). Children's spiritual needs and development, particularly in secular development programs, appear as the second priority compared to the physical, academic and social aspects. Such a practice contradicts the Convention's provisions on the child's rights.

Despite the prominence of child rights discourse, the attention given to listening to the spiritual voices of children leaves much to be desired (Adams et al., 2008, p. 40). With the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the contemporary world, particularly in the Western countries, bears marks of significant progress in listening to the voice of children and giving them due attention in education, health, family, child protection and other areas that are relevant to children and their development. In these spheres, the child's voice has become a part of the standard practice in social discourses, giving children wider opportunities to express their views and experiences (Adams et al., 2008, p. 31). However, steps to listen to children's spiritual voices appear to be progressing less well as concerning as in the other dimensions (Yust et al., 2006, p.3). There is still a concern that 'the spiritual dimension of children is often not being heard' (Adams et al., 2008, p. 32).

A similar concern is also noted in theological reflections and Christians' practices of child spirituality. While there are materials that focus on how to minister to children and multiple ways of helping them navigate doctrinal and ethical issues, there needs to be more when it comes to listening to them. 'The voice of the child in this sense seems to have been silenced. They are conspicuous by their absence' (Richards & Privett, 2009, p. xv). Grobbelaar notes similar dissatisfaction from the African context, 'All too often, children's agency and voices are ignored in the church and in doing theology' (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.34). In the context of the African church, children are viewed 'as objects of the ministry in need of 'something', whether instruction, salvation or maturity' (Knoetze, 2016, p.244).

The gaps highlighted in social science and development interventions contribute to a limited understanding of children's spiritual dimension and holistic child ministry. While there have been encouraging efforts recently, the significance of child spirituality has yet to be

extensively explored (Scott, 2003, p. 117). Likewise, the practical field of intervention programs for children in need does not seem to have theoretical and operational rigor in articulating children's spirituality, spiritual needs and mechanisms for appropriate ministry. While the Convention on the Rights of the Child was endorsed decades ago, 'the international community remains largely uninformed of what this right entails developmentally or legally' (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008, p. 129). Consequently, the strategy to map and support children's spirituality, spiritual experiences and development still needs to be mature enough to mobilize all actors around the cause.

1.4.3. Child spirituality in Ethiopian context

Viewed in light of the above discussions, the situation in Ethiopia has a similar story. While Ethiopia is a home of nearly fifty million children under the age of fourteen, child spirituality is rarely considered in child-related research and literature, with a few exceptions (e.g., Poluha 2004, One Hope 2010; Faris, 2012). Ethiopian children are raised with and dedicated to religion (Poluha, 2004, p.171). However, children's perspectives and experiences of spirituality have not been explored and understood. Moreover, child-focused endeavors mainly emphasize the physical, academic, and social dimensions. The spiritual dimension is an exception outside religious contexts.

The underlying causes for this inadequate attention to child spirituality in the Ethiopian context broadly relate to the perceived secular-religious divide that has come into effect with the coming of communism in 1974 and its aftermaths. The seventeen years of communism that Ethiopia had passed through banned spiritual activities officially. Many schools that used to offer religious education were closed, and churches were confiscated. Christian leaders were fiercely

persecuted. The aftermath of communism has left the perception that spirituality is a matter of religion while other spheres of life are treated as secular. This dichotomized view is reflected by non-religious and religious ones like evangelical believers (Girma, 2012, p.57; Hansen, 2015, pp. 139-140; Besha, 2021, p.59).

Following the secular trend, religion and state are separate entities in the Ethiopian constitution. In some way, this constitutional demarcation between religion and state has created a presupposition that spirituality should be limited to the religious spheres; consequently, anything religious should be bound to religious institutions. The space for a broader view of spirituality and its presence surpassing religious walls is constrained.

Enclosure of spirituality within the boundaries of religion prevents it from being considered in other sectors, such as education and development. Until recently, development programs have been run with secular attitudes relegating religion and the ‘non-material’ dimensions of people (Clarke, 2007, p.77; Myers, 2011, p.33). Secular views reflect cynicism about incorporating the spiritual dimension of children in development programs. In cases where development programs include spiritual aspects, it is not without stringent criticism and simplistic branding with religious manipulation and proselytization.

However, scholars around the globe challenge such restricted views and argue for a broader view of child spirituality. Lisa Miller, a professor of psychology and education, argues that spirituality serves as a resource to understand human development and well-being and that awareness of child spirituality is an enabling factor to better understand children and adolescents as well as to play a productive role in supporting their development (Miller, 2015, pp. 3-4). Showing interest and respect and listening to the spiritual voices of children empower adults to

nurture children's spirituality and its expression (Adams et al., 2008, p.29, 39). Hyde takes the idea of spirituality beyond a two-directional relationality as a movement towards ultimate unity with the divine (Hyde, 2008, pp.34, 43). The rising interest of these and other scholars to study in studying the spiritual dimension of children shows that child spirituality is an aspect of children that needs to be investigated closely and comprehensively.

While the recent burgeoning interest of researchers on the spiritual dimension of children is a critical step toward filling the gaps and challenges highlighted so far, research on the subject has not yet reached the point of representing children's perceptions and experiences from diversified sociocultural contexts in different parts of the world including Ethiopia. How children in the Ethiopian context view spirituality and the possible implications this could have on child-focused endeavors are areas that need a closer look. The need to include children's voices from different cultural and geographic contexts is also self-evident. The absence of children's spiritual voices affects our connection with them, our understanding of their needs, and our ability to gain valuable insights (Stonehouse & May, 2010, p.11). Considering the emerging discourse on child spirituality and the gaps yet to be addressed, this research seeks to understand children's views and experiences of spirituality from the Ethiopian context.

1.5. Research questions

Considering the background information and gaps presented above, this research intends to answer the following questions.

Primary research question: How can a better understanding of children's views and experiences of spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia, contribute towards holistic child ministry?

Secondary research questions:

1. How do children in Wonji Shoa understand and experience spirituality?
2. What contextual factors influence children's understanding and experiences of spirituality in Wonji Shoa?
3. What are the implications of children's understanding and experiences of spirituality for holistic ministry?

With its focus on child spirituality and the nature of the research questions it addresses, this research falls under the discipline of spirituality studies. The next section provides background on spirituality studies.

1.6. Umbrella discipline of the study

Until recently, spirituality studies have been excluded from scientific research and theories. However, that era seems to have given way to new interest in the subject in the contemporary world. The concept and implications of 'spirituality' have garnered growing interest in public, business, and academic spheres of the current society beyond the traditional religious realms. Scholars of religion, theologians, scientists, and activists of various disciplines, including medicine, education, psychology, psychiatry, politics, business, environment, sociology, human rights, literature, and art, propagate spirituality from their respective angles. Spirituality is spotlighted in mainstream magazines, peer-reviewed journals and practitioner-oriented books as well as by celebrities and public figures (Kourie, 2006, p. 19; Jacobs: 2013:1; Yust et al, 2006, p. 2; Schneiders⁵,1989, pp.679-680). Likewise, there has been increasing attention to exploring and

⁵ Sandra Marie Schneiders is a New Testament professor with different specialists, including the theory of spirituality, is among the scholars frequently mentioned as key contributors in developing the field of spirituality. 'Schneiders has She formulates an all-purpose, user-friendly definition of spirituality in general' (Kourie & Ruthenberg, 2009, p.192). '[She] has been perhaps the most articulate and prolific English-speaking scholar writing on the definitions and methodologies appropriate to this relatively new academic discipline' (Holder, 2005, p.6).

understanding children's spirituality (Adams, et al, 2008, p.9; Hyde, 2008p. 9; Hay and Nye, 2006, p.9).

Kourie sees the growing interest in spirituality as a renewal movement in human reality that has existed for ages. 'We are witnessing a renewal of interest in perhaps what is one of the oldest traditions in human history, namely, the transmission of spiritual wisdom' (Kourie, 2009, p.169). Spirituality, that science fields treated as 'too ephemeral, mystical, theological, ineffable, or transcendent to be a researchable subject' (Moberg, 2010, p.101), is now considered a discipline on its own in the postmodern world (Schneiders, 1989, p.676; Jeongho, 2016, p.110; Kourie, 2009, p.148). Noting this development, Kourie writes,

It is not often that we witness the birth of a new discipline; the academy is slow to open its doors to "newcomers". Yet, within the last few decades, we have seen the introduction of the "new" discipline of Spirituality into the revered corridors of higher education, not without some raised eye-brows from those within the established disciplines, in particular that of theology and religion (2009, p.148).

Hailing the emergence of the new field of Spirituality in the modern academy, Kourie notes, 'The birth of the "new" (yet ancient) discipline of Spirituality is one of the most exciting endeavors for those involved' (2009, p.149). Here, it is to be noted that the field of spiritual study is not a new advent. Long before it acquired its new name, it existed subsumed in religion and theology fields (Schneiders, 1989, p.685; Moberg, 2010, p.99; Kourie, 2009, p. 156). Following its elevation to a field of study, Spirituality is given in university-level academic programs. Furthermore, there are specialized conferences, journals and plethora of publications that reflect and disseminate the essence and methodology of the field (Schneiders, 1989, p.679; Kourie, 2009, p.150).

While there are diverse ways of Spirituality, the field of Spirituality at its core investigates spiritual experiences of human beings, 'the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's

life in terms of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives' (Schneiders, 1989, p.692). The field is interdisciplinary overflowing the borders of theology and religious studies into a broader conversation with other fields like anthropology and psychology (Kourie, 2009, p.152; Jeongho, 2016, p.130, Schneiders, 2005, p.19). Furthermore, the discipline is holistic; it pertains to the 'human being as a whole: spirit, mind, and body; individual and social; culturally conditioned and ecologically intertwined with all of creation; economically and politically responsible' (Schneiders, 2005, p.17). Schneiders, in her earlier works, indicated that:

spirituality is a holistic discipline in that its inquiry into human spiritual experience is not limited to explorations of the explicitly religious, i.e. the so-called "interior life." The psychological, bodily, historical, social, political, aesthetic, intellectual, and other dimensions of the human subject of spiritual experience are integral to that experience insofar as it is the subject matter of the discipline of spirituality (1989, p.693).

These notable characteristics of the field of spirituality facilitate the study of human beings' spiritual dimensions to gain insights, address concerns, and enhance well-being. With its emphasis on examining spiritual experiences in a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, the discipline of spirituality provides a framework for studying child spirituality.

Accordingly, this research falls under the discipline of spirituality. Apart from the apparent connection implied by the focus on the phenomenon of spirituality, the discipline of spirituality also offers the opportunity to examine child spirituality holistically through an interdisciplinary approach. It gives the liberty to consider child spirituality, including non-religious aspects. Moreover, as spirituality is a growing discipline, this specific study on child spirituality contributes insights from the specific context of Wonji Shoa to the broader field of human spirituality.

1.7. The research location: Wonji Shoa

1.7.1. Choosing the research site

When I planned to do an in-depth study about child spirituality, I envisioned interacting with children in a specific location that reflects the broader socio-cultural mix of the country and, at the same time, where I speak the language that the community uses. I also considered the accessibility of the site and existing relationships I have had with people in the area so that I would not be seen as an outsider, as this could influence the level of interaction with children and limit the depth of the research. Considering these criteria, I tentatively chose two communities, collected preliminary information from each, and contacted people for additional information. Based on the information, I found Wonji Shoa to be the right site:

1. Wonji Shoa is a small town with a mix of people from different parts of the country. It is home to all religions in Ethiopia: Christianity (Orthodox, Evangelical and Catholic) and Islam.
2. The people of Wonji speak fluent Amharic, which is my mother tongue.
3. Wonji Shoa is accessible by road. It is only a two-to-three-hour drive from where I live.
4. I have some knowledge of the town and its children's situation. The organization I work for runs child development projects in partnership with some churches in the community.

Therefore, I found Wonji Shoa a place where I could conduct my study within the limits of my resources (time and finance).

1.7.2. Background of Wonji Shoa town

Wonji Shoa is a small town located about 120 km to the East of Addis Ababa. It is situated at the heart of the Ethiopian Rift Valley at 9.1450° N, 40.4897° E. The total population of Wonji

Shoa is 12,721, (male 6,104 and Female 6,617)⁶. The establishment of the town is attached with Wonji Sugar Factory by a Dutch company, H.V.A. The background of the sugar factory gives a better picture of this town.



Map 1. Location of Wonji Shoa

After preparatory work that took about three years, the Wonji sugar factory started production in March 1954⁷. The Wonji Sugar Factory was among the first factories to attract unskilled labor from all over the country, specifically from highly populated districts of the Southern Ethiopia⁸ (e.g. Gurage and Kembata). By then, employment opportunities beyond agriculture were limited and mainly government led. Wonji Sugar factory created an opportunity to a new socio-economic lifestyle.

⁶ Oromia region population Size of Towns by Sex, Region, Zone and Weredas as of July 2021, Ethiopian Statistical service

⁷ Sweet Magazine Special Edition 2014, p.28

⁸ Wonji Shoa Sugar Factory Jubilee Magazine, p.13

Wonji Shoa is dusty in the dry season. Its weather is not only warm but hot most of the year. The town is warm not only in climate but socially also. Currently, many of the residents are pensioners. After spending their years of strength in the factory, most of them live on an average monthly pension of less than 20 USD, whereas many of their children have left Wonji in search of other opportunities both in the country and abroad. Girls and young women mainly go to Arab countries, usually leaving behind their young children. Hence, many children in Wonji are being taken care of by elderly grandparents who struggle both physically and financially.

1.7.3. Children of Wonji Shoa

The children of Wonji are easily identified because of the permanent mark that fluoride has stamped on them. Because of its location in a volcanic area, Wonji's water is highly fluorinated for drinking. The people of Wonji drink untreated water, and they are obliged to carry not only the marks but also the health issues and complications related to it.

Many of the children face the brutal reality of poverty. Because of the critical needs of children in Wonji, Compassion has opened seven sponsorship projects in partnership with churches in the Wonji area, including Wonji Shoa. Despite the challenges of abject poverty, the children of Wonji are outgoing and confident in expressing their views; they relate easily and engage lively with adults.

1.7.4. My Experience of Wonji Shoa

I have known the Wonji area for over twenty years through Compassion's sponsorship program for children in poverty. My first exposure to Wonji town and the children in Wonji was in 1997 when I led a children's trip from Addis Ababa, the city where I live. We visited Wonji Sugar Factory and then spent the afternoon in a football match with the children of Wonji Gefersa Meserete Kristos church project children. The day was fun, particularly seeing children connected

despite coming from different contexts and meeting for the first time. Later, I visited the town several times in relation to the child development program that Wonji churches and Compassion International Ethiopia run in partnership.

One of the most personally impactful events I had in Wonji was a Marathon race we organized in May 2014. We hosted men and women from the Netherlands. The Marathon was held in Wonji Shoa and its outskirts. Wonji Shoa is a small town by itself but is commonly known as part of the bigger Wonji town. Running gave us the opportunity to see the surrounding terrains of the town.

The Marathon comprised a half marathon (21km), a full Marathon (42km) and a Super Marathon (63km). I ran a half marathon, which allowed me to know Wonji Shoa children differently. Children were joining runners out of passion, and they were running well in a way that seemed fun. While they did not have formal preparatory exercise and proper clothing or footwear for the run, they were enjoying themselves by the run. A group of them joined me. I witnessed their passion, strength, and confidence in running and how they interact with people they have not known before. This experience, added to my previous exposures, led me to learn more about the children of Wonji Shoa, specifically their spiritual dimension. The situation and potential of Wonji children, the relationships that I have developed over time with leaders and development practitioners in the area and the accessibility of the town were factors that helped me decide to choose Wonji Shoa as my research site.

1.8. Delimitations of the study

This research focuses on children's spirituality, specifically from the perspective and experiences of children from the small town of Wonji Shoa. While the phenomenon of spirituality is interrelated with other domains of children, such as affective and cognitive domains, the study

examined the spiritual dimension. It did not intend to cover other areas. Moreover, this research was conducted specifically to assess the possible implications of spirituality for holistic child ministry and holistic child development programs in the context of evangelical churches.

The study participants were children between 10 and 14 years old when the first data collection was conducted. The first data collection was conducted in April 2017. Three follow-up interviews, one individual and two group discussions, were conducted in February and October 2019. The interviews were conducted with freedom for children to share their views and experiences in the way they feel comfortable. While this was helpful for children to freely share their views, it posed some limitations, especially in cases where I would have liked children to dwell more on some of the issues.

Considering the specific phenomenon of the study in particular town of Wonji Shoa with selected children, direct generalization of findings to represent other contexts is not claimed. However, there are reasons to consider the realities of children in Wonji Shoa applicable in other parts of the country. People living in Wonji Shoa have their origins in different parts of the country, which more or less represents the population mix of the country. Similarly, children of Wonji Shoa share the realities of children in broader contexts of Ethiopia, such as the education system, health services, and religious practices. They also face multidimensional poverty, which is a reality for the majority of Ethiopian children (see in section 1.2). Accordingly, majority of Ethiopian children face more or less similar challenges. Therefore, it is conceivable to suppose the findings of this research to be true in other contexts of Ethiopia.

1.9. Organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. This chapter (chapter 1) introduces the thesis and presents the background of the study, including the purpose of the research, the questions it

intends to answer, and its scope. The chapter also highlights the research's location in the discipline of spirituality studies.

Chapter two presents a review of the contemporary understanding of child spirituality. Starting with a broader conceptual understanding of spirituality, it discusses the relationship between spirituality and religion and clarifies the position this research has taken. Then follows a review of the understanding of child spirituality in contemporary research on spirituality from the African and Ethiopian contexts and broadly from the perspective of developmental theories. Key concepts identified as a framework for this study are provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter three discusses holistic ministry. It explores the concepts of ministry and holism at a broader level and then zooms into holistic child ministry practice. Chapter four presents research approaches and methods. Chapters five and six are finding chapters. Chapter Five discusses how children in Wonji Shoa understand and experience spirituality, and by doing so, it intends to answer the first sub-question of the research. Likewise, chapter six discusses contextual factors that influence child spirituality in Wonji Shoa and intends to answer the second sub-question of the research.

Chapter Seven draws insights from Chapters Five and Six and discusses their implications for holistic ministry in light of existing understandings and gaps that chapter three discussed on holistic ministry. Chapter eight summarizes the major research findings and discusses how the overarching research question is answered. It also highlights the contribution of the study to the body of knowledge in the discipline of spirituality and to the practical field of holistic child ministry.

1.10. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide essential background information about the research. Accordingly, it has outlined the research's purpose, the problem it revolves around, the questions it tries to answer, its location within the academic discipline and the specific place it was conducted. The next chapter reviews contemporary views and theories on child spirituality.

Chapter 2. Child spirituality: contemporary views and theories⁹

2.1. Introduction

Despite the eras of reductionism and the disappearance of spirituality from public debate and discourses, there is an upsurge of interest in spirituality in the contemporary world. To the level of one's amazement at how that could be, academic works and popular views pop up quickly with a one-word hit on the Google browser, filling the computer screen and leading to an endless source of information from website links, blogs, podcasts, journal articles and books. At times, the voluminous information overwhelmingly inundates, repudiating the capacity to tell between where the beginning and the end is.

Regardless of the amount of information and the subsequent questions on coherence and clarity, the fact that the topic of spirituality, going beyond traditional religious affiliation, made it to the public square has signaled a loud voice that the subject amounts to consideration not only at theoretical levels but also in places where there is pragmatism and commitment to address gaps

⁹ The word 'child' denotes two broader meanings. In one sense, it refers to blood relationship 'with respect to parentage and consanguinity' and, in another sense, 'the status of a human being in its early years of life' (Teshome, 1997, p.39). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) define the child as a person under 18. The general understanding of the child in the Ethiopian legal framework is age-based, i.e., a person below 18 years old (Teshome, 1997, p. 40; Alemu & Birmeta, 2012, p.12). The word 'child' in this research falls within the conventional definition of the age bracket; all the research participants were children in the age range between 10 and 14 years.

and needs the real-life people and their interactions echo. Child ministry is one of the fields that needs a closer look from the spiritual dimension.

As indicated in **section 1.2.**, this research focuses on an in-depth understanding of children's perspectives and experiences of spirituality and the implications this may have on holistic child ministry run by churches and like-minded actors. Notably, the research aims to answer how a better understanding of children's views and experiences of spirituality contributes to holistic ministry to children by examining children's perspectives and experiences of spirituality and the sociocultural factors at play around this. Conducting the research necessitated a review of existing scholastic works on the subject to understand what has been done so far and what the current trend looks like. Accordingly, this chapter reviews how related theories have understood and discussed child spirituality and its context in recent decades.

Child-focused literature discusses child spirituality with variations in the depth and breadth of analysis. Some theories have dealt with the subject at length, while others touch on it implicitly. Considering the subject's multidisciplinary nature, I limit this review to major theories indispensable in child-focused discussions, including child spirituality. To set the conceptual background of spirituality and the relationship between spirituality and religion, **section 2.2.** of the chapter presents how contemporary discourses understand the concept of spirituality and its relationship with religion. Then, it highlights the fundamental concepts of spirituality this research adopts and its position on the relationship between spirituality and religion.

Section 2.3. highlights child spirituality, particularly emphasizing scholastic works in the last three decades. The section starts with a brief overview of child spirituality in religious traditions. It reviews how scholars define and describe it in their research focused on understanding the subject. Then, it zooms in on reviewing the seminal works of Robert Coles and Hay and Nye

and a brief review of Champagne's and Hart's research findings on spirituality as a mode of being and capacity. Many scholars, for example, Hyde, Mata-McMahon, and Ratcliff, regard Robert Coles' work as a groundbreaking contribution to the rise of child spirituality movements.

Similarly, Hay and Nye's theory of child spirituality as relational consciousness has been influential in furthering research efforts. Taking note of not only their prominence but also the insights they brought to understanding child spirituality, the works of Coles, Hay and Nye are critically discussed by bringing other scholars to the conversation. Moreover, considering their way of viewing spirituality as a mode of being and capacities, Champagne's and Hart's works are also reviewed.

Section 2.4. reviews the general understanding of child spirituality, specifically from the angle of the African and Ethiopian contexts. It gives how child spirituality is understood in light of the African context, where spirituality is often viewed as part of broader sociocultural interactions.

Section 2.5. assesses the broader child development theories to see what they have to say about the spiritual aspect of a child. While there has been overt criticism of child development theories for lacking attention to the spiritual dimension, child spirituality cannot be reduced from child-focused issues, whether it is overtly discussed or kept implicit. The review of major developmental theories of child development provides evidence of spirituality; however, the evidence is fragmented.

Section 2.6. closes the chapter by drawing critical insights from the works reviewed and highlighting questions yet to be answered. **Section 2.7.** concludes the chapter by drawing observations from the previous sections.

2.2. Contemporary understanding of spirituality

2.2.1. The concept of spirituality

According to Sheldrake (2013, p.2), the word spirituality has its origins from the Latin noun '*spiritualitas*' associated with the adjective *spiritualis* (spiritual) and from the Greek '*pneuma*' (spirit) and '*pneumatikos*' (adjective, spiritual). Peng-Keller describes 'spirituality' as a 'traveling concept' oscillating between anthropological, cosmological and theological views. In the early days of Christianity, the word 'spirituality' referred to 'an aspect of a human being'; 'a life imbued with the Holy Spirit'; 'the work of the holy spirit in all dimensions of human life' (Peng-Keller, 2019, p.88). With the development of scholasticism in theology, spirituality came to be used as umbrella term for things of immaterial value that did not belong to the realm of worldly affairs (Peng-Keller, 2019, p.88). Continuing its journey, spirituality in the contemporary world is extended to denote 'individualized, de-traditionalized and de-institutionalized' realities of human beings beyond religion (Peng-Keller, 2019, p.87). The concept has taken diverse forms, ranging from New Age philosophies to the embrace of alternative health remedies (Vialle, et al, 2008, p.1; Yust, et al, 2006, p.1).

The continuing changes and the diversified understandings conveyed in the process have made the conventional definition of spirituality unrealistic and difficult. There is doubt whether a single definition could adequately encapsulate 'the richness, complexity, and multidimensional nature of this concept' (Benson et al., 2003, p. 205; Roehlkepartain, 2004, p. 121). Spirituality is viewed to surpass confinement in a few words (King, 2013: 4; Haight, 2004, p. 110; Nye, 2009, p. 1). With the lack of a shared definition to consider in research endeavors, scholars offer descriptions and stipulative definitions for the concept to be understood in their research milieu. However, stipulative definitions share common threads including viewing spirituality as inner

personal quality, subjective experiences, quest for meaning and connectedness (Carroll, 1998:6; Miller, 2015:25; Hay and Nye, 2006:21-22; Yust, et al, 2006: 8).’Rather than searching for a universally agreed definition, a more helpful approach seems to be to identify common features of different usages and ways of understanding children’s spirituality; and to use a range of metaphors’ (Eaude, 2023, p.24).

Stipulative definitions scholars use consider both social science perspectives and religious traditions. For example, in helping professions like social work, nursing, psychiatry and education, understanding of spirituality comprises a person’s mode of being, striving for meaning and purpose; relational consciousness and intimate experience of the divine (Champagne, 2003:44; Canda, 1988:30; Carroll, 2001:6; Miller, 2015:25; Hay and Nye, 2006:21-22, 63, 109; Hart, 2006:164). As Carroll notes, spirituality denotes the wholeness of humanity with dual meanings, the innate essence and experiential dimension of a person. ‘Spirituality-as-essence’ includes supernatural essence, source of soul and capacity for growth, whereas as ‘a dimension of a person’, it may refer to behaviors and experiences developed through self-transcendence and connectedness with others (Carroll, 1998, pp. 3-5, 8-10). According to this understanding, spirituality is a natural, experiential and dynamic human dimension. These characteristics of spirituality are reflected in other operational definitions as well (e.g., Benson et al., 2003, pp.205-206; Yust et al., 2006, pp.8-9).

Discussing spirituality from the perspectives of established religious cultures, belief systems and rich experiences accumulated over centuries, Yust et al, adopt the following operational definition:

Spirituality is the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence in which the individual participates in the sacred—something greater than the self. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and ethical responsibility. It is experienced, formed, shaped and expressed

through a range of religious narratives, beliefs and practices, and is shaped by many influences in family, community, society, culture and nature (2006, p.8).

In this definition, the authors have highlighted distinctive features of spirituality. First, spirituality is 'an intrinsic human capacity'; it is among the qualities that constitute humanness and drive human experience. Spirituality is the irreducible minimum of humanness that naturally puts all human beings on equal footings: being spiritual is part of being human. Second, spirituality is related to but not defined by religion and faith only. Spirituality can be nurtured both within and outside traditional religious frameworks. Thirdly, spirituality involves growth, maturation and transformation and hence can be cultivated toward full realization in mystical, relational and divine aspects. Fourth, spirituality is embedded in relationships and communities, meaning that it is not limited to an individual's experience or phenomenon. Finally, spirituality is expressed in ethical behavior; it is not only "inner life" reality but also manifested in "outer life" as ethical behavior and action (Yust et al., pp. 2006:8-9).

Characterization of spirituality as an inner reality, the experience of self-transcendence, and connectedness with others, appears more consistently through the work of different scholars as well. For example, in Benson et al.'s operational definition of spiritual development, spirituality refers to a human capacity, self-transcendence, and connectedness in a continuous journey of change and transformation (2003, p. 205). Writing from a psychology and education background, Lisa Miller sees spirituality as an inner sense of relationship and dialogue with divine presence, including but not limited to God (Miller, 2015, p.25). Hay and Nye's research on child spirituality emphasizes relationality. They have conceptualized spirituality as a heightened awareness of relationships with inter- and intra-personal domains (2006, p. 109). In his study on primordial elements of spirituality in youth, Michael Mason focuses on the experiential aspects and considers

spirituality a conscious way of life (worldview, ethos and practices) based on a transcendent referent (Mason, 2004, p.8).

While a plethora of literature discusses spirituality from various perspectives and interests, it seems that there is some scholastic consensus in characterizing the concept using personal and shared realities of human beings. Human essence, transcendence, and connection are the most repeatedly observed features in the description of spirituality. Accordingly, spirituality could be conceptualized as a composite concept that comprises human nature (innate being and capacity), human transcendence (experiencing the external reality especially the divine) and human connection (relationship). Spirituality is an inherent aspect of human nature that defines humanness, drives self-transcendence and enables connectedness with others. Spirituality is ‘the capacity of persons to transcend themselves through knowledge and love, that is, to reach beyond themselves in relationship to others and thus become more than self-enclosed material monads’ (Schneiders, 2000, p.3).

Considering the various views and discussions presented so far, the concept of spirituality can be summarized in three key terms related to human reality: capacity, experience and relationality. Understood with a combination of these key features, spirituality is broad and multidimensional. It is both personal and interpersonal, individual and communal, religious and non-religious. This way of looking at the concept invites revisiting the long-held view of equating spirituality as religion. However, this understanding should not shadow the relationship between religion and spirituality. In line with this, the following section presents a brief review of the relationship between religions and spirituality.

2.2.2. Religion and spirituality

In contrast to the long-held conflation of spirituality with religion, there are contemporary views that separate them (Nelson, 2009:3, 9). Religion is taken as concrete faith practices and abstract attitudes in the presence of God. In contrast, spirituality is conceptualized in terms of relationships, inner motivation, search for meaning and meditation practices (Zinnbauer et al., 1999, p.892; Nelson, 2009, p.9). Hay noted that people perceive spirituality 'as much warmer, associated with love, inspiration, wholeness, depth, mystery and personal devotion like prayer and meditation'. In contrast, they see religion to be associated with 'what is publicly available, such as churches, mosques, Bibles, prayer books, religious officials, weddings and funerals' (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 19). Such views may reflect biased and inadequate perspectives toward religion as narrow, archaic, imposing, ritualistic, hierarchical, rigid and less attractive. In contrast, spirituality is acclaimed 'for seeing the unity of the sacred, human beings and nature, providing a holistic approach and all-encompassing worldview' (Niekerk, 2018, p. 11).

However, some scholars argue against this divide. For example, Zinnbauer, et al argue that without religion, spirituality becomes disproportionately 'broad and bland', communicating little about what it is (Zinnbauer et al., 1999, p.904). Carr, writing from the angle of spiritual education, argues that it is attachment to religion that positions spirituality to a more precise orientation and content, consequently saving it from reduction to a 'hotchpotch of only vaguely connected items of cognition, intuition and feeling between which, it is well nigh impossible to discern any coherent conceptual connections' (Carr, 1995, p.86). There is a risk for adherents of spirituality without religion to 'end up becoming an institution – the very thing that they objected to in the religious domain' (Niekerk, 2018, p. 11). According to these arguments, divorcing spirituality from religion is difficult, if not impossible. A claim of no religion but spirituality leads to a sort of religion,

perhaps nameless for the time being. Alternatively, it risks the concept of spirituality to be broadly defined and become meaningless or handleless.

Recognizing long-held commonality and the undeniable distinctiveness of religion and spirituality, some scholars consider the two constructs distinct yet related. For example, Ratcliff and May visualize an overlapping circle with a shared space representing the meaning of life and the quest for transcendence. Similarly, Zinnbauer et al. propose ‘an integrative perspective that can account for the varieties of individuals’ religious and spiritual experiences without polarizing the two’ (1999, p. 904). The same understanding is applied in the works of many researchers, (e.g., Benson, et al., Yust et al.). This understanding brings a reasonable balance without unrealistically meshing up or separating the two subjects. The empirical boundary between spirituality and religion is porous (Ammerman, 2013, p.258). They have strong links that make the integrative perspective a reasonable proposal.

The link between the two concepts stands strong. Some definitions intentionally find and acknowledge this link without underplaying their differences. This common ground is attached to the concept and sense of the ‘sacred’. The ‘Sacred is a person, an object, a principle, or a concept that transcends the self (Hill et al., 2000, pp.64 -66). According to Hill et al., the ‘Sacred’ is central to the experience of both religion and spirituality (Hill et al., 2000, p. 64). The idea of the ‘Sacred’ includes ‘the concept of God, divinity, transcendence, and ultimate reality’, and accordingly, spirituality is described as ‘a search for the sacred, a process through which people seek to discourse, hold on to, and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives’ (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, p.5). The sacred is defined ‘through institutional mechanisms like ecclesiastical authority, sacred writings and traditions’ in a religious context (Hill et al., 2000, p.64). With the Sacred, the two realities are intertwined (Hill et al., 2000, p.71).

With this understanding as a backdrop and considering contextual realities, my research adopts the 'distinctiveness yet related' view. The 'distinctive yet related' position embraces existing realities of the research context where the community and the nation at large highly regard religion. On the other hand, it also encourages us to consider the broader nature of spirituality beyond religion. Intentionality in considering links, shared themes, and distinctive aspects of spirituality would better contribute to understanding the subject of child spirituality, which is the focus of my research.

2.3. Child spirituality in contemporary research

The idea that children have innate spirituality is not new. Children's spiritual nature is central to the diverse and rich religious traditions. Different religions highlight children's spiritual being in their theologies, traditions and practices (Anderson & Johnson, 1994, p. 20; Yust et al., 2006, pp. 15-17). In Christian theology, as described by Yust et al, children are spiritual beings who reflect divine nature and beneficence. In the Islamic faith, children are gifts from Allah. Hinduism considers boys and girls as manifestations of divinity. In Judaism, children are the gift of God and the hope of the future. In religious cultures, young children denote innocence, purity and closeness to the Creator. They grow with religious socialization and corresponding expectations to adhere to religious faith, rituals and practices. Religious culture embraces children's inherent nature, religious nurture and practice. Religious traditions have reasonably established views on children's spiritual aspect (Yust et al., 2006, pp. 15-17).

Unlike the long-held views in religious traditions, child spirituality in social science research embraces a history of ups and downs. Reviewing child-focused research efforts in the last 100 years, Ratcliff has identified four periods that child spirituality research has passed through 'holistic periods, declining interest, cognitive phases, and the recent spiritual emphasis' (2007,

p.218). The first phase ran from 1892 to 1930, which was markedly holistic, whereby scholars viewed the religious dimension of children as inseparable from other dimensions. Ratcliff notes,

During those early years, religion and the daily lives of children apparently were less dichotomized than today. It was not uncommon for a research study of some aspect of child development—reasoning, for example—to include examples that were religious in nature. Thus, in an early journal article on children's thought processes, Sunday school, Jesus, and heaven were considered side-by-side with non-religious topics (2010, p.8).

There was a holistic view of children in the first phase. However, it did not continue due to developments that made religious interests less palatable.

The second phase covers the period between 1930 and 1960. During this period, emphasis on the religious experiences of children declined due to the growth of secularism and the opposing view and stringent criticism of religion from the school of psychoanalysis and behaviorist psychologists (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp. 49-50). At the same time, the rationalistic framework got increased attention. The third phase (1960-1990) is known as a cognitive period, where cognitive development was in the limelight, and a study on spirituality focused on the religious concepts of children. The cognitive focus neglected the possibility of spirituality in the lives of children (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp.49 -50). An emphasis on child spirituality marks the last phase (1990 onwards), during which research in child spirituality has grown to engage in children's religious and non-religious experiences. Scholars investigating child spirituality seek to consider all aspects of children holistically (Ratcliff, 2010, p.11) and the interest in the field is growing, especially in psychology and education disciplines (Scarlett, 2006, p.28).

Noting the growing interest and attention to child spirituality, Scarlett calls the current developments 'the spiritual child movement'. According to Scarlett, the child spirituality movement is a reaction to the tradition of stage approaches applied for spirituality and religion, which was

'too cognitive' in focus (2006, p. 28). According to Hay, the problem with stage approaches was 'their narrowness, coming near to dissolving religion into reason and therefore childhood spirituality into nothing more than a form of immaturity or inadequacy' (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 57). The limited attention of psychology to the spiritual dimension of children has given way to the current revival of research interest in child spirituality.

An overview of current research endeavors shows that studies on child spirituality have various objectives, including improvements in the school curriculum, enhancing children's well-being and resilience, empowering children's spiritual life and combating the influences of electronic media (Hyde, 2008, pp. 16-17, Hay and Nye, 2006, p.9). Many scholars (e.g., Brendan Hyde (2008), Anne Giesenberg (2000), and Kori Nemme (2012)), see child spirituality in the context of education. Hyde describes spirituality as an ontological reality involving children's connectedness and experience of unity with others (2008, p.42). For Giesenberg, spirituality is an innate part of a person that comprises awareness, a sense of compassion and a relationship with people and other things in the surrounding (2007, p. 257). Similarly, Nemme defines spirituality as 'an active and lived process that directs and gives an individual's actions and beliefs. It is the construction of meaning through experiences of connection and the development of values in coming to know the self and the world' (2008:12).

Studies from Christian perspectives include Allen's research on children's spirituality in an intergenerational Christian context. Allen succinctly describes child spirituality as 'awareness of relationship with God' (2002, p.204). Similarly, Glanville, in her doctoral thesis on discerning the legitimacy of a child's revelatory experience with God, described child spirituality as 'Relationality [relational consciousness]' that 'includes a broader role of the Holy Spirit and a wider range of relational experiences with God' (2016:52).

Apart from their particular emphases, descriptions of child spirituality from educational and Christian perspectives share cross-cutting themes like inborn reality, awareness of relationship with self and others, meaning-making process, and experience with God and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the latest understanding of child spirituality primarily includes the child's nature and continuous engagement (experience) with the surrounding ecology, including human beings and the divine.

Under this broader view of child spirituality as key element of children's nature and experience, some researchers, for example, Robert Coles, give detailed narratives of child spirituality, whereas others like Hay and Nye have worked under and toward a specific theoretical framework. Many scholars in the field of child spirituality, for example Hyde, Hay and Nye, Mata-McMahon, and Ratcliff, consider the work of Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, as a forerunner of the current revival of research in child spirituality. Similarly, the work of David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, is also highlighted as a significant influence in the field. I now briefly review these two influential and representative works.

2.3.1. Robert Coles' narration of child spirituality

2.3.1.1. Curiosity for child spirituality

Robert Coles' narrations of children's spirituality portray the richness, vastness and depth of children's spiritual dimensions. Children's spirituality can be seen in their joys and sufferings, excitements and depression experienced in the past, present and future. Trained in pediatrics and psychiatry, Coles was drawn to fieldwork with children after witnessing the stresses and difficulties children were experiencing in New Orleans, USA, in the 1960s. Coles enunciates, 'Had I not been right there, driving by the mobs that heckled six-year-old Ruby Bridges, a black first-grader, as she tried to attend the Frantz school, I might have pursued a different life' (1990, p. xi). Through

engagement with children in different contexts, Coles wrote many books about children's life, including *The Moral Life of Children*, *The Political Life of Children* and *The Spiritual Life of Children*.

Coles' emphasis on children's spiritual dimension was not his original intent. While he was writing his books, *The Moral Life of Children* and *The Political Life of Children*, Coles says, 'I began to remember certain long-age moments with children: a remark, a picture drawn, a daytime reverie shared, a dream or nightmare reported all of them in some fashion having a religious or spiritual theme' (1990, pp. xiii-xiv). After reviewing the data he already had at hand, he saw nuggets of ideas the data could uncover about the spiritual dimension of children. Noting the potential themes from the data led him to pursue an inquiry into children's spirituality.

Through reading and reflection on what children shared out of their realities, Coles observed children's perceptions, questions, interpretations and experiences about their life and relationship with God. He noticed spiritual themes surfacing while reflecting on children's remarks, drawings and dreams shared during his research journey. Children exhibited high regard for God, as a black Mississippi girl explained after she drew a picture of herself:

"That's me, and the Lord made me. When I grow up my momma says I may not like how He made me, but I must always remember that He did it, and it's His idea. So when I draw the Lord He'll be a real big man. He has to be to explain the way things are." (Coles, 1990, p. xiv).

Coles described this quote and many others as strong hints toward children's spirituality while exposing his regrets that, had further exploration been made, more would have been known about the child's idea and experience of God. Consequently, he went to explore children's spirituality at length.

With a curiosity to learn more about children, Coles conducted a two-year research project involving interviewing over five hundred children from North and South America, Europe and Africa. Coles' interaction with children was guided by his deep conviction that children, approached appropriately and of their own free will, could reveal spiritual matters that can inform and educate interested and active listeners. His work was contextual and intentionally focused on watching, listening to and learning from children as they pursue their lives in their natural physical and socio-cultural settings, such as at home, in the playground, in school and in religious places (1990, p. 342). Through this research project, Coles was able to see children as 'seekers, as young pilgrims well aware that life is a finite journey and as anxious to make sense of it as those of us who are farther along in the time allotted to us' (1990, p. xvi). Coles narrates fascinating features of children's spirituality in *The Spiritual Life of Children*, a book he regards as 'my story of the stories they [children] kindly gave me' (1990, p.39). Many scholars and researchers regard this work of Coles as a ground-breaking piece in narrating child spirituality (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006, pp. 475-476; Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 52–53).

2.3.1.2. Narrating child spirituality

Coles' narration of children's spirituality includes their visualization of God (his face, voice, relationship), psychological realities (searching for meaning, developing morality, desire, hope, fears and worries), their worldviews (purpose, principles, explaining their realities) and visionary (envisioning beyond the current realities).

Regardless of their religious backgrounds, children referred to God and showed him in picture in sharing their life experiences. Except in a few instances where they posed question about God's existence, children repeatedly mentioned God as a creator, as one they talk to in prayers, and as someone who helps answer profound questions about existence and life's difficulties. They

visualize God in a way that reflects their existing personal and contextual realities. For example, in their paintings of God, children gave him their own eye and hair colors. Those who had somehow a sense of God's anger drew God with a pointed and raggedly sharp tooth (Coles, 1990, pp. 44, 57, 76, 79). Similarly, they expressed intimate experiences with God through hearing his voice and sharing their needs and successes. Some children reported that they heard voices from God on their specific requests. Hearing these testimonies, Coles says that God's voice is essential to children regardless of religious affiliation (Coles, 1990, p. 74).

While children visualize God to as to their realities in his color, emotions and interactions, as the same time, they did not hide their uncertainties that God could be different from what they think he is. For example, a ten-year-old boy, Hal did not hesitate to admit that God could look different from the picture he drew in his (Hal's) own features:

"No one has ever seen God, not before you die. So how can you know? He probably looks different a lot of the time I mean, you see Him your way, and maybe the next person sees Him some other way. My mum says He's a shadow He looks like that, a shadow." (Coles, 1990, p.44).

Similarly, another eleven-year-old said, 'I don't think of Him as handsome, not the kind of man I picture myself wanting to meet when I grow up. God is different. He looks different. He's the only one who looks like He does' (Coles, 1990, p.57). Children also have profound questions about making sense of God in the realities of their lives. They reflected on deep quests to know God and relate him to their contexts. Coles notes:

I often found myself remembering their sometimes urgent determination to define God, to locate Him in time and place, to know Him as precisely as possible, to explain (to themselves and others) who and what He is; and I found myself wondering whether the children themselves aren't the very

treasure they so obviously seek: God as children pondering, musing, ruminating, brooding on Him, young minds bending and applying themselves in His image (1990, p.147)

As this quote implies, children's spirituality goes beyond believing in God's existence and visualizing him as caring, interactive and intimate being. Their view of God also encompasses the desire to know more about him. They understand that God is not yet known fully. The need for people to know what they think is sacred is often mentioned as a core element of spirituality (Yust et al., 2006, p.8). Spirituality is a 'search for the sacred, a process through which people seek to discover, hold on to, and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives' (Hill & Pargament, 2003, p. 65). As Coles observed, children's spirituality involves their belief in and visualization of God's closeness and the acknowledgment that they showed to know more about God in their realities.

Another observation Coles made about children's spirituality regards what he calls 'children's psychological themes' (1990, p.98), which includes searching for meaning, developing morality and various emotional realities created in children because of internal and external factors. Children and human beings in general are captives of hounding knowledge and understanding of what happens in their lives, be it good or unwelcomed. They seek to make sense of everyday happenings and experiences (Bryan, 2016, p.55). Coles notes children's active desire and engagement to 'understand not only what is happening to them but why; and in doing that, they call upon the religious life they have experienced, the spiritual values they have received, as well as other sources of potential explanation' (1990, p.100).

Children seek to make sense of both their successes and difficulties such as accidents, illness or moments of danger. Experiences and responses (e.g. fear, hope, despair) these incidents create in children portray another dimension of children's spirituality. As Coles says, 'the entire

range of children's mental life can and does connect with their religious and spiritual thinking. Moral attitudes, including emotions such as shame and guilt, are a major psychological and sometimes psychiatric side of young spirituality' (1990, p.108).

Coles also narrates children's spirituality in terms of philosophical themes encompassing questions, inward reflections, imaginations and speculations children have about their past, present and future realities. Observing their philosophical questions about life, death, eternity, nature, pain, faith, doubt and things of God and religious natures, Coles likens children to philosophers. Reflecting on his interaction with a nine-year-old boy by the name Gil, Coles sees Gil as a philosopher:

Like them, the boy was searching for an explanation of what is, of reality as he saw it, heard it, felt it, both palpably and within his mind. Like them, he pursued wisdom with his mind's energy and in hopes for moral answers, a clue or two about how this life ought to be lived. Like philosophers, he examined the beliefs of others and was becoming an analyst and critic of ideas. Like them, he was trying to pull together what he had observed, learned, read, heard others espouse to make, thereby, his own "system," his own set of principles. He had yet to (and may never) write articles for journals of philosophy, but he most certainly was trying to assemble what he had learned in a narrative of his own, which he could offer to others: a description of the perceived world; a discussion of the views of others with respect to that world; an enunciation of his own manner of making sense of that world; and, not least, an affirmation of the moral principles he had constructed for himself (1990, pp.146, 147).

Because of the philosophical nature of their spirituality, children reflect on reality and look for drawing principles. However, their spirituality also has another dimension: envisioning what is not yet real.

Coles has noted that some children experience transcendence, passionately looking toward a spiritual horizon that goes beyond the reality around them. The story of an eight-year-old girl, Natalie's daydream, explains such an experience. Coles reports that 'Natalie went further on her own and with no ideological purpose in mind. Her mind wandered across the barren, much-loved tribal land of her people; but her mind also raced across clouds and planetary bodies toward the sun' (1990, p.155). In visionary moments, Coles notes that children break the confines of self, society, time and space, and even faith; they look within themselves for the strength to leave themselves to pursue a vision (Coles, 1990, p.166).

Going through insightful experiences with children, Coles attested to a new light that has come to his way of looking at children: 'children as pilgrims'. He says, 'I found myself, finally, looking at those children in a new light, one they had provided, actually, as young pilgrims just setting out on a journey, getting ready to "march through life' (Coles, 1990, p.320). Csinos, in his discussion on paradigms toward children, praised 'children as pilgrims' as the right way of viewing children. The paradigm 'children as pilgrims' values children as active agents who make meaning of themselves and the world around them (Csinos, 2011, p.12, EPUB).

Viewing children as spiritual pilgrims has a direct implication for child ministry. Csinos notes, 'This view of childhood radically alters how we do ministry with children... It affirms their status as active makers of meaning, a quality of humanity that is at the heart of what it means to be a spiritual being' (Csinos, 2011, p.13, EPUB). Hence, child ministry is a call to walk with them, not to walk them. 'As we nurture children in their relationships to God, as we walk the spiritual pilgrimage together, we can learn to give, to receive and to trust' (Csinos and Beckwith, 2013, p.29, EPUB). Hence, child ministry is a call to serve children and be ministered by them.

2.3.1.3. Summarized insights from Coles' narration of child spirituality

Coles' narration of children's spirituality shows that God is central in children's visualization and representation of the spiritual realm. 'God can take almost any shape for children. He can be a friend or a potential enemy; an admirer or a critic; an ally or an interference; a source of encouragement or anxiety, fear, even panic' (1990, p.119). Children's spirituality encompasses their psychological experiences, philosophical questions and their continuous yearning to know the reality beyond. Hence, children's views, questions, reflections and yearnings are expressions of children's spirituality (Viall et al., 2008, p.148).

Coles' narration sheds light on understanding spirituality and provides invaluable insights for research and practice related to the subject.

1. Children's spirituality is universal, authentic and expressed inseparably from their life realities; to put another way, it is a reality of all children at all times in all places. This dispels uncritical and trivializing attitudes toward the spiritual dimension of children (Hyde, 2008, P.149).
2. Children can share lived experiences of their spirituality in multiple ways. Hence, Spirituality and spiritual matters can be discussed with children in a meaningful way. This is a call to make children part of spiritual conversations.
3. Children's perspectives and lived experiences are better accessed when interactions with them happen in their natural settings, which is what Coles describes as contextual approach. Therefore, listening to children in their contextual realities will be important.
4. Unlike some broad and ambiguous views of spirituality in the recent literature, children's spirituality can be understood in terms of the divine. The creator is the object of children's spirituality.

5. Listening to children as a methodological insight in researching child spirituality: pointing out the richness of children's spiritual dimension and their capacity to share their stories including their relationship with the divine, Coles' work demonstrates that children's spirituality can be studied by listening to their experiences, not just through cognitive oriented methodologies. Commenting on Coles' methodology, Hay says, he sees it as a mistake to give priority to intellectual operations in our attempts to understand children's spirituality. In his dialogues he insisted on listening actively to the descriptions of the children's experience' (Hay and Nye, 2006, p.54).

In addition to the above general insights, Coles' observation of children's psychological and philosophical themes gives an unusual angle to approaching children's spirituality. First, their philosophical questions show that accepting the seen and unseen reality goes deeper to the level of underlying meaning and principle. Secondly, children formulate their outlooks and principles despite the traditional assumption that guidance flows one-sidedly from the grownups. Seeking principles from children is uncommon practice. In this sense, child spirituality calls for a new way of interacting with children. Third, children's philosophical and psychological themes shed light on understanding spirituality's relational and connectedness aspects. The ideas children reflect in searching for meaning, purpose, insights and principles are modes of connection with the Lord (Coles, 1990, p.142) and, by the same token, with other relationship dimensions besides the divine.

While Coles' work on child spirituality was pivotal in bringing children's spirituality to the fore and inspiring research on the subject, other scholars from different disciplines have also studied child spirituality and contributed invaluable insights. The seminal work of David Hay and Rebecca Nye's 'The Spirit of the Child' is one of the field's most influential pieces of research.

2.3.2. Hay and Nye - child spirituality as relational consciousness

David Hay and Rebecca Nye are among the most frequently mentioned scholars in the bibliography of contemporary research on child spirituality. Most prominent is their book *The Spirit of the Child*, 1998, revised 2006, which was written from the perspective of developing better spiritual education in the school system in Britain and has hugely influenced later thinking and research on child spirituality (e.g., Hyde, 2008; Adams et al., 2008; Reimer & Furrow, 2010; Moriarty, 2011). Noting the growing appreciation of the public in Britain on the importance that spirituality plays in maintaining unity among society and, at the same time, the critical conceptual and informational gaps about the same subject, Hay and Nye's arguments and evidence revolve around addressing the 'lack of agreement on what spirituality is and shortage of detailed information about the spiritual life of children' (2006, p.6). They extensively discuss what spirituality is and what it is not, both from the angle of different constructs and children's lived experiences.

While many scholars, for example, Hill et al., Zinnbauer et al., and Niekerk, argue that spirituality should be taken together with religion, Hay claims that spirituality can be identified, understood and expressed independently despite its traditional construal in relation to religion. Accordingly, he argues that spirituality goes beyond knowledge and expression of religion; it is 'biologically built into the human species, an holistic awareness of reality and logically prior to religion' (Hay, 2006, pp.18, 63). In the same line, he also argues that 'children's spirituality is rooted in a universal human awareness; that it is 'really there' and not just a culturally constructed illusion'. Accordingly, spirituality is conceptualized in terms of human awareness, while awareness refers to a more reflexive process of being attentive toward one's attention or aware of one's awareness (Hay, 2006, p.63, 65).

Based on evidence from the literature of spirituality and psychology as well as reflections on preliminary child spirituality research, Hay and Nye identified three categories of spiritual sensitivity: Awareness sensing, Mystery sensing and Value sensing (delight and despair, ultimate goodness and meaning) (Hay & Nye, 2006, p.65). Spirituality as awareness sensing denotes children's alertness to what they experience at a specific time and space; their awareness becomes an object of attention. Children's awareness sensing is expressed by their (i) being in the 'here-and-now' – focusing on immediate relationships, (ii) 'tuning' – resonating with what is happening in their immediate surroundings, (iii) 'flow' – letting themselves go with what happens in their surroundings and (iv) 'focusing' – attention to the felt sense or bodily awareness. Mystery sensing refers to the imaginative experience of what is 'incomprehensible'. It involves children's experience of wonder, awe and imagination in what they see and think beyond the obvious. The dimension of value sensing involves moral sensing, the experience of emotion, and the discovery of meanings (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp. 65-77; Hyde, 2008, p. 52).

Hay and Nye's spiritual sensitivities imply that spirituality includes attention to and experience of what is happening in the surrounding environment. Moreover, it is also an acknowledgment of and connection with unseen realities. However, the connection is not with everything; it is with realities that give meaning and add value. Eade (2023, p.29) notes,

The emphasis on values highlights that spirituality is not neutral, ethically, about what matters, that on mystery suggests that what appears to be the case is not all that there is and that on awareness implies being attentive to small details even when these may seem unimportant.

With an objective of creating an empirical account of childhood spirituality in mind, Hay and Nye used these categories of spiritual sensitivities as a starting point for their research, which aimed to listen to what children had to say about spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp.64-65).

Nye conducted the research with 38 British schoolchildren, an equal number of boys and girls from two age brackets: six to seven and ten to eleven. About three-quarters of the children were from families without religious affiliations (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp.86-87). Conversations with children proceeded guided by the three spiritual sensitivities, whereby children were provided selected sets of photographs and encouraged to share their own experiences. Explicit references to religious aspects of spirituality were intentionally brought up toward the end of the sequence of conversations. Nye used grounded theory to analyze children's data and, through an extensive search to see patterns and make sense of the data, a core category that summarizes the relevant data emerged. She calls this core category relational consciousness (Nye, 2006, p.109).

Nye coined 'relational consciousness' to systematically discuss the wealth of evidence each child expressed about spirituality. Relational consciousness denotes children's unusual perceptiveness of relationships with inter- and intra-personal domains (Nye, 2006, p.109). As Nye explains, the words consciousness and relationship are meant to carry meanings deeper than their usages in routines; consciousness is taken to mean 'something more than being alert and mentally attentive, 'meta-cognition' (an awareness of awareness). Likewise, the word relationship is understood broadly to embrace 'I-Others', 'I-Self', 'I-World' and 'I-God' (Nye, 2006, p.109; Nye, 1998, p.237).

Hay and Nye's categories of spiritual sensitivities and the relational consciousness model offer helpful insights for a broader understanding of child spirituality. First, viewing spirituality as relationality helps to recognize that children can connect with others both in religious and non-religious contexts (Adams et al., 2008, p. 12; Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 60). Scott notes this, 'Acknowledging that children are relational, that they can and do have beyond-the-self experiences, that they have perceptions and sensitivities that open them to spiritual experiences

can provide an initial framework to inform our understanding of children as spiritual' (2003, p. 127). Second, child spirituality embraces children's inner life realities and their interaction with their ecology, both seen and unseen dimensions, holistically (Nye, 2004, p. 92). Third, Children's spirituality is expressed as they relate and interact with their context in everyday life.

Besides contributions to the conceptualization of child spirituality, Hay and Nye's work has some limitations regarding context, focus, methodology and content. First, Contextual limitation: Hay and Nye's research was focused in a secular context of the UK where religion is losing adherence, 'it has become almost compulsory to say you do not believe in God, if you are to stay abreast of fashion' (Ward, 2014, p.1). Spirituality in the secular world is left to be more personal and relative without necessarily referencing God. Hay and Nye's research partly responded to this secular trend, implying possible limitations in their work in a non-secular or religious context (Hay, 2007, p.14). The ecological dimension plays a crucial role in understanding spirituality (Scott, 2003, p.120), and Hay and Nye can be criticized for inadequately considering this dimension. Commenting on this, Csinos says, 'Hay and Nye sweep culture under the rug, almost overlooking it completely, while discussing Nye's qualitative research into children's spirituality' (Csinos, 2018, p.57). Csinos argues that 'Scholarship into children's spirituality and theology must attend to culture at every stage of research – from organising a study to conducting it, interpreting knowledge and communicating it to audiences' (2018, p.64). While I understand that Nye's research was focused on children, she has provided conditions and contexts around relational consciousness.

Second, specific focus: The research was conducted with schools to enhance curriculum to nurture children's spirituality better. The research argues for spiritual education in school (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 159). However, spirituality, understood in its multidimensional nature, calls for

actors beyond what happens in school. Education can only address part of what spirituality encompasses. Moreover, in many secular governments, including Ethiopia, schools do not give religious education. Therefore, considering child spirituality and child ministry outside of the school and education context needs further work.

Third, Methodological comments: Nye's conversations with children were guided by the three spiritual sensitivities, whereby children were provided selected sets of photographs and encouraged to share their own experiences. Conversations focused on specific events (pictures) could limit children from considering other dynamics. Moreover, the process evaluates children's pick experiences, possibly leading to a sense of 'heightened awareness'. However, as Coles (1990, p.320) says, children are 'young pilgrims' on a spiritual journey, and I would say all the time and in all places. 'The spiritual is persistently present but requires attention to be noticed. A critical sensibility is necessary to attune to what the nature of the spiritual is in any moment.' (Scott, 2011, P. 294). Spirituality involves experiences, questions and ideas manifested both in everyday routines and in exceptional events (Eaude, 2023, p.24).

Fourth, there are comments on the conceptual boundary around Hay and Nye's spiritual sensitivities. Hay and Nye's spiritual sensitivities are not differentiated from cognitive or socioemotional awareness; the boundary is unclear (Scott, 2003, p. 121). However, the question of boundary does not seem a concern in some other works based on relational consciousness; for example, in Reimer and Furrow's research as well as in Coles' narration, the spiritual dimension is interrelated with the psychological and philosophical themes (Reimer & Furrow, 2001, p.10; Coles, 1990, p.108).

Referring to Hay and Nye's theory, Reimer and Furrow's socio-contextual framework for child spirituality explains relational consciousness as an analog of the child's representational

world mentally created apropos of spirituality and transcendence due to interaction with socio-cultural context. According to Reimer and Furrow, relational consciousness embraces language, sensory experiences and thoughts related to the child's spiritual self (2001, p.10). In their study of children aged seven to eight years from Christian backgrounds, Reimer and Furrow approached relational consciousness as a developmental phenomenon related to the theory of mind and self-construction. They explained the core process of relational consciousness as children's symbolic, relational and rational expression of transcendence (2001, pp.15-20). Hay and Nye's relational consciousness theory and Reimer and Furrows' observations indicate that children's spiritual dimension cannot be singled out from or subsumed in other cognitive or affective aspects of children. It is one aspect of their being. In this regard, scholars such as Champagne and Hart discuss children's spirituality as their way of being (Champagne, 2003, p.44; Hart, 2006, pp.163-164). The following section briefly reviews this idea.

2.3.3. Spirituality as children's mode of being, capacity and experience

Champagne and Hart have conducted research on child spirituality with different participants. Champagne's research focused on younger children between three and six, whereas Hart's survey recalled childhood spiritual experiences. While their observations share similarities, Champagne sees child spirituality as a 'mode of being'. Hart discusses the subject in terms of children's experiences and capacities.

Champagne describes the spirituality of young children as a spiritual form of being, meaning one's being as a person has a spiritual form or dimension. With a desire to know the spiritual experiences of preschoolers, Champagne did phenomenological research with sixty children aged three to six years from three daycare centers on the basis that 'if spirituality can be related to children's expressions of being, if it is related to the children's being, it may then be

possible to recognize it in different concrete situations and even more in their activities of daily life' (2003, p.44).

Based on her research, Champagne says, 'The spiritual *modes of being* of the children observed do not reflect attitudes or styles of action. Rather they manifest essential facets of the being of the child' (2003, p.44). She has identified three modes of being the preschoolers exhibited: *sensitive, relational and existential* modes of being. The *sensitive mode of being* corresponds with children's perception of their surroundings using their senses while fully engaged in activities. Through their activities, they perceive and respond to what they experience with a bodily expression of who they are. Children's sensitive modes of being include verbal and vocal expressions (e.g., screaming, laughing, crying, hearing), pictures and sculptures (e.g., drawings, connecting visually, touching), physical activities with gestures (e.g., running, sitting, connecting with movement), and through their gazes and facial expressions (e.g., interest, enthusiasm).

Children's spirituality is the experience and expression of their sensitivity to the surrounding world. It is children's 'being-in-the-world', their way of acknowledging their presence and that of the surrounding world, 'The sensitive mode of being allows the child both to express *its-being-in the world* and to *be* constructed by the world' (Champagne, 2003, p.47). The sensitive mode of being takes 'the idea that for children using their senses is not just a way to communicate; it's a form of being' (Jackson, 2012, p.1).

The *Relational mode of being* denotes the quality of interactions children have with others as expressed by affection, forgiveness, preference, openness and experience of presence and absence, closeness and distance (Champagne, pp.44, 47-50). This mode of being implies experience, choice, and influence when connecting with an 'object' of a relationship. Relationships as a quality of interaction imply developing friendships among students, having neighbors in the

community, knowing individuals by name, and going from hearing and seeing people to respect and honor. It gives place to others and vice versa. It 'offers a *home* for the *being-in-the-world*' (Champagne, 2003, p. 50). It is like creating a more meaningful world as a subset of the bigger world one could sense. This indicates that relationality may not be a general claim with everything around, but rather with the subset of what is around that is made personal. However, personal relationships could widen their influence on interpersonal faith.

As sensitive and relational beings, children engage in person with their surroundings. Champagne's *existential mode of being* refers to children's lived experience of the 'here and now': experience of time and space, games, imitation, symbolism and imagination (Champagne, 2003, p.51). Through experiencing and exploring the world, children express their 'being-a-child' and relate to the world. Champagne's observation considers children's spirituality inseparable from children's activities. In other words, young children's spirituality includes sensory experiences and responses without demarcation between the spiritual and bodily dimensions. While considering bodily responses as spiritual appears to be a different idea, other scholars have also made the same observation. For example, Hyde has noted the conscious bodily experiences of children, characterizing child spirituality as a 'tactile, sensorial and bodily experience of being – an experience of being whole' (2008, p.90).

While Champagne's observations consider children's experiences from all aspects of children, Hart's research presents specific components of children's spiritual capacities and experiences. Critiquing presuppositions of some theories (e.g., views in stage theories) that present children as immature and incapable of manifesting spirituality in the preadolescent stage, Hart contends, 'children's spirituality may exist apart from adult rational and linguistic conceptions and from knowledge about a religion' (2006, p.163). Hart discusses children's spirituality based on a

recalled survey of the spiritual experiences of 450 undergraduate students. Accordingly, he has identified four types of spiritual experiences and capacities: wonder, wondering, relational spirituality and wisdom. Hart describes these experiences and capacities as children's ways of being in the world (2006, p.165). *Wonder* is a 'feeling of awe, connection, joy, insight, and deep sense of reverence and love' expressed both in extraordinary spiritual experiences and everyday ways of being and knowing (Hart, 2006, pp.165, 168). Hart further characterizes the experience of wonder as direct knowing and awareness of the world beyond reach, including the sacred other and overwhelming moments of ecstasy and vision. Therefore, wonder as a spiritual experience and capacity connects children with a reality that may not be comprehensible in the usual way. It is a different moment of connection.

The experience and capacity of *wondering* relate to children's search for meaning and principle through questioning and pondering. Through philosophical and radical questions such as 'Why am I here?', 'What is life about?', children seek the source of knowledge, logic, ethics, and insights into various issues. With their uncountable questions on the one hand, the spiritual capacity of children also has *the wisdom* to address real-life issues, children often show a remarkable capacity for cutting to the heart of a matter, for accessing profound insight and wise guidance' (Hart, 2006, p.170). While *wisdom* is often associated with experience and maturity, Hart says that children's wisdom comes through contemplative experiences.

The other spiritual experience and capacity Hart has identified considers the relational aspect of spirituality and is termed '*between you and me*'. This aspect of spirituality acknowledges life lived out at the intersection of 'between you and me'. It embraces children's openness and intuitive capacity for empathy, compassion and love for others. It also includes a connection with the cosmos (Hart, 2006, pp.172-174).

In some sense, Hart's views of children's spiritual experiences and capacities challenge the commonly held belief about child spirituality. It has brought insights into children's spiritual dimension without necessarily associating it with religion. Moreover, Hart's view of children's wonders, questions and insights from the spiritual angle encourages seeing child spirituality more broadly. Hart's components of spirituality agree with Hay and Nye's spiritual sensitivities.

In Nye's relational consciousness theory, children's spirituality connotes moments of exceptional experiences, which are explained as heightened awareness. Champagne's observation of younger children sheds light on the fact that children's spirituality pertains to every aspect of their modes of being expressed naturally and spontaneously. Hart's model of spiritual experiences and capacities presents the spiritual qualities of children that are commonly attached to the grown-up. These scholars, in one way or another, have implied that children's spirituality involves contextual realities beyond being a personal matter. Contextual realities, including perceptions and practices of spirituality, give insights to have a comprehensive understanding of child spirituality. 'Scholarship into children's spirituality and theology must attend to culture at every stage of research' (Csinos, 2018, p.63). The ensuing section briefly reviews the African context, including specific realities in Ethiopia.

2.4. Child spirituality in African and Ethiopian contexts

Peter J. Paris emphatically describes Africans as spirituals, and spirituality as the mark of the African people. Traditional African religions saw God as one who presided over a pantheon of sub-divinities and ancestral spirits (Paris, 1993, p.114). The spiritual world is often seen as interlinked with culture, religion and communal life (Cilliers, 2009, p.2).

Cilliers (2009, p.1) adopts three key concepts to describe African spirituality: '*ubuntu*(community), *ubunye* (holism) and *Amandla* (vitality)'. Ubuntu denotes Africans' strong emphasis on community,

relationship and social interaction, claiming 'a person is a person through other persons' (Cilliers, 2009, p.4); 'I am because the community is' (Vumisa, 2012, p.47). One's humanity can be defined through interaction with others. In its *ubuntu* aspect, African spirituality connotes community and togetherness. From the *ubunye* (holism) angle, African spirituality signals an integrated view of life. *Ubunye* means 'we are one' (Cilliers, 2009, p.9); it conveys a holistic view of life, 'Africans view life holistically, and to them, life embraces politics, religion, social dimensions taken as a whole' (Vumisa, 2012, p.43). With *ubunye*, African spirituality emphasizes interpersonal relationships and how people relate to their environment (Cilliers, 2009, p.10). On the other hand, *Amandla* (vitality) refers to Africans' belief in the divine power that rules over humanity. Summing up the three key concepts, Cilliers notes, '*Ubunye* (the unity of all reality) is kept intact through *Amandla* (power), which in turn operates within *Ubuntu* (community)' (2009, p.5). African worldview portrays relationality both vertically and horizontally (Wissing et al., 2020, pp. 1- 4; Onyednam & Kanayo, 2013, p.62; Wijngaarden, 2022, p.412). The African view of spirituality appears broad, encompassing religion, culture and social relationships. 'In Africa, everything finds explanation and validation in religion. Africans do not contend about the existence of God; it is given.' (Vumisa, 2012, p.48). Accordingly, African understanding of child spirituality dominantly relates to religiosity. Writing on child spirituality from a South African context, Roux notes that 'spirituality is still discussed mainly in the context of theology in general. Spirituality was and is still seen as a religious domain within a religious institution.' (2006, p.152). The emphasis on child spirituality from a religious angle often leads to training children in established religious practices rather than attending to children's personal spiritual experiences (Yust et al., 2006, p. 3). In this sense, adherence to religion could take priority over spirituality, which is commonly observed in the Ethiopian context.

In the Ethiopian context, there is a general belief about raising children to become loyal to religious faith, rituals and practices. Poluha, in her study with Ethiopian children, has captured children's views and practices of religion:

In their interactions with people in their surroundings the children came to express their religious adherence in many different ways. Often they did not seem to think what they said and did pertaining to their religion but took their own practices as 'natural' part of their lives... children took it for granted that everyone had religion. ... The 'naturalness' of religion partly seems to come from the fact that the children's days were regulated by the precepts of their religion (2004, p.160)

Children often view themselves as affiliated with religion. In OneHope's study, with a sample size of 3576 children between age 13 and 18, 91% indicated that religion is important to them (2010, p.7). In such a context, child spirituality implies children's participation in sacramental practices and being part of a faith community. For example, in the case of the Ethiopian Orthodox church, infants and young children participate in several sacramental practices like baptism, confirmation and Holy Communion (Tamene, 1998, p.101). Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has the same practice of infant and child baptism (Galla, 2011, p.46). Children in the Ethiopian context are raised with religious precepts and rituals. Therefore, it will not be far from reality to understand child spirituality in the African and narrowly in the Ethiopian contexts as participation in established faith traditions and practices that are more communal rather than personal.

The review of contemporary literature on child spirituality and the long-held beliefs of the African and Ethiopian contexts around the subject portrays that the spiritual dimension of children encompasses their innate nature (essence, capacity), nurture (experience of transcendence and interactivity) and relationship (connectedness) achieved with self and everything outside the self including the divine. Put succinctly, child spirituality is a reality of their being, becoming and

belonging. These concepts are core elements in child-related discourses, mainly developmental theories. Discussions on child spirituality, in one way or another, are also related to developmental theories. Therefore, looking into how the well-established child development theories treat child spirituality will be paramount. The following section presents a brief review of developmental theories related to child spirituality.

2.5. Child spirituality in the perspectives of child development theories

Developmental psychology is often criticized for neglecting children's spiritual dimensions. While I agree with the gaps, I also note insights to draw toward the conversation on child spirituality. This section briefly reviews major perspectives of developmental theories and assesses how they present child spirituality. Accordingly, I review major perspectives in developmental theory: the biological, sociocultural, and interactionist approaches and the ecological theory (Miller, 2016, pp.20-21; Thomas, 2000, p.34).

Theories of developmental psychology, at their core, focus on 'change over time' in the course of children's development (Keenan, 2008, p. 23; Miller, 2016, p. 8). Developmental theories concentrate on tackling fundamental questions of children's development like 'What develops in a child?', 'What causes development?', 'In what way and when development can be promoted?' (Thomas, 2000, p.32; Miller, 2016, p.14).

The way developmental theorists approach such questions depends on their view of nature and nurture's influence on a child's development. Based on the 'nature versus nurture' debate, also known as 'nativism versus cultural relativism', 'genetics versus social control', 'maturation versus learning', 'innate trait versus acquired characteristics' (Thomas, 2000, p. 32), theories in developmental psychology are categorized as organismic and mechanistic (Keenan, 2008:23, 47-52; Miller, 2016, pp.14-17; Thomas, 2000, pp. 29-50). Organismic theories emphasize nature as a

development cause and view the child as an 'active player' in his 'developmental changes'. In contrast, mechanistic theories stress nurture and see the child's environment driving the 'developmental changes' of the child (Keenan, 2008, p. 23).

However, this polarized view of 'nature or nurture' in child development does not seem practical, as neither factor can exert or exist without the other (Thomas, 2000, p. 32). Instead, 'nature and nurture are inextricably intertwined from conception throughout life span' (Miller, 2016, p. 20). Hence, the debate evolved in formulating it toward interactivity of nature and nurture, considering the way of interaction and its natural drives and environmental triggers (Thomas, 2000, pp.33, 34; Miller, 2016, p.20). Miller used a 'nature-nurture continuum' to locate theories regarding where they focus more. Accordingly, based on their location in the continuum, developmental theories can be categorized into three approaches: a) biological approaches – those emphasizing the nature side; b) sociocultural approaches – those that emphasize the nurture side; and c) interactionist approaches- those that give more or less equal attention for both nature and nurture (Miller, 2016, pp. 20-21; Thomas, 2000: 34).

2.5.1. Biological perspectives

Developmental psychologists have an established view of a biological basis for child development. Biological approaches emphasize that biological factors and processes with the environment's relevant input drive the child's development (Miller, 2016, pp.214, 268). According to biological perspectives, 'intellectual and personality development, as well as physical and motor development, are rooted in biology' (Kail, 2012, p. 8). Biological approaches consider the connection between 'body, mind and behavior' whereby 'genes, brain and experience form a complex system' of interactions that cause development process and outcome (Miller, 2016:212,

268). Theories like ethology inform the understanding and theorization of child development from biological perspectives.

Biological approaches have had a positive influence on child development theories and practices. First, biological approaches have pinpointed the importance of early intervention in children's lives. Specifically, prioritizing prenatal and early childhood care is highly advocated for lasting positive impact on children's lives. Effective interventions can alter Children's development course in early childhood, changing 'the balance between risk and protection, thereby shifting the odds in favor of more adaptive outcomes' (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 4).

Secondly, the attachment theory in the biological approach emphasizes the importance of relationships in child development work. Considering the relationship between a dependent individual and nurturing protectors, attachment theory has become a lens through which to understand and enhance child-parent/caregiver relationships. The quality of attachment that children have with their parents and caregivers determines both their behaviors and functioning. Secured attachments predict effective social functioning in childhood and adolescence (Miller, 2016, pp.229, 242). The biological approach shows the importance of the relationship to the practical field of child development. Thirdly, the biological approach gives attention to an individual child without underestimating the influence of the environment in driving development. In summary, biological approaches address the nature-nurture polarization, emphasizing the individual child. As an individual, the child draws on resources from the environment for her development. Biological approaches distinctively value the child as an individual.

Despite their notable contributions, biological approaches also have shortcomings to note. While the 'body, mind, behavior' connectedness is central in biological perspectives, the child's spirituality and spiritual dimension are largely ignored. How the spiritual variables of the child are

addressed is a legitimate question unrequited within the biological approaches. This leads to looking for an approach that considers the whole child in a non-simplified environment. Considering this, the following section focuses on sociocultural approaches to child development. How do sociocultural approaches view the child?

2.5.2. Sociocultural perspectives

Sociocultural approaches to child development represent the nurture side of the nature-nurture continuum. They emphasize nurture over biological factors – ‘evolutionary, genetics, neural’ – as drivers of child development (Miller, 2016, pp. 20, 305). Miller has noted that Socioculturalists view ‘child-in-context’ and see the child as ‘fused, or embedded, in some culturally infused context’ (2016, pp.158-159). According to a sociocultural perspective, child development is a phenomenon that comprises children and their surroundings, including significant people in their lives (Miller, 2016, p. 154). In other words, development is not an individualized journey.

The systemization of sociocultural approaches goes back to the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his collaborators (Miller, 2016, p. 154; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). Vygotsky understands child development as children’s ‘internalization of the result of their transaction with their environment’ realized through a ‘dialectical exchange’ process in a ‘cultural context’ (Thomas, 2000, pp. 290-290). Vygotsky’s theory views development as ‘dependent on the child’s interactions with other, more skilled, members of the culture’ (Keenan, 2008, p. 52). Vygotsky and the present-day sociocultural psychologists emphasize ‘children-in-activity-in-cultural-context’ (Miller, 2016, p.158). An ‘active-child-in-cultural-context’, in sociocultural theory, is the unit that develops’, whereby the unit constructs cognitive skills and cultural knowledge (Miller, 2016:179). For sociocultural psychologists, Miller notes, ‘The hand creates the

mind' meaning experience shapes cognition (cognitive styles, attitudes, perception of reality and beliefs) and doing creates knowledge (2016, pp.156, 159-161). In general terms, the child is meshed with her environment according to sociocultural views.

Sociocultural approaches have influenced the field of child development both conceptually and pragmatically. Miller highlighted three significant strengths of sociocultural approaches: 'attention to sociocultural context, integration of learning and development, and sensitivity to the diversity of development' (2016, p.182). Sociocultural approaches to child development have challenged the dichotomized view between children and their contexts.

Vygotsky's resolute rejection of individualistic reductionism in explaining the development of human mind and society constitutes an essential part of his theory. It went along with his rejection of biological reductionism. One of the most consistent ideas of Vygotsky's work is his rejection of any attempt to use either individualistic or biological reductionism to explain the genesis and functioning of the human mind. Whatever simple or complex psychological processes were in question, Vygotsky had a real gift for demonstrating that the most interesting part, or component, of it is not inherited biologically, but caused by and originated in a specific set of social interactions (Ageyev, 2003, p.434)

Sociocultural psychologists acknowledge cultural differences between individuals and between cultures, which could be a basis for contextualized child ministry: 'Different historical and cultural circumstances may encourage different developmental routes to a developmental endpoint' (Miller, 2016, p. 184). In general, sociocultural approaches to children's development acknowledge and promote children's inclusion in their contexts. Children are viewed as belonging to a context and develop in context toward more belongingness while they constitute that context.

Besides their notable contributions to the child development field, sociocultural approaches also have shortcomings. The Socioculturalists' emphasis on 'child-in-context' raises questions

about the child's agency. The child's individuality seems diluted within her context, whereas context appears absolutized. Sociocultural approaches are also silent about the child's spirituality. Hence, despite their contributions, sociocultural approaches have reduced the child to be only a 'social person'. In other words, it does not address the child's spiritual aspect. The following section focuses on the interactionist approaches and whether they address the whole person of the child, including the spiritual dimension.

2.5.3. Interactionist perspectives

As the name implies, the Interactionist approach emphasizes the interaction of nature and nurture in driving the child's development. The interactionist approaches see nature and nurture as 'two different dimensions, each operating 100 percent in its role' in the interaction process of the 'person's psychophysical qualities and the environment's social/physical qualities' (Thomas, 2000, p. 34; Thomas, 2001, p.31). According to Thomas, interactionists believe that 'heredity defines the boundaries of potential development and environment determines where, within the boundaries, a child's actual development is realized' (2000, p.34). Hence, the child's development can be explained as 'the confluence of the inner-biological/physiological components of an organism [the child], its immediate physical/environmental- and social/experiential- milieus, and the historical/cultural contexts within which these organismic and experiential processes are embedded' (Lerner, 1978, pp. 1-2). With this basic tenet of child-environment interaction driving change, there are different theories in the category of interactionist approach, including Riegel's dialectical theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, Lerner's contextualism, Piaget's cognitive-stage theory, Erikson's psychosocial theory, Gibson's ecological theory, Jung's collective consciousness theory (Miller, 2016, p. 20; Loder, 1998, p. 20).

According to the interactionists, the child-environment interaction is complex, amalgamating what the child and the environment have and the aura they create as they entwine in space and time. The child and the child's environment are not single entities; instead, they are independent systems that act interdependently, dynamically driving the phenomena of the child's development. Explaining the 'nature-nurture dynamic interactionism', Richard Lerner writes:

More than being a product of either nature or nurture alone, or even of a static interaction between components of these two sources, the organism is seen to develop as a consequence of a dynamic intermeshing of interdependent influences both endogenous and exogenous to it... Thus, organism—organism relations also exist in states of dynamic interactionism, and these mutual exchanges are both derived from and provide a source of the sociocultural and historical setting within which they exist. In sum, the development of an organism is derived from dynamic interactions among maturation, physical experience, other organisms, the sociocultural context, and, ultimately, itself (1978:18).

It could be noted that the interactionists' approach goes beyond a 'unidirectional causality' where the child is seen as a 'target of environmental influence' or 'classical interactionism' in which the child's behavior is seen as 'the result of the interplay of individual and environmental factors'; instead, it is a 'holistic (modern) interactionism' which involves 'continuously ongoing interaction processes between individual and environmental factors, and the continuously ongoing processes among psychobiological and behavioral components in the individual' (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006, pp. 405-406).

Interactionist approaches to child development have hugely influenced child development program design, content, and methods. For example, Thomas notes Erikson's psychosocial theory to have 'guided general child rearing, influenced early childhood education, and generated techniques of therapy for disturbed children.' Likewise, Piaget's cognitive theory has influenced

'choice of learning objectives, curriculum sequencing, grade placement of topics, assessment of children's intellectual functioning, and teaching methodology' (Thomas, 2000, pp.159, 274). Therefore, interactionist approaches in the practical field of child development programs imply the need to emphasize the child and the child's context. The child's development is a dialogical process.

While affirming the pivotality of biology and environment in the child's development, Interactionists tend toward the 'assumption of causality' (Lundh, 2015, p. 185), which may not show reciprocity or development dynamism within the child. In other words, the cause-effect view undermines the individual dynamism for development. Moreover, interactionist approaches do not explicitly discuss the spiritual dimension instead they tend to implicitly acknowledge it.

While affirming the interactionists' implicit indication of the 'primacy of human spirit' (1998:20), Loder comments that:

Everything in the psychological approach may be seen as the work of human spirit in its effort to understand and interpret itself. But for all of the analytical power of such theories, their preoccupation with adaptation (important as that may be) prevents them from self-criticism in the relation to the more profound issues of human existence. That is, even after we have carefully examined human development from the various standpoints, including criticisms and revisions of the theories, we will not have explicitly said anything of theological significance. We always must ask, "What is theological about human development?" and allow theology to call the tune if the scope of the inquiry is to be sufficient (1998:27).

Therefore, interactionist approaches, like biological and sociocultural ones, do not adequately address the whole child. This heightens the need for a more comprehensive approach.

2.5.4. The ecological theory

Representing opposite ends of the nurture-nature continuum of child development, developmental psychology's biological and sociocultural approaches emphasize the 'child' in terms of 'body-mind-behavior' connectedness and 'the child-in-context' in their conceptualization of child development. At the same time, interactionists consider both ends and stress the nature-nurture interaction as a driver of the child's development. Considering these three approaches, it could be summarized that the child is recognized as an individual *being* on a journey of *becoming* (development) while *belonging* to a specific physical and sociocultural context.

While most developmental perspectives do not explicitly consider children's spirituality, various elements of child spirituality can be deduced from each perspective. From the biological perspective, the innate aspect of spirituality can be considered as spirituality is part of the child's being. The sociocultural approach implies the contextual side of child spirituality, the 'child-other' relationships. The Interactivist view, on the other hand, offers insights into the quality of interaction, the 'connectedness' aspect of child spirituality. There are insights every perspective offers, though in a fragmented way. The fragmented views need to be systematically organized for a more comprehensive view of the spiritual dimension of children. In this regard, the ecological theory offers a more systematic approach.

Bronfenbrenner, the pioneer of ecological theory, conceptualizes human development in a broader way that considers the developing person, the environment of development and the interaction between the two. He defined *development* as 'the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, and its growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties' (1979, p.9). The ecological perspective conceives the child's environment as 'nested

structures' comprising the *micro, meso, exo, macro* and *chrono* components arranged in a concentric form where the inner is encompassed within the next (1979, pp.21-22).

Bronfenbrenner's components of child ecology comprise people (e.g., family, friends, teachers) directly interacting with the child, the interaction among ecological components (e.g., school relationship), and broader economic, political and sociocultural dynamics in the child's setting, and the direct or indirect interaction these elements have with the child and what the child experiences in this process. Accordingly, the ecological view provides a more comprehensive view of child spirituality. Child spirituality involves intra - and inter-context relationships that involve emotional and relational experiences resulting in continuous change toward self and others (Estep & Breckenridge, 2004, pp.330-331, Dickie, et al, 1997, p.25).

2.6. Summary of insights and conceptual framework

Despite the low priority it had during the pre-1990 eras of cognitive development theory, child spirituality has received some growing attention both in social sciences and other sectors of society. This development is good news for sectors that have faced challenges in incorporating spiritual aspects into their programs. However, with the growing interest in the subject, there have also been some tendencies to take spirituality as personal, relative, and without standard. Some view spirituality as separate from religion with the assumption that religion is dry, dead, conservative and unimportant (Hay & Nye, 2006, p.19). Such views have caused concerns, especially among the religious communities, doubting whether the long-held religious beliefs, narratives, and commitments would take root in the younger generation with the new view of spirituality (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, p.1). Therefore, the current trend in spirituality needs a balanced view between the 'conservative' view of spirituality from a religious angle and the perspectives developing in the contemporary world. This makes the need for careful analysis

considering multidimensional realities, including sociocultural contexts and current developments, critical.

Spirituality in the contemporary world is viewed broader than the traditional construal as religion. The current view of spirituality considers inherent human nature (capacity), which drives self-transcendence toward connectedness with self, God, other people and inanimate things. Coles' narration of child spirituality considers children's psychological experiences, philosophical questions, and continuous yearning to know the reality beyond. Scholars like Champagne and Hart discuss spirituality as children's mode of being and capacity. Hay and Nye emphasize a child's relational consciousness in their understanding of spirituality.

The view of spirituality as relationality appears in literature frequently and is appreciated for bringing conceptual and practical clarity to the subject. However, the literature mostly hails relationality with a limited focus on discussing whether spirituality also has nonrelational aspects. There is a need to consider whether there could be conditions in which relationality might not imply spirituality. The question of whether spiritual sensitivities such as awareness, mystery, and value sensing could depend on objects stimulating sensitivity is worth exploring. Should the who or what of relationship matter to consider it spiritual? Or are all wonders, awe, and imagination positive regardless of their sources? Questions such as these need further investigations in addition to what contemporary literature offers.

Contemporary literature, mostly of Western origin, discusses child spirituality as 'human essence' and 'experience'. Scholars employ phrases like 'innate being', 'inner vitality', 'ontological reality', and 'inherent capacity' to explain that spirituality is an essence of a child, a part of being human. In light of this, spirituality is an inner vitality definitive to who children are at their core (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, p.5; Yust et al., 2006, p.8). Likewise, concepts and phrases such as

awareness, relationality, self-transcendence and earnest desire for God (the *sacred*) are used to show how the essence of spirituality is expressed and experienced by the individual both within and outside the self.

Based on the observations made so far, I understand that child spirituality encompasses children's being (inherent nature), becoming (e.g., the experience of transcendence) and belonging (e.g., relationality and connectedness). Put succinctly, child spirituality encompasses children's nature and experiences. In conceptualizing child spirituality as inherent nature and experience, the concept of the *sacred* plays a pivotal role in reasonably addressing child spirituality's spiritual and religious aspects. Similarly, I have noted that viewing child spirituality in terms of *capacity* and *relationality* gives more clarity to the subject, enhancing research efforts in the field. Accordingly, the concept of the *sacred* and spirituality as *capacity* and *relationality* are used as conceptual lenses in the study of child spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia.

While I note from related literature on child spirituality that the subject has been explored, narrated and theorized mainly from the perspective of the Western world, North America, Europe and Australia, I have also noted that the interconnections between the narrations and theories of child spirituality scholars have developed so far can give a lens to understand the subject in the Ethiopian context. The core concepts identified above can serve as a broader framework for understanding children's spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia.

2.7. Conclusion

A review of contemporary literature shows a growing interest in child spirituality. Research on child spirituality focuses on understanding, describing and nurturing the spiritual dimension of children both within and outside of religion. Spirituality and religion have long held commonality as well as undeniable distinctiveness. While some scholars emphasize one over the other, others

consider the commonalities and differences of spirituality and religion. They see the two constructs as 'distinctive yet related', which this research adopts. Links and shared themes of spirituality with religion, as well as spirituality's distinctive aspects, would better contribute to understanding child spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia, which is a different context than most of the Western World, where many child spirituality studies are conducted.

While the Western world emphasizes spirituality to be a personal and individualistic experience, the African and Ethiopian contexts tend to see spirituality as a communal (shared) reality. As much as child spirituality is an innate nature expressing children's being, it is also true that context plays an undeniable role in shaping and nurturing spirituality. Therefore, a better understanding of child spirituality needs to consider the child's nature and context in balance, a holistic view of child spirituality that comprises the child and the divine world and sociocultural context.

Considering understandings in contemporary research and the research context, child spirituality is understood to encompass children's inherent nature, its expression through the experience of relationship with God and others, and the connectedness they establish. Children's spirituality is taken to embrace children's being, becoming and belonging with reference to God, the creator and people. This description's fundamental concepts are reflected in most of child spirituality research.

Child spirituality studies done so far are mainly in the Western world. While they inform general understanding of the subject in other parts of the world, there is still more to examine, especially from the contextual point of view. Child spirituality is seen mainly as personal and includes many things beyond religion. School curriculum is among the vital areas of focus for child spirituality research. On the other hand, a closer look is deemed necessary in a context where

spirituality is assumed as a subset of religion, where children are expected to adhere to religious norms, where the communal takes priority over personal, and where religious education is absent from the school curriculum. How do children view, express and experience spirituality in such contexts? What contextual factors play an influence on children's spirituality? How does children's lived experience of spirituality influence thinking and action to serve the 'whole child' in such a context? This research addresses such and related questions by focusing on children and their experiences with a view to seeing their implications on holistic child ministry which is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Holistic Ministry

3.1. Introduction

Scholars and practitioners mention the idea of holism and holistic ministry in their respective areas of focus, including religion, science and helping fields like health, education and development interventions. It has become common to see various services qualified as 'holistic', for example, 'holistic medicine', 'holistic education', and holistic development (Papathanassiou et al, 2013, pp1-2; Freeman, 2005, p.154, Johnson, 2014, p.43; Schreiner, 2005, p.1, Brewster, 2011, p.39). With the gain of familiarity, the concepts of holism and holistic ministry have taken the characteristics of a buzzword (Wiher, 2022, p.7), which, somehow, limits their conceptual depth and technical rigor. Moreover, the concepts also appear pretentious from a practical point of view. The varied uses of the concepts of holism and holistic ministry and the sentiments some people have at the level of practicability call for a closer look, considering the specific context of their application.

One of the areas this research focuses on is holistic child ministry in light of children's understanding and experiences of spirituality in the context of Wonji Shoa. It intends to explore

the implications of children's perspectives and lived experiences to holistic child ministry of churches and parachurches. In order to assess children's possible inputs, a review of existing understanding and experience on holistic ministry is deemed necessary. Accordingly, this chapter reviews related literature on holistic ministry and derivative concepts.

Section 3.2. of the chapter discusses the concepts of mission and ministry and how these concepts are used in this research. Upon establishing the relationship between these terms, the concept of ministry is reviewed in its broader sense, which embraces mission. **Section 3.3.** reviews the concept of holism and holistic ministry, including Ethiopia's specific context. **Section 3.4.** focuses on the practical field of holistic child ministry. The chapter closes at **section 3.5.** with the conclusion drawn from the previous sections.

3.2. Ministry and mission

Literature on ministry and mission portrays different formats of the relationship between the two constructs. Mission and ministry are sometimes treated the same and used interchangeably. In other cases, they are seen as distinct constructs. From viewing the two as distinctive constructs, ministry focuses on internal matters of the church. In contrast, mission applies to a different context in far geographic locations. The most accepted definition of mission by theologians, as Kozhuharov notes, is that 'mission is about going out, teaching, making disciples, and about the salvation of souls, including redemption of whole persons, broken and sinful systems, and so on' (2016, p.233). The idea of 'going out' has geographic and cultural implications, resulting in different understandings of mission and ministry. While mission is about extending beyond the here and the known, 'Ministry takes place within the body of Christ, mission happens outside the walls of the church' (Missions and ministry, <https://baptistsonmission.org>).

However, some views do not emphasize putting a border between the two constructs. Instead, they see one subsumed in the other. Presler sees ministry embracing mission: ‘Mission is ministry ‘in the dimension of difference’, an endeavor of ‘reaching out beyond who and where we are to encounter and form community with people and communities who are different from ourselves’. Mission is ‘ministry to and with the other who is different’ (Presler, 2010, p.195). Presler advises seeing ministry broadly encompassing all dimensions of the church’s call, including mission.

It is more useful to encompass within ministry the full range of service to which God calls the church. Ministry thus includes both the work that builds up the community within itself and the work that extends the community’s initiative beyond itself. It is this latter kind of ministry, ministry in the dimension of difference, that is the community’s mission work. Likewise, particular kinds of ministry are found in both the work of the community within itself and in the difference-engaging work that is mission, whether these be prayer, worship, proclamation, education, health care, elder care, or administration. A church is on mission when it is ministering in any of these ways beyond itself, with people and communities that are different from its own (Presler, 2010, p.195).

Presler’s view of mission as ‘ministry in the dimension of difference’ – ‘mission as a subset of ministry’ – provokes a question of whether Ministry should be seen as a subset of mission as Harley asks, ‘Is ministry subset of the broader *missio Dei* activities as a whole or is mission a subset of activity – “mission in the dimension of difference”?’ (Hartley, 2015, p.53). In answering his question, Hartley does not argue for or against this view of placing one in the other; instead, he views mission as a broad concept more limited to “cutting edge” church activities.

The attempt to view Ministry and mission as constructs that one supersedes the other or separately could be an endless debate. Ministry and mission are church mandates, whether they

are similar, distinctive, or overlapping. What helps from a practical point of view is holding the differences lightly and focusing on which one works where and when. A Korean pastor and theologian, Sang-Bok David Kim, gives such a comprehensive view:

Ministry is the spiritual work which carries out the will of God for this world, and missions are the same that is done in the cross-cultural context. Whether it is done at home or abroad, Ministry and missions are primarily spiritual works of God' (Kim, 2001, pp.20-21).

Kim's view appears more relevant in practice, where the emphasis goes from conceptual analysis to concrete implications and applications to people's lives. From a practical point of view, concepts like mission and ministry make more sense when guided by realities on the ground, the extent to which they are familiar and relevant contextually. In light of this, while I do not intend to tightly hold the distinctiveness of 'mission' and 'ministry', I see the concept of ministry in its broader sense to be fitting in the context of my research for practical reasons:

1. The research deals with a specific community, hence the broader idea of mission, as going to places with far-reaching geography becomes out of scope.
2. The research embraces children from church and public schools and their contexts. In its broader sense, ministry is the church's mandate to serve all people within and outside its walls; hence, it embraces the realities of the research participants and context.
3. The broader view of ministry incorporates the breadth of services that can be offered to people depending on their needs without solely focusing on soul-saving or development.

Therefore, discussions in the ensuing sections dominantly use ministry but in its broader sense, which embraces the church's ministry both within and outside of its wall. Ministry extending outside of the church's wall implies the inclusion of the missional call for the immediate

community. The boundary between ministry and mission is kept faint, and they are used interchangeably in some cases.

3.2.1. More on Ministry

Based on its familiarity with day-to-day uses, the concept of ministry is assumed to be direct, with consistent understanding across audiences of different mixes. It is often said that the difficulty of ministry is not in understanding the concept but the 'practice' of it (Kaneen, 2015, p.2). However, some precedents call this view into question. First, "ministry" has borderless uses (Kaneen, 2015, p.1). It is used, for example, in religion, politics, business and social relations without necessarily conveying the same meaning in all fields (Heldt, 2004, p.167). Thus, the need to set the concept in the context of given discourses beyond everyday use becomes evident.

Second, it is not uncommon to see the concept of ministry preceded by different qualifiers introduced to imply its nature. For example, children's ministry or adults' ministry shows the focus of the ministry. Adjectives like holistic, integrated, sustainable, and result-oriented signify the emphasis and intention of the ministry. The use of these adjectives depends on understanding the concept of ministry, whether it focuses on a specific age group, the extent to which it is poised to address needs, and the results it intends to achieve. This poses a question of specificity instead of relying on the assumption of generalized understanding.

Thirdly, in terms of social and environmental changes (developments), words and concepts, including the concept of ministry, change or are susceptible to change (Hartley, 2015, p.52; Kaneen, 2015, p.6; Collins, 2014, p.12; Stott, 1992, p.140). Therefore, looking into how the word ministry is understood will be helpful.

The Collins dictionary defines the word ‘ministry’ as ‘Service, function or profession of a minister of religion and the body or class of ministers of religion, clergy’ (Collins Dictionary, 2016, n.d). Likewise, the Longman dictionary explains ministry as ‘the work done by a priest or other religious person as a result of their religious beliefs’ (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, n.d). According to these interpretations, ministry is related to religious activity. It is about the responsibility of people in a spiritual hierarchy and what they do. It implies both the actions and the executors. These definitions limit the concept of ministry around religion, specifically to certain people. However, other definitions consider the non-religious and functional aspects of ministry.

From a theological perspective, the term ministry is explained in terms of the use and meaning of its Greek root word, ‘Diakonia’ (Kaneen, 2015, p3; Collins, 2012, p.11, 29; Hartley, 2015, p.52) with deviations on what the word connotes. In its broader and common sense, Diakonia connotes lowly and humble services, caring for those in need, and waiting on the table (Hartley, 2015, pp.52, 58; Collins, 2014, pp.22,29; Kaneen,2015, p.3). However, Collins argues that Diakonia does not refer to lowly service, waiting at the table. Instead, it is a mandate from a commissioning person or institution, an ‘ordained or commissioned ministry’, emphasizing ordained office rather than service by everyone (Collins, 2012, p.28). Kaneen, on the other hand, argues that ministry should not be restricted to the ordained or those given a mandate. Instead, he emphasizes that ministry should be open to all to meet the needs of people without compromising the demonstration of good character in living it out (2015, pp.30–31). Kaneen’s observation is inclusive that Diakonia is both a service and mandate for the ordained and everyone in the church. Ministry is for all Christians without exceptions (Stott, 1992, p.140).

Hartley portrays the service and mandate aspects of ministry in the form of 'an elongated circle with two gravitational centers', which he calls 'the caritative and the emissarial dimensions of meaning for diakonia' (Hartley, 2015, pp.54-55). The ministry's 'caritative dimension' denotes service clothed with humility. It is a 'religiously motivated social welfare work', focusing on humble, loving service like the deacons in the book of Acts, whose ministry has the imagery of 'towel and basin' (Hartley, 2015, p.55). On the other hand, the 'emissary dimension' of ministry is what the church gives to individuals; the focus is not on the nature of the service but instead on the position of the servant as a minister, as a vocation, calling, unlike the humble, lowly service in caritative dimension (Hartley, 2015, pp.57-59). Considering the two dimensions, Hartley advocates for balance, stating that Diakonia is not to be taken as an exclusive mandate of the ordained but as an informal and formal nature that broadly involves laypersons (2015, p.62). Different people have different ways of ministry (Stott, 1992, p.141).

Some salient ministry features can be highlighted from the above definitions and discussions. The concept of ministry involves a commissioning body (mandator), commissioned individuals (servants), the people receiving service and the nature (type) of the service. Ministry has a caller, an initiator, or a guide (Stott, 1992, p.140; Heldt, 2004, p.168; Collins, 2012, p.28; Kaneen, 2015, p.27). After discussing ministry from a biblical point of view, Kaneen characterizes ministry as 'conferred by others', that ministry has a mandating authority, and '[Jesus]' ministry is undertaken under the authority of another (i.e., God the Father). Thus, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a self-appointed ministry does not correspond with this usage of the word 'ministry' (Kaneen, 2015, p.27). Kaneen further notes that 'those who 'ministered' were always accountable to others' (2015, p.28).

Based on the above observations, the idea of ministry could refer to realizing the qualities and standards the ministry mandator has purposed for the lives or livelihoods of the people targeted in this process. In the process, the mandator guides the servant's calling and how to fulfill it. Therefore, understanding ministry requires considering the mandator's perspective, i.e., the intended standards and qualities for people's lives and how the assigned servants should fulfill them.

From the servant's point of view, ministry refers to 'living a calling' and fulfilling responsibilities as mandated by the commissioning body. According to Stott, the calling is not limited to what happens in the church only but includes ministry at the broader public level engagements (1992, p.142). In living out a calling, Kaneen notes, ministers in the church (I would widen it apply in all spheres) need to have both character and competence, 'those who are chosen to undertake 'ministry' are not just 'anyone', but those who have a particularly suitable character and ability' (Kaneen 2015, p27). Ministry is a meaning-giving service to those in need and the spiritual, mental, social, and physical fulfillment it achieves. It is a platform where the servant can exercise his strong desire, vision, and overall potential and skills under the auspices of the ministry mandator. It is a field where a minister (servant) sees that (s)he is bringing good influence, change and improvements to others, be it people or inanimate bodies. Therefore, the minister's success has two facets: fulfillment of the mandator's calling and improvements in the lives of the people targeted.

Ministry necessarily focuses on addressing the needs of people. Kaneen's view from a biblical perspective characterizes ministry as focused on people and meeting their needs without dichotomizing the 'spiritual' activity from the 'mundane' (2015, p 26). This meeting of needs in real life implies service that is relevant to people. The relevance of ministry can be seen in two

ways: addressing needs and nurturing potential. Human needs are unfulfilled or neglected necessities and desires because of lack, shortage, ignorance, or attitudinal orientation. Need refers not only to external things like lack of material and access to services or opportunities but also its effects as a determinant of thinking, valuing, relationship, self-concept, physical health, and psychological motivation (Myers, 2011, p.132). Therefore, the ministry is a call to meet the needs of external, internal, material, and spiritual natures (Kaneen, 2015, p.31). Hence, it addresses a person's inner and outer realities, solving problems and nurturing potential. Nurturing potential includes supporting the proper manifestation and practice of gifts and talents and encouraging transcendental life principles and vision for a sustainable life journey. Therefore, ministry promotes faith and ownership for a healthy life.

The highlights provided evidence that the concept of ministry goes beyond the simple assumption that it is a straightforward construct. It has both religious and non-religious dimensions. From the religious dimension, particularly about the church, the idea of ministry is related to its root word, 'Diakonia'. Bringing together the various elements reflected in the description of 'ministry' as 'Diakonia', ministry can be explained comprehensively as God-mandated service of the church rendered by ordained or laypersons in a way of caritative services or through fulfilling emissarial mandates to meet the needs of people both within and outside of its wall. Such a comprehensive description of ministry offers the why (responding to the mandate), who (ordained and laypersons), what (addressing needs) and the how of ministry.

While such a comprehensive view of ministry gives a better theoretical picture, the practice of ministry takes different shapes depending on the priorities attached to various aspects of ministry. A case in point is the 'evangelism- social action' debate on the church's mandate among the evangelical circles. The dichotomized view of the physical and spiritual dimension of people

and their needs and the response this view drives, i.e., whether the church's diaconal mandate should include social responses or be limited to evangelism, has stimulated responses of extreme ends: ministry as evangelism or as social responses. The 'evangelism' side emphasizes meeting spiritual needs over social actions, whereas the 'social response' end prioritizes addressing material concerns (Wiher, 2022, pp.15-17; Unruh & Sider, 2005, p.166).

To mediate the extreme views on ministry and, consequently, to maintain a more integrated view and practice of ministry, evangelical leaders have adopted the concept of holism to ministry. The idea of holism is adopted from an emphasis on the relationship of the two constructs, evangelism and social responsibility, to move from a dichotomized view toward an inclusive perspective (Wiher, 2022, p.15; Barreca, 2020, p.64; Padilla, 2005, np; Gustafson, 2004, p.81). The introduction of 'holism' and its adjective form, 'holistic', to qualify 'ministry' intends to address the one-sided understanding and practices focusing on either evangelism or social action (Padilla, 2005, n.p). The holistic notion of ministry upholds its comprehensive nature, embracing evangelism and social actions inseparably (Stott, 1992, p.337; Ringma, 2004, p.438). The following sections discuss holism as it applies to the concept of ministry.

3.3. Holism and holistic ministry

3.3.1. Holism

The concept of holism goes beyond addressing extreme views of how the church should approach ministry to the ontological and epistemological perspectives about human beings as individuals and collectively in their sociocultural realities and environment. Stemming from Greek rationalism, science fields tend to view realities in pieces far from the bigger picture. Such a fragmented approach in science is considered one of the reasons for the growing interest in holism. The divide in the current world between word and deed, between the spiritual and the

material, plays a stimulatory role in contemporary interest in holism (Rowdon, 2014, p.33). Holism is adopted to salvage the fragmented culture.

The dictionary definition of holism is connected to the Greek word '*holos*' which means whole, complete, and integrated (Brewster, 2011:37). It denotes the intimate interconnection of parts of a whole; that parts cannot exist independently of the whole whereas the whole is regarded as greater than the sum of its parts (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The idea of holism from the social dimension views individuals in the context of their community; that 'social roles can only be exercised in a community and that social interactions are necessary for the development of thought and rationality in a human being'. An individual becomes 'a thinking being only in virtue of its membership in a social community of persons' (Weber & Esfeld, 2003, p.1).

Smuts of South Africa is credited with coining holism in its philosophical sense (Freeman, 2005, p. 154; Lundh, 2015, p. 186; Smuts, 1926, p.86; Bubandt & Otto, 2010, p.7) as an 'antidote for reductionist epistemology' (Carlson, 1978, p. 467). Noting the advancement of knowledge holding 'matter, life and mind' disparately and the overdependence of science on treating concepts in exclusion of their contexts, Smuts insists that the parts and the whole are inseparable, 'Both matter and life consist of unit structures whose ordered grouping produces natural wholes which we call bodies or organisms. This character of "wholeness", Smuts says, meets us everywhere and points to something fundamental in the universe (Smuts, 1926, p.86). The notion of holism, as Jan Smuts has explained, implies the creation of 'whole' by the 'ordered grouping' of the parts where 'the whole is in the parts and the parts are in the whole' (1926: 86). Put in other words, 'parts of a whole cannot exist and be understood except in their relation to the whole; complex systems cannot dismantle into their parts without destroying themselves' (Sengupta, 2011, p. 1).

Lundh characterizes holism as 'non-reducibility, non-separability, and self-organization'. As Lundh explains, 'non-reducibility focuses on the whole and implies that its properties cannot be reduced to the properties of its parts' whereas 'non-separability focuses on the parts and implies that these cannot exist independently of the whole.' On the other hand, 'Self-organization' implies a system's inherent capacity for self-changing and developing new features from existing ones (Lundh, 2015, p. 188). Bringing holism in a 'person-oriented approach', Lundh understands a person as a 'holistic system' – a 'dynamic psychophysical system' (2015:188).

Viewed from the angle of science and philosophy, the essence of holism seems far from relating to ministry in the church's context. For example, the idea of 'whole' appears too abstract, lacking concrete evidence of where it starts and to what extent it goes. Wholeness is pictured as an absolute dream to which the parts should strive to belong to secure their identity, but 'the whole will always elude us' (Ringma, 2004, p.437) as there will be the next higher whole. If parts continue making whole and the process continues like that, the final whole is beyond understanding. This needs another way of looking at reality.

Similarly, the ideas that 'the parts cannot exist independent of the whole' and 'the monopoly of the community over individuals' in some sense imply the reductionism of the parts or the individuals. The questions of what the part is, where it begins, and the degree of independence ascribed to it are far from clear. Viewed from this angle, adopting the concept of holism for ministry could add more complexity and confusion. To avoid such a level of sophistication, the word 'whole' needs to be distanced from referring to everything, 'totalization' (Harkin, 2010, p.37). Put in other words, the concept of wholeness serves better with boundaries.

On the other hand, some valuable insights can be gleaned if holism is taken as a paradigm (lens) to see ministry. Emphasizing the interconnectedness of the parts and the whole, holism stands against dichotomized views and addresses the tendency to take ministry calls to extreme ends. Moreover, with the emphasis on wholeness, holism encourages us to consider the broader context of ministry and hence addresses reduced views of individuals and communities and their ecology. Judicious application of the ethos of holism can serve as a remedy to address fragmented views and practices. Holism infers interconnection and relationships. These valuable inputs from applying the paradigm of holism to ministry can be more visible if biblical views are called into the discussion.

Biblical holism proposes a non-dualistic view of human beings. Human beings are 'body-soul beings' created in the image of God. 'The spirit, the body, the mind, and the emotions together make up the total human package' (Sider et al., 2002, p.49). Biblical holism recognizes and upholds the wholeness without dichotomization of the 'spiritual' from the 'physical. Holism 'embodies the ideas of completeness, perfection, oneness, integration, soundness, integrity, harmony, regained health, restored relations with God, peace with ourselves and our fellow human beings, and respect for the environment' (Brewster, 2011:37). Discarding the dualistic view of a person, biblical holism endorses the '*psuche-soma*' indivisibility (Weathers, 1983, np). This indivisibility implies that the wholeness of a person is not a simple arithmetic sum of the components of his make-up (like physical, spiritual, cognitive, and socio-emotional aspects). Rather, it is like 'a fabric' in which all components are interwoven (Brewster, 2011, p. 39). Holism is not a one-sided view of a person's ideals. It is neither one-sided optimism nor pessimism about human nature. Instead, it is a realistic assessment that both the good and bad live together in a person (Hendricks, 1998, p.223).

Furthermore, beyond individual wholeness, biblical holism acknowledges the social aspect of human beings. Humanness is expressed as a community that brings another layer of reality to the personal level, interwoven features of physical and spiritual nature. The individual is also viewed as a member of a broader social network that humans form and cultivate in their physical environment. Myers notes, 'People as individuals are inseparable from the social systems in which they live.' (2011:135). Similarly, Stott says:

[human beings are] not just souls (that we should be concerned exclusively for their eternal salvation), not just bodies (that we should care only for their food, clothing, shelter and health), nor just social beings (that we should become entirely preoccupied with their community problems). They are all three. A human being might be defined from a biblical perspective as "a body-soul-in-a-community (Stott, 2006, p.53).

From a biblical perspective, holism applies both at individual and collective levels. A person is whole, i.e., all the aspects of humanness are considered without reducing one or the other or dividing them. Moreover, an individual's wholeness is maintained in the broader context (the bigger whole), the community encompassing the individual. The individual and the community have their respective wholeness with shared and unique features.

Scholars coined the concept of holism to respond to ontological and epistemological reductionism in science and philosophy. Its adoption in ministry addresses the dualistic view of human beings and the multichotomy in ministry perspectives and practices. The concept of holism is incorporated into contemporary ministry literature to avoid reductionist views and fragmented actions, 'it is helpful to speak of holistic mission as a reaction to reductionism and to overcome mechanistic or atomistic approaches to life and ministry' (Ringma, 2004, p.435). Thus, we read

ministry preceded by the evocative word 'holistic' – 'holistic ministry'. The following section discusses holistic ministry, with a particular focus on child ministry.

3.3.2. Holistic ministry

In its general sense, the idea of holism and holistic ministry is not a result of recent debates among Christians. A holistic approach was a common practice in the Old Testament era and during Jesus' ministry in the New Testament. Woolnough notes that the holistic view is a thought pattern in the non-western world (Africa, Asia and Latin America), unlike the dominance of Greek dualism in the Western world, which tends to see different aspects of life as distinct (Woolnough, 2010, p.5). The origin of the contemporary idea of holistic mission is attached with the names of two Latin American theologians, René Padilla and Samuel Escobar (Woolnough, 2010, p.12; Kirkpatrick, 2016, pp.351- 353 Wiher, 2022, p.8; Langmead, 2009, p.1). As Wiher notes, Padilla and Escobar wanted to go beyond Western theologians' limited view of mission to evangelism and church planting. Padilla and Escobar found the Western view of mission to have 'reductionist tendencies' inappropriate for the context where poverty is rampant (Wiher, 2022, p.8). Hence, a holistic mission was developed to address a one-sided understanding of the mission as vertical or horizontal (Padilla, 2005, n.p).

With the intention to make mission relevant in the context of poverty, holistic mission was designed to remove the wall of the dichotomy between evangelism and social responsibility (Wiher, 2022, p.p. 8-9). Going further to functional integration of ministry (evangelism and social responsibility), the idea of a holistic mission acknowledges the inseparable togetherness of life's spiritual and physical aspects (Woolnough, 2010, p.5). Moreover, holistic ministry extends to embrace multidimensional dynamics of contextual realities. Hence, it can be observed

that holistic ministry is a loaded concept that addresses the multichotomic view of human beings, their needs and contexts and the fragmented approach to ministry.

While adopting holistic ministry aims to bridge philosophical, theoretical, and practical gaps that the evangelicals have grappled with, particularly in the 20th century and onwards, the conceptualization of holistic ministry still entertains multiple voices, including efforts to define the concept. In the Lausanne paper Occasional Paper 33, Hughes describes holistic mission:

Holistic mission is the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ. It begins with the confession that Jesus is Lord of all and attempts to live out that lordship in the whole of life. The mission of the church is, therefore, comprehensive in its means and in its impact.

Holistic mission is the focus of the Lausanne Movement¹⁰ which is conveyed by its slogan 'the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.' However, an agreed-upon definition is far from reality. Scholars work from an operational definition they propose based on what they assess fitting in their contexts (Wan, 2005, np). Considering the theological, theoretical and practical aspects holistic ministry encompasses, Wan proposes the following comprehensive definition:

“Holistic ministry/missions” is understood to be “Christians motivated by their love for God and neighbors (within or without one’s socio-cultural context) , mobilized to be engaged in multi-dimensional services to HIM by serving others inclusively caring for the spiritual, psychological, social, physical, etc. well beings of others, with multifaceted[d] (religious & charity, public & private, etc.) services and at multi-levels (personal and

¹⁰ Lausanne Movement ‘is a global evangelical Movement that emerged as a part of the International Congress on World Evangelization in 1974’ (Tennent, 2014, p.45)

institutional, local and global), in the framework of reconciliation vertically with God, horizontally with humanity and hierarchically with the created order (2005, np).

According to this definition, holistic ministry involves all Christians serving God and all people in all possible ways toward restored relationships in all dimensions. Wan highlights reconciliation as the theological core of the holistic mission in addition to the theoretical and practical dimensions. Langmead's definition reflects a similar emphasis on reconciliation. Acknowledging the different tasks and dimensions mission involves, Langmead summarizes all aspects of mission in one overarching goal, 'although there are many tasks and dimensions of Christian mission there is only one overarching goal, and that is to co-operate with God's mission to reconcile the world to Godself in all of its relationships', both in vertical and horizontal dimensions (2009, p.3).

From these definitions given as an example, it could be noted that holistic ministry is a multidimensional construct that involves God, people, and the broader cosmic order. Holistic ministry is both paradigm and praxis. The concept seems overstretched because it brings everything in every direction without a specific limit. Ascribing such limitless conceptual elasticity to the subject could stifle its clarity and focus, making it 'too much' and 'too general' (Ringma, 2004, p.433). The scope of holistic ministry drives several questions when one looks at it with the realities on the ground.

In this regard, the availability of resources and capacity to live out holistic ministry with its all-embracing nature is among the legitimate questions and concerns reflected. Some see holistic ministry as a distractor of resources and time that could be invested in selected tasks, such as evangelism (Russel, 2008, p.95). Others see it from the limited capacity of human beings and their collectives as a community. With the 'limited, imperfect and sinful' nature of human

beings, the expectation of a holistic mission seems pretentious (Wiher, 2022, p8) as ‘we can never do enough, and when we try to do too much, we may well fail in the process because of undoable expectations’ (Ringma, 2004, p.44). There cannot be a body with all ‘competencies, resources and expertise’ to live up to the expectations of holistic ministry with its philosophical underpinnings (Heldt, 2004, p.162). ‘Being holist is unreachable even in thought’ (Willmer and Prevette, 2016, pp.198-199).

While holistic ministry is overstretched to go in every direction, as explained above, the narrow take of it both conceptually and practically is also observed in many ways, including unintended attachment of holistic ministry with poverty and the poor, reduction of ministry to evangelism and social response and ascribing holistic mission as a responsibility of selected groups and organizations. It seems that the very start of the holistic mission in the context of poverty in Latin America has created the unintended perception that ‘holistic ministry’ is for people experiencing poverty, for people in the Third World. Holistic ministry is often discussed as serving people and communities in need, where need is dominantly taken in material and economic terms. While the priority of serving people experiencing poverty is always proper and should not be compromised, ‘the poverty of the non-poor’ (Myers, 2011, p.148) is also a call for ministry, perhaps of a different sort. With poverty-driven ministry, ‘the poor will not gain much unless the rich are converted to the values of the reign of God and just structures are created in the fabric of society’ (Ringma, 2004, p.435).

Another narrowness of the holistic mission is related to implementors. Born out of the intention to serve the poor, holistic ministry is perceived as a call of parachurch organizations and assigned professionals against ‘the whole church’ principle of a holistic approach. Criticizing such narrow perceptions and practices, Ringma asks, ‘Is holistic mission only for the poor? Is

mission not for all? Does it not involve the whole church to be engaged in the work of God in all spheres of life?’ (2004, p.439).

Exposing the reductionist tendencies in holistic mission both perceptually and in practice and arguing toward other aspects of mission, Ringma disagrees with the very debate on mission limited to evangelism and social concerns, ‘the discussion of holistic mission in contemporary evangelicalism is trapped on the rocks of the evangelism-social concern debate and hopelessly inadequate’ (2004, p.435). For Ringma, mission is more than the ‘evangelism-social’ pulls:

It is also building families that love God, creating businesses that serve the wider community, and forming institutions that shape society. It involves evangelism, church planting, the work of charity, the quest for justice, the task of social transformation, and the work of inculturation. And this is the task of the whole church, not that of some zealous workers on behalf of the church (2004, p.435).

This observation is a call to outdo artificial divides and live out holistic ministry in a relevant way. In this sense, the claim of holism that 'the whole is greater than the parts' makes sense. Holistic ministry cannot be claimed by simply adding evangelistic and development activities or having ministry content that addresses a person's physical, spiritual, social, and cognitive aspects. 'The tendency to segregate or fragment life into component parts for analysis not only robs life, but destroys it' (Case, 2011, p.9).

While understanding, practical experiences, and conceptual and experiential gaps in holistic ministry are generally seen in almost all contexts, with possible variations, unique contextual realities cannot be minimized in facilitating or inhibiting the practice of holistic ministry. In the next section, I highlight contextual realities from the Ethiopian perspective.

3.3.3. Holistic ministry in Ethiopian context

Ethiopian socio-cultural and political fabric is interwoven with religious heritage, particularly with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) since the 4th century AD (Tamirat, 1968, pp. 43-44; Marcus, 2020, p.7; Adejumobi, 2002, p.12; Girma, 2018, p.20). Holding the status of state religion until communism came to power in 1974 (Kipfer, 2017, p. 308), EOTC has played a pivotal role in the history of Ethiopians, making Christianity native in Ethiopian land, deeply rooted in the people's culture and expression of national identity (Girma, 2012, p. xvi; Shenk, 1987, pp.8, 9).

The journey of EOTC evidences a long history of holistic ministry in Ethiopia. Shenk notes that EOTC's mission involves evangelism, Christian nurture and social services. The Church promoted this through training of clergy, Sunday school, bible schools, women and youth-focused programs, moral instructions and services in hospitals and prisons (Shenk, 1987, p.16). The holistic engagement got added impetus when the Church cooperated with the WCC Division of Inter-Church Aid in the late 1960s. Through this collaboration, the Church strengthened its action in furthering 'religious education, literacy, libraries, rehabilitation programs, health concerns and refugees' (Shenk, 1987, p.17). Consequently, the Church created a development wing, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission, to organizationally engage in humanitarian needs (Shenk, 1987, p. 17).

The holistic ministry has been part and parcel of the missionary-founded churches as well like The Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (KHC), The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), The Mesrete Kristos Church (MKC), and many Baptist churches (Haustein, 2014, p.109, Longwe, 2016, p.382, Girma, 2018, p.2; Eshete, 2013, p.163). Like the mission-founded

churches, Indigenous evangelical and Pentecostal churches have also engaged in holistic ministry in recent decades (Donis, 2017, p. iii). Holistic ministry necessarily incorporating development programs, e.g., education, health, and food security, played a strategic role in missionaries entering Ethiopia and offering services, including the spiritual aspects (Gonfa, 2015, p.9). The relationship between the development and evangelistic activities was complementary, more integral/reciprocal than instrumental' (EKHC, 2020, p.2).

Whenever the topic of the holistic ministry of Ethiopian churches is raised, the late Gudina Tumsa of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus comes among the pioneering voices in developing the theology of serving the whole person (Terfassa, 2017, p. 37; Deressa, 2017, p. 155; Jadock, 2022, p.45). Tumsa takes credit for his holistic thinking, which balances universal and contextual realities. He believed in the undivided human reality and viewed life in its totality (Deressa, 2017, pp.155-156). In his article on Tumsa's contribution to theology, Jadock articulates:

Gudina's way of doing theology is important because it is both contextual and universal. The dynamics are universal, the focus on relationality is universal, the holistic emphasis is universal, while at the same time these dynamics intentionally take seriously the here and now of individuals and particular peoples and engage their specific social settings so seriously that the end result turns out to be deeply contextual--but contextual in a way that does not set one part of the church against another (Jadock, 2022, p.45, 56)

According to this observation, the essence of holism is multifaceted, going beyond viewing a person and unnecessarily zooming in to a specific culture or context at the expense of other tangible realities in the broader world. However, practices, in some ways, fall short of such a robust view of holism.

Ethiopian churches' longstanding practices of holistic ministry have not been free of gaps. The gaps can come under the mother problem of dualistic view. Dualism is a problem in Ethiopian Orthodox and Evangelical Churches (Girma, 2012, p.8; Hansen, 2015, p.138; Besha, 2021, p.53). The dualistic view puts a divide between the sacred and profane, the spiritual and the material, and the religious and the secular. The dichotomy is also between the 'spiritual–social', 'internal-external', 'individual – organizational', and 'ordained- laypeople'.

Discussing the dualistic view in the context of EOTC, scholars have pointed out the practice of observing holy (saints') days against engagement in hard labor work, the involvement of some liturgies (*debteras*) in syncretistic practices and the high view towards asceticism (Hansen, 2015, p.138, Besha, 2021, pp.52-53). The ascetic way of life (monasticism), renouncing the world, is seen as the highest form of spirituality in the Orthodox belief, which esteems monks and priests 'above ordinary believers' (Hansen, 2015, p.138, Besha, 2021, p.53).

Like the realities among the Orthodox culture, Evangelical Christians also exhibit dualism in their individual and ministerial lives. Hansen has identified four themes of evangelical dualistic view in Ethiopia: attitude toward creation and material reality, attitude toward work, attitude toward society and attitude toward spirituality. According to Hansen, Ethiopian Evangelical Christians tend to be expectant of the world to come, undermining and leaving out the current world as destined to burn and perish. Such an attitude has resulted in minimal intentional effort for the care of creation that Christians must demonstrate. Likewise, Christians' view toward work is divided into serving the "pharaoh" (this world) and serving the church or in the church (God's world) (Hansen, 2015, p.138).

Evangelicals see involvement in social issues as a secondary priority. They exhibit a "politico-phobic" posture in social engagements (Girma, 2018,18) and leave out serving people

in organizations (Hasen, 2015, p.139; Besha, 2021, p.59). In the same line, Hansen observes that the spiritual view of evangelical Christians denigrates science, lacks sound biblical interpretations and divorces or separates faith and reason (Hansen, 2015, pp.138-139). However, a caveat is needed here to avoid the risk of generalization.

Reflecting on the social engagement of evangelical churches, Deressa notes that the divide in social–spiritual actions was not the story when missionaries started work in Ethiopia. Instead, he notes that engaging in social actions helped missionaries get in and set up on Ethiopian soil. Up to the 1960s, mission endeavors focused on preaching and caring for people in need, integrating social responses (mainly development projects) and proclaiming the gospel (Deressa, 2017, p.152). Similarly, Mengesha, commenting on the ministry of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in its early days, notes, ‘mission and development works were integrated ministries of the church’ (Mengesha, 2017, p.161).

However, the shift in holistic approach came in the 1960s when the Western world started metaphorizing human well-being in economic terms and the implied investment of resources needed to address needs. The view of well-being economically led the Western mission to raise more resources for development activities than the African churches (Deressa, 2017, p.54). Consequently, African churches focused on evangelistic works, whereas Western missionaries were inclined to development programs. In the aftermath, the spiritual-social divide crept in.

Dualism is also reflected in distorted views of the role of individual church members, the church, and other institutions, such as parachurch organizations. In the practice of evangelicals, individuals tend to see social responses as the role of the church or other originations. Mengesha, commenting on charismatic practices, notes this reality:

The charismatic practices in the church motivated and encouraged people to a better spiritual understanding and ethical life. Nevertheless, there is very little interaction between that spirituality and social engagement at the level of the individual. Often, members at the grass roots perceive social engagement as the role of some other institution, not themselves (Mengesha, 2017, 172)

On the other hand, churches' social engagements in justice, policy and right issues are limited, apparently leaving that space of responsibility for its interested individual members. Because of these attitudes, both from individual members and the church, meaningful participation in social issues falls through the cracks.

Similarly, the internal-external divide is also visibly observed in the church's ministry. As Molla notes, the ministry of pastors of the church, for the most part, is restricted within the church compound. They have no or minimal involvement in public issues. In cases where people from the community, for example, participants (beneficiaries) of the church's community service projects, come to the church premises, there is labeling that signals 'othering' those people. For example, in cases when churches serve children from the community, they use expressions like 'supported children', 'sponsored children', and in the worst cases, 'poor children' while calling others 'children of the church' (Molla, 2015, p.106). I heard a true story about a pastor who got upset seeing children from the community playing in the church compound with their hand-made balls (made of rags). The pastor shouted that 'the church is God's house, a house of prayer, not for children to play football', and furiously asked social workers to stop the children's activity. Such a seemingly small perception makes some children 'insiders' and others 'outsiders'. The internal-external divide erodes the holistic nature of the church's ministry Including holistic child ministry.

3.4. Holistic child ministry

3.4.1. The journey of children's ministry

Children's ministry is one branch of the church's life in the contemporary world (Csinos, 2011, p.7; Grobbelaar, 2016, p.122; Mumo, 2013, 793). However, practiced in one form or another, it is older than the church, 'the people of God have long wrestled with how to empower the native spirituality of children to thrive and take the shape of an enduring, resilient faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' (Rains et al., 2019, p. 1).

Children's ministry in Africa is as old as Christianity's arrival. It dates to the arrival of Christianity in the Northern part of the continent in the first century AD (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.118; Coetsee & Grobbelaar, 2013, p.806). To make children know and follow the religion that set foot on the continent, the fathers of faith at that time, like Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine, emphasized education, so teaching children continued to be the ministry of the church in North Africa (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.118).

In the Ethiopian context, child ministry made the first Christian king and founded the Ethiopian church. Grobbelaar and Coetsee (2013, p.806) note:

The Ethiopian church, in fact, has an interesting origin, which all started with Christian education. Two Christian boys from Tyre, Frumentius and Edesius, was on a voyage on the Red Sea with their uncle when the ship was attacked and all but the two brothers were killed. They were captured and sold as slaves to the king of Aksum in Ethiopia, who was so impressed with their education and Christian lifestyle that he put them into responsible positions and eventually freed them. After the king's death they were appointed by the queen to educate her children, amongst whom the heir Ezana. The brothers introduced the gospel to the crown prince and his people and Ezana became the first Christian monarch of Ethiopia.

The conversion of King Ezana was a key milestone for the Christian religion in Ethiopia (Tamirat, 1968, pp. 43-44; Marcus, 2020, p.7; Adejumobi, 2002, p.12; Girma, 2017, p.20;). While children's ministry has a long history related explicitly to Christian education, it has emerged through time to meet the needs of children perceived as critical in specific periods.

3.4.2. Reviewing models of holistic child ministry

Churches have various activities to nurture children's spiritual life starting from infancy. For example, in the Ethiopian Orthodox church, infants and young children participate in sacramental practices like baptism, confirmation and Holy Communion (Tamene, 1998, p.101). Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has the same practice of infant and child baptism (Galla, 2011, p.46). Similarly, evangelical churches have various spiritual services like child dedication, baptism (usually after ten years), bible teachings and discipleship courses. Further to the spiritual services, churches support children's physical and educational needs through different social and programmatic interventions. Sunday school and holistic child development models are the most widely practiced child-focused ministry.

3.4.2.1. Sunday school

One of the notable developments in the history of child ministry is the 18th-century Sunday school movements started in Britain by Robert Raikes, later joined by the Reverend Thomas Stock and Hannah More (Coetsee & Grobbelaar, 2013, p.804; Mumo, 2016, p.47). Originally, Raikes' Sunday school movement started outside of the church with less concern for 'religious indoctrination' and more intention was given to literacy and moral development for children from low-income families (Coetsee & Grobbelaar, 2016, pp. 804-805). Following the accessibility of formal education for children regardless of economic status, the focus of Sunday school in the Western world shifted from equipping children with literary skills to evangelism and Christian

education (Mumo, 2016, p.49). Furthermore, the practice in the modern church has moved from an outward focus to serving the insiders (Coetsee and Grobbelaar, 2013, p.805).

Unlike its history in Europe and America, Sunday school in Africa started with a focus on evangelism and Christian education. Introduced by the Western missionaries, Sunday School was an integral part of the strategy of teaching children the word of God in mission stations (Coetsee and Grobbelaar, 2013, p.806; Mumo, 2016, p.50). Literary programs were included later when missionaries opened primary schools attached to churches planted in the villages of their outreaches. The schools used to offer both Christian and modern education (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.120). However, schools have not continued this practice in postcolonial Africa.

With the global trends of secularism, the nation-states in Africa assumed responsibility for education, leaving the church to focus on religious issues with limited participation in health and welfare activities as an act of charity. The secularization consequently led to the divorce of the spiritual and other needs of children, and Sunday school ended up becoming the primary avenue for the church to minister to children (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.121; Coetsee and Grobbelaar, 2013, p.806). Sunday school is widely run by evangelical African churches (Mumo, 2013, p.793). When child ministry is considered, Sunday school is often the first thing that comes to mind. Despite the long-standing practices and the countless impacts Sunday school has brought in the history of the church ministry, there are also criticisms, especially in its latest school-type formats and methods (Mumo, 2006, p.53; Coetsee and Grobbelaar, 2013, p.807; Grobbelaar, 2016, pp.122, 137; Csinos and Beckwith, 2013, p.25).

This criticism is that Sunday school ministry seems pulled too much toward the style of secular school in the way it is perceived and practiced. ‘The style, the strategy, even the classes are based on the public-school matrix’ (Coetsee and Grobbelaar, 2013, p.807). As Coetsee and

Grobbelaar note, 'The first concern relates to the linguistics surrounding Sunday School: "school", "teachers", "classes", lessons", "curricula", "certificates" – terminology copied from the field of education and carrying a particular set of values' (2013, p.807). On the same line, Grobbelaar sees Sunday school activities as focusing more on 'activities aimed at the intellect' where the priority is to transfer knowledge of biblical contents to recite from memory (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.122).

The unbalanced inclination to run Sunday school as a copy of public school consequently causes a shift toward focusing on head knowledge, making the process a "brain work" rather than experience (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.122; Ingersoll, 2014, p.167). The focus on "head knowledge," in turn, has methodological implications. One of the risks is that delivering Biblical lessons takes more attention than the children, treating children as mere recipients. Such an approach is commonly known as the 'banking model'. Even though it is highly criticized, the 'banking model' is still a common practice, including in Sunday schools:

This concept [the banking paradigm] is not uncommon today, both within faith communities, through the Sunday school or church school, and outside of congregations, through systems of public education. Whether children are seen as raw material, blank slates, wet cement, or sponges, these metaphors espouse a view of young people as passive objects to be molded or formed into functioning human beings by adults (Csinos, 2011, pp.10-11)

The traditional teaching method, like the banking approach, is teacher-focused, employing a one-directional flow of information from the teacher to students as a lecture. Such a process not only limits children's engagement but also minimizes the impact Sunday school could have had on children's lives. 'The traditional teaching methods of lecture, write, and listen won't engage 21st-century learners, nor will they promote learning or create future followers of Jesus' (Smith, 2014, 107, EPUB).

As noted above, one of the criticisms on Sunday school ministry relates with its mode facilitation (way of teaching), the level to which it engages children. Children make and gain spiritual meanings when they effectively engage in the learning process and their way of engagement is not the same for all children. Appreciating the individual differences of children in their way of experiencing God, Csinos argues that child ministry should move beyond ‘one-size-fits-all approaches’ and encourages people who are in ministry with children (e.g. pastors, parents, and teachers) to use ‘ministry models, methods, and practices that engage children of each and every spiritual style in authentic, life-changing trans/formation’ (2011, p.86).

Aside from criticisms of Sunday school's design, content, and presentation, service coverage is another concern. As mentioned above, although Sunday school initially aimed at children from outside the church and from low-income families, the changes and challenges over time limited it to the insiders – within the church premises. The limitation is both in the number of children to serve and the nature of service to give. What happens in the church compound, by and large, focuses on bible teachings and spiritual nurture, 'the focus of children's ministry is mostly on children already within the church, and on enhancing their continuous spiritual growth' (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.136).

By implication, this restricted scope of the Sunday school approach means that it becomes short of reaching many children outside the church premises, including orphans and vulnerable children, commonly known as ‘Children At Risk’ (CAR). The needs of CAR go beyond what the regular Sunday school offers. Their risks are multifaceted, going to ‘the ultimate risk of being human, of falling short of the glory of God, of failing to be, to become and to persist in being, truly human, as measured in the fullness of Christ’ (Willmer & Prevette, 2016, p.198). It calls for a more integrated response.

3.4.2.2. Holistic Child Development (HCD)

Child ministry is more expansive than the Sunday school churches do in their compounds. Prevette argues that “mission with children requires more than a ‘gospel of sin management’ that simply calls for their conversion to a ‘life in heaven’ or readjusting questionable social systems for ‘life in the present’” (2014, p.102). Considering the broader nature of children’s needs and the corresponding responsibility of ensuring their wellness and development, churches and parachurch organizations nowadays run programs to minister to children holistically.

In response to the multidimensional needs of children at risk, a notable ministry called holistic child development (HCD) has emerged as an umbrella concept, mainly in Christian organizations. Brewster notes, ‘holistic child development is the work of the Church and God’s people to enable needy children and families to overcome their poverty and neediness and to become all that God has intended them to be’ (Brewster, 2011, p.41). The holistic child development ministry is mainly driven by a compassionate paradigm intending to serve children in difficult circumstances (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.136). As its name implies, HCD aims to serve all aspects of children’s development and meet their needs holistically. It comprises interventions that address physical, educational, social, emotional and spiritual needs (Brewster, 2011, p. 37).

The holistic child development model considers the child a whole person and adopts the ‘whole child’ approach as a guiding principle in its ministry endeavor. ‘The whole child’ concept embraces the child’s being, belonging and becoming. The child’s ‘being’, also called ‘child agency’, refers to who the child is and how her agency interacts with ecological realities (Hyde et al., 2010, p.97). The child’s development proceeds from the present status of wholeness to the next level yet to be realized (Bunge, 2006, p. 566; Meggitt, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, a child’s wholeness is both the starting point and the yet-to-be future to develop into.

The implementation of a holistic child development model uses various approaches. Child sponsorship is one of the undertakings churches and parachurch organizations use to serve at-risk children. Child sponsorship programs are international-level undertakings that mobilize resources of any form to support children at risk in their locations. Through the child sponsorship programs, Millions of children are supported with billions of US dollars. As Wydick et al.'s 2010 report shows, there were an estimated 8.3 million children supported by sponsorship programs with an annual budget of \$3.2 billion (2010, p.1). The child sponsorship approach brings the issues of children to individual-level engagement; it mobilizes millions to support children:

There is really no other tool that has the potential to engage millions (a pre-requisite to trigger movements) to consider the poor on a personal level. All the funding from all the major donors and corporates could not have achieved the engagement of the ordinary middle class for a single cause” (Christian, 2014, p. xiii).

Christian views the child sponsorship approach as a tool that can advocate wealth redistribution, transform the humanitarian industry, promote mutuality among stakeholders, equip young minds to break the vicious cycle of poverty and trigger a worldwide movement for people in need (Christian, 2014, xv).

Many organizations do child sponsorship with some common characteristics despite their organizational contexts. Sponsorship organizations generally mobilize personalized regular giving and occasional gifts by individual sponsors to support an individual child and their families and, in some cases, the community. They emphasize relationship building between children and sponsors and, to that end, facilitate and encourage regular child-sponsor communications by exchanging photos, letters and updates (Watson & Clarke, 2014, p.2; Wydick et al., 2010, p.1).

Despite the claimed holistic nature, there are some observations that make HCD somehow short of its name. One of the drawbacks often mentioned is HCD's use of 'development' as a metaphor in viewing children and ministry. The concept of development, as it commonly connotes, signals that children go from a lower level to a higher level, giving a sense of their 'becoming' more important than their 'being' (Grobbelaar, 2016, p.129). Commenting on the concept of development in relation to children's spirituality, Nye (2009, p.85) says:

The term spiritual development is problematic. It is quite hard to think of development without imagining a linear, hierarchical model. But that kind of model does not fit spirituality, which does not necessarily go from less to more, from simple to complex. And linear thinking can make it hard to value 'earlier' stages in spiritual development as highly as later stages.

Developmental thinking often advocates stagewise structured maturity which signals a perception that children are 'developing creations' into 'future adults' and members of the 'next generation', despite their being both 'today' and 'the future', (Ben-Arieh, 2006, p. 4). However, children are simultaneously 'being and becoming' (Uprichard, 2008, p. 303).

Another observation on HCD is related to views toward children and their contexts. While it is legitimate to prioritize children in need, there are unintended risks related to 'othering' and 'stereotyping' these children through labeling them as 'children at risk', 'poor children', 'orphans and vulnerable children', 'children infected or affected by HIV' and so on (Greener, 2016, p.164; Grobbelaar, 2016a, p.136; Watson & Clarke, 2014, p.14). Commenting on the view toward children at risk, Greener notes:

when we consider a segment of labeled humanity, such as 'child' or 'child-at-risk', we can fail to notice children as fully a part of the household of Christ and, thus, rely on scriptures where they are explicitly mentioned, which marginalizes, over-simplifies, and minimizes their full humanity (2016, p.164).

Marginalizing causes children a deep pain, perhaps not visibly seen at the physical level. This reminds me of a painful story a 12-year-old boy shared with me about the psychological effects of HIV and AIDS while we were chatting over tea and cake. In the middle of our conversation, he asked me, ‘Take us somewhere else from this place’. Overwhelmed by his question, I asked why. He said, ‘Our friends, people in the church and the community, everyone calls I and my sister ‘ኤድዛም ፣disami’ - children of AIDS’. The loss of these children was aggravated by the irresponsible labeling of them as if they were ‘born of HIV/AIDS)’. While the church arranged foster care and provided the necessary support for these children, the support was stifled with words uncritically used, resulting in stigmatization.

In their qualitative research on similar issues, Jones et al. (2020, p.1) observe ‘how the very processes and practices set up to support the young people can often have unintended consequences by routinely positioning them as Other’. Similarly, Csinos and Beckwith noted the risk of stereotyping children by labeling children even using positive expressions:

Too often, churches hold stereotypical views of children. They can buy into stereotypes and generalizations that kids are happiest when they are running around (or even that they need to run around all the time), that children always make lots of noise, that they crave constant entertainment, or that they have the most fun when they’re on the verge of being out of control. But by viewing each unique child through stereotypes and labels we attach to them, children’s ministry can become co-opted by consumerist, market-driven agendas, and it forgets the church’s mission of offering radical hospitality to the least of these (2013, p.100, EPUB)

The uncritical usage of words to refer to children has the potential to cause unintended stigmatization, discrimination, and one-sided treatment, which I see as ‘othering’ (negatively) and ‘Stereotyping’. Both views ultimately affect the relational aspect of holistic child ministry.

There are also questions about the extent to which holistic child ministry and child sponsorship programs include children, children's families, and their contexts (Watson et al., 2014, p.79; Grobbelaar, 2016, p.128). Commenting on program issues, Myers notes:

Children tend to be seen as passive recipients of development aid. They are portrayed as sad, hungry, and desperately in need of assistance. This image dominates development planning and evaluation process as well. The result is that children are fed and educated but not taken seriously' (2011, p.276).

In summary, despite its notable strategy, holistic ministry to children has shortcomings that include attitudinal, scope and methodological aspects. The ensuing section focuses on how children's understanding and experiences can help address the observed gaps in holistic ministry.

3.4.2.3. Spiritual Formation Models

As noted above, some criticisms about Sunday school ministry include its inclination toward 'head knowledge' and 'teacher-student' type approach. In relation to this, some scholars question how much Sunday school engages children and enables them to experience a relationship with God. There is agreement that children make and gain spiritual meanings when ministry is facilitated engagingly. However, the way of engagement could vary from child to child. Scholars who emphasize the spiritual formation of children, for example, Csinos and Anthony, consider multiple ways children experience and express spirituality.

In his research on the effectiveness of children's ministry and how children express spirituality, Csinos (2011, pp.8, 48- 50) has identified what he calls 'four ways' children know and experience God:

- A word-centered approach

- An emotion-centered approach
- A symbol-centered approach
- An action-centered approach

Children (people) with a word-centered approach experience spirituality with intellectual thinking through what they sense and imagine. For children of this style, engagement in logical and rational thinking, such as reading the bible and bible study groups, helps connect with God and understand the world (Csinos, 2011, p.52-53). For an emotion-centered approach, feeling holds the core of spiritual experiences. Activities like music, drama, dance, and personal testimonies pointing to God's interventions in one's life enhance spiritual experiences (Csinos, 2011, p.57). Symbol-centered people value the power of quietness and silence, listening and hearing and connecting with God. Activities like prayer and quiet time are of high value for such people (Csinos, 2011, p.61). Finally, action-centered people emphasize action beyond prayer; they seek to 'make the world a better place, to transform the world into a place of justice, equality, and care for all people and for the earth' (Csinos, 2011, p.65).

Appreciating children's differences in their way of experiencing God, Csinos argues that child ministry should move beyond 'one-size-fits-all approaches' and encourages people who are in ministry with children (e.g., pastors, parents, and teachers) to use 'ministry models methods, and practices that engage children of each and every spiritual style in authentic, life-changing trans/formation' (2011, p.86). Children do not passively absorb information, they want to actively engage in family and church activity (Hood, 2004, 240).

Similarly, based on Holm's diagram on prayer and Kolb's learning cycle, Anthony (2006, pp.30-42) has identified four quadrant models of spiritual formation as indicated in the diagram below.

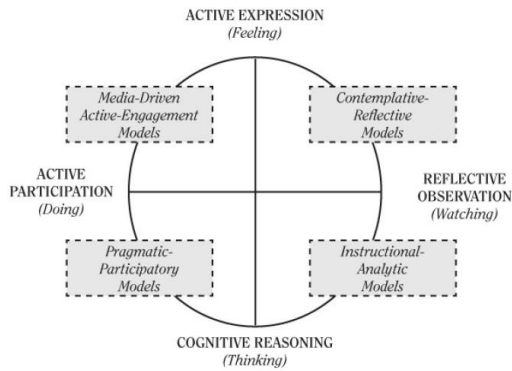


Figure 1. Four quadrant models of spiritual formation (source Anthony, 2006, p.36)

The contemplative-reflective quadrant involves reflection, prayer and storytelling, leading to personal and revelatory experiences and intimate relationship with God (Anthony, 2006, pp.36-37). Elucidating the model in detail, May (2006, p.45) says:

In a contemplative environment the careful observer is able to watch the children transition from ordinary time and space to a special time and space that reveals deep contentedness on their faces and in their posture. This transition does not happen quickly but rather subtly. It seems as if the spirit of the child is communing with the Spirit of God. The Contemplative-Reflective Model of children's ministry seeks to facilitate experiences such as these.

Experience of contemplation is often related to adults, while children are characterized as having a short attention span and tactile and operating on objects rather than spiritual matters (May, 2006, p.46). However, children are active and have the capacity to wonder and think reflectively (Nye, 2009, p.86). Through contemplation and reflection, children experience joy, dignity, awe and wonder (May, 2006, p.69).

The instructional-analytic quadrant focuses on spiritual experiences through cognitive thought processes, and spirituality is nurtured through the systematic study of God's word

(Anthony, 2006, p.38). This approach helps to enhance children's spiritual growth and obedience according to God's word (Carlson & Crupper, 2006, 103). The Pragmatic-Participatory involves engagement, fun and activities such as choreography, singing, and dramatizing bible stories that children participate in (Anthony, 2006, p.39). The Pragmatic-Participatory Model is a ministry that involves the experience of active participation in the learning process and the practical and relevant application of lessons (Graves, 2006, p.165).

Finally, the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model is 'characterized by high-energy, heavily vested in instructional technology, with children always in motion. These children love creative expression, guided imagery, music, drama, and activities' (Anthony, 2006, p.41). This model uses 'technology and interactive media to emphasize discovery-based and cooperative learning' (Ellis, 2006, p.225).

As noted, the spiritual formation models consider children's differences in experiencing and expressing spirituality. They imply the need for individual attention for every child. However, how to put these approaches into practice, especially in contexts beyond the church premise, seems to need further work. On the other hand, some shortcomings can be noted with the models:

1. While acknowledging individual inclination is acceptable, the qualities mentioned appear essential for every person. In this sense, how can child ministry help children develop the qualities that are less visible than those mentioned is a question to ask.
2. While individual attention is essential, it could make spirituality more individualistic and affect its relational aspect.
3. The models appear resource-intensive, and their practicability could be limited in contexts with capacity constraints.

4. The models are focused on the spiritual maturity of children. However, children, especially in the context of poverty, have needs in other dimensions as well.

Both the existing and emerging models around holistic child ministry have their own strengths and shortcomings. Holistic child ministry could benefit from considering the different experiences, both strengths and areas that need attention.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of related literature on holistic ministry. The review shows different understandings of ministry, mission and holism, implying the need for a stipulated definition in a given work. Based on the background review of these concepts, this research adopts the concept of ministry to embrace mission, agreeing with scholars like Kim (2001, pp.20-21) and Presler (2010, p.915). Ministry is taken to mean the church's call to live up to its call by God by serving people within and outside of the church, both near and far. Hence, this addresses the dichotomized view of ministry and mission.

It was also noted that the focus of ministry entertains another dichotomy, which is reflected in the tension between evangelism and social responses. This debate brought the idea of holism, implying that ministry needs to focus on the whole aspects of a person, including individual and communal dimensions. The concept of holism addresses both epistemological reductionism and a disintegrated view of life and ministry (Ringma, 2004, p.435). Holism, in its biblical sense, emphasizes humanness on both an individual and communal level in a relationship with God (Sider et al., 2002, p.49; Brewster, 2011, p.37).

In its holistic sense, ministry is about responding to the divine mandate by serving people holistically, meaning addressing all dimensions of need. People have different needs, including spiritual, physical and relational aspects. In this sense, holistic ministry becomes inclusive of all

people. However, both scholastic and biblical views agree that children and people in the context of poverty should be priorities of holistic ministry.

Churches use different mechanisms to serve children. Sunday school, Holistic Child development programs and various spiritual formation activities are some of the mechanisms churches use. While the different ministries churches facilitate for children play undeniable roles in nurturing spirituality, a closer look of them also show some gaps related to the content and methodology as well as inclusivity of children. Likewise, the insightful ways of approaching children's spiritual experience and nurture that scholars propose need further contextualization to put them into practice in the Ethiopian context.

Enhancing holistic child ministry requires appropriately addressing the observed gaps reflected in various models and approaches discussed above. Children can play their own role in strengthening holistic ministry, given appropriate approaches and methodologies are employed to facilitate their meaningful participation.

The literature review on holistic ministry in this chapter and child spirituality in chapter two has given the background for investigating the phenomenon of child spirituality in the context of Wonji Shoa from children's perspectives. As mentioned above, listening to children's perspectives and experiences requires an appropriate methodology. The next chapter discusses the approaches and methods employed in this research.

Chapter 4. Research Approach and Methods

4.1. Introduction

This research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of children's perspectives and experiences of spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia. As such, it seeks to answer the overarching

question, 'How can a better understanding of children's views and experiences of spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia, contribute towards holistic ministry to children?' and the secondary questions, 'how do children in Wonji Shoa understand and experience spirituality?', 'what contextual factors influence children's understanding and experience of spirituality in Wonji Shoa?' and 'what are the implications of children's understanding and experiences of spirituality for holistic ministry?'. In order to answer these questions, the research primarily looks for perceptual data.

This chapter presents the research approach, philosophical assumptions and frameworks that guided the study. It starts with the need to hear children's voices on important aspects of their lives, like spirituality. The next part presents the research approach, including ontological and epistemological assumptions. Then, methodological details, including the selection of participants, data collection tools, data management, analysis, and the major themes identified, are presented. The final section discusses ethical considerations before the chapter concludes, highlighting major points in the chapter.

4.2. Research with children: hearing children's voices

Whether emanating from biological ties, a sense of social responsibility or an interest in shaping the future of society, children are in the agenda of individuals, families, institutions, governments and non-governmental bodies. Consequently, children get care, developmental support, and protection from their families through programs designed by institutions that are guided by policy provisions and sociocultural norms. Studies are conducted on children's development and ways of serving them. However, child-focused programs and research have been criticized for low levels of children's participation. Criticizing research about children, Cunningham et al. note, 'Whilst many studies focus on the views of adults in terms of their

experiences and perceptions of quality childcare, there has been serious neglect of the other major stakeholders, i.e., the children themselves' (2004:7). For the most part, the emphasis has been on children as the objects of research rather than as subjects, with child-related outcomes prioritizing child-related processes and child variables catching interest over children as persons (Alanen et al., 2011, p. 2).

The dominant view that society upholds toward children as innocent and immature for effective communication and meaningful contribution has been driving the treatment and position of children in research endeavors; 'Children in most societies are valued for their potential and for what they will grow up to be but are devalued in terms of their present perspectives and experiences' (Alanen et al., 2011, p. 4). Researchers focus on adults' knowledge, experience, and relationships. At the same time, children play no or little role in the research about them (Poluha, 2004, p. 12). Policy research and development concerning children tend to focus on adults' critical roles in shaping children's lives with an implied assumption that adults speak as proxies (delegates) better articulate children's issues than the children themselves (McDonald, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, research conducted with a genuine interest in children's perspectives needs to add more intentionality in adequately engaging with them and their situations. This direction has gained traction in recent endeavors.

Regardless of how society has perceived children, there has been a shift across many disciplines in seeking and valuing children's viewpoints. Freeman and Mathison (2009:2) have noted the series of shifts made toward children, starting from John Lock's tabula rasa to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's romantic view of children as 'inherently pure', all the way to the interest of the 20th-century socialization studies in children's understanding and interpretation of their social world as well as the recognition of children's right in the CRC. According to Freeman and

Mathison, 'social scientists began to acknowledge children's active role in society, as cocreators of that society, not just absorbers of it' (2009:2-4). These developments led to the perspective that children should be active research participants, making research with children a dominant discourse in the contemporary world (Kellett, 2010, p. 16). There is also a growing research interest in understanding children's experiences. This growing motivation attests to the range of researchers' commitment toward children, including interest in the experience of children, on children as persons, as well as recognition of children's diversity and individuality:

The researcher who values children's perspectives and wishes to understand their lived experience will be motivated to find out more about how children understand and interpret, negotiate and feel about their daily lives. If we accept a view of children as persons, the nature of children's experiential life becomes of central interest (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 4).

Greene and Hill understand experience as 'The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition or of being consciously affected by an event' (2005, p.5). According to the Oxford Dictionary¹¹, experience in its noun form denotes knowledge, skills, understanding, maturity, and wisdom as synonyms. *Experience* is the accumulation of knowledge or skill resulting from direct participation in events or activities. In a philosophical sense, experience is 'the combination of intuition with the concept in the form of a judgment' and is a synonym for 'Empirical knowledge'¹². Experience is interpretative and can be shared. Interpretation of experience involves self-reflection (interpreting the experience for self), communicating the experience to others, and

¹¹ Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. Oxford university press.
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/experience_1

¹²Empirical Knowledge is knowledge that is both synthesis and posteriori. It is the knowledge we gain through science and experience. Glossary of Kant's Technical terms: <http://staffweb.hkbu.edu.hk/ppp/ksp1/KSPglos.html> [Accessed September 7, 2015]

others' understanding of the original experience (Greene & Hills, 2004, p. 5). Such a process requires a well-thought-through methodology, which I will discuss in the next section.

4.3. Research Approach

4.3.1. Qualitative approach

The most frequent approaches in the research field are quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods, comprising both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2009, p.4). Quantitative research deals with numerical data with the premise that a study phenomenon can be observed and counted, whereas qualitative focuses on investigating ideas and experiences. Qualitative research focuses on understanding and describing people's circumstances, views, perceptions and experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp.12 - 13, 525). Researchers adopting a qualitative approach consider the nature of their study, including its purpose, the study phenomenon and the research question. Creswell (1998, pp.17,18) lists compelling reasons for choosing the qualitative research approach:

If the research question is a 'how or what' type

When the intent is to explore the research phenomenon where variables are not easily identified.

The aim is to present an in-depth view of the research topic,

If the study is conducted in the natural settings of research participants.

If time and resource can be given for an extensive data collection.

Acceptance of the approach by audiences i.e, 'how and what' (1998: pp.17,18)

Considering the focus of this research (understanding children's perspectives and experiences), the type of the research questions (how and what types) and the research site at children's natural setting (Wonji Shoa), this research falls in the category of qualitative approach. It analyzes 'child

spirituality' qualitatively by accessing children's narration of their views and experiences (Casimiro, 2004, p. 34; Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 91). The study primarily deals with qualitative data collected considering the children's own context.

As Hyde notes, qualitative research understands reality to be subjective. It 'upholds and gives credit to the collection of the participants' thoughts, perceptions and experiences' (Hyde, 2008, p. 62). Analysis of data is predominantly verbal rather than statistical and uses contents obtained from natural settings in the form of observation, audio-video, documentary data, or photographs (Savin- Baden and Major, 2013, p.12,54; Flick, 2007, p. ix; Hammersley, 2013, pp. 12-14; Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Qualitative inquiry is attentive to 'context and local data'; pursues 'holism in inquiry through the particulars'; holds the 'tension between the whole and the particular'; explicates 'people's understanding and actions', and in most cases, emphasizes 'words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data' (Shaw & Gould, 2001, pp. 6-8). With these inherent characteristics, qualitative research appropriately serves as a study method for exploring child spirituality.

Other contemporary research seeking to gain insights into the content of children's theological and spiritual ideas also employs qualitative approaches (Csinos, 2018, p.60, Boynton, 2011, p10, Casimiro, 2004, p.34). Jennifer Mata-McMahon, in her review of published empirical studies on child spirituality from 2005 to 2015, notes that most of the studies concentrate on 'analysis of qualitative data, with an in-depth look at smaller numbers of participants, with no intent of generalization of findings' (2016, p.2). Qualitative approach is preferred 'for theory development in children's spirituality as the area is nascent' (Boynton,2011, p.121); it helps 'to *develop theories* when partial or inadequate theories exist' (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). On the other hand, qualitative approaches 'situate the child at the center of the research inquiry and allow the child's

own words, activities, and creations to be the primary source of insight' (Boyatzis & Newman, 2004, p. 177). The existing experiences support my decision of adopting qualitative approach.

Qualitative research involves essential choice moments including philosophical stance; the phenomenon of the study; basic research approaches; data collection methods, and analytical strategy (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp.36-37). In the next sections, I present the choices I made in the proceeding of this research.

4.3.2. Ontological and epistemological assumptions

The foundation of qualitative research design starts from the philosophical stance of the researcher, which is a philosophically informed view about reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and ways to gain knowledge that serves as a guide for a particular study (research approach and methods) (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 54). Views of reality answer ontological questions like what is real? What can we know about it? Epistemological assumptions address knowledge-related questions such as what knowledge is, how much of it we can gain, the extent to which knowledge represents 'reality' and the relationship between the knower and what could be known (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp. 57-58).

Social researchers approach their works from realism (objective) or idealism (subjective) ontological perspectives, which exist in a continuum. An objectivist point of view claims that the existence of an independent reality is to be known objectively. In contrast, subjectivism assumes that reality is to be constructed, implying the active involvement of the subject and the researcher in the research process. While most quantitative researchers adopt an objectivist position, qualitative researchers mostly take the subjectivist end (Hammersley, 20013, p.13; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 59).A subjectivist ontological assumption assumes that reality is socially constructed (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 63; Given, 2011, p. 116; Noonan, 2008, pp.411-412)

and individuals construct knowledge based on their experiences through their active interaction with their environment (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 29; Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 1). Through their interaction, individuals develop varied and multiple subjective meanings of their experiences directed toward particular objects or things (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Subjectivists believe that knowledge is created, not discovered, and inquiries investigate the world created by humans and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences in the social world (Savin-Baden, 2013, p. 63; Given, 2011, p. 116; Creswell, 2013, p. 25; Noonan, 2008, p. 414).

Located in the qualitative approach (as discussed in section 4.3.1), this research adopts a subjectivist (idealist) ontological perspective, a belief that reality is ‘immaterial and subjective’ (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 56). As discussed in Chapter Two, children’s spirituality is their unseen reality that comprises their innate nature and experiences. It includes how they view and experience God and other people around them. In other words, their experience is also part of their spirituality, implying that spirituality includes an aspect children construct through experience (Carroll, 1998, pp. 3-5, 8-10). I see child spirituality as a reality that can be accessed through interaction with children; it is not an objective reality outside of the children.

Adopting the subjectivist ontological perspective that reality is socially constructed, the constructivist epistemological assumption underpins this study. Constructivists believe that knowledge is constructed – not discovered (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 64); ‘coming to know is always a process of reconstruction and reorganization of knowledge based on experience’ (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 16). Sharing this assumption, I believe knowledge of children’s spirituality can be gained through a collaborative process in which the researcher closely works with children to understand and interpret their views and lived experiences in the place where they live.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions drive the type of methodology research should apply, including strategy of inquiry, data collection process and tools. The following section discusses the choices made in this research based on the subjectivist and constructivist perspectives.

4.3.3. Phenomenological case study

Qualitative research applies different inquiry strategies (methodologies), including case studies and phenomenology, that guide the investigation of realities related to the research phenomenon. While inquiry strategies are used independently, some practices use combinations (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp. 154, 158). Considering the nature of the research phenomenon and the philosophical assumptions discussed above, this research was conducted in the framework of the phenomenological case study.

The case study approach investigates a phenomenon in a real-life context (Yin, 2003, p. 13). It is an ‘intensive exploration of some single or multiple cases with a purpose to gain a better understanding of the larger classes of cases’ (Gerring, 2007, p. 20). Phenomenological studies, on the other hand, describe and interpret human experiences and meanings ‘in the ways that they emerge and are shaped by consciousness, language, our cognitive and noncognitive sensibilities, and by our preunderstandings and presuppositions’ (Given, 2008, p. 614). Participants of phenomenological studies ‘must be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences’ (Creswell, 2013, p. 150).

These two approaches are blended in this study, emphasizing an in-depth understanding of children’s perspectives and experiences (Phenomenology) in the specific context of Wonji Shoa (case study). Blending case studies with phenomenology approaches makes the study ‘more holistic, particularistic, contextual, descriptive and concrete’ (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 157).

The phenomenological case study approach involves working with research participants in the field. In this study, I employed a collaborative process in which I went to the field and interacted with research participants. Subjective evidence on the study phenomenon was collected using group and unstructured individual interviews.

4.3.4. Selection of research site and participants

4.3.4.1. Selection of research site

As section 1.7 indicates, this research was conducted in Wonji Shoa. Wonji Shoa was selected considering three significant factors. First, Wonji reflects the broader realities of the country. Ethiopia is a multiethnic country with a diversified culture and religion. Likewise, Wonji Shoa is a home for different ethnic groups, languages (e.g., Amharic, Afan Oromo, Kembata, Hadiya, Tigre, Gurage) and religions. The three major religions of the country, Orthodox Christianity, Evangelicals and Islam, have a presence in Wonji town. With its features, the town more or less reflects the dynamics of the country. Second, Wonji is accessible by road in all weather conditions. Third, I have existing contacts to seek support in the research process.

There are primary schools in Wonji Shoa, both community schools and church-owned. Attendance to the church school requires payment. Children from families that cannot afford school fees attend community schools. The children I chose for the research participants were from a church school and one community school. I considered children from these two schools, by and large, to represent the socio-economic backgrounds of school-going children in Wonji Shoa.

4.3.4.2. Selection of participants using purposive approach

Qualitative research often employs purposive sampling ‘to select information-rich cases, to yield insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation’ (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p.148). The most important point about sampling in qualitative research is whether the

sample is related to the research question. In other words, the sample is purposefully selected considering the research question (Ezzy, 2002, p.74). Considering the objective of this research to investigate children's perspectives and experiences, I applied a purposive approach to select study participants. Within the framework of the purposive approach, the following specific criteria were used to select participants who could contribute to the study:

1. **Level of expressiveness (articulacy):** Considering the research's intent to understanding of children's conceptual and experiential meaning of spirituality, children's grade level was considered. When I did sampling, the Ethiopian education structure had two cycles of primary education, the first cycle covered from grade one to four and focused on basic education. The second cycle covering grade five to eight was focused on general primary education. Considering the articulacy this research requires, children starting from grade five and above were considered.
2. **Age:** within the targeted grade levels, age was also considered. However, considering the possible age variations¹³ between children, a four-year window was considered which was 14 years old. Therefore, the age bracket was between ten and fourteen years.
3. **Gender mix:** both boys and girls were considered.
4. **School:** both public and church school were considered.

The selection of actual research participants was made using the criteria indicated above with involvement of gatekeepers. The role of gatekeepers is indispensable to gain entry to research site and conduct quality research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 347). Freeman & Mathison (2009, p. 37), note 'working with gatekeepers to gain access to children is a fundamental part of

¹³ According to Ethiopian Demographic Health Surve, it was on 3% of children under 5 who had birth registration

research with kids'. While I had some exposure with Wonji Shoa as indicated in section 1.7, I did not have close familiarity with schools. Therefore, it was necessary to work with gatekeepers.

In this regard, the director of Emmanuel church Compassion assisted child development project and the pastor of the church whom I used to know helped me in facilitating access to the schools. After I shared my research objective and approach with them, they introduced me to the school directors and also worked with the school directors as they select children according to the criteria listed above. Accordingly, 26 children, 16 girls and 10 boys, between ten and fourteen years old, were selected by the gatekeepers and their staff participated in the study. Of the participants, 15 were from a church school, and 11 were from a community school. Eleven participants are beneficiaries of a holistic development program run by Compassion and its partner churches to support children in need.

Age	F	M	Total
10	3	0	3
11	3	1	4
12	2	4	6
13	5	4	9
14	3	1	4
	16	10	26

Table 1 Research Participants by age and gender

4.3.4.3. Determining the number of interviews

The intentionality of qualitative research to delve deeply into details of the study phenomenon provokes a question of how many participants are enough. Qualitative researchers often deal with open-ended questions. Hence, advance decisions on how much data is needed may not be cleanly possible. Some scholars propose to collect data until a point of data saturation when

new data collection does not add new insights anymore (Saumure & Given, 2008, p.196). However, some scholars question the idea of saturation in the context of qualitative research. Tight notes, 'The interest in saturation, particularly the attempts to link it to sample size, may also be seen as another attempt to "quantify" qualitative research' (2023, p.581). Apart from the question saturation poses on the nature of qualitative research, reaching saturation point is not always possible or practical (Adler & Adler, 2012, p. 8). The idea of saturation implies that researchers combine sampling, data collection, and data analysis to do simultaneously instead of treating them as separate stages (Bryman, 2012, p. 18). Moreover, saturation can never be reached in constructivist approaches as there is always more to learn (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 317; Freeman & Mathison, 2013, p. 16).

Instead of depending on statistical numbers, estimation to reach saturation considers other factors, including the study's scope, the topic's nature and the sample's homogeneity (Morse, 2000, p.3). Other factors determining sample size include practical implications like the time needed, accessibility and capacity to manage, transcribe and process data (Adler & Adler, 2012, p. 10). I considered these factors together with the focus of a phenomenological case study to decide on the number of interviews. The study's primary interest is understanding child spirituality, and generalizability is not claimed. Moreover, the research participants' being in primary school with an age bracket between ten and fourteen gives some homogeneity. Finally, I have considered the time and resource capacity to manage and process data.

4.3.5. Data collection methods and process

Research that involves multiple data collection methods gives children broader alternatives to share their views and experiences and widens the possibility of researchers listening to children's voices. 'Research methods using narrative and pictorial methods – and preferably

multiple methods – enable children’s ‘voices’ to be heard’ (Eaude, 2023, p.34). A ‘multi-method – “mosaic” approach helps adults have “ears to hear” the voices of children (Csnios, 2011, p. 38). Multiple approaches also have the added advantage of triangulating data, given it goes with the objective of the research (Green & Hill, 2005, p. 18). Among the widely used data collection approaches in researching children’s experiences include observations, group and individual interviews, drawings and storytelling. Bloomberg and Volpe noted that an interview is often selected as a primary data collection method for it elicits rich and thick descriptions with an opportunity to seek clarifications and additional information while capturing the attention of respondents. Qualitative interviews enable to ‘capture perceptions, attitudes, and emotions’ of research participants (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p.155). For research within a constructivist framework, Freeman & Mathison (2013, p.88) note:

Group interviews diffuse the attention of the researcher across all participants as well as provide a setting for children to interact with peers on common topics...Interviewing children in groups may also reduce the researcher’s power within the research context, because the presence of peers will typically take precedence over the presence of the researcher.

Considering the benefits of interviews to generate data for the phenomenon of the study, I have employed focus group and individual interviews and have noted the significance of individual and group interviews.

4.3.5.1. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is among the common data collective methods in qualitative research with children. Focus group interview helps to gain insight and baseline information about research phenomenon (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p.376). It also enables children to share their views and experiences with their peers which minimizes the possibility of

children feeling alone before data collectors. Moreover, group interview is one mechanism that reduces power distance between children and research participants (Freeman & Mathison (2013, p.88).

Focus Group Discussions was employed in this research considering its potential to generate rich data on the subject of spirituality in a way that makes children comfortably share their thoughts. It was also considered as one mechanism to minimize power distance between the research and research participants.

I conducted seven focus group interviews in two rounds with different objectives. The first round was done with an objective of getting children's understanding and experience of spirituality. The discussion was focused on the topic of spirituality, and it was mainly related with the first sub question of the research. The objective of the second group discussion was mainly related to the second sub question of the study and participants were selected based on the interaction I had with them during the first round. The table below shows details on FGDs that I conducted.

Round	FGD#	participants	School	Date	Research Question focused
1	FGD I	6	Church	11/04/2017	Sub question 1
	FGD II	6	Community	12/04/2017	Sub question 1
	FGD III	5	Community	12/04/2017	Sub question 1
	FGD IV	5	Church	12/04/2017	Sub question 1
	FGD V	5	Church	12/04/2017	“Sub question 1
2	FGD VI	3	Church	19/04/2019	Sub question 1 &2
	FGD VII	9	Church	20/02/2019	Sub question 2

Table 2. Focus group discussion

4.3.5.2 Individual interviews

As Freeman & Mathison (2013, p.88) have noted, individual interviews give opportunity to listen to children's personal views and experiences. I employed individual interviews with the intention to get their personal views and experiences on spirituality. I did individual interviews with twenty-four children, eight boys and sixteen girls (See appendix 1). I had one interview with all of them, except one child with whom I had a second-round interview as a follow up to the first interview with her.

4.3.5.3. Data Collection process

Intending to build rapport with children and create a shared environment, we had group activities before group interviews. We played short name games before group interviews. All of us constructed a word using the first letter of our names. I then described the objective of the study in general and specific activities for the session, followed by asking each participant whether they were willing to participate and if they would be comfortable recording the interviews. All children provided oral consent.

After group discussions, children were also asked to draw pictures expressing spirituality as they view it. Then, I sat with children individually and listened to what they meant by their pictures—the time I had with individual children varied from about five to forty minutes, depending on how children wanted to discuss their pictures. There were four children with whom I did individual interviews only. They did not participate in the FGD. I did this intentionally to get their perspective without participating in the FGD.

The data collection took slightly over two years, and the original age bracket was moved forward accordingly. During the second data collection, I observed changes in children's way of communicating and articulating their views. However, the conversations were still with children who participated in the first data collection.

4.4. Listening to children: Process and observations

I had conversations with the children in Amharic language, which all could comfortably speak. With an intention to make group discussions start without hinting towards religious or non-religious directions, I asked a question using a phrase common in public ‘menifese t’enikara’ ‘spiritually strong’. In the context of Ethiopia, spiritually strong is an inclusive phrase denoting courage, persistence, firmness. I use this phrase so that it could lead me forward in discussing questions about spirituality. Children’s understanding of ‘spiritually strong’ incorporated both religious and non-religious expressions:

what it means by spiritually strong is a person who is far from his life of flesh and is holy in in his spiritual process, meaning in when he meets God... I mean... a person who is far from worldliness and who is respectful, hardworking and has devoted his life to God (FGD1, Tsehaywota Group interview, April 11, 2017)

he has strong emotions...emotionally strong... he does not get angry and hurt ...never loses (FG2, Tsehaywota Group Interview, April 11, 2017)

The responses, in one aspect, paved the way for discussion of spirituality broadly, as some of them were not religious. On the other hand, the adjective ‘spiritual’ in the phrase served as a prelude for discussions on spirituality.

As we proceeded with the discussion, my role as a researcher was to throw a few broader questions yet focused on the area of the study phenomenon, such as ‘How do you understand spirituality? What do you mean by spirituality? I framed discussion questions so that they did not appear strange (challenging) or narrow (implying specific objective answers) to children. The questions were broad and reasonably familiar, yet not a direct ‘yes, no’ type. However, I raised a series of questions during the conversations. Some participants did ask questions as well.

From the group interviews, I observed the importance of presenting discussion questions in a way that respects children's belief in the existence of spirituality. Concept-focused questions did not work well for deeper and broader interaction. Here is what I noted during data collection:

I have seen forwarding questions that imply concepts did not work well. Children pick the first phrase to answer the question and then describe behaviors, existence and relationships rather. I used 'what do you understand by the word 'spirit', 'spiritual', 'spirituality' and sometimes to make it familiar, 'spiritually strong'. When they give their answers for the first time, they start by saying 'spirit means....' then they continue with other descriptions. None of them seem giving their personal understanding only rather they appear speaking about something common and complementing each other in giving description as much as they could. When I see the pattern of asking questions, I also observed using the word 'describe' rather than understand more frequently. Accordingly, the appropriate question would be 'How do you describe 'spirit', 'spiritual' and 'spirituality'? or 'Would you share us your view of 'spirit', 'spiritual' and 'spirituality'? I say this because the existence of spirit and spiritual realities was unspoken/unsought assumption that all the children demonstrated without any exception (Researchers note, Tsehaywota April 11, 2017).

According to my field experience that I had with the children, I observed that the word 'spiritual' is more than a concept, rather it exists and is a reality for children in Wonji Shoa. Conversations with children about spirituality could be facilitated better if questions are framed in ways which give wider possibilities for children. In this regard, scholars have noted that what the words 'spirit' and 'spirituality' represent a reality that goes beyond words to define, and yet known, active, and defines human beings. Spirit is one that defines but not definable, one that convinces but beyond the formulated logics we know, 'Spirituality is not something that likes to be confined in words, it is more 'felt sense', drawing on non-verbal insights, vision, sound touch, and so on. It can be a powerful kind of knowing that is less worried about proving how you know' (Nye, 2009, p.1).

4.5. Data Management

I collected the data in audio and physical (hard copy) forms. All the interviews were audio recorded using a Sony IC recorder. In addition, a research assistant took notes of group interviews in a notebook. I also recorded my observations after data collection. Children's drawings and scripts were collected in hard copy. Some photos of the process and the research location were also taken.

Immediately after the fieldwork, I hired transcribers, and the audio data were transcribed 'as they were' in 'Amharic' and then translated into English. I realized the importance of having the print copy of the raw data bound and kept on a shelf. Children's drawings and scripts are scanned, and the e-copy, the uploaded audio data, and digital photos are kept on my laptop and in the cloud. I also filed the hard copies of drawings and scripts.

While I began reading the scripts in Amharic and English translation, as well as children's drawings and scripts, I realized the need to bring the transcribed data and its translation side by side to ease the analysis process. Therefore, the transcription and translation were brought together side by side with corresponding time codes. This facilitated the need to return to the audio and check for accuracy in the data-cleaning process.

Time code	Amharic	English
00:00-00:10	ጸሐይወጣ: ስለዚህ የመጀመሪያውን፣ በድጋሚ እንኳን ድህና መጣችሁ ማለት እፈልጋለሁ ለዚህ ውይይት።	Tsehaywota: So first of all, welcome again to this discussion.
00:11-00:20	ጸሐይወጣ: ኧ ... [ለሚኖረን] የሚኖረን ውይይት ለመጀመር፣ የመጀመሪያው መወያየት ሃሳባችን ሰለ ወንጂ ስለከተማችሁ	Tsehaywota: To begin our discussion, our first discussion is about your town Wonji.
00:21-00:33	ጸሐይወጣ: መልካም ምትሉትን ነገር እንዴት እንደምታዩት በሱ እንጀመር። በከተማቺ አየሁኝ ያለ መልካም ነገር ምንድን ነው? በከተማችሁ ላይ ያለ መልካም ነገር ምንድን ነው?	Tsehaywota: Let's begin with the good things you know about it. What good thing is there in your town? What is good in your city?
00:34-00:40	ጸሐይወጣ: አሱን እንጀምርና እንቀጥላለን ማለት ነው።	Tsehaywota: Let's begin with that and then we'll continue.

Table 3. Sample of transcription with translation and time code

I gave shape to the raw data with maximum sensitivity, not to change its formats and continents. I filed individual interviews separately and labeled them as ‘CHN’, where ‘CH’ refers to individual child interviews and ‘N’ is a number assigned to an individual child. This labeling is used to keep children anonymous in my writing.

Likewise, group interviews were given a number as ‘FGDN’, where FGD stands for data collected based on group discussion, and N refers to the particular group discussion. The raw data is then saved in both Word and PDF forms both on my computer and in the cloud. I then imported the data file into Nvivo for coding.

4.6. Data analysis

According to Woolf and Silver, qualitative data analysis (QDA) is a systematic process that is not intended to proceed 'in a predetermined, step-by-step manner'. Instead, it is often an 'open ended, organic, and unpredictable' process (Woolf and Silver, 2018, p. 3). Although it is given a stage in the research process, QDA is an inherent and ongoing process all through the write-up of the research (Bloomberg & Volp, 2016, p. 187). For this reason, QDA is an emergent process, not of a 'cut-and-dried' nature (Woolf & Silver, 2018, p. 3). Conforming with qualitative data, QDA

deals with unstructured data, data not 'preorganized in numeric Categories', instead it deals with 'Unstructured data' that are in the form of speech, transcribed audio and video recordings and drawings (Woolf & Silver, 2018, p.4, Bloomberg & Volp, 2016, p.188). The ultimate goal of qualitative analysis is to make sense of the unstructured data. To that effect, QDA requires varying degrees of iteration and emergence, different from the step-by-step, recipe-like procedures of well-structured computer software (Woolf and Silver, 2018, pp.4, 17). Coding is one such procedure often used in QDA.

Coding in QDA is an interpretive act in which researcher-generated meanings are given to concepts. Although not a precise process, coding enables us to see patterns of similarities, differences, frequencies, and sequences reflected in data (Saldaña 2013, p.4, 6-7). Coding helps to acquire insights from data, make data accessible, structure data, ensure transparency and validity and ultimately ensure the participants' voices are rightly reflected (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 2). This is realized through a well-crafted process that is either manually or computer assisted.

NVivo is a computer tool used for qualitative analysis. It is not a data analysis program but a tool like Microsoft Word that helps manage concepts (Woolf and Silver, 2018, p. 2). I have used NVivo v.12 to code and process the primary data. Accordingly, I went up to the level five hierarchy of codes at the preliminary stage of looking at the data. The progression of concept development is presented in the diagram below. The first step was to see items by the similarity of words, which gave me some pattern. However, it was still detail, and it did not help me except to show that there was some level of coherence among the primary sources. The next step was giving codes after reading the scripts several times. Then continued to the level of reaching what I identified as

themes. The following table show the flow of ideas as an example¹⁴. At level 4 the ideas were somehow dispersed which becomes more concentrated as related ideas were categorized into subthemes. Finally, major themes were identified.

Source	Extract	Descriptive code	Level 4 categorization	Level 3 categorization	Sub theme	Theme
FGD1	Now if we narrow down the discussion, if you describe spirituality using one word, what word would you use?...Walking before God...From the heart...To humiliate oneself... to humiliate oneself and making God king over oneself.	To humiliate oneself	Humility	Good characters toward others	Demonstrating virtue	Personal Spirituality
CH4	Ee... the other thing I have mentioned, which can help us develop spirituality in our individual lives, can be expressing love for our family members. If we had conflict with a person, forgiveness, meekness and frankness...	Forgiveness	Forgiveness	Good characters toward others	Demonstrating virtue	Personal Spirituality
CH15	My spirituality is expressed in helping those in need... Yes. Those in need... for example, if I see someone who is sick I feel sorry for them and helping them makes me happy	Helping those in need	Compassion	Good characters toward others	Demonstrating virtue	Personal Spirituality
FGD3	if a person who is self-motivated to participate in a voluntary work in the school, that can be an indication of his spirituality. That means his motivation... the motivation to do the work...	Voluntary participation	Voluntary work	Voluntarism	Demonstrating virtue	Personal Spirituality
CH8	When you have emotion you also have spirit... that there is emotion..... for example when you are in love... it is both spiritual and emotional... [I love my friends and class-mate friends... it is both spiritual and emotional..	Spirituality is when you love others	Love	Good characters toward others	Demonstrating virtue	Personal Spirituality
CH16	Things that show my spirituality, when my desire, when we do things on our will. Now I drew this picture because I enjoyed it and now I came to you for questions and all out of my own desire and feeling and will.	Doing things with own will	Willingness	Willingness	Demonstrating virtue	Personal Spirituality

Table 4. Example of analysis process from level 4 to major themes

Through repeated reflection on what children shared about spirituality, and coding exercises, a few but major themes surfaced that embrace how children view the spiritual dimension of their life and that of the whole world. Here was what I noted:

... from children's responses about their understanding of spirituality, I observed five major themes pointing to divine, religious, personal, worldly and evil dimensions. I see that the spiritual and religious realms have two opposite ends, while the personal comes at the center with the potential

¹⁴ See also appendix 7

to move to any of the ends. The spiritual realm encompasses good spirits on one end and evil spirits on the opposite end. The side of good spirituality is about God, the creator, the Holy Spirit, angels, and all the spiritual beings that children see as suitable for human beings. Children believe that evil spirituality exists contrary to good spirituality, including Satan, the devil, and demons, with their being causes of evil and harm to human life. Religious spirituality is related to religious affiliation and participation. Children understand spirituality as one's adherence to their respective religion. Religion and adherence to it is religious spirituality; being without religion and religious practices is worldliness, the opposite end of religious spirituality. Spirituality also involves self: children understand spirituality as one's capacity (Tsehaywota, Memo, July 2023)

The theme identification process is summarized in the following section.

4.6.1. The process of identifying themes

As discussed above, identifying the major themes of the research started with understanding the primary data by reading and rereading the primary data, followed by coding and categorization of related codes. The process involved four key steps that followed the gradual progression of concepts from specific ideas to composite (abstract) thoughts.

Level 4. Assigning codes for key concepts reflected in the primary data: In the coding process, I assigned codes using words and phrases children used in their narration of spirituality. For example, in explaining spirituality, CH4 said, 'If we had conflict with a person, forgiveness, meekness and frankness...wishing well for any person...'. While more than one concept was reflected in this quote, considering the mention of conflict and the idea of 'wishing well for any person' beyond conflict, one of the first level codes I gave to this script was 'forgiveness', using the child's word. However, I also found some descriptions of children to be better captured concisely by utilizing a concept not mentioned in the primary data. For example, CH15 said, 'My

spirituality is expressed in helping those in need...Yes. Those in need...for example, if I see someone who is sick, I feel sorry for them and helping them makes me happy', in which feeling sorry for others in need and corresponding acts of kindness based on her feelings were reflected. In this case, I found the word 'compassion' to be the best concept to capture the essence of what this child said. Hence, I did not use the child's direct quote to code this idea. The result of level one was, as indicated above, was list of concepts too many to pursue further analysis. However, some patterns that I saw led me to the next level.

Level 3. Categorizing related codes: At this level, I brought related concepts that were reflected by different individual and FGD participants together. In this level, I found it appropriate to use my own words or phrases to capture the essence of the related codes identified in level 4. For example, codes, humility and faithfulness' (FGD1), forgiveness, humility and love' (CH4), 'compassion' and 'kindness' (CH15), 'love' (CH5, CH6b, (CH8) pointed to children's positive behavior toward other people. Hence, I categorized them. Accordingly, I categorized them as 'good characters toward others'. Through this process, concepts of categorization again showed evidence that some can still be classified. For example, I saw categorized concepts such as 'good characters toward others', 'self-control', 'courage', and voluntarism could be recategorized to give a theme and that led me to the next step.

Identification of subthemes: I recategorized concepts I identified in level three above at this stage. For example, I categorized 'good character toward others', 'self-control', 'courage' and 'voluntarism' as demonstrating virtue. I identified 12 subthemes through this process: 1. God exists and causes existence; 2. God lives in 'heaven' and 'sees even when the roof hides him' (in this case, I found it helpful to maintain a direct quote from the CH6 response); 3. The image of the Creator, 4. The Creator' speaks and listens'; 5. religious affiliation, 6. religious adherence, 7. religious

participation, 8. emotion and emotionality, 9. self-motivation and initiative, 10. 10. demonstration of virtues, 11. worldly spirituality, and 12. evil spirituality. Many of these themes also pointed to another higher-level theme, and I rethemed them, which was the final step that enabled me to identify themes.

Identification of themes: I recategorized related subthemes under one overarching theme as indicated in the table below.

Sub themes	Overarching Themes	Brief description
God exists and causes existence God lives in 'heaven' and 'sees even when the roof hides him' The image of the Creator The Creator 'speaks and listens'	Divine spirituality	The research participants did not mention the word divine except once. I found it to be a concept that captures children's views of God, the creator, their relationship with him, and their behavior before God.
Religious affiliation Religious Adherence Religious participation	Religious spirituality	The word 'religion' was repeatedly mentioned in children's responses, and I used their word for this theme.
Spirituality as emotion and emotionality Spirituality as self-motivation and initiative Spirituality as a demonstration of virtues	Personal spirituality	I deduced this theme from what children reflected about spirituality.
Worldly Spirituality	Worldly spirituality	This theme is taken directly from children's description of spirituality.
Evil Spirituality	Evil Spirituality	This theme is taken directly from children's description of spirituality.

Table 5. Categorization of subthemes under five major themes.

The five major themes with the corresponding subthemes are discussed at length in chapter five of this thesis. The same process was also followed for the identification of contextual factors that influence children's spirituality which is discussed in chapter six. This research process starting from its design was guided by principles pursued to ensure its relevance and credibility. The following section presents guiding principles of the research.

4.7. Ethical considerations

4.7.1. Ethical guideline

Research that involves human subjects considers ethical issues that may arise in the process. Accordingly, research practices are required to ensure that the vulnerability of the research participants is understood and that the necessary ethical measures are put in place to guide the research process. Vulnerability refers to the ‘diminished autonomy’ of research participants due to their positions in society and within the research process (Tisdale, 2004, p.19). With this broader view, children are regarded as a vulnerable population. They are vulnerable because of various factors, such as their limited knowledge and experiences and social and economic status (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p.24). Therefore, research involving children must be conducted with ‘sensitivity to their physical and psychological comfort’ (Tisdale, 2004, p.24).

Ethical research with children involves considering voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, absence of harm, communicating responsibly and reciprocity (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, pp. 70-84; Kellet, 2010, p. 23-31). Adopting these principles, I conducted my research, complying with the following specific guidelines.

1. Participation in the research is voluntary. Group and individual interviews were conducted only after participants confirmed their willingness. Participants' choice not to continue at any point in the research process was respected.
2. The data collection process was interactive; it involved interviews that gave freedom and flexibility to the research participants.

3. Interaction with children was conducted with respect and regard for their dignity. Children's ideas and silences were equally respected.
4. The research was conducted with the intention of not causing harm, physical or psychological. Interviews were held in children's schools in an open environment, and discussions were guided so as not to embarrass the children.
5. The research was conducted according to OCMS's research ethics for this particular group and the child protection commitment I signed to adhere to according to the policy of the organization I am working for (see appendix 8).
6. As a researcher, I own the data that has already been collected.

4.7.2. Researcher's positionality

According to Savin-Baden and Major, a researcher's positionality emanates from a personal stance, deeply held attitudes and concerns about what is essential and reflects the researcher's position in the study process (2013, pp.68, 71). Hence, a researcher's position influences research decisions starting from initiation all the way to methodological designs and final reporting. For this reason, qualitative researchers should be sufficiently self-aware to know who they are, what they believe, and the influence of their stances and biases on the research process. Having clarity on how much of the research is related to the researcher's interests, experiences, beliefs, and personal positions helps the researcher locate where he or she stands in relation to the subject and participants of the research (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, pp. 67-68).

In light of this, I acknowledge my Christian background and involvement in holistic child development programs have influenced my positionality in the research proceeding. My Christian background has influenced my choice and understanding of the phenomenon of the study –'child spirituality'. Moreover, my engagement in holistic development programs has a clear connection

with my Christian life. Directly related to my working with children in poverty for nearly three decades, being a better voice for the voiceless and an advocate for appropriate ministry to children in poverty is a deep-seated passion in my heart. This has also played a role in the conception of the research.

Given my involvement in child development programs, including Wonji Shoa, and my approach to the research as an insider, I have been cautious about the possible power distance this might create:

1. The underpinning assumption adopted in the research elicits a collaborative process that minimizes power differences. To make the process collaborative, I shared the purpose and methodology of the research with participants, affirming that their participation was entirely voluntary.
2. Group interviews started with a simple name game that we played together. The game helped make me known to the children and develop relationships with them.
3. I followed an unstructured interview, which was broader for children to share their thoughts.
4. I used the 'draw/write-explain' approach for individual interviews, which made me a listener while children explained their drawings.

Moreover, my research assistant and I walked on foot to the schools where we did the interview, parking our car in one place. In Wonji Shoa, people usually walk or use a bicycle or motorbike. They use buses and vans when traveling out of town. In such a context, driving a private or company car somehow signals to the people, more so to children, authority or higher positions. To

avoid the possible power distance that our going by car could create, my research assistants and I chose to walk within the town.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter discussed research approaches and methods, highlighting the importance of children's voices in research, my choices in this research process, the methodology employed, data management and analysis, and ethical issues that guided the process. Considering the nature of the study phenomenon (child spirituality), the objective of the study (an in-depth understanding) and the methodological experiences of scholars who conducted research (e.g., Coles, Nye), I chose to pursue the research in a qualitative approach. The option to follow a qualitative approach necessitates making choices compatible with it. Accordingly, I have adopted the subjective ontological perspective and a constructivist epistemological assumption.

With the intent of the research to understand and describe spirituality from the perspective of children in their natural setting, I did a phenomenological case study that involved listening to children's views and experiences. Twenty-six children between ten and fourteen years participated in this study after being selected with a purposive sampling approach with the involvement of gatekeepers. I collected data using group and individual interviews. Most of the individual interviews were done based on children's drawings and scripts they produced about spirituality. I did the interviews with research assistants, taking notes. The data collected was mainly audio, while the research assistants' notes were included in the paper. I hired three assistants to transcribe the Audio data. I then transferred the transcribed data to NVivo for coding.

I read and re-read the transcribed data, listened to the audio data as necessary, and coded and categorized it. Finally, I identified five major themes corresponding to the research questions.

The following chapter presents findings corresponding to each theme and discusses findings in light of contemporary understanding of child spirituality.

Chapter 5. Children's understanding and experience of spirituality

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses children's understanding and experience of spirituality to answer the first sub-question of the research, How do children in Wonji Shoa understand and experience spirituality? The chapter presents findings related to this research question and assesses them in light of existing theories about child spirituality. With the intention of getting an in-depth understanding of spirituality from children's point of view, the chapter presents children's multidimensional perspectives about spirituality based on the analysis of data collected in individual and group interviews and children's drawings. Then, children's views and experiences of spirituality are discussed in relation to key theoretical concepts identified in the review of literature (section 2.6). The chapter has two major sections, respectively dealing with children's understanding and experience of spirituality and discussion considering existing theoretical frameworks. Children's understanding and experience of spirituality are presented in **section 5.2.** with focus on five major themes, namely, divine spirituality, religious spirituality, personal spirituality, worldly spirituality and evil spirituality. Then, a summary of the main findings is given. **Section 5.3.** discusses the main findings in light of contemporary understanding reflected in the literature on child spirituality. This section assesses the consistency and differences between the main findings and existing discourses. **Section 5.4.** concludes the chapter by highlighting how the research question is answered and insights toward holistic child ministry.

5.2. Children's understanding and experiences of spirituality

Contemporary child-focused discourses reiterate the importance of accessing and representing children's views and experiences on issues directly related to them. However, this is easier said than done, and in some cases, it appears unpractical, specifically with issues of 'spirit' and 'spirituality'. Discussing spirituality with children is not a common practice and is not easy either (Adams et al., 2008, p.29; Nye, 2009, p.21). One of the reasons for this could be the perception that the adult world has developed, which turns spirituality 'from something explicitly reflected upon to something implicit and vague' (Hay 2006, p. 32). At the beginning of my research, I had some doubts about whether a deeper interaction with children on spirituality—a subject perceived as implicit—would be possible.

The feeling of doubt occurred not because I questioned the reality of children's spiritual nature; instead, it was about how 'to get a visa' to enter their spiritual world and learn from them. The decision was not easy, specifically when I considered whether children could understand words, phrases, expressions and questions that I was to use in the research journey and, equally, whether I would understand theirs, too, which goes beyond speaking the same language. Apart from the carefulness that was deemed necessary to the research process, I was also aware of the influence of the existing perception of spirituality as related to abstractly sacred realities beyond day-to-day life routines, as well as the uncritical innocence ascribed to children as if they do not know much about matters of 'spirit' and 'spirituality'. Passing through doubts and questions during this process, I learned a lot.

Despite my concerns, I found conversations with children about their spiritual aspects engaging and lively. The children of Wonji Shoa are capable and willing to share their views and experiences about spirituality and the spiritual realm. Their engagement in sharing their

perspectives demonstrated that spirituality is a reality they know and practice in everyday life. Witnessing children's animated engagement added to my belief and experience that children know, understand and experience spirituality and can meaningfully communicate it to others with their own words.

Children used different ways and words to express 'spirituality' and 'Spirit'. They used alternative words, metaphors, functional illustrations and their own experiences. When asked, 'What do you understand by 'spirit, spirituality, spiritually strong', children gave detailed accounts using words and phrases like 'walking before God', 'from the heart', 'righteousness', 'faithfulness', 'respecting religion' 'truthfulness', 'emotionality', expressing emotion', 'thought', 'idealism', 'showing capacity', 'communicating with God'. Moreover, they used a two-way categorization of spirit and spirituality: good spirit, holy spirit, the spirit of truth, divine spirit' on one side, and 'unclean spirit, evil spirit, false spirit' in the other category. Similarly, the pictures they drew and the descriptions they gave on their pictures were done with a belief that God exists, and spirit exists, and they can express it in their own words or pictures. For example, they used words and phrases indicating existence when they referred to the spirit as 'this spirit, the evil spirit', 'of the spirit', and 'something spirit'.

Children view spirituality from different dimensions. Their descriptions of spirituality encompass personal, religious and spiritual realities. For example, in explaining her script she wrote about spirituality, CH4, a twelve-year-old girl from the church school, said,

when we try to see what spirituality is...I explained it as leaving worldliness and [living] according to the word of God...e...I explained it in the right way, I mean in a way that is not connected with Satan. I have tried to explain what spirituality means...It can be different activities we carry out in the church. It can also be our relationship with God. I explained spirituality. Yes. And I have

divided it into two categories according to my own understanding that is our individual spirituality and spirituality we have in our social life (CH4, 12 years old girl, church school, individual interview by Tsehaywota, 2017).

This quote from CH4 shows that the idea of spirituality comprises leaving worldliness, a relationship with God, not being connected with Satan, church-related activities and individual and social aspects. Similarly, in a group discussion I had with 13- and 14-year-old girls and boys from the public school, the children expressed their spirituality with the ideas of faith, leaving the world, attending religious places (church, mosque), and worshipping God.

Spirituality from faith...what we call from faith are those who leave the world aside and most times we find them in the church ee.... In the mosques and ee... in the churches. Most of the time, they are in the churches, leaving the world aside and serving in the spirit...They live in the church, and after they live in the church, they live by serving God...When we say spiritual, I said earlier that we may be talking about the fact that they worship God. (FG3, group discussion with grade seven students (boys and girls), public school, Group interview by Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017)

Children's view of spirituality comprises the spiritual beings, (e.g. God, the holy spirit) and evil spirit (e.g. Satan), human behaviors in relation to the spiritual beings, and as well the role of spirituality in human life. Through repeated reading and reflection on interview transcripts, I have noted that the following themes emerged about children's understanding and experience of spirituality.

1. Divine spirituality
2. Religious Spirituality
3. Personal spirituality

4. Worldly spirituality

5. Evil spirituality

I present each theme with the sub themes under them in the following subsequent sub sections. I will start with the Divine spirituality.

5.2.1. Divine spirituality

Children's view of spirituality from the angle of the divine (divine here used as a common name representing God, the Creator, Holy Spirit, Christ, angels, and good spirit) predominantly revolves around their belief in God, the creator. Children use God, the Creator, as a 'predictor' in describing spirituality, repeatedly referring to his existence and characters.

That [spirituality] is the relationship I have with God...God has a relationship with a pure heart – that he has a spiritual relationship (CH1, 11 years old girl, church school, Individual Interview by Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017).

Spirituality is a time we take to at a silent place to ask something from God.. spiritual is what a person does in his relationship he has with God. (FGD5, grade five and six students (boys and girls), church school, Group Discussion by Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017)

I drew it as an image of God (the Creator) ... the Lord cannot be described by place or anything...and the creator God created all of us. Because he has held the bodies of all of us he has a great relationship with the heart. He created all of us...we have a relationship because he created us. [The creator meets] with the heart...Since they do not meet at a certain place, it is called spiritual relationship. (CH7, 11 years old girl, public school, individual interview by Tsehaywota, Aril 12, 2017)

Through analysis of what children shared about their understanding and expression of spirituality, the following four subthemes emerged under the main theme of divine spirituality:

- God exists and causes existence
- God lives in 'heaven' and 'sees even when the roof hides him'
- The image of the Creator
- The Creator 'speaks and listens'

5.2.1.1. God exists and causes existence

Children take the existence of the creator unquestionably, without any doubt. For the children of Wonji Shoa, God exists. In discussing spirituality in the divine and other aspects (e.g. religious and personal), the research participants hold an incontestable position about the creator's existence, taking the existence of God 'for granted'. They do not seem to exert attention to think about God's existence; His existence seems to be their 'default mode'. Noting their solid belief in this subject, I asked some children a thought-provoking question: 'What if the creator does not exist?' However, the children did not seem to take such a question to heart in the first place; some children responded, 'the Creator exists'. Others who assumed 'if the creator does not exist' responded by its implication, 'nothing would exist':

what if the creator did not exist? He exists... I think that he exists... I think he exists (CH11, 12 years old boy)

If your creator does not exist, we will all die (CH6, 10 years old girl)

If God does not exist, the world does not exist as well... he is the one who created us...the world did not exist as well....no, the world would not exist...no we would not exist (CH8, 11 years old boy)

if there was no creator, none of us would have lived... if there is no creator, none of us would exist (CH9, 10 years old girl)

Imagining the absence of the creator does not seem to be an idea that ever-crossed the minds of the research participants. For example, a 13-year-old girl who believes that spirituality has other aspects in addition to the divine has never thought of 'no Creator'.

Researcher: What if there was no Creator. Have you ever thought of no Creator?

CH13: No, I have not.

Researcher: What if He was not there...What do you think will happen?

CH13: Everyone will have no caregiver, and everyone would scatter all over the earth...and...I know that everyone would go to something else.

Considering what children reflected, it is fair to conclude that children have a firm belief in the existence of God and equally believe God's existence is a source of existence for human beings and the whole world. In other words, as children see it, everything depends on God. Like their firm belief in the existence of the Creator, children also have solid views on the other attributes of the Creator: who God is, where he lives, what he does and how he behaves toward human beings.

5.2.1.2. God lives in 'heaven' and 'sees even when the roof hides him'

Children's gesticulations in discussing where the Creator lives did not convey curiosity but rather signal an air of familiarity, implying no need to bring it up for discussion. Most children believe that God's presence is unlimited; he is not only limited to religious places but is actively present in family, school, play fields, and on the road; wherever the child is, God is. Some children drew pictures that positioned God in the clouds: 'these are clouds... this one is a cloud in which there is God' (CH6), 'right here God in heaven and above' (CH8), 'I have never found him [the Creator]. He lives in heaven' (CH9). A 12-year-old boy drew a picture of a boy playing (See Appendix 4, children drawing 1) and gave the description indicated beside it.

here it is raining... and right here he is playing on a swing chair...right here... the hills show.....right here the flower has grown...this is the Creator giving rain.... he (the boy) was playing... he did not want the sun...it was just not convenient for the game... he was playing... I mean before praying...then while he was playing the rain showered...the Creator lives in heaven.

The conversation with this boy based on his drawing portrayed four spots about where the creator lives: 'heaven, everywhere, here and among us':

Researcher: where does the Creator live?

CH11: the creator lives in heaven.

Researcher: eh..eh?

CH11: he is everywhere.

Researcher: he is everywhere?

CH11: Yes.

Researcher: is he here now?

CH11: Yes, he is among us.

Researcher: really? How do we know that he is here?

CH11: How do we know? Even if we do not know, he is here.

Agreeing with the four spots of presence, another 10-year-old girl qualifies how the creator presents, 'He is in heaven. He is also amidst us. Whenever there is love, there is God' (CH6).

Children perceive God's presence as both a 'near' and 'far' realities inseparably. As far as the Creator's presence is, it is also close at personal level. Sharing her experience, a 10-year-old girl says, 'I pray by either sitting or bowing my head down and crying... Yes, he [the Creator] sees that. Even when the roof is hiding it, He will still see. He [the Creator] is everywhere (CH6). Similarly, one participant in FGD1 shared a story that she hears God speaking to her while walking

on road. However, some participants think that God lives in heaven and his close presence at personal level is place -bound and depends on whether a person asks for it. Sharing her view in this regard, CH9, a 10-year-old girl said,

What I have written right here is eee... we do not meet the Creator face to face... we don't also meet in (stuttering) we meet him in our hearts...I just go to the Mosque, and when I beg him, he does what I ask for me...When I go to the Mosque on Friday... I do not ask while I am here...I have never found him. He lives in heaven.

Whether far or near, children relate to the presence of the Creator. Many of them drew pictures of the Creator as if he resembles human beings. Children's images (thinking) of God are presented below.

5.2.1.3. The image of the Creator

One of the data collection methods was to ask children to express their understanding of spirituality in drawings or scripts. No specific instruction was given. Accordingly, children drew various pictures, including pictures of God, religious symbols, pictures of things they want to see (have) and scripts about spirituality. Some of the children drew pictures of God that show what he looks like and how he relates to people.

While the children indicated that they did not pay serious attention to gender when drawing images of the creator, they drew a picture of their gender. Some children explained that they had a reason for resembling the Creator with their gender. One boy (CH10) said, 'I drew a person. [He] is male because the Creator is male' (CH10). Another 10-year-old girl drew God as a woman with long hair. In our conversation about her picture, she shared the following story, which, in some

sense, shows that her image of the Creator as a woman relates with the strength women exhibit through multifaceted challenges.

Researcher: The image that you drew is interesting! Is it a man or a woman, by the way?

CH6: She is a woman.

Researcher: aha... why did you make her a woman?

CH6: because she bears all the hardship.

Researcher: how about a man?

CH6: man also bears hardship, but not as much as her.

Researcher: please explain it for us? What does that mean?

CH6: she works in the house, she wants to go to school but she is told that she is not going to...

Researcher: aha...

CH6: she gets raped... therefore, because a woman bears lots of hardships I made it the image of a woman ¹⁵(CH6)

In connection with the mention of hardship women face, I asked this child (CH6) about her family with the intention to know about her mother. I learnt that her mother works in a sugarcane field while her father is a school guard. The family leads a low living status which makes this girl dream to be great, 'I wanted to be great because my parents are now...in problems, so that they would be rich in the time ahead and so that they would stop this work and start a new one with

¹⁵ One of the core focuses of the organization I work for is child protection. Staff and volunteers sign child protection commitment before they involve in any aspect and at any level of the ministry.

the help of God' (CH6:5). Apart from the economic challenges, she also mentioned that there is fight in the family including the fight between her father and mother.

This child did not explicitly mention that she drew a picture of God with particular emphasis on likening him to her mother. Instead, she talked about women and their hardships in her community. Her imagination of the Creator with the strength of a woman (including her mother) reveals an unusual way of thinking about God. God is likened to a mother, while the usual way is to call him a father when thought the relational way.

From the angle of relationship, children claim intimacy with the Creator. God is like a father and speaks to the heart (inner self) (CH6, CH8, CH4). CH6 said, 'God is even more than a father'. According to CH4, spirituality is 'personal connection and intimacy with the Lord'. Children palpably expressed that spirituality is a relationship with the Creator. They imagine the Creator relationally. They believe that he listens and speaks. He is perceived as a communicator and commander of the heart in the communication process with a person.

5.2.1.4. The Creator 'speaks and listens'

Children view God (the creator) as an interactive authority who speaks to them and listen to their pleadings from where they are. CH8, eleven years old boy, drew a picture of God and explained as 'God speaking to a child. Below is his picture along with his description.



...this one shows God speaking to someone's heart. Right here God in heaven and above. The man is on earth, under heaven. He is on earth. God talks to the man's heart from above, he speaks to his [the person] heart. The man does what God tells him... We cannot do anything if he does not speak... because he created us we can act only when he speaks.

Figure 2. Drawing by CH8, eleven-year-old boy

In the above picture, the boy explained that God speaks including to him. However, his understanding does not show how the communication happens. Participants of group discussion explained how God speaks. Here are what two participants shared:

How God speaks to me, there are many ways...for example when someone is preaching and tells what God says to him for another or when he tells him to repent his sins and when he tells him to do some things it means God is talking to him (FGD1 participant)

But I...emm...when I go to church, there is a word that comes from mouth. Once I said when I was walking on the road, I said God please speak to me, please do not pass me by, or at least call my name at least call me 'you'. Then I went to a conference in Kale Hiwot Church. I was in the middle of other kids sitting on Jeba (traditional mattress). The minister said 'you' and he talked to me...Emm I was so happy and surprised that God spoke to me through the minister because God said the word I asked him to say, and my request was granted to me...God spoke to me (Another FGD1 participant)

According to the above quotes, God speaks, listens and responds to requests. The ‘talking to God’ practice for children is a two-way traffic where both parties actively engage and share with each other what they have to. This is done in a multifaceted way, not limited to commonly acknowledged religious practices like prayer and fasting or to places dedicated for religious purposes. The interaction encompasses speaking, whispering, singing, and thinking.

The way to talk to God is prayer and in other ways, for example without praying just like when talking to God without praying, speaking alone...there could be a voice from him and I repeatedly hear that voice...while I am walking on the road seeing and talking to myself like insane but God might be talking to me in revelation ... maybe he is talking to me. When we sing songs, in different ways, when we write poems ...when he sends to me when I think should I say this or that...and when he ... he tells me what to say...it might be different from what I say...sending words in my mind to say and makes me to write in...it means God is revealed to us this way (FGD1).

Many children indicate that God speaks to them in various places: in their homes, on the road, at school, in their communities or wherever they are. They believe they can readily connect with him, and he reveals himself to them. This connection is perceived to be realized through various spiritual practices, including going to worship places, listening to religious teachers, praying, and silence moments.

Children particularly from the church school see prayer as one and the main way to talk to God and to listen to what He has to say. The way they do prayer is flexible while the emphasis is on communicating with the creator.

One way for us to talk to God is prayer. Because prayer means talking to God. When we talk to God we could be kneeling down or standing, keeping our eyes open or close...or while walking anyway when we talk to God it means we are communicating to God and praying to him. And

when we are talking to God when we receive divine call or when a person is preaching or servant of God who comes to us and tells us prophecy, it means we speak with God and it also mean he heard our voices of prayer (FGD1 participant).

Talking to God means now if we are the people talking to God...all the time we talk in prayer. We have different issue to talk to God. The main method to speak to God is prayer...we talk to God in prayer...when we pray in faith, there is God's voice that comes to us, coming from God...We lift our voice to God...thus we meet with God in prayer (FGD1 participant).

Children see prayer as a way to access God's help, guidance, provision and protection for themselves, their immediate family members and their relationships. Through prayer, children see the presence of an authority, the creator, who is willing to listen to their requests and intervene in their challenges: sickness, lack, distress and insecurity. They view God (the creator) closer to their realities as a faithful sharer who can give solutions (answer prayer) and bring about an improved life. Here is what FD5 participants shared about their prayer items.

[I pray] about my mother...because my mother lives abroad... I pray for her...so that he would keep her safe.

[I pray] For my mother and my sister. For my sister because she is abroad. She is at Beirut. She went to help us and when she comes back she is going to continue her studies. I pray for her so that she comes back safely. [I pray] For my mother so that she would stay alive until she [my sister] returns...[I live] with my mother and sister...she [my mother] does not do anything...

I pray when my mother is sick and for those who sit at the church gate and are sick.

I pray for my family and for our country's peoples... when some things happen in our country I pray for peace and so that problems would not happen. I also pray for the woman in Compassion, who supports me...so that the Lord helps her wherever she is and so that she would succeed... I pray so that her children would be safe.

[I pray] about my mother...my mother's leg really hurts her...[I pray] by begging the Lord.

Children view the creator as a hearer, a helper and an authority to intervene in their personal and family issues. They assume a 'supplicant' role for unwanted life situations their immediate others pass through regardless of geographic limits. In line with this, children testify that God answered their prayers for healing. CH17 is a 10-year-old girl. In an interview, she shared that God healed her from an ear problem.

Researcher: what problem have you faced?

CH17: Any person faces different problem in his life. If he does not pass those problems with the help of the Lord, he might face many problems.

Researcher: have you passed any problem with the help of the Lord?

CH17: yes.

Researcher: Can you tell as one as an example

CH17: for example I have been healed from sickness, from a problem on my ear...my left ear could not hear...then I watched spiritual channel and I was healed...I watched Winners Y channel and I was healed...I used to use medication. I have gone to Wonji Aba's house and had my ear washed but...I did not get well. Then when he [the person in the channel] told us to lay our hands at the place we feel pain, I lay my hand on it, it did not hear before, now I have been healed.

Similarly, other children shared testimonies about how God rebuilt broken relationships among their families, saved them from what they feared, and revealed new ideas (creativity and innovation). The Creator speaks, listens and answers.

Divine spirituality is one aspect of spirituality's multidimensional nature. In the divine aspect of spirituality, children acknowledge that God exists and is the source of existence. Children of Wonji Shoa believe that the existence of human beings and everything else depends on the existence of the Creator. With this understanding of children, divine spirituality is the source of

everything else. Children's spirituality has the Creator as a source. Children see the Creator present everywhere, and he sees children and relates with them.

Another aspect of spirituality observed in children's understanding and experiences relates to religion and religious practices. In contexts like Ethiopia, religion is honored in people's individual lives and collective practices. People see religion and spirituality inseparably. The following section discusses children's understanding and experiences of spirituality from a religious angle.

5.2.2. Religious spirituality

Religion and spirituality, in many ways, are considered the same especially in a religious-dominated culture like Ethiopia. Children of Wonji Shoa reflect this broader understanding of religion but think of it as one dimension of spirituality. Children shared their religious affiliations and practices during group discussions and individual interviews. They are from families of Orthodox followers, Evangelical churches and Islam. A father of one child is converted from Islam to Orthodox Christianity. Some children have indicated that they have family members following different religions.

Children's understanding of religious spirituality includes religious places (church, mosque), rituals, services and activities (teachings, sacraments and instruction) in which they participate. In group discussions, children shared the following:

[Spirituality] is according to our religion... when we say according to our religion, what I understand by it is that we deny the world. Denying the world and worshipping God...What we call from faith are those who leave the world aside and most times we find them in the church. In the mosques and in the churches. Most of the time, they are in the churches, leaving the world aside

and serving in the spirit. They live in the church, and after they live in the church, they live by serving God (FGD3, Interview at public school by Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017).

Spirituality is something related to religiosity. It is something one has under his religion... Spirit is something you cannot see with your eyes. It is what we do in our respective religion about spiritual thing. It is something that is invisible and not clear (FGD4, Interview at church school by Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017).

Because children are brought up in church and learn things, it will make them have religion. There are things they learn since childhood. Even at the age of five, they participate in church and study what they have learned. So these will make them have a religion...I am a Christian and believe in God, believe in Mary and I attend church. So, I believe I am a Christian and have a religion...Most of the time children do not have their own faith. They live after what they hear and see in their family. And follow the same religion (FGD6, interview with 13 to 16 years old teenagers, church school, second round Group interview by Tsehaywota, October 22, 2019).

As the above quotes show, religious spirituality comprises belonging and dedication to one's religion, serving God and leaving the world. Analyzing the transcription of what children shared about religious spirituality revealed the following subthemes.

- Religious affiliation
- Religious Adherence
- Religious participation

5.2.2.1. Religious affiliation

Religious affiliation signifies children's sense of belongingness in a religion they or their families follow. Children of Wonji Shoa exhibit such belongingness: CH6 (age 10) and CH18 (age 11) proudly express that they are Orthodox Christians:

Yes.[I go to] Kidane-Mihret Church...The church is near to our home. Why I go to church? Because I believe in it!...My father was not an Orthodox Christian before... He was a Muslim. Then, he was converted into Orthodox Christianity when he marries my mother...I do not know but I love my religion, I respect it and I believe in it (CH6, interview by Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017)

I am a Christian and believe in God, believe in Mary and I attend church. So I believe I am a Christian and have a religion (CH18, in a group interview by Tsehaywota, October22, 2019)

Similarly, CH9, from a Muslim family, says, 'I go to the Mosque on Friday'. As the quote implies children are passionate about their religion. CH6 sees religious affiliation as a way they meet with God, the Creator, 'going to church and there I pray, fast and attend the liturgy and finally I meet God'. This shows that religious spirituality and divine spirituality are related in some sense.

While some children expressed considerable regard for their religious affiliation in general terms, other children who attend evangelical churches qualified between religious affiliation and faith. For example, CH5 says, 'If we see it as a religion, I am a Christian. And if we talk about my faith, I believe I am saved through Christ.' The differentiated view of children suggests that faith and religion come as a continuum in children's lives; they begin with religion and, with time, build their faith with a process that involves knowledge-based evaluation and decision. Faith is a decision for these children.

Faith means being sure about what you think and accept God. So, everything you do comes out of the faith you have about God and is connected to the belief you have about it. So, faith is connected to believing.

When we see the direct definition of faith, [it] is having evidence about things which we do not see, hear, touch, and being sure about what we did not know. Therefore, even though I was not

there 2000 years ago, I have not reached that place, I do not think, I do not say anything, but I believe that it exists, or I am sure that I believe (FGD6, interview by Tsehaywota, October 22, 2019).

Based on this expression of children, Faith is a personal journey of believing and connecting with God. 'Faith means being sure about what you think and accept God. So, everything you do comes out of the Faith you have about God and is connected to the belief you have about it.

So, Faith is connected to believing' (FGD6).

Faith is a growing element, whereas religion is inherited. Participants of FGD 6 reflected that children inherit religion from their parents uncritically. Considering this understanding of children, religious affiliation develops in two ways: inheriting from family and through personal decision (faith). However, putting a hardline between the two could stretch it too much. The activities that children take part in their affiliation, for example, religious teachings offered at worship places, could nurture faith and strengthen religious commitments.

5.2.2.2. Religious adherence

Religious affiliation is a continuous process requiring a lifestyle that meets a given religion's specific beliefs, rituals and traditions. As mentioned above, children see spirituality as living according to one's religion, implying that religious spirituality is about observing expectations. Religious adherence is a way of maintaining religious belongingness. In a group discussion, FGD4 participants said,

We respect our religions...our faithfulness. Our faithfulness and the fact that we always meet with God. There are things which do not glorify God. By not doing those things and by praying and reading the Word every time. By serving God. Because we meet God and we worship him. Because he has opened my mind, sharing what I have with another person.

Respect for religion, such as observing religious practices like fasting, attending religious days, going to religious places, and praying as per the practice of their religion. Children from Orthodox backgrounds emphasize attending Sunday mass and fasting. CH6 says,

I have been fasting without interruptions. [I am fasting today] I did not eat. [I fast] so that my prayer would be heard and that we would all live peacefully. By wearing *netela* (traditional headscarf) and going to church. there I pray, fast and attend the liturgy and finally I meet God. I go to church after I am back from school... because it is in the afternoon I can attend the liturgy

In the second-round interview, CH6 also said, 'I respect the ritual order. Every Sunday morning...I often go and attend whenever there is a fellowship program. But I never miss the Mass'. Similarly, CH11, a twelve-year-old, said, 'I fast because this is lent season, because it is the week of his suffering, I have to meditate on that. And so that he would hear our prayer'.

While evangelical circles do not often mention rituals, they facilitate various activities for their followers. Children from evangelical churches attend Sunday worship services, prayer programs, bible studies and Sunday schools. 'I go to Sunday school' (CH17); 'I learn in Sunday school. And sometimes I strengthen what I learnt in the Sunday school from my bible' (CH2), 'I pray when I am going to bed and when I wake up' (CH3). Children also mentioned attending overnight prayers, evangelistic conferences and healing programs. The weekly Friday program is among the most known practices in Islamic tradition. Children go to the Mosque on a Friday.

Through adhering to their respective religious beliefs, teachings, and rituals, children socialize with the religious dimension of spirituality. Having established traditions, religious cultures have their own way of behaving, often requiring compliance. Within this broader set up, children of Wonji Shoa have also indicated certain areas that they take part in. They participate though limited.

5.2.2.3. Religious participation

As mentioned before, contemporary child-focused discourses emphasize children's participation in matters related and relevant to them, including spiritual and religious matters. While religious affiliation and adherence have elements of participation in general, some research participants, particularly those affiliated with evangelical churches, mentioned a few specific activities they participate in. Among the areas children participate in are choir and prayer groups. CH17, a ten-year-old girl; CH3, a 13-year-old boy; and CH5, a 13-year-old girl, indicated that they serve as choir members. CH4, a 12-year-old girl, says, 'We also pray in a group with my friends...I mean, we schedule our time and pray, when we do this our spirituality develops. If we agreed that we will pray next week, we first complete our duties and plan to do it'.

According to CH4, participation in ministry nurtures children's spiritual life. It develops children's relationship with God, shapes their characters and strengthens their faith both as individuals and as a group.

...a social life we have in the church could be serving in the choir, or in prayer team. If we meet to pray continuously, in the process, our spiritual lives could develop. The other I have tried to express its spiritual profit... our relationship with Jesus will grow from time to time, both in our individual and social life. If we preach both as a person and as a community, then the fullness of grace will be upon us. If we pray and preach the gospel, our faith will be continuously strengthened. The characters of God such as love, peace, light and endurance would start to be upon us (CH4, individual interview by Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017).

This quote suggests that children have both the will to participate, and they see its relevance for their spirituality. Children have both the capacity and vision to participate and grow spiritually. In a group discussion, a participant shared the story of her encounter with God. Her response was

‘until I die...to live in the house of God...and not to be deceived by the world and to live in his house for ever to serve him’ (FGD1, group interview, by Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017). Similarly, CH4, envisioning her future, said,

when I grow my spiritual life... I might become a church leader...I might become a prophet, you never know... because if you are spiritual, it also means that you know how to handle the church. When your spiritual life is developed, nothing hinders you from becoming a prophet. Or you might even become a prayer [minister] or a singer... you never know.

From this quote, it could be deduced that children have a vision in their spiritual arena, and appropriate participation would contribute to nurturing their vision in this and other aspects of their lives. Therefore, religious participation impacts both today and the future individually and collectively.

The religious dimension of spirituality embraces the aspect of children’s spirituality related to belonging to their respective religious communities, growing in the religious context where they know how to behave in the religious dimension. It includes their participation in contributing to the religious community and nurturing of their spiritual lives. As observed from what children reflected, children adhere to various religious rituals and traditions. However, opportunities for religious participation are limited.

The two dimensions of spirituality presented so far, the divine and religious spirituality, show that spirituality is related to sources related to children. Divine spirituality pertains to the place of God, the creator, in children’s spirituality. Religious spirituality emphasizes the communal aspect of children’s spirituality. The divine and religious spirituality deal with outside spiritual sources and how they relate to children’s spirituality. Another dimension in which children see

spirituality is within themselves, the personal aspect of spirituality. The following section focuses on the personal spirituality of children.

5.2.3. Personal spirituality

Spirituality for children of Wonji Shoa is a reality with inner and outer dimensions. While the outer dimension of spirituality relates to children's belief and relationship with the creator and engagement in religious precepts and practices, the inner aspect refers to personal qualities, including emotion, feeling, motivation, resilience, thought, creativity and caring for others. This view of spirituality is inward-focused, valuing the self as trustworthy, capable, and responsible to take worthy initiatives and actions. Such an inner-focused look at spirituality makes the self both an owner and object of spirituality simultaneously, where spirituality on one side implying trusting the self as dependable, able and capable of behaving positively and productively.

A spiritual person means an emotional person [a person with emotion] expressing his feelings, who does something educative on his initiative, a person who is himself and searching for himself, courageous, and an invincible person (CH8, 11 years old boy, public school, Individual Interview by Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017)

...the experiences I have had...eee.... First it is the fact that I convince myself is itself a spiritual experience. Or it means that I know that I can convince myself that so that I have acceptance of myself. Another thing is I believe that I have avoided the worldly lives I have mentioned earlier...what I mean by convincing myself by myself is that I convince myself that I am spiritual so that I practice it because I have faith inside of me. I have explained to myself that I am spiritual. That's what it is (CH2, 14 years old boy, church school, Individual interview by Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017).

Personal spirituality is an acknowledgment of the spiritual dimension as an integral part of who a person is at the individual level. Analyzing children's expression of spirituality as a personal quality, three subthemes have emerged.

- Spirituality as emotion and emotionality
- Spirituality as self-motivation and initiative
- Spirituality as demonstration of virtues

5.2.3.1. Personal spirituality as emotion and emotionality

Children understand spirituality as emotion and emotionality. FGD2 participants were 10- and 11-years old students from the community school. There were three girls and three boys. Our group discussion on spirituality continued revolving around the question 'what spirituality means to them'. Children were asked to use other words or phrase that can represent and describe 'spirituality'. One of the terms they iterated was the word 'emotion' with additional definers, adjectives and verbs:

Response 1: Emotionality.

Response 2: Expressing being emotional.

Response 3: Expressing one's own feeling, with one's own initiative.

Response 4: Expressing one's own initiative.

Response 5: Spirituality means emotionality and emotionality means with one's own initiative.

Response 6: Speaking own emotions.

As could be observed from these responses, the children expressed spirituality in its nature as qualities a person owns individually: emotion, feeling, and initiative. While the response of the

first speaker could guide the emphasis on spirituality as emotionality, further explorations through individual interviews with the children show that the view is more profound than an immediate influence from the discussion.

In the script he wrote to share his understanding of ‘spirituality’, CH8, an 11-year-old boy, describes a ‘spiritual person’ instead of the word ‘spirituality’. His description of a ‘spiritual person’ revolves around the concept of ‘emotion’: ‘A spiritual person means an emotional person [a person with emotion] expressing his feelings, who does something educative on his initiative, a person who is himself and searching for himself, courageous, and an unbeatable person.’ Through follow-up discussion on this description of a spiritual person, CH8 insists that ‘spirituality’ and ‘emotionality’ are the same. Even though a series of questions were raised, he consistently and confidently stood by what he said previously.

Researcher: But what does emotion mean?

CH8: When you have spirit, there is emotion. When you have emotion, you also have spirit.

Researcher: how do you know that you have emotions?

CH8: that there is emotion... for example, when you love other people.

Researcher: does it mean loving others is spiritual?

CH8: it is both spiritual and emotional.

Researcher: Is there a difference between spirituality and emotionality?

CH8: No.

Researcher: do you have friends?

CH8: Yes

Researcher: do you love them?

CH8: Yes.

Researcher: Now, is that spiritual or emotional?

CH8: It is both spiritual and emotional.

Researcher: how about when I hate someone?

CH8: It is the same when you hate someone...it is both emotional and spiritual.

Researcher: is hatred spiritual?

CH8: Hatred is spiritual. When you hate someone the spirit that you have in him will disappear.

Researcher: how about the emotional?

CH8: the emotional disappears likewise.

Researcher: here in Wonji, is there something that you can call spiritual?

CH8: Here in [Wonji] Shoa, there is spiritual teaching.... For example when the popes teach in the church it is both spiritual and emotional.

Researcher: are they spiritual and emotional too?

CH8: Yes.

According to this boy, spirituality is one's emotion and emotion including relationship with others and religious teachings. It could be noted that hate is a negative emotion that causes positive emotion and hence spirit to disappear. Based on this expression, spirituality is related with positive emotion. Hatred makes spirit to disappear. Beyond the words this boy expresses, his connection with the idea is also spiritual. Not only understanding spirituality as emotionality, but he himself seems fixed on the idea. So, spirituality as a connection with the self could be how

one is consistent in his own idea. It is true that children could change what they said with time but remaining focused at the point of conversation shows spirituality.

Another concept worth noting that children use relates spirituality with the ‘expression of emotion’. Spirituality is both emotion and the ability to express emotion. It is not only the emotion itself but the ‘expressing’ of it, is perceived as spiritual. Arguing toward a child’s spirituality, FGD3 participants reasoned out that a child can be spiritual because children can express their feelings, spirituality is an expression of person’s feeling. We can express our feelings too’. With the understanding of emotionality, children also mentioned self-motivation, creativity and desire as spiritual qualities making a child spiritual (FGD3).

5.2.3.2. Personal spirituality as self-confidence and self-motivation

Children’s understanding of spirituality includes self-confidence and self-motivation, which reflect spirituality’s inner, personal, and self-focused side. CH12 is a 14-year-old girl. In the short script she wrote to explain spirituality, she indicated spirituality as having self-confidence, ‘There are things that can explain spirituality, for example it could be a person who has self-confidence. His spirit may be that of not cheating, because he wants to express his spirituality. (CH12). Similarly, CH13, a 13-year-old girl, explaining her picture of a girl playing with a jump rope, emphasizes ‘self-confidence’ and ‘self-motivation.’

Similarly, children understand spirituality as self-motivation, ‘Spirituality is what we call self-motivation depending on our own feelings’ (FGD3). Explaining self-motivation, FGD3 participants said:

self-motivation is... for example not copying from other people... and being self-motivated for work and creativity... for example there are people who can create... and those who are good at

circus and motivated for work...if it is self-motivated, for instance, creativity can be spiritual ... that spirituality is self-motivation. For example, in a given classroom, if a student is sick, we can be self-motivated to contribute money and help him if his family does not allow it. The other thing we could be saying when we say self-motivation is ... generosity... for example if there is work to be done in the school, the students of the school can get together to do the work.... And that can be spirituality, since it is self-motivated...if a person who is self-motivated to participate in a voluntary work in the school, that can be an indication of his spirituality (FGD3, group interview by Tsehaywota April 12, 2017)

As the explanation suggests, spirituality as self-motivation entails sense of responsibility that comes out from the inner self. Self-motivation includes self-dependence, diligence, creativity, voluntary participation, generosity, and care for others. These qualities are related with how children behave and relate with others virtuously, which is another aspect of personal spirituality.

5.2.3.3. Personal spirituality as demonstrating virtue

Children's view of spirituality in terms of their reality comprises their behavior toward others. In other words, their self-spirituality influences how they relate to other people. The fruit of this internal initiation drives a sense of responsibility towards others in the form of care, kindness, and concern. CH15, a 14-year-old girl, said, 'My spirituality is expressed in helping those in need...for example, if I see someone who is sick, I feel sorry for them and helping them makes me happy'. Similarly, CH4 shared that spirituality involves doing good to family members and others.

the other thing I have mentioned, which can help us develop spirituality in our individual lives, can be expressing love for our family members. If we had conflict with a person, forgiveness, meekness and frankness...wishing well for any person and cleansing ourselves off any worldliness within our hearts. Filling our hearts with meekness. Is this not spirituality? (CH4)

In addition to acts of goodness and exhibiting accepted behaviors, the above quote also suggests that virtuous spirituality involves a commitment to resolving relationship breaks and keeping oneself away from things that bring defilement.

FGD1 participants have reflected a similar idea that spirituality involves cleanliness. They said, ‘what it means by spiritually strong is a person who is far from his life of flesh and is holy in his spiritual process, meaning in when he meets God... a person who is far from worldliness and who is respectful, hardworking and has devoted his life to God’ (FGD1). For FGD2 participants, spirituality includes self-control and courage, a spiritually strong person does not get angry and hurt, is resilient, and never loses.

Comprising qualities including feeling, emotions, motivation, self-confidence, and faith, personal spirituality focuses on the inner realities of spirituality. It connotes perception toward self, inner thought processes and the resulting personal beliefs. It also relates to the way a person demonstrates virtuous behaviors such as love, kindness, generosity, and courage for others. On the other hand, it also involves avoiding the aspects of worldliness that are against virtuous personal qualities. Worldliness embraces both positive and negative elements. The following section presents the aspect of spirituality that focuses on matters of worldliness.

5.2.4. Worldly spirituality

As children shared, the worldly dimension of spirituality refers to behaviors and activities that people engage in outside of the divine, religious and personal dimensions. Worldly spirituality encompasses practices that are good or bad. The good ones include behaviors like kindness, faithfulness, and helpfulness, which are associated with the divine and religious dimensions. Bad practices include engaging in immoral actions like alcoholism, adultery, jealousy, fights, and destructive behaviors. They are related to evil spirituality and the wrong side

of personal spirituality. The following quotes from children reflect the nature of worldly spirituality.

The other one comes due to worldliness. When we say spiritual, we know worldly spirituality, as we all know. But when we say worldly, I think it has self-motivation and confidence. . .when we say according to our religion, what I understand by it is that we deny the world. Denying the world and worshipping God (FG3, discussion with grade seven students (boys and girls), public school, Group interview by Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017).

a worldly act is....eee... first, if we try to see what it means by worldly, it is an act that is outside of God's will and glory. Worldly can be adultery, drunkenness, insult, dancing and a person who does such things (CH2, age 14, church school, individual interview by Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017).

we can see spirituality in two ways. Spirituality of the bible, of the holy Spirit and of the world... spirituality of worldliness ... [is] when we are far from the Lord and lose our spirituality (CH4, 12 years old girl, church school, individual interview by Tsehaywota, 2017).

The quotes from children show that worldly spirituality, in its positive aspect, overlaps with the personal qualities discussed above. In this sense, it refers to characters and behaviors that do not directly relate to the Creator or religious traditions. CH13 thinks that spirituality at school, meaning outside religious contexts, could enhance self-motivation, smartness, courage and diligence to work hard and become knowledgeable.

In his careful analysis of spirituality, both from positive and negative sides, CH2 thinks that an action of a person who does not believe in the Creator could be spiritual 'Because his acts can be spiritual, when he is doing worldly things, without knowing God, if he is doing spiritual

acts. On the other hand, the same child says that worldly spirituality is a separation from God and the church, as he explained in the picture below.



...it has been tried to depict spirituality. While the man that we see on this corner (left) has spiritual life and he is obedient to God, on the contrary the man on this corner (right) participates in satanic works and lives worldly life.... And right here (indicated by heart shape), there is a man who has a hard time choosing any of them and the man in the world has a double heart (CH2)

Figure 3. Drawing by CH2

Other children, especially those from an evangelical background, have set a demarcation between the divine and worldly spirituality. CH3 said, ‘the worldly and the spiritual are very different and opposite to each other’. In this sense, worldly spirituality is related to living as per the desire of the flesh (FGD1, FGD6).

While worldly spirituality has both positive and negative aspects, several children focused on explaining it in relation to Satan's rule. CH3 said, ‘By worldly, we do not just mean the world, but a person who is under the rule of Satan.’ Therefore, worldly spirituality shares some characteristics of the evil dimension of spirituality, which the next section presents.

5.2.5. Evil spirituality

Talking about evil spirits, children used different names such as unclean spirits, evil spirits, Satan, the devil and the enemy at different points both in group and individual interviews. I use evil spirituality to refer to Satan, the devil and associated practices. Children perceive this spiritual dimension as a source of difficulty and challenges.

Unclean spirit means filled with cruelty... unclean spirit means sent from the Satan and it is jealousy and deception. Disagreement and hating each other. Jealousy, deception, conflict, disrespect, and failure to make peace among people...now unclean spirit makes us fearful and not to be identified by others. it gives the tendency to hid things. just unclean spirit gives the tendency not to relate with others...makes you at odds with everyone...just unclean spirit is filled with brutality emm...and there is no good thing...the words that come from you” (FGD1, church school, boys and girls, interview by Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017).

sin is just sin.... Doing this abominable things before God, hatred, hurting other people are all evil spirituality (CH5, individual interview by Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017)

According to children’s views, evil spirits are opposite to God and the holy spirit. For example, while God is related to a pure heart, the picture of a muddy (unclean) heart is for an evil spirit. ‘But with the other heart, the one with mud... that there is the work of the devil inside it and that it does not have a relationship with God’(CH1). God is pictured to resemble human beings, whereas the evil spirit is ‘black,’ indicating non-relatedness with human beings. God reconciles, but evil spirit causes conflict and fight. Children mentioned conflict and fight several times and used evil spirits as a source.

when a person is in conflict with another it means there is an unclean spirit in him. Even if this one person he does not one to fight with the other one, the other one might want to fight and if Satan inserted unclean spirit in him, even if the other person does not want to fight, if he puts an unclean spirit on the other he can beat the other back to the other wondering why he is in fight with him. And the devil might use this opportunity and places his unclean spirit on the other one and they can be killing each other. This means the devil have inserted unclean spirit in them. Unclean spirit is sent from Satan (FGD1).

when I hate someone it is Satan deceiving me. When Satan deceives us and comes between us, we fight with people.....When he comes between me and the other boy, we are stirred to quarrel and we fight. like when the whirlwind stirs the dust...when it is whirling...[yes] he whirls the dust (CH8).

As mentioned above, children perceive the evil spirit as causing realities of fear, suppression and relationship challenges. They have also mentioned that evil spirituality drives practices such as witchcraft, sorcery, and spellcasting. In this regard, CH6 shared what she saw with close relatives:

There are many people, including my relatives. I also have relatives. My[aunt's] aunt's husband, his mother, and his family believe in that [witchcraft]. We don't talk to each other as a result. Because they believe in witchcraft, we do not approach them...I don't mean we don't talk to each other. We talk about the matters we should talk about and we don't talk on matters we shouldn't, that's it.

Children see engagement in evil practices as driven by bad behaviors such as jealousy of the success of others. Evil spirituality embraces danger and threats in the unseen world. Children share psychological, relational and spiritual challenges like suppression, hate, and fear that affect them in one or the other way. Fight and conflict are ascribed to be caused by evil spirits, with a possible implication that children feel like victims of evil spirits whenever they have such an incident. This leads to the conclusion that as much as the unlimited God with unlimited goodness is in the spiritual realm, there is also a spiritual threat that children are aware of.

5.3. Summary of main findings

The findings presented under the superordinate and subthemes show that children who participated in this study understand spirituality as a multidimensional reality. They view spirituality as how humans behave depending on the nature of spiritual realities. Children see the

spiritual reality as encompassing both positive and risk factors. The findings are summarized as follows.

1. The children of Wonji Shoa understand spirituality as a multidimensional reality. They see spirituality as comprising the divine realm, religious orientation and practices, inner personal qualities, the world of evil spirits, and worldliness. Children believe that there is divine, personal, religious, evil, and worldly spirituality.

- Children perceive that the spiritual realm encompasses good spirits on one end and evil spirits on the opposite side. The side of good spirituality is about God, the Creator, the Holy Spirit, angels, and all the spiritual beings that children see as suitable for human beings. Children believe that evil spirituality exists contrary to good spirituality, including Satan, the devil, and demons, with their being causes of evil and harm to human life.
- The religious aspect of spirituality embraces religious affiliation, adherence and participation. Children understand that spirituality involves obeying and observing their religion's beliefs, precepts and rituals.
- Children identify human behaviors and activities outside their relationship with God, the Creator and religious affiliation as worldliness. Worldly spirituality is conditional in that it encompasses both positive and negative features. Those features that do not contradict the divine and religious dimensions are considered positives. Those features contradicting the divine and spiritual dimensions are negative aspects of worldly spirituality.
- Children see spirituality as a personal quality that embraces emotion, self-confidence, motivation and virtuous characters. Personal spirituality values the self

as trustworthy and capable of expressing emotion, taking self-initiative, and behaving appropriately.

2. Children of Wonji Shoa understand that spirituality is how a person behaves and relates with, corresponding to the nature of spiritual sources. Divine spirituality involves a relationship with the Creator (connectedness), whereas evil spirituality should be avoided (dissociation). Religious spirituality requires behaving according to set standards and teachings (belonging). Worldly spirituality involves engagement or detachment depending on the nature of behaviors and actions. Personal spirituality is about valuing the self and demonstrating the right behaviors before others (people).
3. Depending on the sources, the children of Wonji Shoa see the spiritual world as comprising both enabling factors and risks (threats). Divine spirituality provides care, protection and provision, whereas evil spirituality suppresses, stumbles and instigates unwanted behaviors.

5.4. Discussion

This section discusses children's understanding and experience of spirituality with contemporary views and theories in the field. It discusses children's multidimensional view of spirituality in light of the concept of the sacred, the idea of spiritual capacities and the theory of relational consciousness.

5.4.1. Children's multidimensional view of spirituality and the 'sacred'

As mentioned earlier, study participants view spirituality as a multidimensional reality incorporating the inner and outer aspects of human beings, the good and evil spiritual beings, and human experiences referent to the various dimensions of spirituality. This view of children confirms the description of spirituality in contemporary literature. Understanding of spirituality adopted by Benson et al. (2003, pp.205-206), Roehlkepartain (2004, pp.122-125), and Yust et al.

(2006, pp.8-9) reflect spirituality to be both an intrinsic and nurtured domain of human beings cultivated within or outside of religious traditions and expressed through ethical behaviors. Similarly, Nye's relational consciousness theory focuses on the multidimensional characterization of spirituality involving 'I-Self', 'I-Others', 'I-World' and 'I-God' relationships (Nye, 2006, pp.109 -128). At a broader level, children's multidimensional view of spirituality agrees with descriptions of the subject in contemporary literature.

Scholars' multidimensional view of spirituality considers the human capacity for self-transcendence and connectedness with animate and inanimate beings within and outside religious contexts. In one sense, such an inclusive view of spirituality shows the vastness of the spiritual world. On the other, it also conveys that spirituality is limitless without a handle. Children's understanding considers both aspects of spirituality. They view spirituality's vastness within a framework of five dimensions. Instead of considering spirituality in everything, children start from their belief in the existence of spiritual beings, 'God' and 'evil spirit' as 'objects of spirituality'. They believe that God takes the good side of the spiritual world, whereas evil spirits cause bad things.

The study participants view God the Creator as the sacred core of the spiritual realm. The sacred refers to the Divine or any object depending on an individual or group's perception (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66). Children believe that God, as the sacred core, is the source of everything, creating both the physical and spiritual world, including the spiritual dimension of human beings. He is all-present, all-powerful and holds the ultimate source of spirituality. With this belief, children see spirituality in relation to the Creator, which agrees with the perspective Christians uphold.

From a Christian perspective, Nye succinctly defined child spirituality as 'God's way of being with children and children's way of being with God' (2009, p.5). She explains further that children's spirituality starts with God because God has created them. Similarly, writing from the

biblical account, Stonehouse has indicated that human beings, regardless of religious backgrounds, are spiritual creatures since they are created in God's likeness, 'Since God is spirit, those created in the image of God are spiritual beings' (Stonehouse, 2006, pp.95–96). Therefore, participants' view that God is the source of spirituality aligns with the view of Christian scholars.

Believing divine spirituality as the sacred source, the children of Wonji Shoa regard the religious dimension as related to the divine. In other words, they believe that God, the sacred, is accessed through religion. As discussed under *religious spirituality* (section 5.2.2) many of the study participants believe that religion is a way to be related to God and to be spiritual. With its relationship with divine spirituality, the religious dimension of spirituality and commitment to religion are considered sacred. Children's view of religion as sacred is consistent with scholars, for example, Zinnbauer et al. (1999), Niekerk (2018) and Carr (1995), who argue against putting a boundary between religion and spirituality. Zinnbauer et al. argue that 'Religion is associated with the sacred' (1999, p.908). Similarly, Niekerk says spirituality is closely connected with religion (2018, p.10). Religiousness and spirituality involve the sacred (Zinnbauer et al., 2005, p.39).

As indicated under religious affiliation (under section 5.2.2), some children distinguish between their faith in God, and affiliation and commitment to religion. Instead of religion, they believe their faith enables them to access divine spirituality directly. While they do not have negative views toward religion, these children think that religion is inherited from family, not necessarily from the sacred source. However, Zinnbauer et al.'s integrated view of spirituality and religion recognizes personalized expressions, such as the search for meaning in life, beliefs and personal goals, to happen within the framework of religious association with the sacred.

Religious destinations and pathways associated with the sacred also may encompass both personal and social religious expressions. Religion may involve the search for personal ends, such as peace of mind, meaning in life, control and mastery, self-development, and good physical health. Religion may also involve social ends, such as the desire for closeness and intimacy with others, membership in a religious community, and the goal of peace and justice in the world. To achieve significant goals, the religious devotee may travel very personal trails of individually constructed beliefs and practices that have little to do with traditional religious institutions (Zinnbauer, et al, 1999, p.908).

Children's high regard for religion, as well as the emphasis some children put on personalized faith to access the sacred, appears to agree with the integrated view of spirituality and religion. With the integrated view, religion embraces individual commitments such as faith. However, the traditional view of religion that emphasizes institutional and ritualistic aspects over the dynamic nature of spirituality (Hay, 2006, p.19) may not accommodate personalized reflections and decisions such as personal faith in God. In this case, the sacredness of religion, a way to access the divine, could be questioned, as some children reflected.

With God being the sacred core, children's multidimensional view of spirituality also confirms the view of spirituality as awareness of unseen realities. Children's awareness of spirituality at a broader level agrees with Nye's relational consciousness theory and Hyde's characterization of child spirituality. Nye explains spirituality as 'discrete moments of unusual awareness, reflective consciousness' (2006, p.109). Hyde views awareness as children's concentration on activities they are engaged in (2008, pp.97, 99). However, the study participants shared spirituality as part of everyday life, implying that it is not necessarily about notable moments of 'heightened awareness' and 'concentration'. Spirituality may not necessarily refer to specific experiences of awareness or special attention. Instead, it refers to the conceptual pictures

of children, their spiritual dimensions, and the world around them at the point of interaction. This view of children appears consistent with Champagne's understanding of spirituality as a mode of being (discussed in section 2.3.3).

5.4.2. Children's multidimensional view of spirituality and spirituality as 'capacity'

As discussed in the section on the spiritual dimension of spirituality (section 5.2.1), children's understanding of spirituality embraces personal qualities such as emotion, self-confidence and self-motivation. This view of children is consistent with contemporary views of child spirituality. Drawing on various theoretical and empirical sources, Pargament conceptualizes spirituality as 'a distinctive motivation and process' in and of itself (2013, p.271). For Fisher, 'spirituality is emotive' that profoundly touches a person's heart (2011, p.18). Broadly, the personal qualities children shared confirm with the views of spirituality as intrinsic human capacity (Benson et al., 2003, pp.205-206; Yust et al., 2006, pp.8-9, Roehlkepartain, 2006, pp.5-6), as a mode of being and interacting with their surrounding (Champagne, 2003, p.44; Hart, 2006, pp.163-164), as a reflective, contemplative and imaginative capacity (Coles, 1990) and as relationality and connectedness (Nye, 2006, p.109, Hyde, 2008, pp.43-44, Adams et al., 2008, pp. 23-24).

While children mentioned only a few personal qualities, such as emotionality, initiative and virtuous acts, contemporary literature presents diversified spiritual capacities. Hart's view of children's spiritual capacity includes awe, wonder, and wondering, often considered experiences rather than capacities. Similarly, Hay and Nye have noted children's capacity for awe, wonder and imagination to sense what is not directly comprehensible. According to Emmons, spirituality is a set of capacities and abilities encompassing the capacity for transcendence, the ability to enter heightened spiritual states of consciousness, the ability to invest everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the sacred, the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems

in living and the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior (2000, p.1). This broader understanding of spirituality as capacity and the specific abilities it considers widens the possibility of seeing children's spirituality from different angles. The concept of 'capacity' brings more clarity to understanding the scope of spirituality and its distinct features from religion (Pargament, 2013, p.278).

The conceptualization of spirituality in terms of personal qualities implies that spirituality can be nurtured and developed within and outside religious frameworks. Yust et al. note that spirituality as a capacity 'must be actively cultivated or nurtured for it to be fully realized' (2006, p.9). One of the questions raised often about spiritual development is 'what aspects of a person develop?' Considering the primary and secondary sources presented above, spiritual capacities such as awe, wonder, imagination, transcendence, and connectedness can be considered aspects of spirituality that develop. Spiritual development is about developing imagination, transcendence, spiritual awareness, relationship, and responsibility (Scarlett, 2006, p.23; Cartwright, 2001, p.216; Hay et al., 2006, pp.48 -50).

However, scholars put a caveat that not all aspects of spiritual development should be taken to follow the stage structure of developmental psychology (Benson et al., 2003, p.210; Scarlett, 2006, p.26). Some scholars, for example Hay and Nye, argue that spirituality is more evident in children than adults. Nye notes that 'spiritual awareness is especially natural and common in childhood, and comparatively rare in adulthood' (2009, p.9). Children are observed to be more willing and apt to experience transcendence than adults (Csinos, 2011, p.15). Considering this observation, children's spiritual development is not a linear stagewise development from lower to higher levels.

5.4.3. Children's multidimensional view of spirituality and relational consciousness theory

At a broader level, the study participants discussed spirituality as a relationship consistent with the relational consciousness theory. Relational consciousness emphasizes children's dual-natured consciousness and connectedness: child-self, child-God, child-people, and child-world relationship (Nye, 2006, pp.115-117). However, the study participants consider both the relational and non-relational aspects of spirituality. Spirituality is a relationship with God and dissociation from evil spirituality.

Some of the research participants palpably expressed that spirituality is a relationship with the Creator without mentioning other aspects, i.e., relationships with other people and their environment. They understand spirituality as the relationship with God and how a person behaves before him. Holding a relationship with God in a central position and considering the five dimensions of spirituality, children's view of relationality conveys four categories. First, relationality as connectedness applies to divine spirituality. The study participants understand spirituality as connectedness with divine beings comprising God, the Creator, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. Second, relationality in religious spirituality denotes a sense of belongingness comprising affiliation, adherence and participation. Children see spirituality as respect for religion. Third, relationality in worldly spirituality is conditional, involving engagement and detachment depending on what worldliness entertains. Relationality involves engagement in worldly spirituality when behaviors and actions do not contradict the divine and religious dimensions. In cases where conditions contradict relationality with God and religious beliefs and values, what is perceived as spirituality is 'detachment'. Fourth, when it comes to evil spirituality, what children see is 'dissociation'. In the dimension of evil spirituality, dissociation (not connection) is considered spiritual.

While the relational consciousness theory mainly emphasizes spirituality as connectedness, the concepts of detachment and dissociation the study participants reflected are worth noting. In contemporary literature, spirituality is characterized positively as awe, wonder, imagination, vision, and pilgrimage. However, there are also negative influences from evil spirituality and some aspects of worldly dimensions. There is also the dark side of spirituality. Commenting on the views of spirituality in the Western world, Marian de Souza (2012, p. 291) notes:

spirituality has moved out of theological and religion study disciplines to include studies in secular spheres, much of the literature identifies spirituality as a positive thing. Experiences often linked to it are positive experiences such as awe and wonder, joy and delight, tolerance and kindness, truth and honesty and so on. While this is important, I believe it is equally important to recognise that there is a dark side to spirituality. As a rule, this has not often been identified, examined or discussed.

According to de Souza, the dark side of spirituality includes ‘aspects of relationality or connectedness’ that affect children’s well-being negatively, for example, misleading ideas about children’s ability, unrealistic media messages that signal children can be and do anything they want, obsession with something else other than the self, and fear of the otherness of other (2012, pp.298-300). Therefore, the conceptualization of child spirituality also needs to consider the dark sides. Spirituality involves connectedness, belongingness, and engagement on one side, while detachment and dissociation are on the other.

5.4.4. Insights to draw from the discussion

Children’s multidimensional view of spirituality and contemporary discourses on child spirituality share common themes at a broader level. For the most part, children’s understanding of spirituality in five dimensions considers the core concepts reflected in recent research and

literature. Conceptualizing spirituality considering the divine being (the sacred), human capacity, and relationality broadens how the subject should be seen. Children's view of God as the ultimate sacred and the source of healthy spirituality helps visualize spirituality with boundaries that spirituality is not everything.

The view of spirituality in terms of human capacity broadens the subject beyond religious limits. Spiritual capacities are a state of being and dynamic aspects of spirituality that develop and mature. They open the way to consider spiritual nurture within and outside religious contexts. However, spiritual development may be treated differently than child development theories suggest. Children's spiritual development acknowledges that children are already spiritual, in some respects more so than grown-ups. Development in the spiritual dimension follows a non-linear path (Nye, 2009, pp.9, 85).

Like the concept of spiritual capacity and development, the idea of relationality enables consideration of the broader spiritual realm. As children indicated, relationality is not limited to the 'I-other' type of connectedness. Children's view of relationality as 'connectedness, belongingness and engagement' on one side and 'detachment and dissociation' on the other side gives insight into considering spirituality in its positive and negative aspects. Spirituality is multifaceted.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter addresses two areas of focus in the research. It aimed to answer how children of Wonji Shoa understand and experience spirituality and assess how children's views relate to contemporary discourses about spirituality. Three major findings were noted regarding children's understanding and experience of spirituality. First, children view spirituality as part of their everyday life. Their views attest to the realness of spirituality in children's regular activities and

interactions. The spiritual realm is real for the children of Wonji Shoa. Second, Children view spirituality as a multidimensional reality considering religious and non-religious dimensions and the nature of spiritual beings. Children's understanding considers the spiritual realm's divine, religious, personal, worldly, and evil dimensions. Third, children's understanding of spirituality revolves around God's sacred core, spiritual capacities and relationality.

The multidimensional view of spirituality reveals that the spiritual reality necessitates a broader view than the simple categorization of spirituality under religion. While spirituality is related to religion in many ways, it also embraces other features of personal qualities, behaviors and actions exhibited in non-religious contexts. However, children's multidimensional view of spirituality considers a framework for spirituality, addressing the tendency to claim spirituality of everything in the postmodern world. For children, God, the Creator, is the sacred core and the source of spirituality, meaning that spirituality is not the result of a person's thinking.

Starting from the belief in God and his being the source of spirituality, children understand spirituality using a relationship with the creator as a sieving criterion. Most children view religion as a divine reality and ascribe it to some degree of sacredness. Evil spirituality embraces spiritual realities that are against God, the creator. Worldly and personal dimensions of spirituality are assessed in terms of their relationship with divine and religious dimensions.

Viewed in light of the key theoretical concepts adopted to guide this research, children's understanding of spirituality as a multidimensional reality at a broader level has shown consistency with contemporary views. Children's view of divine spirituality confirms the core sacred that contemporary literature reflects, especially those from a Christian perspective. Children's emphasis on emotion, confidence and motivation relates to understanding spirituality

as capacity. However, children's view of capacity appears to be focused on some areas only compared to what scholars discuss.

On the other hand, children's view of relational consciousness considers connectedness and dissociation as spiritual, depending on the nature of the spiritual dimension considered. As the relationship with God is spirituality, so is avoiding evil dimensions of spirituality. Spirituality as relationality involves discerning what is good and what is evil. The view that spirituality necessitates distinguishing between good and evil realities shades light, especially in contexts where an inflated view of spirituality is upheld without considering the possible dark sides.

Children's understanding and experiences of spirituality have several implications for holistic child ministry. First, children's view conveys the need for a broader view of spirituality apart from the common understanding as part of religion. Second, children's multidimensional view implies the need to consider the inner and outer realities of human beings and the sound and dark sides of the spiritual realm in research and practical fields, such as holistic child ministry. Third, conceptualizing spirituality in terms of spiritual capacities and relationality facilitates efforts focused on spiritual development and maturity.

Children's multidimensional view of spirituality implies that spirituality is a reality of context beyond a personal nature, which is consistent with what Hart (2006, pp.172-174) calls, '*between you and me*'. The next chapter discusses the contextual factors of spirituality that the research participants reflected.

Chapter 6. Contextual factors that influence child spirituality

6.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the influence of contextual factors on child spirituality. It intends to answer the second sub-question of the research, ‘What contextual factors influence children’s understanding and experience of spirituality in Wonji Shoa? Child development theories and ecological perspectives acknowledge context's role in children's life journey in its totality. Child spirituality, one aspect of children's being inseparably meshed with the other dimensions, is part of the child's interaction with various elements of her ecology. This interaction is the mutual influence of the context on the child and vice versa (Estep & Breckenridge, 2004, p.331). As the context influences them, children can also interact with and influence the context in the way that works for them. As a child's spirituality comprises connecting with God and others, considering the influences of those the child connects with enables one to picture the child's context from the spiritual dimension.

In this chapter, I present major findings about contextual factors of child spirituality. The chapter has two major sections: presenting identified factors and discussing findings in light of contemporary discourses on the subject. **Section 6.2.** presents contextual factors under four themes identified through data analysis: People, institutional, community and beyond community factors. **Section 6.3.** discusses the main contextual factors of spirituality in Wonji Shoa in light of the contemporary views reflected in child spirituality-related literature. The section assesses the consistency and differences between the main findings and discourses on child spirituality. **Section 6.4.** of the chapter highlights how the research question is answered and provides insights toward holistic child ministry.

6.2. Contextual factors of child spirituality in Wonji Shoa

It is a widely accepted theory that who children are and what they have is related to the context in which they live. This view includes children's spiritual dimension, understanding, and practices. The ideas shared by the children in this study indicate that human, social and environmental roles influence spiritual understanding and practices positively or negatively. As discussed above, children see spirituality in five dimensions: divine spirituality, religious spirituality, personal spirituality, worldly spirituality and evil spirituality. This chapter deals with the contextual factors behind these perspectives of children. While I note that child-context interaction goes both ways, this research focuses more on the context's role toward children's spirituality.

During the data collection process, I intentionally did not pose direct questions for children to discuss contextual factors related to their spiritual understanding and experiences. Posing direct questions in one sense would be leading for children, and hence, the temptation could come to answer the question for the researcher. This can frame children's thinking in a certain way, imposing a sense of right or wrong instead of freely sharing their thoughts. Moreover, framing questions for such concepts needs unpacking from the researcher's side and puts the researcher as knowledgeable; hence, it can create power distance. So, instead of framing direct questions, children's freedom was a priority, and discussions proceeded based on what they said. While group and individual interviews indicated several contextual elements, the two FGDs and one individual interview I did in the second-round data collection process focused on broader community issues.

Through analysis of the transcribed field data, I have noted that children mentioned their parents, guardians, siblings, preachers, spiritual teachers (e.g., Sunday school teachers), religious institutions, friends and schoolmates when sharing their spiritual understanding and experiences.

Based on the data analysis, I have identified four major themes emerging as findings on contextual factors around children's spirituality.

- People-related factors
- Religious factors
- Community level factors
- Factors beyond the immediate community

In the following sections, I present each theme and the subthemes under them.

6.2.1. People related factors of child spirituality

Children's spiritual dimension, like other dimensions (physical, cognitive, socio-emotional), relates to the people around them beyond being a private (personal) reality (Adams et al., 2008, p.119; Hay & Nye, 2006, p.26). As could be credibly imagined, the people who are closer to children, particularly family members, children's friends and spiritual teachers, come to the forefront in influencing child spirituality. As Boyatzis et al. note, 'The family is probably the most potent influence — for better or for worse—on children's spiritual and religious development' (2006, p.305).

Through analysis of what children shared about spirituality, the following three subthemes emerged under the main 'people-related factors':

- Children's family
- Children's friends
- Religious teachers: Sunday school teachers, preachers

6.2.1.1. Children's family as a spiritual factor

Being the nearest (closest) of all, parents (caregivers) play a multifaceted role, incorporating both positive and negative sides. The positive sides include parents passing religion on to their children, parental support and guidance, and shared family-level needs. The negative influences come from unhealthy parent-child communication and strained family relationships.

A. Parents pass religion to children

As was explained in chapter five, religion is one aspect of child spirituality. Children echo their parents' influence to be more evident in religious spirituality than in the divine and personal lines. Children say parents are givers of religion; they bequeath religion to their children, and children inherit religion from their fathers and families (FGD6¹⁶). Parents bequeath their religion to their children through what they say in words and how they practically live out religious commitments; 'Most of the time, children do not have their own faith; they live after what they hear and see in their families. And follow the same religion. They live after what their family showed them' (CH5, 13-year-old girl in FGD6). The words 'hear, see, show' in this quote hint at how children inherit religion from their parents. Under normal circumstances, the naturally ordained parent-child tie is an unrestricted avenue for children to 'hear and see' about their parents' beliefs, values and actions and for parents to offer what they value most and see it become true in their children. Parents' allegiance to religion, observing religious beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and practices, and their practical actions, like religious pilgrimage and acts of goodness, socialize children primarily in religious spirituality.

¹⁶ Group discussion, Tsehaywota, October 22, 2019.

According to some research participants, children inherit religion from their parents uncritically. A 13-year-old girl says, 'They [children] do not evaluate right from wrong when they accept their family's belief' (CH5, in FGD6). Similarly, a 14-year-old boy also says, 'Many religions have come after their [children's] families. I do not believe most of them accept it through deep knowledge and personal decisions about their religion' (CH2, in FGD6). Although they did not indicate specific age brackets, these research participants think that children's uncritical inheritance of parental religion is due to the age factor that children are not yet able to evaluate 'right from wrong':

'before I came here I used to follow what my parents follow and do what they do, the rituals they do. What did I know about it?'. At one point I was empty inside and through the time I found out about the truth and know I could be a believer. Therefore, when we look at children, before they think about what they accept as right and wrong, they inherit religion or ritual from the family, not the faith... religion is only a ritual. For example, when I talk about myself, I am a believer in Christ and do only Christian rituals... but if I do not do the things that the Christians have to do, I am not using my faith. So, religion and faith are very different (CH5, in FGD6)

According to the above quote, religion and faith are considered to be different. Religion is considered more communal, ritualistic, and accepted without question, whereas faith is considered a personal decision based on personal choice and action, based on discernment of right from wrong. As these children say, faith is not inherited like religion; instead, it can be developed, and children have the potential to do so.

But we are born with ability to adapt. So, our faith is not something that is inherited from our family. but we were born with the mindset to hold our faith. So, faith is not something that we brought from our parents but a decision that we have after evaluating and accepting something.

Evaluating is like choosing between two things and deciding one is better than the other, and living according to it (CH2, in FGD6).

However, other children (ages 10 and 11) do not scrutinize religion and faith; instead, they believe that the religion inherited from parents continues to the end, 'most of them [children] accepted their religion from their fathers and families. And knowing whom they believed and following to the end' (CH18, 11-year-old girl, in FGD6). Another 10-year-old girl whose father is a convert from Islam to Orthodox Christianity thinks that her religion cannot be argued on, and she gets irritated when there is an argument about religion.

My father was not an Orthodox Christian before. He was a Muslim. Then, he was converted into Orthodox Christianity when he married my mother. I don't know but I love my religion, I respect it and I believe in it. I respect the ritual order. [I go to church] every Sunday morning. Of course, I often go and attend whenever there is a fellowship program. But I never miss the Mass. I mean, I believe in St. Mary. I love her. But they say that St. Mary is Jesus' mother and not an interceder. They say, "Jesus is our interceder," ... According to my belief, Jesus is the mediator, not interceder. It irritates me when they say like that...Therefore, I don't like to talk about religion at school because it causes to quarrel (CH6).

Apart from children's different views on the boundary between religion and faith, they all agree on the parental role in religious spirituality. Family plays a significant role in transferring religion to children. Children are exposed to religious beliefs, values and disciplines because of their parents. Family is an environment that equips children's religious spirituality with acceptable languages, rituals and practices.

B. Family as spiritual support and guide

Parents can set good examples and facilitate a conducive environment for the spiritual activities of their children. What CH4, a 14-year-old girl who lives with her mother and a younger sister, shared about her spiritual engagement gives an excellent example of family support. She explained spirituality, on the one hand, as connectedness and intimate relationship with God and, on the other hand, as engagement in spiritual activities with others. She shared that she is actively engaged in both aspects and acknowledges her mother for being a support and an example for her active engagements, 'what helped me... I think my mother has helped me... because for example, when we want to pray in a group with my friends, she leaves the house for us. She also prays a lot. So, she has helped me to follow her example' (CH4).

Parental guidance is another side of spiritual input for children. In my discussion with children, particularly in FGD6, the participants reiterate the importance and need for increased parental follow-up at school and home. If parents carry out this role the right way, CH5 says, it will be suitable for children, 'if an opportunity is facilitated for children to know the right way, if there is effort to shape their perspectives, it will be good for children' (CH5, in FGD6). However, children did not hide the negative effect of overly strict parental supervision. They assess parental supervision as overdone and parent-oriented, 'Yes, parents' attitudes must change. That is to say, they want their children to go the way they went about and that is not fair, but they accepted it as right because it was something that lived with them' (CH5, in FGD6). Another child commented that parents have unrealistic expectations from children without creating a supportive environment, and this causes a burden on children:

But when we see the reality, parents are not making the environment for the child to study. Most of the time the child does not have a place to study at home or sometimes the family may even disturb

the child when they drink coffee together. So, these may be the burden. Parents expect a good result and that overburdens the child. At the same time, parents expect other things also and this is another burden. So, parents' expectations and reality do not go together (CH2, in FGD6).

Children reflected that family support and guidance play pivotal roles in their holistic lives, including spirituality. However, family supervision and unrealistic expectations can become negative influences if overdone without considering children's perspectives.

C. Bad communication in the family

Children generally see a family playing a positive role in children's spirituality by passing on religion and providing support and guidance. However, they have also indicated risks related to bad parent-child communication. The children perceive communication as one-sided and parent-oriented, which can hurt children's spirituality. A 13-year-old girl explains how 'bad words' continue to be rooted in children's minds, affecting their development.

let us talk about the seed that is sown by bad words on their mind... some seeds are sown by words. Most of the time parents use words like; "You do not have any future, no future". There are bad seeds that are sown by words. May be, at first, the child may not feel bad about it. But as the child grows up, these words that are sown on the mind of the child will affect him. It may even to the point that changes the way he thinks about himself. These kinds of seeds affect most of the time (CH5, in FGD 6).

CH6 notes that such communication appears normal for parents, 'they use it as if it is a blessing'. However, a bad seed sown on the minds of children, perhaps with negligence from their parents' side, causes a burden heavy to bear not only when the children are at a young age but as they continue to grow, 'It may not affect them at an early age. But as they grow up and ask questions

about themselves, they will find these thoughts. So, these seeds become their new way of thinking' (FGD2).

Another respondent implied a gap of understanding between parents and children. Sharing her experience, this girl says she goes to her friend to express deep feelings when her parents annoy her, 'It is because she understands me...I often go to her and cry when my parents annoy me. I never expose my feelings in front of them'(CH6B). As mentioned, children see feeling and emotion as one aspect of spirituality. The emotional hurt that comes from bad words and misunderstandings is, therefore, a negative influence on child spirituality. Children also mentioned that strained family relationships cause emotional burdens.

D. Unhealthy relationship in the family

When strained, family relationships disturb and stress children. Unfortunately, this happens often among the participating group. One of the relationship issues children mentioned is fighting in the family—between father and mother, between parents and children, and between siblings.

When I was at home and my mother and father fought, I cried and asked God. They reconciled and I was happy (CH18, in FGD6)

[I pray so] that He would keep my family in peace...my brother and father used to fight (CH15).

[I pray] when I face problems. when people in my family fight. when my father and my mother fight. when my sister and my brother fight (CH6)

Strained family relationships steal children's attention and cause emotional burden, with a possible adverse effect that can continue in children's future lives.

Sometimes if the husband fought with his wife and when the children came home, he may show them a terrible face. Then it will become difficult for the children to focus on their studies.

Because their attention will be taken by their father's situation. Then it will even influence them in their future life (CH18, in FGD6).

Disagreement and conflict between family members, especially parents, affect children. In such situations, children say that they pray. They repeatedly mentioned family issues as their prayer items.

E. Family as a prayer item

One of the repeated prayer items children mentioned was about prayer for their family members. In addition to relationship problems mentioned above, children also pray for the healing of sick family members and for the parents who do not live with them. Several children reported praying for their mothers or sisters who have left the country and are searching for jobs abroad, mainly in Arab countries. When responding to questions about prayer, children said:

Ch21: [I pray] about my mother. Because my mother lives abroad... I pray for her. [She lives] in Dubai.

CH19 (in FGD5): Yes, I do pray. [I pray] For my mother and my sister. for my sister because she is abroad. She is at Beirut. She went to help us and when she comes back, she is going to continue her studies. I pray for her so that she comes back safely. For my mother so that she would stay alive until she [my sister] returns.

CH18: I pray when my mother is sick and for those who sit at the church gate and are sick.

CH8: When I pray on Saturday, I sit at the church to pray for my mother and my aunt.

CH9: when I ask him to protect my mother wherever she is, he protects her. when I ask him to protect my mother, he protects her... my mother went to an Arab country.

CH19: I pray for my sister and my mother... As for my sister, I pray that she may come back in peace and continue her education. One of my sisters is here. The other one is in an Arab country. For my mother so that we will live together until Jesus Christ comes.

In summary, what children reflected regarding the role of family in child spirituality affirms the indispensable role family has in this dimension, as is true in other dimensions. The formal and informal interactions in the journey of living together have a spiritual dimension in addition to the observable physical realities. Family is a spiritual context for children.

6.2.1.2. Friendship growing together spiritually

Children's social context next to their families comprises their peer relationships. Children's friendship is one explicit example of spirituality as relational connectedness. While it is well-established that friendship or peer relationships are visible realities of adolescent age, some studies also show that they are a reality in children of earlier ages (Hay, 2005, pp. 1-3). Participants of this study reflected the same reality: not only do they have friends, but they also see the level of relationships from a spiritual angle. In its general sense, friends are agemates, classmates or children going to the same school together as CH6B says, 'My friends... they are many! All the students in the school compound are friends with me. We talk and have fun'. However, friendship goes deeper than its generality. CH6 continues to say, 'A friend is someone you share your secrets. By the way, no need to have friends more than one. The friend with whom you can share secrets should be one'. When it comes to a friend or selected few friends (intimate friendship), the relationship becomes more profound and more personal, including valuing each other, sharing personal secrets and frustrations, and providing support, including admonishments for abnormal behaviors.

Talking about her intimate friend, CH6 says, 'she [my friend] understands me. She is also the same age as me. I often go to her and cry when my parents annoy me'. Likewise, CH4 expresses her high regard for good friends and shares their character:

the humility they show when they leave Choir practice... and they do not insult anyone but are instead meek.... If you make a mistake, you are the one who should ask an apology, but they will ask apology instead and show you meekness... when you see these signs these children are spiritual. They have Christian divine [character].

As some of the research participants reflected, this high regard for friendship is an avenue to practice spiritual disciplines and avoid negative aspects of worldly spirituality. Talking about his friends, CH3 says, 'Many of my friends are Christians... as we can see [others, not friends] often times, they spend so much time singing secular songs than worshipping. I have three other friends...they are Christians, all three of them'. When we see the friendship in this boy's view, the influence of the spiritual dimension is evident in bringing these children together. He further mentioned prayer, worship and choir as a team. These friends nurture their spirituality mutually (CH3). Group spiritual activities seem to be an avenue for children to nurture spirituality as friends:

I go to church together with my friends and we counsel each other. So when I get back home I study, watch the TV and help my family with the housework. (FGD6).

We also pray in a group with my friends... I mean, we schedule our time and pray, when we do this our spirituality develops. If we agreed that we will pray next week, we first complete our duties and plan to do it (CH4)

social life we have in the church could be serving in the choir, or in prayer team. If we meet to pray continuously, in the process our spiritual lives could develop... we want to pray in a group with my friends (CH4)

However, there are also negative influences that come from friends with destructive behaviors like jealousy and other evil spirit-led activities. CH4 describes how friendship could go in a negative direction and cause disconnect contrary to what spirituality is, '[the Devil] can make us jealous of our own friends. He makes us do worldly things and fills us with worldly things. For example, if we are jealous of our friends, we might even be discriminated against in social life' (CH4). CH5 reflects a similar idea that when there is envy and harmful competition among friends, it leads to engagement in evil spirituality.

Another unhelpful practice CH6 mentioned about friendship is an argument on religious matters. She specifically says 'an argument becomes unfriendly when there is no listening to each other, when everyone takes his own side, which then leads to fights. 'When my friends fight and when I also fight with others, I pray to God to calm me down' (CH6). Other children perceive fights as instigated by an evil spirit. Therefore, unfriendly arguments negatively influence spirituality.

Considering that children's relationships with their peers create a spiritual connection, it is relevant to ask what the ways are to ensure this strong spiritual connection. Three main things can be mentioned based on the ideas expressed and pointed out by the children who participated in this study. One is to share secrets between friends. In this regard, CH6 has said:

A friend is someone you share your secrets... By the way, no need to have friend more than one. The friend that you can share secrets should be one...She [my friend] is of my age. We grew up together. We've age differences of a few months.

A secret is something personal. Perhaps few things are more personal than a secret. Sharing a secret can be seen as self-giving; it means considering the other as oneself. When viewed in the context of a relationship, it reflects a high degree of trust. According to the children who participated in

this study, secrets can be a problem or difficulty that children cannot share with their parents, but they share with their friends. A secret could also be a mutual affair; friends agree not to share it with others (CH11). When children share their personal secrets, their bond with each other is preserved. This fosters a strong relationship, which is one of the most important aspects of spirituality.

The second is spiritual activities that children do together. These activities include group prayer, singing group and Bible study. In these small group activities, children get to know each other through the activities they do and the content they learn. They cherish their relationship. Thus, small group activities nurture spirituality.

Third, "play" is one of the ways children bond. Play is universal for children. Their gaming skills, communication skills and self-discipline will be highlighted. As a result, children give themselves to others without sparing at the playground. Therefore, it should not be taken as a physical game. It is also a way for children to develop spiritual commitment.

In addition to the above key friendship features, there are other ways in which children develop "group loyalty". For example, their sense of belonging to their church and their good attitude towards their environment can be mentioned.

6.2.1.3. Religious teachers: Sunday school teachers, preachers

Children's understanding of spirituality seems to have stamps of influence from individuals who have close relationships with children either by assignment or through social proximity, in addition to those people in their inner circles. Under this group come Sunday school teachers, preachers (religious teachers) and elders. Children with Christian affiliation mentioned children Sunday school run in their respective denominations. Although its name is Sunday school, the

actual implementation also includes other days. In the discussion on spirituality, children mentioned Sunday school, referring to the knowledge and understanding they gained. When explaining the picture of ‘hearts’ she drew about spirituality, CH1 said the illustration was from her Sunday school teacher:

I have tried to show a pure heart. Pure heart shows that it is clean from any work of the enemy or from any evil work. What we mean by this is...e... I remember once when we were learning in Sunday school, our teacher drew a pure heart on one paper and on the other... on the other paper... what do you call it? This... (stuttering) heart... after he drew a pure heart, he put mud on it. And he asked, ‘what do you understand by this without me telling you anything?’ and he looked at us. I understood first that that is the relationship we had with God. When we say this, according to our teacher, God has a relationship with a pure heart – that he has a spiritual relationship. But with the other heart, the one with mud... that there is the work of the devil inside it and that it does not have a relationship with God (CH1).

In the focus group discussion where CH1 participated, I asked participants to explain spirituality in a word or phrase; CH1 and other children explained spirituality as ‘from the heart’. Although the other children did not mention the source of this phrase, the fact that CH1 mentioned it shows that the influence is consistent. Similarly, CH4 explains that Sunday school helped her and her friends to practice group prayers: ‘I mean, we schedule our time and pray, when we do this our spirituality develops. If we agreed that we will pray next week, we first complete our duties and plan to do... [we] studied [this] in Sunday school’ (CH4).

Children also shared the experience that God talked to them through preachers, ‘I talked to God...em..God talks to me. He talked to me I mean emm...As I said earlier a preacher preaches and says this will happen or do that...God gave me similar message’ (CH1, in FGD1). Other participants of this FGD mentioned messages, prophecies and examples preachers brought to

congregations in which they attended at.

While not many children mentioned it, CH18 mentioned that she asks elders on spiritual matters, ‘I think that when I go to church, I will have faith and by asking my elders I will grow my faith and know new things then I will share for others’ (CH18, in FGD6). While adults guide children on spiritual matters, some children pointed out that the way some adults communicate to children causes negative consequence:

For example, some youth even people older than that, they see children not knowledgeable more than they know. They speak to them [children] in a way they feel inferiority. A person older than a child or better than that child, should not negatively affect the child’s identity. When a child says something, the adult could say, keep quit. Such an attitude is very common in our community (CH5)

The spiritual influence of adults on children has both positive and negative sides as children observe. The positive influence comes from teachers and preachers in a way of affirming the reality of the spiritual dimension and sharing spiritual contents and skills for children’s spiritual development. The advice from older people can reinforce children’s spirituality. However, if care is not taken the influence could be inclined to one side, imposing adults’ thinking on children without considering children’s perspectives.

6.2.2. Religious factors

Children expressed high regard for the religion and religious practices in group and individual interviews. As discussed in section 5.2.2, children view religion as one of the five dimensions of spirituality. As observed from what children shared, religious institutions have multiple influences on child spirituality. Through data analysis, the following sub-themes emerged as areas of influence religion has on child spirituality.

- Religious teachings

- Religious space (go-to places for spiritual purpose)
- Symbolic significance
- Developing belongingness.

I discuss each sub-theme in the subsequent sections here under.

6.2.2.1. Religious teachings

In Ethiopia, religious institutions own and conduct spiritual education for children. The religious institutions give spiritual education to children based on a curriculum that their respective denominations have either prepared or endorsed. In the Christian context, spiritual education for children is mainly Sunday school. Evangelical churches teach on Saturdays and Sundays. The spiritual teachings they provide include the basic teachings of their respective faith and practices, as well as how to live out faith as per the teaching. Some children shared their experience of the teachings their respective religions facilitate. CH2 says, ‘I learn in the Sunday school. And sometimes I strengthen what I learnt in the Sunday school from my bible’. Similarly, CH6B says, ‘I often go and attend whenever there is a fellowship program. But I never miss the Mass. I like preaching and everything’. Children believe that the precepts religious institutions teach help keep their religion. CH18 in FGD6 said:

Because children are brought up in church and learn things, It will make them have religion...There are things they learn since childhood. Even at the age of five, they participate in the church and study what they have learned. So these will make them have a religion...I am a Christian and believe in God, believe in Mary and I attend church. So I believe I am a Christian and have a religion.

As this quote shows, religious teachings are not events; instead, they are ways of developing children in spirituality in the religious dimension. The teachings influence the religious dimension of child spirituality, particularly their affiliation and adherence.

Religious teachings and the practices they encourage vary from religion to religion. I observed this during the interview process. In my interview with older children at the church school (FGD1), participants openly shared their unique experiences of being filled in the spirit and speaking in tongues. Other FGDs, particularly those I did at community school, did not mention such an experience. While I was processing data, I was wondering what brought the difference. Participants of FGD1 are from church school, and I learned that many of them go to evangelical churches where such spiritual experiences are accepted and encouraged in teaching and practice. Religious teachings influence faith practices. Apart from their teachings, religious institutions are places children often go to.

6.2.2.2. Religious places as ‘spiritual go-to places’

As mentioned in section 5.2.2., children have high regard for religion. Some children shared that they regularly attend worship services in their respective religions. They shared their experiences of going to church or mosque respective to their affiliations. During group discussion (FGD6), CH18 repeatedly reflected her going to church:

I keep my faith by reading the Bible, **going to church**, and praying for people who are in need. Also by hearing teachings on the bible I will try to grow my faith...**I go to church** together with my friends and we counsel each other...I think that when **I go to church** I will have faith and by asking my elders I will grow (Emphasis added).

According to CH18, going to church is a way of growing in faith. Other children, for example CH2, CH6 (mentioned above) and CH9, have indicated that similar experiences. They go to church

or mosque depending on their affiliation whenever there is service during out of school time or days. Religious places being designated for the spiritual services give physical evidence for the unseen reality of spirituality. In addition to the physical space, religious institutions have also symbols that are developed to signify spirituality as they understand it.

6.2.2.3. *Symbolic significance*

Different religions have their own culture of expressing spirituality based on their teachings. In addition to the language they use to express spirituality, I have observed that some children use symbols used in religion as spiritual. CH6, during an individual interview, shared that she kneels before an image of God and prays, especially when there are disagreements and fighting among family members. Similarly, when I asked children to draw a picture of what they think of as spiritual, some children used signs common in their respective religions, such as the cross, the Bible, and the emblems of the church they attend. Others seemed to work based on the teachings they received from religious institutions. Therefore, the symbolic value of religious institutions and places is significant. Here are two examples from CH17 and CH2.



CH17: Cross

CH2: Good spirituality and evil spirituality

Figure 4 Drawings by CH17 and CH2

Describing her picture, CH17 said that her sketch of the cross shows that Jesus Christ was crucified on this cross and raised from death. Similarly, CH2 compared two persons about their choices. The two pictures exhibit spiritual realities from different angles. The cross is a common symbol in the Christian religion, and the child (CH17) took it directly. On the other hand, CH2's picture seems to result from religious teaching about the spiritual choices people could make and their consequences. In both cases, their religious exposure helped these children visualize spirituality pictorially. However, some children think drawing the creator's picture is inappropriate and impossible. CH7, an 11-year-old girl from the public school, drew the picture below to show spirituality. She indicated in the scripts on the picture, 'This is just an example. The Lord does not look like this'. Describing her picture during an individual interview, CH7 shared that drawing the picture of the creator is not acceptable in her religion. This shows the differences between religious faiths in the symbolic representation of the spiritual world.

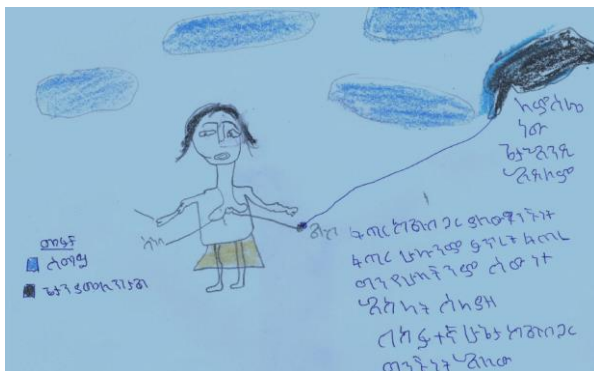


Figure 5 CH7 drawing of what spirituality looks like

Through their teachings, physical space, and symbolic significance (with some exceptions), religious institutions create and develop children with a sense of belongingness. In this sense, religious institutions are pivotal in materializing communal spirituality within their followers.

6.2.2.4. Developing belongingness

As mentioned above, religious places and institutions are places where children can develop their spirituality. The religious institutions recognize their followers and teach that their followers (members) are connected to each other, not having a physical connection but a spiritual one. And they do it in practice. CH4 repeatedly described spirituality as both personal and social practice. The church facilitates the social aspect:

The other thing I have expressed earlier is in connection to our social life. I have tried to raise how we can develop the intimate relationship with the Lord in our social life, or in relation to how much spiritual acceptance people have...a social life we have in the church could be serving in the choir, or in prayer team. If we meet to pray continuously, in the process, our spiritual lives could develop (CH4)

Activities that engage groups of children together, like CH4 mentioned, create a sense of belongingness to the community of followers. Expressing her belongingness, CH6 says, 'I don't know but I love my religion, I respect it and I believe in it'. While religious institutions develop a sense of belonging, in some instances, it also poses a challenge when connecting with children of other religions. In some cases, it causes arguments that affect relationality, which is one of the core elements of child spirituality. What CH6 said shows this reality, 'But I don't talk to my friends at school about my religion. Because if I talk, it will turn to the argument. They irritate me. Therefore, I do not like to talk about religion at school because it causes to quarrel'. The narrower view of spirituality as religion limits its multidimensional aspects. Other factors, such as friendship and the community's social life, could compensate for the possible effects of a focus on religiosity. Some children reflected that community-level factors such as social life and cultural norms influence children's spirituality.

6.2.3. Community level factors

By community-level factors, I refer to a collective of factors beyond those that are discussed under people-related and religious factors. While the idea of community is usually broad enough to include the two factors (people-related and religious factors), there are factors that go beyond them, including the interaction among the people beyond family relationships and religious backgrounds.

I had an in-depth discussion of children's perception of their community with three selected participants as a group (FGD6) and one individual interview (CH6B) in the second round of the data collection process. The participants were selected based on my observation during the first-round interview as primary informants. They were more open than other children with articulacy. In this discussion and individual interview, I intentionally focused on Wonji Shoa to know the extent to which children are connected with their communities and in which specific areas. Participants shared different aspects of their community, the town of Wonji Shoa. Moreover, community-related issues were also reflected in other individual and group interviews.

Through a careful analysis of the data that children shared, I noted three subthemes under community factors on child spirituality:

- Social life in Wonji Town
- Physical space and facility for children
- The effects of poverty

I present findings under each area as follows starting from social life in Wonji Shoa.

6.2.3.1. Social life in Wonji Town

One of the most appreciated features children shared about the town of Wonji Shoa was the people's social life. In this regard, what CH6, CH2, CH5 and CH18 said shows children's upbeat assessment and connectedness in the social life of their community. CH6 was born, raised and has been living in Wonji Shoa. Her father is a school guard, and her mother works in sugarcane farm. With an infectious smile and a sense of pride on her face and in her words, she says Wonji is an enjoyable place, appreciating the town's social life, love, and talk dwellers have. She said:

The love of the people is so amazing. I think I loved it because I was born and raised here. Sometimes, when my father says I should go with relatives, I say, “Never, this is my country”. [laughter]. When he says they came to take me, I say to him, “Oh no! How can I leave my country?” It is a pleasant country. The social life and the people’s love for others are so unique. But we are well known for talking too much (CH6B)

CH6 explains ‘talking too much’ as a positive feature in which people have fun and described it as a social flavor, ‘Yes! I mean, we like talking. This is not a bad thing at all but of a character. Yeah, we are talkative! We talk, we play, we just laugh’. The chatting in the community includes even giving nicknames for people; for this reason, the people in Wonji Shoa say:

ስም ያጣ አለም ጤና ይምጣ (simi yat’a ālemi t’ēna yimit’a), which is a poem, I translated it as:

One who doesn’t have a name,

to Alemtena [Wonji Shoa] let him come (CH6, I italicized to show it is a poem)

CH5 has similar appreciation of the social life people enjoy in Wonji Shoa. Despite their low economic standard, people in Wonji Shoa live ‘high standard’ as related to living together: caring

for one another, sharing pains one another, managing diversity with unity, living with love, peace and happiness:

What I love it so much and what I don't think there are in so many places, is social life. Here, in a very pleasant way, the pain of one hurts the other, the happiness of the other is an area where the other is happy. In a very pleasant manner, there is a spirit of care for other. It is a place where diverse community with diverse attitudes reside as one. Talking about the living standard, by the way, there are no such fulfilled needs except everybody struggles for survival. However, they have love which is the basic need for humanity to live together. It is a community who lives happily and peacefully more than the rich people do in other places... For example, when you go out for a walk in Wonji Shewa at night, you are told to be careful with hyena not of people. Because of the strong social life, the people live in harmony (CH5, in FGD6).

CH2 appears to love explaining underlining causes for the reality he sees. Explaining the reason for such a pleasant social life in Wonji Shoa, he says,

For example, the main reason for the strong social life is poverty and different problems. For example, the social life is strengthened when one of them borrows something from the other. And maybe they will cover the cost of different expenses. For example, if there is some kind of get together, they will try to share and cover the cost. So, I think, the problem itself has allowed one to live a social life (CH2, in FGD6).

While children did reflect the brutality of poverty particularly in FGD7, CH2's view reflects how people use social life as a coping mechanism in the context of lack (see discussion on poverty under section 6.2.3.3).

In addition to the social life, children also shared their assessment of social services in Wonji Shoa. In this regard, CH18 sees the social services like education and market to be good:

Wonji is a very good country. The education is good here in the government school. But more importantly, I prefer private schooling. In general, we get better education. The marketing is so good. Even though we don't spend too much, we are spending moderately. So, I think it's good...Everything is there. Here is what is sold in every city. There is much production of sugarcane here. There are factories here, and there are also in faraway places. It is going well. Our fathers are working there. So, I can say it is good (CH18 in FGD6)

The assessment of this child agrees with what other children reflected about the social life in Wonji. While she believes that there is quality education, CH2 cautiously assesses the education service and thinks that the 'service' is on a journey to be better.

Even though they do not have that much facility, some children succeeded in education, and this is due to their hard work. Also, ...The education is good on average, even if it is not the latest. That is, it is not too deep into the traditional, but it is growing even though it is slow (CH2 in FGD6).

With the understanding that child spirituality comprises relationality and connectedness (as discussed in chapters two and five), children's views of the social life in Wonji Shoa evidence spirituality in term of relationship with people around. From what children shared, they are part of the social life and cherish it with enthusiasm. On the other hand, children also mentioned spiritual practices like engagement in witchcraft, sorcery and spellcasting as hostile engagements (CH4, CH5, CH6). Similarly, practices like alcoholism and adultery were also mentioned in the category of negative influences on spirituality (CH2).

Although social life in Wonji Shoa has both positive and negative spiritual influences, the positive aspects expressed in social relationships seem to outweigh the negative. Another feature of Wonji Shoa children raised was related to availability of physical spaces and facilities for children.

6.2.3.2. *Physical space and facility for children*

Research participants view the suitability of Wonji Shoa from different angles. In one aspect, the unavailability of facilities that tempt children to engage in inappropriate and harmful practices is appreciated. However, there is also a lack of a conducive facility that nurtures children positively. CH5 says Wonji Shoa is convenient for children in one dimension:

In terms of children, Wonji Shoa is also suitable for children on one hand and but also unsuitable on the other hand. That is when we look at the ideal situation. It has no means by which children get corrupted. For example, there is no probability that they use drugs like this. There are no dancing clubs. There are no such things. That makes it socially comfortable. Playing with children instead of being confined to a home strengthens them physically. These things make it child friendly.

However, there are other aspects of the town that does not make it comfortable for children as CH5 says,

The reason you can be uncomfortable is, you know? If a child lives in a cottage, e.g. in the countryside, if he grows seeing the roof made of corrugated iron, he will always say, "I will build such a house for my family." He wishes the same. He cannot imagine high-raised buildings. He wants what he sees. So these children, the children in Wonji Shoa, often don't see big things that they may dream big. It needs to be fixed for children. On the other hand, there are situations in which, for example, they go in and out in exhaustion, but aside from exhaustion, there must be care the community needs to take for children to have something to learn...In most cases, more than 50% are left by parents saying that "he grows by a luck". There is such an attitude. For children, you know? It is said that there is no place for children to learn and to develop their talents from childhood. There was no place. Not only a place where children grow their talents, there was not even means by which they identify their talents. Without knowing it at the right time, or they get to know it after it is over. These are not good things (CH5 in FGD6).

As this extended explanation shows, there are some challenges that make Wonji uncondusive for children: limited opportunity and exposure, careless child-rearing practices and lack of guidance for timely talent identification. Agreeing with these challenges, CH2 tends to blame the children themselves partly. He thinks they have contributed to the uncondusive conditions:

I would also like to add that when we see children themselves or as we see it as children, there is a problem of thinking, that is, to repeat what the family has gone through, or the way the family has gone. Similar conditions of repetition are observed... That is, where they end up in the end of their life, their final destiny will be the same with their families. They may not have such plans as to stay in this town or may not have a purpose or set ultimate goals. Even so, we do not see them choosing the path that leads them to that. They do nothing other than saying it. That is, they have trouble applying that even if they say so...I think their biggest problem is attitudinal (CH2, in FGD6).

CH2 emphasizes the attitudinal gap from the children's side as well. Accordingly, the conduciveness of an environment for children is not only a function of the other players, but children themselves have a role to play. Even though there are gaps in the context, CH5 still thinks that 'even then, it [Wonji Shoa] is comfortable,' implying that what children like about Wonji Shoa surpasses the town's gaps and challenges. Connectedness is not, therefore, necessarily a function of the fulfillment of what one expects only. Instead, it is a commitment to affiliation. On the other hand, it can also be considered a function of various factors that affect the environment. Poverty is one factor to consider, as children mentioned about the conduciveness of Wonji for children.

6.2.3.3. The effect of poverty

As discussed above (section 6.2.3.1 and 6.2.3.2), expressions of poverty such as lack, and low living standard are indicated. During individual interviews, many children mentioned that they have family members who have gone to the Arab countries in search for job. As CH2 and CH5 indicated, many people in Wonji Shoa struggle for survival. There are ‘individual who support about seven to eight souls in their family with a daily income of 40 birr [about \$1]’ (CH2).

In FDG6, participants were asked about their definition of poverty. Accordingly, they described poverty both in terms of spiritual and material aspects. In one sense, they understand poverty as lack of necessities like food, shelter, cloth or lack of money. Here is an excerpt from the discussion:

Researcher: in your own understanding, what is poverty? Express it in a word or sentences as short as possible and whatever comes to your mind. All answers are right.

Response 1: What I call poverty is emptiness, inner emptiness, emptiness of mind. This for me is the ugliest side of poverty, whatever our pocket is full, or we have something, if do not know how to use it, this is poverty for me. Therefore, for me, poverty is emptiness’...there are different types of poverty.

Response 2: For me, I see poverty in two ways. The first one is the lack of basic necessities for example lack of food, shelter and clothes, not fulfilled for a person. When a person does not have what he needs. The second one is attitudinal poverty.

Response 3: The way I see poverty, it is unfulfilled basic need for example, food, shelter, clothes. It could be torn or dirty clothes, it could be food and not going to a good school. It could be their house status for example, their house could be shabby, the roof or the wall could be worn out. When the basic needs are not met.

As these quotes indicate, children see poverty in economic and attitudinal forms. In further explaining the effect of poverty, children explained the psychological and relational problems it causes. Describing indicators of poverty in a children's lives, they said, inability to go to good school at the right age, inability to fulfill school uniforms after registration, not bringing lunch to school, not having clothing and not able to get exercise books and pens. In addition to the physical effects, inability to express their ideas, decreased relationships with friends, frustration in discussions on subjects they do not know much about (e.g., talking about technology), attitudes that do not correspond to their age, failure to succeed and engagement in addictions like alcoholism. One of the participants of FGD7 said,

The others thing that I have seen is, in terms of poverty, as we already expressed, our country is also under the roof of poverty, when we come to children, children's living with their parents at their young age becomes affected. Sometimes a mother can give her child for another person, seeking a better life for her child. Except a few people, those who take the children may not give good care. So poverty separates the child from parents. When we come to the youth, some youth add poverty on their poverty. They do not accept that they are poor. They take the wrong way. We can defeat poverty when we accept it. Therefore, when they try to cover up the economic or attitudinal poverty, that by itself shows they are poor. Sometime, youth are seen getting into addiction because they are not able to eat.

The above descriptions of poverty indicate its effect on spirituality. It makes children have low self-esteem, affects or breaks their relationship with their peers and pushes them to engage in wrong behaviors. These are core elements of spirituality. In Addition to these effects, one participant indicated what she called 'a third poverty':

In addition to this, what the church has to do is, to address the third poverty, meaning there is spiritual poverty that takes the highest part of our life. Sometime there are condition where people living in poverty doubt the presence of the Lord and people who have wealth deny God. Therefore, starting from early age, meaning starting from children, the comforting force, the presence of God, that the situation can be improved, that giving love, most of the time, we imagine money only to support to the poor, but there are poor who do not have money and person around them. Therefore, going to them, listening to them and giving them physical satisfaction, giving them our five minutes, can change them, therefore, getting closer to them and giving pure love to the best we could, I say it would be good the church does this.

This quote provides a broader view of the effect of poverty. Poverty affects people's faith in God. Poverty is not only a lack of money but also a lack of 'a person', meaning a lack of attention from others. Children's analysis of poverty suggests that poverty affects spirituality in many ways. It affects children's view of themselves (emotion, confidence, motivation, virtuous behaviors) and relationships with other people. It could also lead children to engage in negative aspects of worldly spirituality, like engagement in addiction.

The contextual factors of children's spirituality mentioned so far, people-related, religious and community-level factors, have both positive and negative influences. While the above factors are realities in Wonji Shoa, some children also mentioned factors that have sources beyond their immediate community.

6.2.4. Factors beyond the immediate community

The contextual factors mentioned so far have a closer presence (proximity) to where children live. However, some children have also mentioned issues that do not necessarily originate

in their immediate community. I have noted two factors under this theme. One relates to technology, and the other relates to the peace and stability issues at country level.

6.2.4.1. Technology

The rapid development of technology in the contemporary world has multiple influences, which makes what is geographically far to be real and near to children's homes and communities. A ten-year-old girl, CH17, shared her experience of earache she had some time ago, for which she had to be taken to get medical intervention. However, the treatments were not successful. One day, she was watching a Christian channel on television, during which the tele evangelist was praying for healing. She says:

I have believed that Jesus is Lord; that he protects us from different obstacles in our daily living. Any person faces different problem in his life, if he does not pass those problems with the help of the Lord, he might face many problems... for example I have been healed from sickness from a problem of my ear. My left ear could not hear... then I was healed. I used to use medication. I have gone to Wonji Aba's house [a Catholic owned Clinic] and had my ear washed but... and after I went there and got my ear washed I was given medicine. But I did not get well. Then when he [the televangelist] told us to lay over hand at the place we feel pain, I laid my hand on it [the aching ear], it did not hear before, now I have been healed. It is Jesus.

The testimony of this child shows that a person whom she did not know was made real to her need with the help of technology. While CH17 experience was positive, CH6 shared that she experienced unknown pictures and sounds coming via mobile phone and she thinks that some of the images are related with Satan. In this case, the experience is negative, whether it is associated with Satan or unethical information released via the internet.

While access to technology has both positive and negative experiences, lack of it also has a negative effect. FGD7 participants said that a child who does not have access to technology, for example, a Television channel, could not have the confidence to discuss technology, ‘when the discussion is about technology,...he could be surprised, or he could show frustration in his face, he could be hurt psychologically, the effort he tries to hide himself because of such incidents’.

The effect of technology, in this case, goes beyond material needs to the level of affecting self-perception and competence to cope with peers who have access to technology. While things are being digitalized in the current world, accessing technology for children living in poverty is still challenging. Technology, with its access or inability to do so, affects children’s spirituality. Another factor that children mentioned is related to a national-level issue.

6.2.4.2. Peace of the Country

Prayer was one of the frequently mentioned experiences children shared. While most of the prayer items children mentioned were related to personal and family issues, some children said that they pray for their country to 'be in peace'. CH6A says that she prays that 'we would all live peacefully'. Similarly, a participant of FG5 said, 'When something happens in our country, I pray for peace so that problems will not happen'.

From what these children shared; things that happen in different parts of the country have direct spiritual impacts on them. While our discussions did not go deeper into country-level issues, the fact that they mentioned the country's peace situations resonates with peace and instability that have been experienced in different parts of the country.

6.3. Summary of findings on contextual factors

The findings presented above under the four main themes and subs themes under them, show positive and negative contextual influences on the spiritual dimension of children. People-related factors such as family, friends, religious teachers, and preachers exhibit relationality in many ways, which enhances children's connection. Similarly, religious institutions nurture children's spiritual capacities through language, symbols, precepts and rituals. Children also regard the social life of Wonji Shoa as a treasure for connectedness. On the other hand, factors like technology and national-level issues show that the spiritual context is not limited to the geographic bound. The influence of technology has created a new way of looking at context.

From what children reflected, contextual factors that influence children's understanding and experience of spirituality in Wonji Shoa:

1. Comprise diversified elements including people (primarily family, friends and religious teachers), religion (through teachings, physical space, symbols, language and sense of belongingness), community-level factors (social life, physical space and facilities, effects of poverty) and factors beyond community (technology and national issues). The diversified factors confirm children's view of spirituality as a multidimensional reality. As spirituality is multifaceted, so are the factors influencing it. Spirituality includes religion but not limited to it.
2. Include factors that enhance children's spirituality as well as that suppress spirituality. The positive factors facilitate relationality, inclusion and sense of belongingness. The negative factors include constrained communications, unhealthy behaviors, evil spiritual practices, unfriendly environment and negative effects of technology.

3. Go beyond immediate community issues and reflect contemporary realities. The contextual factors appear messier than the Bronfenbrenner's 'nested structure' of child ecology. Contextual factors are dynamic including religious and non-religious ones both from near and far.

6.4. Discussion

The conceptualization of spirituality in terms of relationality, as discussed in chapters two and five, takes the phenomenon of spirituality to be a shared reality beyond being an aspect of an individual. The idea of relationality and connectedness implies that some aspect of spirituality from both ends creates the connection. To put it in other words, spirituality takes context that nurtures its development, facilitates meaningful interactions and shares spiritual qualities that enable connectedness.

In this section, I will discuss contextual factors that the children of Wonji Shoa shared in light of existing theories of child development and ecology and examine similarities and differences.

6.4.1. The role of context in child spirituality

Taken in a broader sense, the contextual factors that influence child spirituality in the context of Wonji Shoa are consistent with what child development theories reflect about the role of context in children's development (see section 2.5). Child development theories give a valuable lens to investigate the spiritual dimension of children and its ecological aspects, though not explicitly (Haight, 2004, p.117; Estep, J & Breckenridge, 2004, p.325). Discussing the child spirituality in light of ecological perspective, Estep, J & Breckenridge have made a proposition that the ecology of children's spiritual formation includes influence from environmental systems,

adaptation and interaction with environmental systems while acknowledging that children's spiritual development may not necessarily follow a linear change. Despite the traditionally considered influencers of children's spiritual formation – 'the home first and the church second', all environmental systems have impacts. They have noted the influence of intra - and inter- context relationships on childhood spiritual formation (Estep, J & Breckenridge, 2004, pp.330-331). The observation of Estep, J & Breckenridge is consistent with the factors children have indicated in the context of Wonji Shoa.

However, the factors that children indicated give a messier picture than the nested structure the ecological theory presents. Some factors that could be at macro level with ecological theory were observed influencing at micro level. This is specifically observed in relation to the development and expansion of technology in the contemporary world. Moreover, with the spiritual dimension of children understood as relationality, the boundary of this relationship may not necessarily follow the physical aspects of the ecology, rather the sensitivity of the context for the child to connect with plays a role as CH17 had responded to the program on TV channel.

6.4.2. Specific factors in contemporary discourses

Within the framework of the environmental systems, specific factors that are identified for the context of Wonji Shoa are also acknowledged by scholars discussing child spirituality. Many scholars have noted the indispensable role of family in children's spirituality. According to Hay and Nye, children's image of God is a projective component of their relationship with their parents. The experience parents give to children influences the way children picture God to be (Hay & Nye, 2006, p.54-55). Similarly, Dickie et al in their research on child-parent relationship and children's image of God, concluded that 'it is parents who directly or indirectly impact God's image' of children (1997, p.25). Likewise, Boyatzis et al notes that parents influence children's spirituality

through ‘verbal communication, and induction and introduction of beliefs, disciplinary tactics, rewards and punishments, and behavioral modeling’ (2006, p.298). The realization of these influences could be ‘unidirectional’ flowing from parents to children or ‘bidirectional’ where children have also some influences on parents. In the case of the unidirectional process, parents act as mentors and children as apprentices (Boyatzis et al , 2006, p.299).

However, the parent-child relationship that children of Wonji Shoa reflected appears to be a unidirectional process in which religion flows from parents to children. Parents pass on religion to children and parent-child communication is often one-directional (see section 6.2.1.1.C). Generally, in Ethiopian context, adult child relationship is assessed to be hierarchical in which children are required to obey and respect their parents, at the same time, they get care, protection and security from their families (Poluha, 2004, p.192; Abebe, 2008b, p.92).

The influence of religion that children mentioned is also another reality in Ethiopia. When spirituality comes up, the first thing that comes to mind for many Ethiopians is religion. Religion is widely practiced in Ethiopia. For the most part, parents and families encourage and require their children to go to worship places with them and attend religious education (see section 2.4). Religious precepts are a huge influence in guiding children’s belief and practice. Another influence (benefit) of religious institutions for children's spirituality is that they play an irreplaceable role as "go-to places" to practice spirituality. In religious places, children have an opportunity to see spirituality practiced in action like mass services, sacraments and teachings. One of the spiritual influences (positive) children get from such participation is language related to spirituality.

According to Hay and Nye, relational consciousness is the most fundamental feature of children’s spirituality which explains children’s awareness of their relationship with themselves and the rest of the world (2006, pp.131-132). One of the ways children share their relational

consciousness with their audience (those who give attention and take time to notice), is using language. Language enables children to frame and articulate the reality that is inner, personal, and private.

While many scholars, e.g., Reimer and Furrow, 2001; Champagne, 2003, Gellel, 2018, note that spirituality has preverbal existence, language plays pivotal role in enabling children frame their understanding and experience of spirituality, which consequently, makes their personal, inner reality accessible to their audiences. Language plays a central role in the nurture of children's spirituality and its expression to the wider public beyond its being an inner and private phenomenon. Children use language to share their understanding and experience of spirituality. Hay and Nye note language as one of the key governing conditions of children's spirituality. Children frame and articulate their spirituality using religious vocabularies as well as languages they use in their day to day lives, 'autobiographical languages, languages of fiction, play and games' (Hay and Nyes, 2006, pp.118-122). As part of the language of spirituality, Gellel discusses the place of symbols to understand and express the spiritual dimension through 'superficial or deep metaphorical and analogical reasoning' (2018, p.111).

From the findings, it is worth noting that child spirituality surpasses one or a few segments of the community. Child spirituality involves many players. For example, in the church context, neither a children's Sunday school program nor a single local church can fully address children's spirituality. Instead, children's spirituality necessitates the collaborative effort of all players, including the child. Adequate collaboration is a prerequisite for healthy relationships; hence, children's sociocultural context also points to relationality.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented findings on the contextual factors around child spirituality and intended to answer the second sub-question of the research, What contextual factors influence children's understanding and experience of spirituality in Wonji Shoa? The major findings as sociocultural factors of child spirituality in Wonji Shoa come under four themes namely, people, religion, community and beyond community factors.

Contextual factors of child spirituality in Wonji Shoa are multifaceted comprising children's family and significant others, religious teachings, social life and factors beyond Wonji such as technology and national issues. The diversified factors confirm children's view of spirituality as a multidimensional reality. As spirituality is multifaceted, so are the factors influencing it. Spirituality includes religion but not limited to it. Contextual factors are interlinked like a web than the ecological view as nested structure.

The findings have implications for holistic child ministry to consider. The next chapter discussed the implications of these findings together with findings discussed in chapter five.

Chapter 7. The implications for holistic ministry

7.1. Introduction

The chapters presented so far highlighted child spirituality from different angles. In chapter one, I presented gaps observed in the practical field of child ministry and argued the need for a closer look at the subject. In chapter two, I reviewed selected conceptual and theoretical debates scholars, particularly in the field of child spirituality, are grappling with. I surveyed proposals forwarded as a framework for further research and consideration in the practical field of child ministry, whether in government-led fields like education and health or among non-government

actors like churches and NGOs. In chapter three, I reviewed a broader understanding of holistic ministry, starting from a conceptual understanding of ministry, mission and holism, which set the framework for practice. Then, I focused on holistic child ministry and reviewed existing models that the church has been using for over 200 years. In particular, I discussed two relatively widely practiced models, the Sunday school and holistic child development models, and additionally, the recent thinking that emphasizes the spiritual formation of children. Based on the review, I noted the need to see ministry and mission integrated and, likewise, to see holistic ministry in a more contextualized way that serves all aspects of human needs. I also indicated some gaps that need to be addressed to enhance holistic ministry to children.

Chapter Five presented findings on children's views and experiences of spirituality and pointed out that children of Wonji Shoa view spirituality as a multidimensional reality. Chapter Six indicated that contextual factors influencing child spirituality are multifaceted, including people-related factors, religion, community-level factors and factors beyond the immediate community.

This chapter focuses on answering the third research sub question, 'What are the implications of children's understanding and experiences of spirituality for holistic ministry?' and discusses the implications of the research findings for holistic child ministry. It starts (section 7.2) by presenting a summary of theoretical and practical gaps that need to be addressed to enhance holistic child ministry. Section 7.3. summarizes major research findings that children reflected on and draws key insights toward enhancing holistic child ministry. Section 7.4. presents directional insights to enhance holistic child ministry. Then, the chapter ends by drawing some concluding thoughts.

7.2. Theoretical and practical gaps observed in child ministry

7.2.1. Summary of gaps in child development theories

Scholars in child development view children and their development from different angles of emphasis. Although developmental theories do not openly discuss child spirituality, scholars, for example, Haight (2004) and Estep J & Breckenridge, 2004, draw insights from child development theories to discuss the spiritual dimension of children. Developmental theories implicitly touch on different aspects of child spirituality. One of the core elements of child spirituality that can be observed in the child development approach is relationality.

Biological approaches consider relationality as an inner reality, the connection between 'body, mind and behavior' whereby 'genes, brain and experience form a complex system' of interactions that cause development process and outcome (Miller, 2016, pp.212, 268). Socioculturalists view children and their ecology as embedded in a cultural context where children's development involves people and their surroundings (Miller, 2016, pp. 158-159). Hence, a child's being and becoming is not an individualized journey but a process involving who and what is around the child. On the other hand, the interactionist approach emphasizes the interaction of the child and their environment. It sees the child and the environment as 'two different dimensions, each operating 100 percent in its role' in the interaction process of the 'person's psychophysical qualities and the environment's social/physical qualities' (Thomas, 2000, p.34; Thomas, 2001, p.31).

However, the traditional child development theories have entertained criticism for their developmentalism and incomprehensive view of children. First, the adoption of 'development' as a way of viewing children portrayed the stage of childhood as a transition to adulthood (Ben-Arieh, 2006, p. 4). Development is taken as a linear change from lower to higher levels. This view

suggests that children's becoming is higher than their being today (Ben-Arieh, 2006, p. 4). However, children are both 'being and becoming' at the same time (Uprichard, 2008, p. 303). The stage view does not reflect the reality of children's spirituality. Nye (2009, 9) notes, 'spiritual awareness is especially natural and common in childhood, and comparatively rare in adulthood'. She also notes that applying a linear developmental thinking for spirituality 'can make it hard to value "earlier" stages in spiritual development as highly as later steps' (Nye, 2009, p.85). Spirituality is holistic and best described by adaptation rather than linear change that stage theories of child development claim (Estep Jr. and Breckenridge, 2004, p.330).

Second, the traditional developmental theories have been silent about the spiritual dimension of children (Hart, 2004, p.38; Hay & Nye, 2006, p.57). Third, stage theories of child development are criticized for picturing the child as disintegrated in different dimensions:

Even if all the pieces are put together, the image of the child is more like a Deschamps painting (e.g., the "Woman on the Descending Staircase"), rather than a vibrant, living being who has life, interests, feelings, and who is a product of various kinds of experiences. However, the relation between these components of psychology produce a nonimage of childhood' (Sigel, 2012: 110).

The above gaps of developmentalism (focus on becoming), an incomprehensive view of all aspects of the child and the seemingly conveyed disintegrative sentiments of stage theories, contradict the spiritual dimension of a child, which is understood to be more real in early ages. Spirituality comprises the child's innate nature, experience and relationality in an integrated manner.

While developmental theories offer invaluable insights into understanding children's spiritual dimensions, they also exhibit critical gaps that need to be addressed. If not adequately addressed, the gaps will not remain theoretical only. As it is known, child development theories heavily influence thinking and action related to child-focused endeavors: research, policy, and

programs at government levels or non-government actors. Therefore, it would not be naive to consider the possibilities of the theoretical gaps reflected in practical fields as well.

7.2.2. Summary of gaps in the practice of holistic child ministry

As discussed in section 3.4, churches run different models of child ministry. The Sunday school approach is by far the most popular model in practice. This approach mainly focuses on serving children in the church. Another model that churches and para-churches implement is the holistic child development model, which mainly focuses on holistic ministry to children in poverty. There are also efforts that emphasize spiritual formation. While these models have played an undeniable role in serving children, they also have some gaps to address.

7.2.2.1. Gaps observed in Sunday school

1. The tendency of running Sunday school in the style of the secular school. This has both philosophical and methodological challenges. Secular schools are guided by developmental theories where the next stage is higher than the earlier ones. This contradicts the spiritual aspect of children, which is more real in earlier ages as mentioned above. Secular schools focus on developing intellect while spirituality is more holistic emphasizing multidimensional relationality and experience.
2. Sunday school tends to be adult-led in its orientation and operation where more emphasis is for teaching children about spiritual content which is one aspect of spiritual nurture (Csinos, 2011, p.92). Spirituality involves children's engagement and experience beyond information.
3. Although Sunday school initially aimed at reaching children from outside the church and from low-income families, through time, its focus is shifted to children within the

church (Grobelaar, 2016, p.136). It has become serving children who come for service, not the church going out to serve children.

7.2.2.2. Gaps in Holistic Child Development Model

1. The use of 'development' as a metaphor in viewing children and ministry. As indicated above, the concept of development implies upward development in a stagewise structure. While development is one aspect of a child, it is seen heavily emphasized as if it is everything of children. The emphasis on development has some critical implications for children. In one of its aspects, the tendency that who children become takes priority over who they are today while children are both today and tomorrow (Ben-Arieh, 2006, p. 4; Uprichard, 2008, p. 303; Nye, 2009, p.85). Another critical challenge is that not all children develop in the way developmentalists understand and see it. In fact, children who do not develop as per the development theories face multifaceted difficulties. While such children should be among the priorities of HCDs, what is seen done leaves much to be desired.
2. The risk of stereotyping: As discussed in section 3.4.2.2., with HCD's specific focus on children in need in some ways comes with labeling such as 'children at risk', 'poor children', 'orphans and vulnerable children', that are not dignifying to children. Such labeling, I believe not done intentionally, make children 'other' which breaks the relationality that child spirituality is anchored on (Greener, 2016, p.164; Molla, 2015, p.106).
3. Gap observed in considering contextual realities: There is an established practice that International and regional organizations run HCD for children living in another context. Because of the contextual differences between funding organizations and children

participating in the HCD, the extent to which local realities of children are considered is an area that needs more work. Another aspect of this gap is the question of including families and local communities of children (Watson et al., 2014, p.79; Grobbelaar, 2016, p.128). The issue of sustainability has also been raised as a concern.

4. Views about HCD often associate it with parachurch organizations. While the engagement of parachurch organizations is important to mobilize support, the perception, I believe it to be unintended, creates a connotation as if HCD is of parachurch organizations.

7.2.2.3. Observations in spiritual formation models

The relatively recent emphasis on spiritual formation appears to address some of the weakness observed in Sunday school practices. While the spiritual formation models advocate the need for attending to children according to their personal inclinations and styles in spiritual engagements, they seem to advocate the individualistic side. Another observation is whether they can be practical in poverty context. Moreover, they also emphasize the spiritual dimension of children.

7.2.3. Summary of gaps

As presented above existing theories and models of holistic child ministry have some gaps to be addressed while their contributions cannot be undermined. The theoretical gaps mainly relate with the developmental theories attention to the spiritual nature of children. Gaps reflected on the practical field of child ministry are mainly related with how child ministry is viewed and implemented. Considering these gaps, the following section discusses insights from children and their contexts of Wonji Shoa and seeks how they could contribute to meeting the gaps. It starts with a summary of findings and then continues to the insights.

7.3. Summary of major findings

7.3.1. Findings on children's understanding and experiences of spirituality

Children's views and experiences of spirituality indicate that the phenomenon of spirituality is multidimensional. Spirituality has multiple sources with corresponding nature, expression, and responses at children's level. The following are the major findings on children's understanding and experience of spirituality.

1. Children's understanding and experience of spirituality is multidimensional with multiple sources. It claims five different types and sources: personal spirituality (ግላዊ መንፈሳዊነት *gilawī menifesawīneti*); divine spirituality (መለኮታዊ መንፈሳዊነት *melekotawī menifesawīneti*) religious spirituality (ሃይማኖታዊ መንፈሳዊነት *hayimanotawī menifesawīneti*), worldly (secular) spirituality (ዓለማዊ መንፈሳዊነት *'alemawī ('alemawī menifesawīneti*) and evil spirituality (ክፉ መንፈሳዊነት (*Cኩስ*) *kifu (rikusi) menifesawīneti*).

2. Children understand spirituality as connectedness (with God), affiliation (with religion), conditional engagement (worldly spirituality) and dissociation (from evil spirituality).

- ***Personal spirituality*** is a relationship with the self. It comprises feeling, emotions, motivation, self-confidence, and faith. It connotes perception toward self, inner thought processes and the resulting personal beliefs,
- ***Divine spirituality*** involves relationships with the Creator. It comprises a 'child-God' direct relationship and child's relationship with the Creator through religion.
- ***Religious spirituality*** – religious affiliation – is achieved through family religion. It includes adherence to religious teachings, rituals and practices.

- ***Worldly (secular) spirituality*** – mixed type– includes practices outside of religious spirituality, and these practices can be good or bad. The good ones include behaviors like kindness, faithfulness, helpfulness, and they are associated with the divine and religious sides of relationships. Bad practices include engagement in immoral actions like alcoholism, adultery, jealousy, fight, and bad behaviors.
- ***Evil (unclean) spirituality – threatening-*** involves Satan, the devil, and associated practices. This is a spiritual dimension to which children say relationships should be *disconnected*. Evil spirituality is perceived as a source of difficulty and challenges.

3. Children experience spirituality as regular practices of prayer, attending religious services and pursuing religious disciplines. Some children shared unique encounters of hearing God’s voice, being filled in the spirit, healing from disease and guidance for innovation.

7.3.2. Findings on contextual factors of child spirituality in Wonji Shoa

Consistent with the multidimensional view of child spirituality, the contextual factors influencing child spirituality in Wonji Shoa are also multifaceted. Four broad categories of child contextual factors were identified as discussed in chapter six.

1. **People-related factors:** family, friends and religious teachers are among the most influencing factors in this category.
 - Parents’ allegiance to religion, observing religious belief, ceremonies, rituals, and practices, and their practical actions like religious pilgrimage, acts of goodness, were noted as socializers of children primarily in the aspect of religious spirituality. Parents bequeath their religion to their children through what they say in words and how they live out religious commitments. They set good examples as well as facilitate a conducive environment for spiritual activities of their children. On the other hand,

children stated bad communication and strained relationships as negative influences on spirituality.

- **Children's friends:** Growing together as an opportunity to connect, sharing personal issues for developing intimacy, serving together for fellowship and fun were mentioned as positive factors friendship contributes towards spirituality. On the other hand, religious argument was mentioned as a distractor of a relationship.

2. **Religious factors:** places of worship are 'go-to places' for spiritual service, practices, and fellowship are factors helping children to socialize, operationalize, and materialize the "spiritual realm" for children. They allow children to see, learn and practice the values adults give to spirituality. Through religious institutions, children experience religious ceremonies in action and receive religious education and holy sacraments. Religious places nurture belongingness, followership, membership, and 'religious family'. They also have a symbolic significance, imagining the spiritual pictorially (see section 6.2.2).
3. **The Wonji Shoa Community:** Social life in Wonji Shoa is generally assessed to be positive for child spirituality. Children of Wonji Shoa have a high view of their town and community life. They proudly claim that Wonji is a good town for social life despite people's economic struggles.
4. **Factors beyond Wonji Shoa:** national level issues like peace and security and technology were mentioned as factors influencing child spirituality in Wonji Shoa.

7.4. Insights from the findings

7.4.1. Insights from children's understanding and experiences of spirituality

The findings on children's understanding and experience of spirituality convey invaluable insights to consider in holistic child ministry. Reflecting on the findings above in section 7.3. brings valuable insights toward the view and practice of child spirituality and contributes to meeting the observed gaps discussed in section 7.2. I have noted the following insights from children's understanding and experience of spirituality.

First, children's multidimensional views of spirituality imply the need to consider child spirituality more broadly than simply placing it under religion. Children's multidimensional view of spirituality (the divine, religious, personal, worldly and evil dimensions) implies that holistic ministry needs a broader approach that considers all realities instead of the common understanding that spirituality is about a relationship with God. The spiritual reality requires a more robust view than the unattested and unquestioned construal narrowly as religion (Estep, J. and Breckenridge, 2004, pp. 330 -332; Csinos, 2011, p.16). A broader view of the spiritual realm makes holistic ministry more holistic.

Second, the need to 'balance between the inside and outside' aspects of child spirituality: In some contexts, mainly where there are established religions, religious affiliations and commitments take high emphasis, connoting spirituality to be more of an extrinsic nature. However, children view spirituality as an inner reality expressed during their interaction with the surrounding environment and dynamism. Therefore, spirituality is both a personal and interactional aspect. It is an existing nature of children nurtured through interaction.

Third, another insight worth noting about children's personal spirituality is those elements that are categorized somewhere else and not given valuable space in the context of spiritual

discussions. Children's emotions (fun, laughing, crying, tears, disappointment, excitement), self-confidence, motivation and virtuousness need proper consideration in thinking about what is spiritual, and ministry focused on spiritual nurture (for details, see under 5.2.3).

Finally, as 'sought, conditional engagement and dissociation', Children's multidimensional view of spirituality comprises God, people, evil spirits and the worldly system. The key concept that brings these elements to children's conceptualization of spirituality is 'relationality'. Spirituality denotes the nature of children's relationships in the five dimensions mentioned under the first point above.

7.4.2. Insights from contextual factors

The role of context in ministry to children and broadly in ministry context has received significant attention, particularly in the last few decades. Children's spiritual formation and development are intelligible through the dynamics of the sociocultural, spiritual and economic elements (aspects) of their community (Hood, 2004, p.234). The contextual factors identified in Wonji Shoa have the following implications for holistic child ministry.

First, an acknowledgment that child spirituality has many actors, including religious and non-religious, physical and non-physical, from near and afar. The implication of this for holistic ministry is to broaden its approach, going out from the straightforward consideration as if the church is the only actor of spirituality (Estep et al., 2004, p. 330; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, pp281-282; Nye, 2006, p.114).

Second, serving with family, friends and significant others who are front liners as far as ministry to children is concerned (Boyatzis et al., 2006, pp.297-306; Schwartz, et al., 2006, pp.310-320). As front liners, they have an opportunity to have the lion's share of children's time as they

give and provide care, teach children and interact with them in a way that is possibly all-rounded, touching various aspects of children's lives, if not all of it. With this as a backdrop, holistic child ministry can be enhanced better if the ownership, role and needs of the human context of children's spirituality are recognized appropriately and given the proper place in the ministry journey. The front liners are owners of children in a much more extensive way than any other agencies, including the church and child-focused organizations (under normal circumstances). Their positionality toward children is both natural and functional. Children and parents are bonded by natural design, not because of performance. It is given, not earned; likewise, children's relationships with peers (friends) and the people who serve them are more or less the gift (provision) of the socio-geographic location of children.

Third, the need to serve those in the child's context: Those who serve others also need to be ministered to; they have their own needs and gaps (shortcomings) that invite others to come into their space to play compulsory roles. This is another implication for holistic ministry to consider. How to serve servants so that ministry becomes mutually fulfilling, taking a direction to empower the capacity of others. Children's families in the research context have gaps in children and family-level interactions. There are attitudinal cultural and economic shortcomings that children have indicated to be addressed (FGD6, FGD1).

Fourth, there is a need to collaborate with the community: Children have high regard for the social connection and religious culture of the people in Wonji, showing that the community plays a significant role in the lives of children in its all-around aspects. There are positive influences in children's lives that cannot be realized in any other way. Conversely, some aspects of the community, for example, space, need reconsideration and investment to bring them (transform them) into positive inputs in children's lives. There is, therefore, a call for holistic ministry to

intentionally look at the contextual factors of child spirituality so that ministry can be run in a relevant way that factors context into account. Careful appraisal of sociocultural factors necessitates a critical review of the exciting things and those that need attention.

The sociocultural context of children's spirituality has critical implications that holistic ministry should consider both as positive inputs and areas to address. The key roles of sociocultural practices, including ownership, the experience of guidance and nurturing, and resource mobilization, contribute toward making holistic ministry whole, as its name suggests. On the other hand, the attitude toward children that reduces their spirituality because of untested assumptions of innocence is a call for intervention. There is a cause for holistic ministry to work on in the umbrella claim of serving “the whole child”, “serving the whole person”.

7.5. Relationality as a directional insight for holistic child ministry

Through the discussions above and the other chapters as well, several directional insights can be gleaned. Among the cross-cutting ideas reflected comes the idea of multidimensional view of child spirituality, contextual factors of spirituality and ways of approaching child ministry. While these themes can be analyzed by their own, I also see that the concept of relationality somehow embraces these themes. In the next section, I will discuss the concept of relationality can embrace the reflections of this thesis and help to enhance holistic child ministry.

7.5.1. The concept of relationality

Conceptual and theoretical debates and literature adopt the concepts of relationship, relational and relationality to communicate more profound and broader human phenomena beyond their routine use in everyday life. While relational, relationship, and relationality appear similar and interchangeable, there are some nuances to note. According to the Oxford Dictionary of

Geography¹⁷, 'Relational' indicates relation(s) or relationship concerning how two or more people or things are connected; 'relationality' shows 'being related to', 'in a relationship', and 'connectedness'. In discussing the role of connectedness in the social ecology of resilience, Kan and Lejano adopted relationality:

the condition by which individuals (or groups) think and act in coherence with the web of relationships of which they are part. In cognitive terms, connectedness with the other often means that one's decision-making is no longer directed at one's individual utility, but also the good of the other (2023, p.1).

In explicating further, Kan and Lejano highlighted the idea of connectedness, responsiveness, and agency, which signify inclusive relationship, action, and attitude regarding all implied in the relationality (2023, p.2). From a theological point of view, Wan views a relationship as an "interactive connection between personal beings" and "relationality as a generic quality of being connected" (2006, np). In their conceptualization of child spirituality, Hay and Nye used relationality in its broader sense as 'an awareness of being related with something or someone of value adding to everyday perspective or ordinary life' (2006, p.109). I see these descriptions of relationality as broad enough to understand the concept as it is reflected in literature. However, I still do not find them touching the deeper sense of the phenomenon as I see it in my context. I did not find them 'የልብአድርስ yelibi ādirisi 'touching deep down to heart' in revealing the weight the concept carries in my context. So, I want to look at the concept in my language.

The day-to-day word for relationship in the Amharic language is ግንኙነት gnñunet, which implies similarity, closeness, sense of being together, sharing the same idea (Ethiopian Linguistics Research and Research Center Addis Ababa University 1993). With prefixes and suffixes,

¹⁷ 2015 entry by Mayhew, S.

relationality connotes proximity, interaction, connection, togetherness. However, the word ግንኙነት gñunet is a mundane word routinely used in everyday communication, which makes it less robust to convey a message of theoretical significance. I find the words "ዝምድታ zimideta" and its derivative "ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti" to better convey what I mean by relationship and relationality.

"ዝምድታ zimideta" and "ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti" refer to connectedness, togetherness, mutuality, bringing in the natural (given), the cultivated (effort) and the sustainable aspects of relationship and relationality. In the concept of "ዝምድታ zimideta," relationality is both given and earned. "ዝምድታ zimideta" and "ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti" imply a shared nature of humanness that should be valued regardless of circumstances. In "ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti," the creator is the maker of the relationship, and any other factors that break "ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti" are considered marring the pattern of living that should be valued and maintained. Accordingly, my use of relationality is more inclined to "ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti". However, I also note the need to domesticate the concept in the context of this research in order to embrace relationality's theoretical essence. Hence, my use of the word "ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti" in this research comprehensively embraces the intra and interrelationship of human beings individually and as a community, the institutions they build and their broader socio-cultural context.

The concept of relationality in the African context conveys both vertical (spiritual) and horizontal (interpersonal) dimensions and guides the worldview and practices of the people (Wissing et al., 2020, pp. 1- 4; Onyednam & Kanayo, 2013, p.62). Relationships are not limited to human-human and human-divine but also include being in a relationship with nature as well; “Relationality refers to connectedness, a view of the world that underlines how no person or thing exists in isolation because existence necessarily means being ‘in a relationship’ (Wijngaarden,

2022, p.412). Wijngaarden has beautifully captured the view of Ngulupa, a Kisongo Maasai from the North Tanzanian savannah, which captures the essence, depth and breadth of relationality in the African context:

A single star and the earth connect us all. The soil links everyone on it, and the sun shines on all of us. The intertwining of earth and light causes the plants to grow, who feed us and the other animals, that is, if there is rain. We live in the rain shadow of Mount Meru, a volcano whose eruption created the fertile soil, but is also diverting the clouds. We have been pushed into this dry corner due to the rise of national parks and agricultural lands, by whites and the neighboring Meru people. Lately, climate change has brought extended droughts. The radio informs us that the weather changes are due to developments in Europe and Asia. Consequently, my generation has replaced cows with goats and sheep, but even those often don't survive the dry spells. Our women have resorted to cutting the trees to produce charcoal to sell, but the European NGOs advise that makes the environmental situation worse, and indeed the rain seems to come less and less... (2022, p.413)

Ngulupa's perspective captures how relationality is a web that brings human beings and their socio-cultural and political practices from near and far, from the Earth's crust to the solar system. With this broader view of relationality as an introduction, I use the concept in this research mainly from the angle of human-to-human relationality, specifically church, children, and community, given their interactivity in holistic ministry.

Based on the above explanations, relationality can be characterized as a multidimensional and intersubjective phenomenon involving "co-agency" and "co-becoming" among individuals and entities implied in a relationship. Relationality as a multidimensional phenomenon embraces webs of relationships that are vertical and horizontal, inside and outside, intrapersonal and interpersonal, as well as intra and inter-institutions and communities (Hay & Nye, 2006, p.109;

Bone, 2008, p.354; Wills, 2012, pp. 53-54). The co-agency or communion (as referred to by Irwin, 2002, p.25) preludes inter-subjectivity. It implies the recognition of agencies in the relationship, valuing one another, mutual recognition, that awareness of “I am because you are, because the community is and because we are together” (Vumisa, 2012, p. 47). In its inter-subjective nature, I understand relationality positions the agency of those involved in the relationship as subjects in their stand (differentiated self), playing their parts (using their capacity, experience, perspective) and taking share of what happens because of the relationship.

The intersubjective interaction makes relationality a dynamic process of revelation and transformation of all involved in the web (except the Creator), with possible variation in the nature and depth of change at each level (Sugarman & Jack Martin, 2011, pp. 53-54). The change in the context of relationality involves co-becoming (King, 2016, pp.300-301, Balswick, King and Reimer, 2016, pp.18, 66, EPUB). Relationality is, therefore, the nature and behavior of entities to seek one another, create a shared space, realize interdependence, and ultimately move to be a better whole (I believe wholeness is absolute only at the Creator’s level). At the same time, their differentiated self is duly safeguarded. With this conceptual background of relationality, I will now review significant findings on children’s understanding and experiences of spirituality, and the socio-cultural factors related to child spirituality.

7.5.2. How does the concept of relationality enhance holistic child ministry?

Child development theories, contemporary discourses on child spirituality and children’s views and experiences of spirituality, including their contexts, the sociocultural features of Wonji Shoa attest to the central position the concept of relationality holds both to understanding the spiritual dimension of children and child-focused ministry that adopts a holistic approach. Child spirituality viewed through the lens of relationality goes beyond a privatized construct in that it is

multidimensional, co-agentic and intersubjective, involving co-becoming, while the differentiated spirituality and differentiated self are safeguarded.

Assessment of child development theories and the practices of holistic child ministry in light of relationality shows that there are gaps to be worked on to scale up the positive impacts they are already making. The major gaps include the relegation of spirituality in child development theories, narrow view of spirituality as religion and as a personal matter only, pietistic views of religious institutions, stereotyping of children embraced in holistic development programs, and fragmented, in some cases, even competitive, and contradictory actions around children. These gaps beg for a better approach that brings children and actors around them better connected, coordinated and move collaboratively. For this to materialize, I argue that relationality needs to be reconsidered more vigorously. Relationality, when applied in its multidimensional, co-agentic, intersubjective, and co-becoming nature, can bring all actors together and make ministry more holistic through mutual ownership and responsibilities from every corner.

At its core, *zimidetawīneti* relationality is the inherent capacity human beings are bestowed with to live together. ‘God *created humankind* to be in relationship – with God, with other people, and with creation. Humans are *created* to live in community, in relationships, in reciprocating relationships with people (King, 2016, p.300, emphasis mine). The application of relationality, therefore, starts from acknowledging and valuing this capacity. This capacity is a big and warm hug of a child, the unpretentious smile of a mother in poverty, the wisdom of the elderly in the village, the unsparing commitment of the youth to a cause, the selflessness of a spouse, the parent’s life invested on children, the tireless work of the professionals, and so on. In relationality, everyone is a part of the communion in their agency and has a role to play in their capacity.

The essence of relationality as a concept and as it is expressed in people's day-to-day life has a huge potential to reposition holistic child ministry. Adopting relationality in conceptualization and implementation of holistic child ministry enables the church and parachurch organizations to address the challenges of divergent views and actions faced in the field. Application of the concept of relationality “ዝምድታዊነት zimidetawīneti” requires critical appraisal of concepts, claims, and contents of holistic child ministry.

The need to revisit the concept of 'holistic child ministry': what is holistic? Who is the child? What is ministry? As explained above, in the current practice, the word holistic is individualistic, narrowly taken to mean the child's wholeness (physical, psychological, spiritual aspects). However, the child's wholeness necessarily points to a bigger whole. Hence, holism needs to be elevated to embrace that bigger whole, the dynamic interrelated players with and around children. Likewise, the child referred to in holistic ministry appeared to mean children at risk who are registered in some form of support. It must be critically reviewed to embrace all children beyond the narrow, need-driven view. I am not arguing against giving priority to children at risk. I argue that the child in holistic ministry needs to be taken broadly to mean all children.

The idea and practice of ministry are mainly one-sided and focused on serving children, transforming them into a better whole. However, ministry taken in relational terms needs to be intersubjective. What children bring into the equation needs to be intentionally considered. The ministry must also go beyond the church-child relationship to the multidimensional network around children. For this to materialize, the ministry must be simple, flexible, and participatory. The 'professionalism mentality' that, wittingly or unwittingly, has crept deeply into attitudes, designs and actions of holistic child ministry needs to be revisited in a way that all key players (children, family, church, community) can contribute their parts. In other words, the call of holistic

ministry, as its name implies, cannot be ascribed to a few professionals, or assigned people or one institution. Ministry needs to be simplified to take the landscape of its context, in which all players are irreducible in carrying out what they should do both from a sense of ownership and capacity point of view.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter focused on discussing the implications of the research findings for holistic child ministry, hence, ultimately aimed at answering the third research sub-question, 'What are the implications of children's understanding and experiences of spirituality for holistic ministry?' and discusses the implications of the research findings for holistic child ministry. To do so, it discussed major theoretical and practical gaps related to holistic child ministry. The gaps observed have philosophical, conceptual and methodical aspects. With the intention to seek insights, the major findings discussed in chapters five and six were summarized. Major insights drawn from the finding relate to the multidimensional nature of spirituality and the factors around it.

From children's understanding and experiences of spirituality, the need to see spirituality in a broader way beyond religion stands out as a significant insight. Moreover, the importance of keeping balance between the inside and outside aspects of child spirituality, valuing children's personal qualities (e.g., emotion, self-confidence, virtuousness) as spiritual aspects, and viewing relationality as 'sought, conditional engagement and dissociation' have surfaced out.

Similarly, insights from the contextual factors of spirituality include the many actors around child spirituality and the need to serve with children's context, collaborating with family and the broader community. It was noted that the church is not the only actor around child spirituality. Accordingly, the need to reconceptualize holistic ministry to include all actors was highlighted.

Considering the gaps, findings and insights, the concept of relationality is adopted as a crosscutting concept, hence the implications of the research for holistic child ministry. The concept of relationality embraces multidimensionality, intersubjectivity, 'co-agency' and 'co-becoming' and the webs of vertical and horizontal connectedness. Applying the concept of relationality contributes to addressing observed gaps and enhancing holistic ministry.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This research on understanding children's spiritual dimension and its implications for children's ministry stemmed from practical issues observed in the field where efforts are made to address children holistically in the context of poverty. While children's needs from the physical dimensions are well understood and have established mechanisms to address, the unseen side of their life does not come in the front for actors to see, understand and act as necessary. From the unseen dimensions, the wider public generally accepts issues of emotion and social needs. There is shared meaning among the professionals and the public about children's physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive aspects.

In contrast, the spiritual aspect of children is an area that causes diversified, divergent, and opposing views, emotions, expectations, and propositions from the professionals in the field. Many believe that the mention of spirituality should be restricted to individual and religious matters. They place spirituality in the contexts of faith, practices, and rituals that different religions do according to their own tradition. Spirituality, considered beyond individual and religious space, provokes varied interests that divide, create conflicts and hinder practical actions for children.

On the other hand, when social and moral issues that erode cultural norms, individual well-being and communal life are observed, among the first presumed causes heard is the inadequate emphasis on the spiritual life of the younger generation. People consider moral and social problems as the results of inadequate attention to children's spiritual dimensions. The go-to places to address such problems are often religious leaders and institutions. Interventions to address such challenges in non-religious contexts are seen with doubt, criticism and resistance. The general perception is that religion and spirituality are the same. This view of spirituality poses practical challenges for child-focused endeavors that view children holistically.

However, there are arguments against placing everything spiritual under the auspices of religion. Current spirituality trends exhibit growing interest in viewing spirituality beyond the boundary of religion. Views in this dimension, in some instances, go to other extremes, dissolving spirituality in everything.

Noting the divergent attitudes around spirituality and the challenges they pose to ministry to children; this research was initiated with a question: How should child spirituality be understood so that child-focused ministries can be run holistically with respective support and encouragement from all stakeholders?

With the intention to answer the question about the spiritual dimension, this research sought insights from the children themselves. In questions and discussions that are directly related to them, children are often not the ones who give voice. Instead, adults are considered knowledgeable of children's issues. This research, however, sought a different approach and discussed matters of spirituality and spiritual experiences with children of a small town, Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia.

This chapter intends to give a summary of the research. Following this introduction (**section 8.1.**), **section 8.2.** presents the summary of the research findings that were arrived at through critical listening and analysis. It discusses how the findings answer the research questions: ‘How do children understand and experience spirituality?’ and ‘what contextual factors influence child spirituality in Wonji Shoa?’ Then **section 8.3.** discusses the implications of findings for holistic child ministry and how the third research questions is answered. In this section, I have highlighted key actions I will take based on the research findings and the lessons learnt during the research journey. **Section 8.4.** discusses the contribution of this research for the body of knowledge and practical fields of holistic child ministry with the intention to answer the overarching research question, ‘How can a better understanding of children’s views and experiences of spirituality in Wonji Shoa, Ethiopia contribute towards holistic child ministry? **Section 8.5.** presents recommendations for future research in the field. Section 8.6. brings the chapter to a conclusion.

8.2. Findings in summary

First, children of Wonji Shoa understand and experience spirituality as a multidimensional reality comprising five dimensions: divine, religious, personal, worldly, and evil spirituality. This view of spirituality differs from some contemporary views that consider spirituality without boundaries. On the other hand, children’s views are more expansive than those of the construal of spirituality as religion. In these five dimensions, children’s view of spirituality considers relationality as connectedness with God, affiliation with religion, conditional engagement with the world dimension and dissociation from evil spirituality. In many contemporary theories of child spirituality, for example, Nye and Champagne, relationality is emphasized. However, the other two levels of relationality, conditional engagement and dissociation, do not appear explicitly.

Second, Children's understanding of spirituality revolves around God, the creator (the sacred), as the ultimate source of spirituality. With God at the core, they understand spirituality as capacity and relationality, which is consistent with contemporary literature.

Third, contextual factors influencing child spirituality are diversified, including people, religion, community and beyond-community factors. In this sense, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (perspective) also appears to work for the spiritual dimensions of children, which aligns with Hood (2004, pp.233-246). However, distinctive contextual factors such as social life, the effect of poverty and engagement in evil practices are incorporated as factors influencing child spirituality.

Fourth, contextual factors and their level of influence were found to be messier, unlike Bronfenbrenner's "nested structure" of child ecology. This has to do with the nature of children's spiritual dimensions and partly because of the development of technology that brings what used to be far to be near.

The findings of the research address the questions it intends to answer. It has been observed that spirituality is part of children's everyday life. They have a broader view of spirituality than generally viewed as a religion. Secondly, spirituality is both a personal and shared reality of children and humanness in general. Third, spirituality has multiple factors that play both negative and positive roles, showing that context needs to be considered in understanding spirituality.

Children's understanding and experiences of spirituality in Wonji Shoa reflect similarities with contemporary views, with some differences echoing the local context. Contemporary research on child spirituality, for example, Hay and Nye, Hyde, 2008, and Coles, 1990, discusses the subject's nature with the core idea of "relationality." However, the research has also further

unpacked the idea that the spiritual realm also has evil spirituality, which adds 'dissociation from evil spirituality and practices' to the discussion about relationality.

8.3. Implications of major findings for holistic child ministry

The major findings on children's understanding and experience of spirituality and the contextual factors surrounding it have several implications for holistic child ministry. Children's multidimensional view of spirituality (the divine, religious, personal, worldly and evil dimensions) implies that holistic ministry needs a broader approach that considers all realities instead of the common understanding that spirituality is about God and religion. There is a need to acknowledge that child spirituality has many actors, including religious and non-religious, physical and non-physical, from near and afar. This is a call to broaden the holistic ministry's approach by engaging stakeholders particularly serving with family, friends and significant others would be important. Moreover, there is a need to collaborate with the community and its constituents.

As indicated in section 1.3., this research stemmed from conceptual gaps observed in child development theories and practices. The research intends to bring the spiritual dimension of children to the fore of child-focused theoretical and practical endeavors. The research findings emerged from listening to children, and the consequent careful analysis of primary data depicts the need for action to address the observed gap. I am a practitioner and have to play a role toward this end. Accordingly, I highlight some key actions I will pursue in the next phase of this research so that the endeavor positively influences and brings improvements in holistic child ministry. Considering this, I intend to take the essence of this research by employing the following strategic actions.

1. I aim to make the document friendly to the wider public, including the children and community of the research site and the churches that serve children in partnership with the

organization I work for. The main activities in this regard include summarizing the key elements of the thesis, translating it into local language and preparing content appropriate to audiences of various backgrounds.

2. Share the message with audiences, starting from those closer to me, my family, colleagues and leaders in the research location, including persons the leaders recommend to participate. This engagement will also help me see how to share the research's essence on a broader scale with wider audiences.
3. I will use opportunities in my networks, specifically through the organization I work with, to share my research findings and implications, with the intention of creating increased awareness and intentionality in considering the spiritual dimension of children.
4. In the long run, after a series of reflections and feedback from different audiences, I intend to publish the thesis as a book to be used as a resource for sharing findings, implications and possible actions for stakeholders of holistic child ministry.

Considering the above activities and related actions, I envision the research remaining active, inspiring and encouraging more research endeavors and practical actions in child spirituality and holistic child ministry as its contribution to the field of study and practice.

8.4. Contributions of the study

This research has given insights that could expand the boundary of knowledge on the subject by bringing children's views and experiences of spirituality to the forefront. Moreover, the research findings point to practical actions that scholars and practitioners can apply to conceptualizing and implementing holistic child ministry. On the other hand, the research methodology employed in this study lends insight into future considerations. I highlight the

research contributions from these four angles: the body of knowledge, the practical field of child ministry, policy formulation and methodological input for future research endeavors.

8.4.1. Contributions to the body of knowledge

The research's contribution to the body of knowledge can be broadly seen in two categories. In one aspect, it sheds more light on understanding children's spirituality and the spiritual dimension. The second contribution relates to viewing the ecology of children's spirituality.

Child spirituality, as reflected in Chapter 1 and elsewhere in the thesis, is understood narrowly in the space of religion. Moreover, some views ignore or trivialize spirituality as a topic. According to the findings of this research, the existing understanding and views of the reflected in the Ethiopian context need to be broadened. First, child spirituality is a multidimensional aspect of children, including but not limited to religious affiliation. Child spirituality involves personal qualities, relationship with and behavior before God, positive engagement with healthy worldly activities, and avoiding involvement in evil spirituality. Second, the core of child spirituality is better understood in terms of relationality. In this sense, child spirituality embraces three key ideas that expand the narrow view of spirituality in religious contexts and the unlimited view of spirituality as if it is without borders. Child spirituality is children's connectedness, association, positive engagement, and dissociation in cases of the evil spiritual realm. Third, child spirituality is an essential aspect of children expressed and experienced both in their everyday lives and in exceptional life encounters. These insights bring an opportunity to see the subject of child spirituality and its indispensableness broadly.

Another contribution this research makes is about the concept of the spiritual ecology of children. In this regard, the research brings new insights in three ways. First, like the multidimensional aspect of child spirituality, the contextual factors that influence child spirituality

are multidimensional and have both positive and negative aspects. In its positive aspect, many contributors enhance children's connectedness and positive engagement beyond the customarily considered players (religious bodies). Children's family, friends, community, and beyond community factors have a role in influencing child spirituality. This inclusive understanding of spiritual ecology poses a positive challenge to expand the view of spiritual influences beyond those areas perceived as spiritual.

Viewed in the light of the findings of this research, the ecology of child spirituality is a system different from the widely accepted ecological theory of child development, which portrays child ecology as a system of nested structure. With the coming of technology and the world's interconnectedness in the information age, the research showed that factors that influence children's spirituality could play a role from anywhere beyond the concept of proximity that the idea of ecology conveys. The ecology of child spirituality depicts a different picture that embraces ecological factors both from near and far. The ecology of child spirituality portrays a 'web like' structure rather than being a system of nested structure. This insight is another contribution this research makes to consider, particularly in child development theory.

8.4.2. Contribution to the practical field of child ministry

Children's broader view of spirituality as a multidimensional reality preludes child-focused endeavors to consider all dimensions of children's relationality. This highlights the importance of conceptualizing holistic ministry, elevating it beyond being taken as an activity to relate with children rightly. In other words, holistic ministry is multidirectional, involving ministry 'to, for, with' children, as Greener phrased it (2016, p.164). The research showed that holistic ministry denotes a combination of both values and methods (approach).

As a value, holism is about acknowledging the wholistic nature of children, including the multidimensional aspects of children's spirituality. Considering the multifaceted elements of child spirituality entails an approach that enhances the 'connectedness, positive engagement and dissociation' aspects of spirituality. In this sense, the research sheds more light on the importance of viewing ministry as a relationship-building process, an opportunity toward connectedness with children, whereby ministry becomes a mutual experience between the ministers and those reached by the ministry. In other words, ministry becomes a journey of *co-becoming* that brings transformation to all involved in the process.

Taking the ministry toward *co-becoming* acknowledges children as contributors who play indispensable roles in the ministry journey in a way appropriate to their age and gifts. This view challenges the widely practiced holistic child development program, which is hugely inspired by poverty and needs narratives rather than children's potential and contributions. Poverty covers not only the good but also the essence of the holistic mission. With poverty as a background, the ministry's central question is what and how to help children, leaving aside what children could contribute to the process. This research reverberates the question, 'What do children contribute to ministry beyond the focus they are ministered to?' and points to holistic ministry as a mutual experience of co-doing and co-becoming.

8.4.3. Contribution for policy formulation

The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that children have the right to develop in all aspects of their lives, including the spiritual dimension. However, as indicated in section 1.4.2, there is yet more to be done to turn this into reality, specifically from the spiritual dimension of children. Therefore, increased consideration for the spiritual dimension of children, starting from the level of policy formulation, is necessary.

Another contribution this research makes in the practice field relates to policy formulation and implementation. The multidimensional nature of child spirituality and the interconnectedness of ecological factors around it calls for intentional consideration of the subject to be visible in policy documents that guide duties and responsibilities toward children. On one side, policy frameworks need to vividly acknowledge the spiritual dimension of children and stipulate provisions that mandate behaviors and actions to nurture it (the spiritual dimension). Likewise, there is also a need to ensure the legal environment is conducive and encouraging for all stakeholders of holistic child ministry so that they duly carry out their responsibilities for the wellbeing of children and do it to the best of their potential.

8.4.4. Contributions to research methodology

As discussed in section 5.2., one of the concerns I and other scholars reflected in researching spirituality with children is how to go about it, a methodology question. Through this research, I learned that researching spirituality from the angle of children's understanding and experiences can be navigated by applying a qualitative approach that involves mixed methods. Considering this, the research methodology employed in this study showed that a study of child spirituality is a process of listening to children both as a group and individually through their 'words and works'. I found that focus group discussions created a favorable environment for interaction with children, making the process more of an interaction than the feel of 'question and answer' as commonly perceived in research processes. However, FGDs alone do not allow ample interaction with individual children; instead, they show the significance of taking time with individual children.

In interaction with individual children, the question of power distance between the researcher and a child is often raised as a concern. This research applied the approach of listening

to children through their words after their drawings and scripts. The approach used in this research was holding conversations with the individual after they put their thoughts in drawing or script form. This way of listening helped address (minimize) the question of power distance. The children explained what they had done while I sat to listen to them. I observed this process as honoring children, treating them as knowledgeable, and having a sense of some control over the conversation process. On the other hand, it allowed the researcher to listen to children's perspectives properly. Based on this experience, this research gives evidence to consider listening to children through their 'works and words' as a helpful approach for qualitative research in child spirituality.

8.5. Recommendations for future research considerations

The scope of this research is limited to one community and focused on children between 10 and 14 years old. Moreover, the research was conducted with limited capacity; it was done individually. The specific focus and the limits of the research create an opportunity for future research, specifically in the following areas.

- 1. Further research on the topic involving broader participation:** As the findings on factors around child spirituality show, spirituality is as communal as it is personal. This implies the need to conduct further research that involves the various stakeholders of child spirituality.
- 2. Similar studies in other contexts:** While this research, in many ways, reflects the realities of children in the broader Ethiopian context, it can also be enriched by bringing the voices of children from other communities in different parts of Ethiopia and even broadly from African contexts. I recommend further and broader research of a similar nature.

3. **Team research:** Given the multidimensional nature of child spirituality, research that brings in scholars and practitioners from various disciplines and practices would enrich theory and practice in child spirituality. Therefore, I recommend conducting research as a team.
4. **Further thematic qualitative research:** I also see an opportunity for further research to study the five dimensions of child spirituality.

8.6. Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the research findings and discussed how the research questions were answered. The findings show that child spirituality is a multidimensional reality with the influence of multiple players (factors) interrelated in a weblike structure. The concept of relationality captures the essence of child spirituality and the intra- and inter-domain connectedness it conveys.

The findings of this research can serve as input for designing and implementing child ministries and child-focused development interventions. They can also serve as training material to equip people working with children: teachers, social workers, Sunday school teachers and leaders in charge of guiding child ministry. They can also serve as a resource for child development courses and further research at tertiary level education.

In a broader sense, the research contributes knowledge and insights into child spirituality and holistic child ministry in the Ethiopian context and beyond. The study adds to the body of literature on children in Ethiopia and beyond and contributes to the growing discourses and practices on child spirituality and holistic child ministry. Ultimately, this research helps bring the spiritual dimension of children to the fore in boosting child ministry, equipping people working with children and stimulating further study in the theoretical space

Primary Sources

1. Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussion1 by Woldetsadik T.Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017

Focus Group Discussion2 by Woldetsadik T.Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017

Focus Group Discussion3 by Woldetsadik T.Tsehaywota, April 11, 2017

Focus Group Discussion4 by Woldetsadik T.Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017

Focus Group Discussion5 by Woldetsadik T.Tsehaywota, April 12, 2017

Focus Group Discussion6 by Woldetsadik T.Tsehaywota, October 122, 2019

Focus Group Discussion7 by Woldetsadik T.Tsehaywota, February 28, 2019

2. Individual Interviews

CH1 April 11, 2017

CH2 April 11, 2017

CH3 April 11, 2017

CH4 April 11, 2017

CH5 April 11, 2017

CH6 April 12, 2017

CH7 April 12, 2017

CH8 April 12, 2017

CH9 April 12, 2017

CH10 April 12, 2017

CH11 April 12, 2017

CH12 April 12, 2017

CH13 April 12, 2017
CH14 April 12, 2017
CH15 April 12, 2017
CH16 April 12, 2017
CH17 April 12, 2017
CH18 April 12, 2017
CH19 April 12, 2017
CH20 April 12, 2017
CH21 April 12, 2017
CH6B October22, 2019

3. Tsehaywota July 2023 Non-participant observation Memos

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of research participants

Code	Sex	Age	Grade	School	FGD	Individual Interview
CH1	F	13	6	Church	Yes	Yes
CH2	M	14	7	Church	No	Yes
CH3	M	13	7	Church	No	Yes
CH4	F	12	7	Church	No	Yes
CH5	F	13	7	Church	No	Yes
CH6	F	10	5	Community	Yes	Yes
CH7	F	11	5	Community	Yes	Yes
CH8	M	11	5	Community	Yes	Yes
CH9	F	10	5	Community	Yes	Yes
CH10	M	12	5	Community	Yes	Yes
CH11	M	12	5	Community	yes	Yes
CH12	F	14	7	Community	yes	Yes
CH13	F	13	7	Community	yes	Yes
CH14	F	13	7	Community	yes	Yes
CH15	F	14	7	Community	Yes	Yes
CH16	M	13	7	Community	yes	Yes
CH17	F	10	5	Church	yes	Yes
CH18	F	11	5	Church	yes	Yes
CH19	M	13	6	Church	yes	Yes
CH20	F	11	5	Church	yes	Yes
CH21	M	12	5	Church	yes	Yes
Ch22	F	13	4	Church	Yes	Yes
CH23	F	12	5	Church	yes	Yes
CH24	F	6	14	Church	yes	Yes
Ch25	M	6	12	Church	yes	No
Ch26	M	6	13	Church	yes	No

Appendix 2. Focus group discussion schedule and participants

Group	Number of Participants	Venue	Date	Discussion Leader
FGD1	6	Church school	April 11, 2017	Researcher with research assistant
FGD2	6	Community school	April 11, 2017	Researcher with research assistant
FGD3	5	Community school	April 11, 2017	Researcher with research assistant
FGD4	5	Church school	April 12, 2017	Researcher with research assistant
FGD5	5	Church school	April 12, 2017	Researcher with research assistant
FGD6	3	Church school	October 22, 2019	Researcher with research assistant
FDG7	9	Church School	February 28, 2019	Researcher with research assistants

Appendix 3. Data collection tool: Discussion and Interview guide

A. First Round. Mapping children's understanding and experiences of 'spirituality'.

- To get an understanding of children's perspectives on matters of spirituality.
- To describe children's spiritual experiences
- To analyze values ascribed to spiritual matters

Activity1: Focus group discussions

Introductory activities:

- ‘Name game’¹⁸: using the first letter of your name, form a name that is positive about you. For example: my name is ‘*ፀሐይ*’ ‘*Tsehay*’ and I form ‘*ፀጋ*’ ‘*Tsega*’.
- Describing the objective of the study in general and specific activities for the session.
- Agree on how discussion proceeds.
- Request agreement on recording and note taking of the proceedings.

1. Understanding ‘spirituality’ (lead discussion point)

- Have you ever heard people saying someone as ‘*menfese tenkara*’, ‘strong in spirit’?
- What do you understand by the word ‘*menfesawi*’ ‘spiritual’ and ‘*menfesawinat*’ ‘spiritually’?
- If you describe ‘spirituality’ using one word, what word would you use?
- How you see spirituality in children’s activities? Can a child be spiritual?

Part 2. Experiences of ‘spirituality’ (lead discussion point)

- How do children express ‘spirituality’? What types of experiences have you seen?
- Do you have ‘spiritual experiences? What spiritual experiences do you have?
- When did you start and how did you develop these experiences?
- How do you feel about your spiritual activities/practices/experiences?

Part 3. Values children give to ‘spirituality’ (Lead discussion point)

- How important is ‘for you to have spirituality and spiritual practices?
- Can you highlight key benefits of your being spiritual and having spiritual experiences?

¹⁸ This is an icebreaker we use in trainings and meeting in my work with Compassion

Activity 2. Individual interview based on drawings/writings (lead interview point)

1. Welcome and introduction:

- Thank you for your willingness to be here and for your drawing/script. Kindly tell us a little more about yourself: Who are you? Where and with whom do you live? Which grade are you at? How are you? What is the name of your school? Share as general things that describe you.
- Agree on how discussion proceeds.
- Request agreement on recording and note taking of the proceedings.

2. Before we go to your drawing, can you briefly tell us how you understand ‘spirituality’? Perhaps you can express it using a word or a sentence.

3. Would you describe what your drawing/writing is about? What does it show?

4. Follow up questions based on what children mention.

B. Second Round: Assessing how spirituality is reflected in children’s view of their context

1. Children’s view of their town (How does children’s view of their town relate with spirituality?)

- How do you see your town? What do you like about it?
- What would you like to see changed?
- Discussion on how children related their views of the town with what they think of spirituality (religion, faith)

2. Children’s view of poverty (How does children’s view of poverty relate with spirituality?)

- How do children view poverty?

- The effect of poverty in children's lives?
- What should be done?
- What is the role of the church?

Appendix 4. Mapping Children's Spirituality: Children's drawings about spirituality

School Grade: five and seven

Age range: 10-14, April 2017



Age 11, boy, Grade Five: the drawing... here it is raining... and right here he is playing on a swing chair...right here... the hills show.....right here the flower has grown...this is the Creator giving rain.... he (the boy) was playing... he did not want the sun...it was just not convenient for the game... he was playing... I mean before praying...then while he was

playing the rain showered...the Creator lives in heaven

CH13, Age 13, girl, grade 7: It's a confident girl playing...It means like I said before, doing things on



their own. Spirituality is like ...the girl...some people don't believe in themselves and can't do things. Now we're helping the little girl practice, we let her go because we want her to have self-confidence. So now we have the girl playing on her own...what I want to say here in general is...because I couldn't draw the picture...I wanted to draw a non-cheating student...because I wanted a confident person.



CH15, Age 14, Garde Seven: Here we see a blackboard and here we see a teacher, she is a teacher. And these are the students. This teacher teaches the students on her own self-will.... These are the students from her neighborhood; she gathers them and teaches them.... And so this is good deed she is doing with her spirituality and self-will...Self-

motivation is represented by her inner desire.

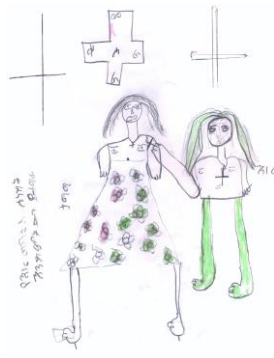


CH6, Age 10, girl, grade five: this image means (stuttering) that God and man meet in the psychology (*sinelibona*)...what I have written here is that while man meets God in the heart, whatever we do is according to his will and commandment.... And we meet God in our psychology...means ...something that (stuttering) in internal process...within... spirit...(stuttering) something that happens there (**the heart**)...these are clouds... this one is a cloud in which there is God...according to some of the pictures he has hair...I am wrong

here...he is the one who speaks to (us).



CH24, age 14, girl, grade five: a picture portraying love of spirituality



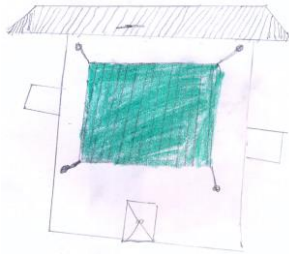
CH18, girl, 11, Grade five: she (left) is a sick person...she is a patient...when God (right) touches her with a cross, it shows that she gets healed...When the sick person is touched by the spirit of God she gets healed. It is the spirit that heals her.



CH21, age 12, boy, grade five: ...it is a church...now there are some people who chew chat [an addictive leaf, usually chewed] and smoke cigarette ... so that they would come to the house of the Lord...this one... it is eucalyptus tree...Some people steal from the church. Someone might enter. Because someone might steal, this is a fence. (this fence is

drawn so that the thief would not enter the church). ...there are some people who do not know anything

about spirituality. They chew chat (the drawing is to show)... that they would come to the church...(they would be spiritual when they come to the church).



CH19, age 13, boy, grade five: the drawing is a house, a little house. It is suitable only for a single person and for a tutor. The reason I drew this is so that I would study in it and pray in it. Because it is not suitable to study while you

are living with your family. It is not suitable for prayer as well because they drink coffee with their neighbors. At our house coffee is made every night and our neighbors are invited. So it is not suitable for study...this house helps to be alone for prayer...there is a lot of noise in the house...it is not convenient for prayer.



CH5, age 13, girl, grade seven: this drawing shows that spirituality is choosing the narrow and troublesome path. This (left) shows the broad path. As you can see there are buildings... greeneries... people would not suspect any thing or show any effort, you can see a very comfortable life here and clean air a very nice life... but before they know it this path takes them to the fire...

but spirituality is a narrow path with many troubles such as sharp knives and different obstacles...bitter.. very bitter situations... it is a path that you walk through ... these things. But within this... by the way according to my belief trouble is the salt which makes life delicious... passing through problem makes us very happy. There are fruits of the spirit that we get from the Spirit. These fruits are mentioned on Galatians 5:22 when he eats of these fruits he will be fine even if these things hit him or wounds him. Just like those people who go on the broad path are happy, this man who walks on the narrow path is happy due to the fruits. This one walks in favor and by the spirit, he does not care about the crooked path he goes through. So he is happy in trouble... this is the kingdom... which the person who passed through the trouble finds

...I wanted to show his destiny. Good spirituality starts from below...what I mean is that good spirituality starts from below...evil spirituality starts from the top...evil grows just like carrot. You know why I said that? Because he just walks happily... when he gets around here the fire starts burning him. When he finishes his path, he will enter into the fire. From height and happiness to trouble. Just like the root of a carrot. This one, the good spirit from a path that is troublesome and crooked, he passes those things from the sword, and the suffering to the good and the beautiful life, in which he lives eternally. Therefore, spirituality starts from below... if we also think wider than this, God himself can... if I want to live a spiritual life, he can make me a millionaire. He can make me someone, not just in Wonji Shawa, but in the world... he can make me the best out of the blue... but he starts from the bottom so that we will be strong.

Appendix 5. Individual Interview with CH4

Researcher	you have written a one-page script regarding spirituality. What meaning does spirituality give you? Please explain.
CH4	when we try to see what spirituality is... I explained it as leaving worldliness and [living] according to the word of God...e... I explained it in the right way, I mean in a way that is not connected with Satan. I have tried to explain what spirituality means. For the question, “ what does spirituality mean?”, ee... divinization or something that does not have (stuttering) any world. It can be different activities we carry out in the church. It can also be our relationship with God. I explained spirituality like that. And according to my understanding I have divided spirituality into two kinds.
Researcher	but before you come to that, when you say ‘our relationship with the Lord’, explain it to us. What do you do you have a relationship with the Lord? mean?
CH4	for example it can be prayer. It could be regarding spiritual activities in the church. I am connected with the Lord.
Researcher	You are connected?
CH4	Yes. It means I have communication.
Researcher	does it mean you are connected right now?
CH4	Yes. And I have divided it into two categories according to my own understanding that is our individual spirituality and spirituality we have in our social life. First, as I have tried to explain above, it is our personal connection and intimacy with the Lord. For example, if we consider prayer in our individual lives....ee... prayer means meeting with God, or meeting in spirit and truth. In addition, it could also be doing things, in our individual lives, which show God in different ways. This helps us to develop our individual spirituality. Ee... the other thing I have mentioned, which can help us develop spirituality in our individual lives, can be expressing love for our family members. If we had conflict with a person, forgiveness, meekness and frankness...wishing well for any person and cleansing ourselves off any worldliness within our hearts. Filling our hearts with meekness.

	Is this not spirituality? So spirituality can be asking and answering directly, being straight forward. And reading our bibles.
Researcher	ehce....
CH4	when we read our bibles, for instance, it is one of the ways in which we can strengthen our spirituality and avoid the things of the world. Ee.....the Bible....(stuttering) is pure from any [impure] things and it is truthful and right word of God. It is written by different people. But it has contributed a lot for our current status... it means reading the bible. It means connecting with the Lord. Eee....this things are helpful in our personal lives. For example we can pull people to ourselves by love, meekness and mercy. Or we after we know who the Lord is from our bible, it could be telling and preaching it to other people. Theo other thing I have expressed earlies is in connection to our social life. I have tried to raise how we can develop the intimate relationship with the Lord in our social life, or in relation to how much spiritual acceptance people have. For example it could be in the church... (stuttering).... it could be by preaching the gospel at different places without any fear For example, as I have expressed it above it could be in the church. For example a social life we have in the church could be serving in the choir, or in prayer team. If we meet to pray continuously, in the process our spiritual lives could develop. The other eee I have tried to express its spiritual profit.ee...our relationship with Jesus will grow from time to time, both in our individual and social life. If we preach both as a person and as a community, then the fullness of grace will be upon us. The other thing is if we see our bible, because it is pure and free of any [impure] thing, when we tell people without any fear, the people on that book will be revealed to us, everything will be revealed to us. Ee... for example, David is not shown only as a good person. (unclear speech) Their characters are expressed so that we would not go to sin. Ee.... If we pray and preach the gospel, our faith will be continuously strengthened. The characters of God such as love, peace, light and endurance would start to be upon us. Things that can hurt our spirituality are envy... for example if we have envy inside of us, our inside will slowly be filled with bad things... losing patience.... For example the Lord might test us in someway. If we lose patience at that time, we might backslide from our Christian faith. Therefore, we have to be wary of such things which might hurt our spirituality. We also have to flee from systemic, Satanic and worldly things, so that they would not hurt our spirituality and our identity.
Researcher	Do you pray?
CH4	yes I do pray.
Researcher	at what time do you pray?
CH4	whenever it is I get time.
Researcher	every time?
CH4	not everytime. Sometimes, I might pray “give me peaceful night” before I go to bed. If I forget in the morning, I will pray during daytime.
Researcher	do you pray during daytime?
CH4	for example, after returning from school, once I am done with my duties, I pray.
Researcher	how do you pray?
CH4	ee?
Researcher	aha... how do you pray?
CH4	I do not understand
Researcher	aha... how do you pray? What do you do when you pray?
CH4	when I pray.... for myself and my family, I close my eyes, kneel down and lean on the sofa when I pray.

CH4	Yes. We also pray in a group with my friends.
CH4	Yes. That is why I expressed it in the category of social things. I mean, we schedule our time and pray, when we do this our spirituality develops. If we agreed that we will pray next week, we first complete our duties and plan to do it.
Researcher	From where did you pick this practice?
CH4	when I studied in Sunday school
Researcher	how about other children? Do you think everyone is spiritual? Other people?
CH4	when we say everyone, we can see spirituality in two ways. Spirituality of the bible, of the holy Spirit and of the world.
Researcher	is there a worldly spirit?
CH4	now it is not spirituality of worldliness.... For example, it can bring (unclear speech).... Ee... when we are far from the Lord and lose our spirituality, Satan himself might (stuttering)... [impose upon us] his own spirit?
Researcher	is there the spirit of Satan?
CH4	the devil himself is spirit.
Researcher	what does he do?
CH4	the devil is the one who does evil things to people and who fills them with evil things....
Researcher	he fills them with evil things... aha... what else?
CH4	for example, if we consider what I mentioned earlier, he might enter a person because of jealousy. When a person wishes someone ill, the devil may enter him... he makes us to not think good things... it might be like that.
Researcher	aha so that we would not think about good things.
CH4	He can make us be jealous of our own friends. He makes us do worldly things and fills us with worldly things.
Researcher	what are worldly things.
CH4	worldly things are things far from God.
Researcher	far from Go.
CH4	yes.
Researcher	what harm does it have.
CH4	it has serious harms.
Researcher	ehhe...
CH4	it brings harms to our lives.
Researcher	for example?
CH4	for example, if we are jealous against our friends, we might even be discriminated from social life. If we do evil things to people... families may dissolve. In addition, when we are urged to sin. When we si a lot we are not going to be fit to inherit paradise and therefore burn in hell. Besides, we will (stuttering) without knowing the Lord.
Researcher	do you think there is the spirit of Satan around here at Wonji?
CH4	Yes. I suspect there is because since they are human beings the devil can enter them due to various reasons.
Researcher	aha.... For instance what are some of the things that can be called the work of Satan?
CH4	digimt (spell casting by repeting incantation)
Researcher	there is spell casting?
CH4	Yes there is muart (spell casting by uttering evil wishes)

Researcher	Muart
CH4	I think these things are at some places.
Researcher	what is muart?
CH4	digimt and muart are related things. For example tinqola (witchcraft) for example like I mentioned earlier, if someone is driven by jealousy against a friend who scored better grades or due to their families... if we consider it with regard to families for instance... in a family, for example if my family or my friend's families are witches... ee... if she is higher.... (stuttering) if we are competing friends, but if she wants to be at a higher satus, her parents may force her to do it due to their position. They might force her due to their position. She might ask them to do it for her. And it might be done on an exercise book... I have heard this things... it might happen.
Researcher	have you ever faced such kinds of things.
CH4	I have never faced such kinds of things.... Ee... but I have seen it at various places.
Researcher	have you heard it before?
CH4	Yes. I have heard it.
Researcher	from your close friends?
CH4	Yes. From my close friends... not from my friends.... But in the school.
Researcher	someone who studies here?
CH4	Yes.
Researcher	one student?
CH4	yes.
Researcher	tell us what happened to him.
CH4	her friend was someone from Wonji...
Researcher	what? What did you say?
CH4	she came from Wonji. And her friend cast a spell on her so that she would not be excellent in her school because she was jealous, in a way that is far from truth.... To [hurt] her so that she would score low. It is not just in school; it can also be at work... and her friend did that to her. One day when I came to the church, her friends told me this story.
Researcher	did she not come?
CH4	Eee
Researcher	didn't she come?
CH4	the student?
Researcher	Eee
CH4	yes.
Researcher	she never came back?
CH4	that one from Wonji stayed there.
Researcher	because a spell has been cast on her?
CH4	no... no it was cast out of the one on whom spell was cast.
Researcher	it was cast out?
CH4	it was cast out crying out.
Researcher	Where? What does 'it was cast out crying out' mean?
CH4	ehe.... What I mean is... there are various ministers, or they can be pastors, the Lord gives them revelation and they.... Because we are the children of Jesus Christ, we have been given to (stuttering) Satan.
Researcher	to do what to Satan?

CH4	for example we have been given the authority to pierce the dragon. We have been given authority to bind it in the name of Jesus Christ. If we have faith, we have been given authority to do whatever we want.
Researcher	whatever we want?
CH4	yes. For example if we have a little authority and faith, we have the authority to tell the mountain to move. According to my reading of the bible if we have faith in Jesus Christ, we can do whatever we want on the devil.... Whatever we want on the devil.
Researcher	do you think children can be spiritual?
CH4	ee?
Researcher	do you know spiritual children?
CH4	spiritual.
Researcher	spiritual children?
CH4	Yes there are.
Researcher	there are?
CH4	yes. There are.
Researcher	are they our friends?
CH4	Yes.
Researcher	what are the indicators to label children as spiritual or non-spiritual. What signs do spiritual children show? Think of your friends and tell me what signs they show.
CH4	I mean... for example... the humility they show when they leave Choir practice... and they do not insult anyone, but are instead meek.... If you make a mistake, you are the one who should ask an apology, but they will ask apology instead and show you meekness... when you see these signs these children are spiritual. They have Christian divine [character].
Researcher	aha... there are [such children]?
CH4	Yes.
Researcher	what signs do you show yourself? Do you believe that you are spiritual.
CH4	Yes I do.
Researcher	what components are there in your spirituality... because you are spiritual....
CH4	in spirituality there is prayer. There is uprightness (benevolence) in spirituality. In spirituality there is meekness. When I practice these things I am developing my spirituality.
Researcher	when you are very spiritual, what level will you reach?
CH4	which aspect are you referring to when you say 'very spiritual'?
Researcher	now you are growing in your spirituality, right?
CH4	eee?
Researcher	where will you reach? When you grow into spirituality?
CH4	when I grow my spiritual life
Researcher	Ee
CH4	I might become a church leader.
Researcher	aha....
CH4	I might become a prophet, you never know.
Researcher	aha.
CH4	because if you are spiritual, it also means that you know how to handle the church. When your spiritual life is developed, nothing hinders you from

	becoming a prophet. Or you might even become a prayer [minister] or a singer... you never know.
Researcher	is spirituality related to school?
CH4	spirituality?
Researcher	Spirituality
CH4	with school.
Researcher	is it related to the subjects you study at school?
CH4	it is related because when we speak about spirituality, they are the things we show to people.
Researcher	ehhe...
CH4	these are related to school. Just like I told you the muart (a demonic practice of wishing evil against someone)... just like you asked me... if there are no bad things, and we show only good things to people in our school. For example, while we are sitting in a group and someone does not understand the subject and we are silent while we know the answer the evil inside us is going to get worse, the evil feeling we have against that person. It is related to our schooling, in relation to how we relate with people.
Researcher	ehhe....
CH4	because when we are sitting in group, for example I am very good at math and if you are good in English subject, If I do not understand both Math or English, there is no problem if you explain it to me. But if you are silent.
Researcher	ee...
CH4	this is not one of spiritual things.
Researcher	ee...
CH4	because if you are silent while knowing and if that student is hurt, what benefit does it have for you?
Researcher	ehhe....
CH4	if you want people to be hurt now you are...
Researcher	ehhe...
CH4	I think this is connected with schooling.
Researcher	Wow! Thank you very very much CH4. Very good.
CH4	OK.
Researcher	with whom are you living now?
CH4	with my mother.
Researcher	what is your mother doing now?
CH4	My mom works in a park.
Researcher	what is park?
CH4	taking care of plants.
Researcher	Is she hired?
CH4	yes.
Researcher	do you have sisters and brothers?
CH4	I have a sister.
Researcher	how old is she?
CH4	five.
Researcher	does it mean she is younger than you?
CH4	Yes.
Researcher	Is she going to this same school?
CH4	no.
Researcher	ee

CH4	there is a school called Mulu Wongel School.
Researcher	Mulu Wongel School?
CH4	yes.
Researcher	ehe... so you came here?
CH4	yes.
Researcher	how long has it been since you came here?
CH4	since I was a little kid.
Researcher	since you were a little kid?
CH4	Yes
Researcher	aha... what helped you to be very spiritual?
CH4	what helped me... I think my mother has helped me.
Researcher	aha... is your mother very spiritual?
CH4	because for example when we want to pray in a group with my friends, she leaves the house for us.
Researcher	aha...
CH4	she also prays a lot.
Researcher	aha she prays?
CH4	so she has helped me to follow her example
Researcher	so the fact that you are spiritual has made you a good child?
CH4	very much.
Researcher	what would have happened you if you were not spiritual?
CH4	the harms I have mentioned before would have happened to me. Not just me I would have also hurt other people. They also might have been hurt.
Researcher	ehe...
CH4	therefore... like I mentioned earlier, we might be discriminated from social life. Not only that, it would also seriously hurt our lives. It would seriously hurt us.
Researcher	aha...
CH4	therefore all these things are hurtful.
Researcher	thank you so much CH4.
CH4	Alright.
Researcher	thank you very very much. We will meet again. We have lots of respect for you for giving us your time today. God bless you.
CH4	me too. OK.

Appendix 6. Individual Interview with CH6 (Second Round, October 22, 2019)

Researcher	Welcome, We are happy to see you again.
Researcher	We would like to spend sometime with you.
CH6B	Okay!
Researcher	You can eat 'kolo'.
Researcher	Okay, could you share with me about Wonji? What do you like about Wonji?
CH6B	Wonji ...
Researcher	It's called Wonji Shoa, right?
CH6B	Yes!
CH6B	The love of the people is so amazing. I think I loved it because I was born and raise here. Sometimes, when my father says I should go with relatives, I say, "Never, this is my country". [laughter]

Researcher	[laughter]
CH6B	When he says they came to take me, I say to him, “Oh no! How can I leave my country.”
Researcher	[Aha]
CH6B	It is a pleasant country. The social life and the people’s love for others are so unique. But we are well known for chatting too much.
Researcher	For chatting? [ha ha]
CH6B	Yes, I mean, there is a saying “One who doesn’t have a name can come to Alemtena.”
Researcher	[laughter]
CH6B	Yes!
CH6B	I mean, we like talking. This is not a bad thing at all but of a character. Yeah, we are talkative! We talk, we play, we just laugh.
CH6B	The sugar factor is here, so we eat a lot of it.
Researcher	Sugar?
CH6B	Yeah!
CH6B	But...sugar is expensive here. The source of it is here but it’s still expensive.
Researcher	So, you eat purchased sugar, right?
CH6B	Yes, but we don’t buy it. My mother brings it for free because she works there.
Researcher	So, the people in Wonji are nice as well as the sugar. What was the talk about? Did you say, it is nice? Or ...
CH6B	I mean, the talk is not a bad thing at all.
Researcher	It’s not a bad talk. So, the talk is nice as well, right? Talking with people.
CH6B	Yes!
Researcher	Wow! It’s so interesting.
Researcher	Um ... what else is do you like?
CH6B	Everything is pleasing to me.
Researcher	What is not pleasing to you?
CH6B	For me?
Researcher	What is that you don’t like or want to see in Wonji?
CH6B	I don’t know! I haven’t ever thought about it.
Researcher	Really? [laughter]
CH6B	I haven’t ever thought about the bad one but the good one.
Researcher	[laughter] Wow! That’s nice. Could you tell me about your education?
CH6B	My education is nice. I like it.
Researcher	What is your favorite subject?
CH6B	I like Mathematics and Chemistry best.
Researcher	Mathematics and what?
CH6B	Chemistry
Researcher	Why did you like these subjects more than other subjects?
CH6B	I like these subjects because of the teachers for I understand them when they teach.
Researcher	Wow! So, do you mean the teachers also ...[inaudible]?
CH6B	Yes, of course. The teachers also matter.
Researcher	Wow! That’s nice.
Researcher	Could you tell me about your friends?
CH6B	My friends... they are many!
Researcher	Are they many?
CH6B	All students in the school compound are friends with me.

Researcher	Oh really?
CH6B	We talk and have funs
Researcher	So you got friends ... [inaudible] ...
CH6B	A friends is someone you share your secrets.
CH6B	By the way, no need to have friend more than one. The friend that you can share secrets should be one.
Researcher	Do you have a friend?
CH6B	Yes, I do. She is of my age. We grew up together. We've age differences of a few months.
Researcher	Is she your friend?
CH6B	Yes. Of course, others are also my friends. My classmates and students of the school compound are friends to me. I talk and I interact with them.
Researcher	Do you play?
CH6B	Yes
Researcher	But how do you favor your best friend?
CH6B	It's because she understands me. She is also the same age as me. I often go to her and cry when my parents annoy me. [laughter] I never expose my feeling in front of them.
Researcher	[laughter]
CH6B	She is just like me; our living standard is the same. I mean, we're the same in everything. Both of us have the same status. Our differences are of a few months.
CH6B	I tell the secret which I don't tell it to anybody else.
Researcher	Do you tell her that?
CH6B	Yes
Researcher	Does she tell you any secret as well?
CH6B	Yes, she does.
Researcher	Okay, how do you keep the secret she shared with you?
CH6B	Of course, by not telling it to others! I never share her secrets with others ...
Researcher	You never share her secrets to others, right?
CH6B	Yes!
Researcher	Do you go to church? You tied the cross around your neck. I can see it.
CH6B	Yes.
Researcher	Which church do you go to?
CH6B	Kidane-Miheret Church.
Researcher	Could you tell us?] Why do you go to church?
CH6B	Why I go to church? Because I believe in it!
Researcher	Could you tell me about faith, please?
CH6B	I don't know but I love my religion, I respect it and I believe in it.
Researcher	What do you respect most about your religion?
CH6B	I respect the ritual order.
Researcher	How often do you go there?
CH6B	Every Sunday morning.
Researcher	Only on Sundays?
CH6B	Of course, I often go and attend whenever there is a fellowship program. But I never miss the Mass.
Researcher	Okay, what do you understand during the Mass?
CH6B	I like preaching and everything.

Researcher	Now, as you said earlier about seeking the Creator; What does it mean to you, Creator? You said there is love, right?
CH6B	I am sitting and talking with you because He is here. If He didn't exist, I wouldn't be here in the first place. I can't live. Without him, no one would exist. Not just me, but everyone on earth is worthless without Him...No one can sit down and speak properly if He was not existing. But because He exists everybody gathers and talks to each other. That's it.
Researcher	How do we know about His existence?
CH6B	We know about His existence by faith. To begin with, if a person lives without it (faith), he does not exist. Because he has nothing to believe in. He has nothing to rely on. I boast in the Creator. But [I mean] I know I live because I rely on Him. I know I live because I rely on Him. But if someone doesn't have faith, he doesn't exist.
Researcher	Doesn't he exist?
CH6B	He doesn't exist if he has nothing to believe on.
Researcher	Do you think everybody believes in the Creator?
CH6B	I don't know.
Researcher	Aren't there non-believers?
CH6B	I really don't know about the other.
CH6B	I personally don't believe that everybody believes on the Creator. There are many people, including my relatives. I also have relatives. My[aunt's] aunt's husband, his mother, and his family believe in that. We don't talk to each other as a result. Because they believe in witchcraft, we do not approach them.
CH6B	I don't mean we don't talk to each other. We talk about the matters we should talk about and we don't talk on matters we shouldn't, that's it. Yeah...
CH6B	You may encounter big problems in life. And that problem can teach you something. It gives you a piece of advice. It is a counselor, they are advising you. Life is all about that. It is a life that teaches you how to overcome that bad thing or how to do it again after you have experienced it.
Researcher	Do you have something to share about what has life taught you? Something the [makes you laugh] when you think of it, it doesn't have to be only a problem, right? [inaudible]
CH6B	I'm just living now. For example, I have nothing to think about. I care about my family, I care about my education. I have nothing to worry about other than that. It means something else. But life taught me. . .
Researcher	Didn't it teach you?
CH6B	I can't remember it. Even if it teaches me, I can't remember it.
Researcher (assistant)	When you say 'life has taught me, where is life? ... [inaudible]
CH6B	It's in you! It is your life; It is yours. So you can remember that, and you can remember what it did for you. So think about yourself what you can do.
Researcher	do you have any other questions?
CH6B	I don't have any questions.
Researcher	We will come to you another time and ask you a question. Is your mother fine now?
CH6B	She is fine.
Researcher	How about your father?
CH6B	He is fine too.
Researcher	Good! Thank you very much. You shared us some very good ideas.

Appendix7. Diagrammatic representation of data analysis process

[illegible]

Appendix 8. Commitment to child and youth protection and safeguarding

PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT

I, Tsehaywota, have read and understood Compassion's Statement of Commitment to Child Protection, including the Code of Conduct.

I acknowledge that this Commitment states Compassion's expectations of me in my service and/or association with Compassion. With my signature affixed herein, I agree to abide by this Commitment.


NAME:

Tsehaywota Taddesse

JOB TITLE/POSITION:

Country Director

SIGNATURE:



Acknowledgement

I, Tsehaywota Taddesse, affirm that:

- ☒ I have received an electronic or physical copy of the Code of Conduct for Child and Youth Protection and Safeguarding. I agree to abide by the commitments and standards in it.
- ☒ I have read and fully understand the content of the Code of Conduct and agree to ask questions about anything I did not understand.
- ☒ I am aware that if I violate the Code of Conduct, I may be subject to disciplinary measures, up to and including termination of employment, volunteer or contractor status, Board or council membership, sponsorship, or any other associations I have with the child and youth development center, Compassion International, and/or International Partner.
- ☒ I understand that any violation by me may subject me to legal action as appropriate.
- ☒ I understand the Code of Conduct may be updated in the future. I may be asked to review and re-affirm my agreement with the Code of Conduct.

I therefore agree to comply with Code of Conduct for Child and Youth Protection and Safeguarding without exception.



(Signature)

Tsehaywota Taddesse