with issues that affect not only churches in North America, but in an ever shrinking, globalised world, all of us. Chapter 4 is however, also a missed opportunity to deal with the key question on the colonial experience ‘from the underside,’ so to speak. It doesn’t deal with the critical question of the colonial experience of the First people’s or the even the slave history, the place of the slave-churches, but also later the role and missional self-understanding of local churches involved in the Civil rights movements.

Furthermore, there is one sweeping reference in the book, to the ‘whole range of movements’ including, ‘the civil rights movement, the youth movement/counterculture, the feminist movement, the ecological movement, and the anti-war movement, amongst others, which defined the period of the 1960’s and ’70s (p.82), yet, in these few words some would argue, we find the key to understand fundamental shifts in the US social history, if not the rest of the world. Van Gelder’s focus however seems to be fixated on the crisis in the suburban churches in the subsequent ’70s to ’90s, which “struggled to maintain their viability.”

Does this impair the value of his contribution? I would argue that Van Gelder and others in the missional conversation have started a conversation which is fermenting fundamental changes on the level of the theology and identity of local churches. These are longer term shifts, but in actual fact, a paradigm shift. On this level, this book grapples with these complex matters in a readable and indeed enticing manner and for all of us this is indeed welcomed.

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The Mystery of the Child.

This wide-ranging and ambitious book aims to stimulate the reader to reflect on the philosophical and theological frameworks that shape our understanding of the nature of the child and therefore the care of the child. Parents and family members, educators, social policy-makers, other concerned adults, and care-givers of all kinds are invited to examine foundational assumptions about what it is to be a child. The book
is part of a series on religion, marriage, and the family, based on joint interdisciplinary research projects at the University of Chicago and Emory University. The series aims to develop new theological thinking, "probing the depth of resources in Christianity and the other Abrahamic religions for understanding, renewing, and in some respects redefining current views of marriage, family, and children" (p. ix). Marty's book certainly tackles all these tasks. It is emphatically not a "how-to" book, though perhaps it could justly be characterized as a "how-to-think" book – an epistemology of the child.

Marty's theology and philosophy is grounded in his understanding of the child not as "a problem faced with a complex of problems," but as "a mystery surrounded by mystery" (p. 1). This means that his book eschews a practical approach to specific and particular concerns in favor of "meta-guidance or meta-advice, treating issues that are situated behind or beyond those involving practical counsel" (p. 1). The conversation Marty aims to foster is situated squarely in the pluralistic contemporary public sphere; something that makes his religious focus as well as his conceptual framework consistently broad rather than specific. In shaping his argument he draws freely and effectively on poetry, philosophy, psychology, and ethics, as well as on the more specifically Judaeo-Christian resources of formative Scriptural narrative, theology, and doctrine.

A further example of the pervasive breadth of Marty's approach is found in the way he addresses his subject matter. Throughout his book, he writes in terms of the singular but unspecific "child" rather than about particular children of various kinds, as a way to indicate and honor the irreducible uniqueness of every child. This rhetorical choice makes his writing consistently personal and personalist in its tone, but rarely specific or individual in its focus. So it is both challenging and intriguing to read – the focal length and scope of the argument keeps shifting, as generalities are painted in broad-brush strokes in order to direct attention to particulars that Marty constantly gestures towards but never explores in detail. The end result is a work that is provocative rather than conclusive – something that is certainly congruent with Marty's stated intention to explore meta-questions.

His central theme is our need to move away from understanding the child in instrumental terms, as a problem to be solved, and therefore framing the activities of care primarily in terms of control. Rather, the child is a mystery to be contemplated and a gift to be received, and therefore care most appropriately involves receptivity, wonder, respect, creativity, and responsiveness to particularity. Marty presents this as a deeply spiritual approach to the child, and develops extensive Scriptural and