



# Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood

By Dr. Joyce Mercer

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## Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood By Dr. Joyce Mercer

This book develops a theology of childhood both from a theoretical basis in biblical theology (especially the gospel of Mark) and practical experience in children and youth ministry. Mercer builds on classical theologians such as Augustine, Calvin, Barth, and Rahner as well as modern feminist theologians such as Brock and Russell. She gains insights from pastoral theologians such as Capps and Couture and from contemporary cultural criticism. Mercer challenges approaches to educational and liturgical practices with children in congregations that segregate children from the rest of the church and its key practices of service, mission, worship, care, and learning. She reframes ministries with children as processes through which the church as a "community of practice" forms children into an alternative identity that resists surrounding consumerist culture and walks in the ways of Jesus. This book offers strategies for educational practices with children in congregations as it seeks to address the question, "What might educational practices that welcome children and contribute to their flourishing look like in the context of a faith community where children's learning happens in collaboration with experienced practitioners of faith?" Outlining a feminist practical theology of childhood, it explores five basic theological claims: (1) children as gifts and parenting as a religious practice of stewardship; (2) welcoming those who welcome and care for children; (3) children as already fully human; (4) children as part of the purposes of God; and (5) acknowledging and transforming the sufferings of children.

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#### **About the Author**

Joyce Ann Mercer is Professor of Practical Theology at Virginia Theological Seminary. Before joining the faculty at VTS, she served on faculties at San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union, and at Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines. Dr. Mercer has also served as a parish minister, hospital chaplain, and clinical social worker.

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