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# Depictions of Religion in Children's Picture Books

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## **Depictions of Religion in Children's Picture Books**

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How children are introduced to concepts of faith is a sensitive matter. One approach used by both religious and secular organizations is children's literature, including children's picture books. *Picture books* are books primarily for preschoolers. The books tell a story using illustrations and few words. This paper offers an exploratory study of how children are introduced to religion and spirituality through illustrative techniques and textual content in such

literature. A content analysis of illustrations from 12 titles sampled from a larger collection of 21,000 picture books published in the past 40 or more years was conducted. The current sample comes from a larger sample of 56 books that were analyzed for textual content. The intent of the study is to introduce possible areas of more-detailed research into how religious concepts are represented in picture books. Using subject descriptors in the cataloguing records of the collection, analysis was restricted to the following themes: *angels, church, god, heaven, Jesus, and creation*.

The intent of the study is to introduce possible areas of more-detailed research into how religious concepts are represented in picture books. The following research questions provided the grounds for inquiry:

RQ1: How are children introduced to spirituality and religion through picture books?

RQ2: What illustrative elements are present in these picture books that may reinforce a child's ability to comprehend complex theological issues?

RQ3: What avenues for research might there be in such a substantial collection?

Using subject descriptors in the cataloguing records of the collection, concepts including the following were identified as a means to selecting books with religious content: spirituality, church, religion, death, god, and creation. The methodology employed is one of content analysis of words and illustrations. Of course, this study is limited to one collection and then to just a sample of possible titles from the 21,000 found in that collection.

## Literature Review

The body of material that studies children's literature is large. For our purposes, three themes are briefly addressed: age and content, pluralism, and spirituality and religion.

### Age and Content

Children's books vary according to age appropriateness. Banks, Cole, Silver, & Silverman noted that picture books, in particular, are intended for a younger audience, up to the ages of eight or nine.<sup>1</sup> In these books, themes are developed through a combination of words and pictures, with illustrations playing a crucial role in the interpretation of the text.<sup>2</sup> The content of religious information in books for children tends to vary according to publisher and the religion being depicted. Sekeres wrote that secular publishers tended to publish religious books only in regard to religious holidays.<sup>3</sup> This is also noted by Peyton and Jalongo, in that school calendars tend to reflect Christian holidays.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cheryl Banks et al., "The Quest for Excellence in Jewish Children's Literature," *Judaica Librarianship* 12 (07, 2006), 69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Peter H. Denton, "What could be Wrong with Harry Potter?" *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* 15, no. 3 (Spring, 2002), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Peyton and Mary Jalongo, *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace: Honoring Religious Diversity and Modeling Respect for Faiths through Children's Literature*, Vol. 35: Springer Science & Business Media B.V, 2008), 301-303.

## Pluralism

Most of the books published in the 17th century were markedly religious.<sup>5</sup> Weinreich noted that books published in Denmark were controlled by the church until the end of the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> Children's books that contain religious content have become less didactic in recent years, however. Banks et al. noted that Jewish books that contained didactic elements should not even be considered for awards.<sup>7</sup> Weinreich noted that the control of books in Denmark shifted to schools and homes by the end of the 19th century.<sup>8</sup> This shift of control from the church to the government sector influenced the didactic content of children's literature. 20th century children's books that contained religious information did so in a less obvious way, such as depicting prayers at mealtime or observing the Sabbath.<sup>9</sup> Because books were now being published outside of the church, they tended to reflect more cultural values.<sup>10</sup>

The specific religion that is depicted by a particular children's book also impacts the theme of the religious content in that book. The study by Sekeres revealed that Jewish books tended to depict themes of adult responsibility and the importance of family and Jewish community.<sup>11</sup> Christian books tended to depict themes of dependence on God and how one's

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<sup>5</sup> Ann Trousdale, "Intersections of Spirituality, Religion and Gender in children's Literature," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 10, no. 1 (04, 2005), 61.

<sup>6</sup> Torben Weinreich, "Between Art and Pedagogy," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* (University of Toronto Press) 46, no. 3 (07, 2008), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Banks et al., *The Quest for Excellence in Jewish Children's Literature*, 69-78

<sup>8</sup> Weinreich, *Between Art and Pedagogy*, 5-12

<sup>9</sup> Trousdale, *Intersections of Spirituality, Religion and Gender in children's Literature*, 61-79

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Diane Carver Sekeres, "Ideal Literature: Faith-Based Books for Children," *Intercultural Education* 19, no. 2 (05, 2008), 151.

choices honor God.<sup>12</sup> Muslim themes tended to include obeying parents and the Qu'ran.<sup>13</sup>

Sanders, Foyil, and Graff noted five archetypes that span the content of religious books from all backgrounds: the questioner, the one truth believer, the atheist, the counterpoint character, and the coach.<sup>14</sup> This development of archetypes for all religions reflect the pluralistic intentions much of the recent literature for children.

### **Spirituality and Religion**

The different uses of *spirituality* and *religion* tend to be culturally based. Yorkey noted that dictionaries were an important tool for ESL teachers to anticipate problems in multicultural definition of terms.<sup>15</sup> The full sentences given as examples in Collins COBUILD English Learner's Dictionary are easier for ESL/EFL students to understand.<sup>16</sup> These dictionaries provide an essential multicultural means of understanding in children's books. In Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary, the term *spirituality* is defined as people's thoughts and beliefs, whereas the term *physical* is defined as bodies and physical surroundings.<sup>17</sup> The goal of spirituality is the seeking and fulfillment of one's purpose in life.<sup>18</sup> This fulfillment is usually

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Sanders, Kris Foyil, and Jennifer M. Graff, "Conveying a Stance of Religious Pluralism in Children's Literature," *Children's Literature in Education* 41, no. 2 (06, 2010), 168.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Yorkey, "Review: Dictionaries for Language Learners," *TESOL Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 177.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> J. Sinclair, *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (Collins, ELT, 1987). p. 1405

<sup>18</sup> Larry Decker, "The Role of Trauma in Spiritual Development," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 33, no. 4 (1993), 33.

expressed in individual terms.<sup>19</sup> A defining feature of spiritual information is direction toward the extra-physical.<sup>20</sup> Spirituality includes cognition and emotion, but is not defined solely by these concepts.<sup>21</sup>

*Spirituality* and *religion* are distinct terms with many overlapping concepts. Zinnbauer, et al noted that spirituality was not a word distinct from religion until the rise of secularism.<sup>22</sup> In Zinnbauer et al.'s study of 346 individuals from 11 different religious backgrounds, it was found that the majority of respondents believed that the meanings of *religion* and *spirituality* overlapped.<sup>23</sup>

Kari noted that the definition of *spirituality* was similar to the definition of *religion*, in that both subjects dealt with what was beyond.<sup>24</sup> A primary difference, however, is that *spirituality* is more informal in structure, as opposed to *religion* that tends to be committed to specific interpretation.<sup>25</sup> Spiritual sources still include elements of religion, however. Indeed, the

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<sup>19</sup> Brian J. Zinnbauer et al., "Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 4 (12, 1997), 549.

<sup>20</sup> Jarkko Kari, "Informational Uses of Spiritual Information: An Analysis of Messages Reportedly Transmitted by Extraphysical Means," *Journal of Information Science* 35, no. 4 (August, 2009), 453.

<sup>21</sup> P. Scott Richards and Allen E. Bergin, *Casebook for a Spiritual Strategy in Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 1st ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 329. p. 22

<sup>22</sup> Zinnbauer et al., *Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy*, 549-564

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Jarkko Kari, "A Review of the Spiritual in Information Studies," *Journal of Documentation* 63, no. 6, p. 935.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

separation is not so clearly defined. Pargament argued that almost all religious institutions are concerned with spiritual issues.<sup>26</sup>

## Illustration

The main function of illustration is to illuminate text, to throw light on words. Illustration in Medieval books is called *illumination* and the term *illustration* derives from the Latin verb meaning “to light up,” “to illuminate.”<sup>27</sup> Illustrators accomplish this through technique, style, and color.

Illustrative *technique* refers to the method or skill of an artist in manipulating a medium or mediums to create a work of art.<sup>28</sup> Children’s books may seem simplistic, but the illustrative technique required to effectively communicate complex environments to children is difficult to achieve. Each book is characterized by a particular artist’s *style*. An artist’s style is defined as, “A characteristic, or number of characteristics, which we can identify as constant, recurring, or coherent in a work of art, it is the personal means of expression and techniques of the artist.”<sup>29</sup> This style is used in children’s picture books to maintain coherence and consistency between the text and the illustrations. Many illustrators also tend to fall into certain historically defined techniques. *The Christ Child*, for instance, is illustrated using a classical technique.<sup>30</sup> The term

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<sup>26</sup> Kenneth I. Pargament, "The Psychology of Religion and Spirituality? Yes and no," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 9, no. 1 (01, 1999), 3. p. 9

<sup>27</sup> Uri Shulevitz, *Writing with Pictures* (New York, NY: Watson-Guptill Publications), p. 120

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Mayer, *Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1981), p. 389.

<sup>29</sup> William Kloss, *A History of European Art*, DVD Lecture series, n.d.

<sup>30</sup> Maud Fuller Petersham and Miska Petersham, *The Christ Child: As Told by Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, inc, 1931).



*classical* belongs to Greek and Roman antiquity. The term is used to describe art in conformity with the standards of the ancient Greeks and Romans and their emphasis on simplicity of line, symmetry and dignity of subject matter.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to technique and style, color schemes are used in meaningful and purposeful ways to induce emotion and convey meaning.<sup>32</sup> A color scheme can be comforting, for example, by making use of pastels and warming, soothing colors. Color is differentiated by intensity, value, and temperature. Intensity refers to how bright a color is. Prismatic colors are the *pure* forms of color. All parts of a color wheel are equal in intensity. These pure colors demand attention. Colors get less intense as they become muted or paler. An orange shirt first purchased may reveal a prismatic orange, for instance, but after numerous washes it becomes to lose this intensity as it fades. Also, if one were to mix a black shirt in a wash with this orange shirt, the orange color would become very desaturated. The color, then, is still orange, but it is a duller orange. Pure hues refers to all the colors of the color spectrum. The color wheel displays 12 of these colors. The color term *hue* refers to a specific color in its pure state found in the spectral color circle. Pure hue color schemes command attention; the visibility and energy factor is high, thus commanding the child's focus. Interjecting black into the mix further empowers the combinations, while at the same time adding a dramatic contrast.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Zellman, *300 Years of American Art* (Secaucus, NJ: Wellfleet Press, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> Fehrman, Kenneth & Fehrman, Cherie, *Color: the Secret Influence (2nd Ed.)* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Leatrice Eiseman, *Color - Messages & Meanings: A PANTONE Color Resource* (MA: Hand Books Press, 2006), p. 98.

Color value refers to the lightness or darkness of something—also referred to as high key and low key. Gray scale lets us see the value of a color. The stronger an illustration appears in gray scale, e.g. when making a black and white photocopy of a colorful book, the higher key it is. Temperature is a third important element of color. A color's temperature can determine the emotional impact it will have on a viewer. Blue colors are cool in temperature and denote a sense of sadness and melancholy—hence *Blues* music). Warmer colors, however—such as bright reds—set the stage for anxiety and excitement and are often used in fast food advertisements.

Children are certainly attentive to elements of a picture book, and an illustrator must be careful to maintain the internal structure of the story. “The beginning gives birth to the end, and the end remembers the beginning; none of the elements introduced at the beginning are forgotten, no loose threads are left hanging.”<sup>34</sup>

Thomas noted that the old masters often used an underlying geometry to increase the readability and expression of their pictures.<sup>35</sup> This geometric pattern can be found in the main visual elements guiding the eye, which create directional—or implied—lines leading to focal points in the picture. Studying this geometric influence, e.g., triangles, rectangles, and circular shapes in the design of the pictures, you can develop awareness to composition. This ability to lead the viewer's eye strengthens the pictures intent. One can never be certain whether the artist planned it that way but it is visible nonetheless.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Shulevitz, *Writing with Pictures* p. 50

<sup>35</sup> Robert D. McPhee and Pamela Zaug, "Organizational Theory, Organizational Communication, Organizational Knowledge, and Problematic Integration," *Journal of Communication* 51, no. 3 (2001), 574.

<sup>36</sup> Shulevitz, *Writing with Pictures*.

A picture is made up of various elements: size, shape, texture, pattern, value, color, space intervals etc. The artists needs to arrange-compose-these elements deliberately rather than at random to create a visual pattern that gives the viewer a meaningful experience rather than a confusing one. When we look at the picture, we immediately see the subject matter and concrete details: we don't see the composition right away. The composition however, is felt. It is to a picture what the unseen skeleton is to the human being. It structures what and how we see.<sup>37</sup>

### **Methodology**

The Marantz children's library at Kent State University, with over 21,000 titles, provided the framework for this study. The information sources for this study are comprised of children's picture books within a narrow set of catalogued entries in the Marantz library. Most of the books in this study are religious, invoking a particular Christian commitment to doctrine and the Bible as sacred.<sup>38</sup>

Search terms were developed for entry into the Marantz database. All books in the collection had been previously catalogued by subject, and so the books were searched by subject heading. The books were then selected based on religious presence and date of publication. The following subject terms were employed: *angels, church, god, heaven, Jesus, and religion*. The original search included a subject heading of *death*, but the results were not consistent in their use of religion, and so the search term was discarded.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Kari, *A Review of the Spiritual in Information Studies*, 935-962

The research was conducted in two phases. In both phases, the books were coded according to elements of how children are introduced to religious themes. In phase one, books were analyzed for textual content. In phase two, a selected number of books from the first phase were furthered analyzed for visual elements of the illustrations.

## **Phases**

In Phase One of the research, 56 books were analyzed for religious and spiritual textual content and themes. In Phase Two of the research, 12 books were selected for further in-depth analysis of visual elements. The *religion* theme from phase one was discarded and replaced by a *creation* theme, as these books tended to focus on elements of creation from various religious groups. The 12 books included in Phase Two reflect two books from each of the following six thematic categories: *angels*, *church*, *god*, *heaven*, *Jesus*, and *religion*. The number of books was limited to allow for more detailed analysis. An illustrator was added to the research team to provide insights to the text.

## **Phase One Results**

The initial level of analysis was an effort to categorize the contents of each sub-topic into themes. In each case, the sub-topic was examined for possible themes in the realm of spirituality and also in the realm of physicality. Three themes for each realm were determined based on the content of the books. Thus, the analysis covers three levels, as follows:

**Realm:** Spiritual or Physical

**Themes observed (23):** Growth, Inspiration, Fun, Task, Nature, Protection, Leadership, Structure, Sacrifice, Emotion, Desire, Process, Location, Aesthetics, Blessing, Direction, Creation, Nature, Naming, Teaching, Imagery, Sensuality, Dependency.

**Sub-topics:** Angels, Church, Heaven, God, Jesus, Religion

## Phase Two Results

### Creation

In *Mama God, Papa God: A Caribbean Tale*, by Keens-Douglas and Czernecki the illustrations are considered to be graphic in interpretation.<sup>39</sup> A graphic interpretation is when the illustrator's *style* is based on the dynamics of shapes on a page and their power to communicate.<sup>40</sup> The figures in the book are flat and lack much depth or dimension. This simplification of people and animals in the book idealizes the figures to a point where children are viewing them in an unusual way, i.e. not in the way they would see them in the natural world outside of the book. The anatomical structure of the figures are simplified—making them appear doll-like—and the illustrations utilize simple shapes and primary colors. Even earth is simplified, as Papa God's gift to Mama God needed to be simply something round. Shape then gave way to the substance of creation. Given the abstract nature of the theology of creation, it makes sense that children would be exposed to this idea in a simplified way.

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<sup>39</sup> Richardo Keens-Douglas and Stefan Czernecki, *Mama God, Papa God: A Caribbean Tale*, 1 American ed. (New York: Crocodile Books, 1999), [32].

<sup>40</sup> Martin Salisbury, *Illustrating Children's Books: Creating Pictures for Publication* (London: Quarto Inc., 2004), p. 78.

Many of the illustrations feature black backgrounds when depicting the heavens, with the main god characters in bright, pure hues. This contrast sets the focal point of each page, as children are drawn to the welcoming brightness—or color intensity—of the god characters. This enhances the textual elements of the book that refer to these gods as mother and father, and the creation as *children* of the gods. Both the color intensity and abstraction of the images help convey the comfort brought about through the use of words like *beautiful*, *love*, *masterpiece*, *wonderful*, etc.

Whereas Keens-Douglas and Czernecki show an extensive reliance on expressive application of paint, changes in viewpoint, and shape to convey the illustrative message, *Mr. and Mrs. God in the Creation Kitchen*, by Wood and Ering, utilizes a more expressive approach in which the two god characters are illustrated more playful and animated with detail.<sup>41</sup> Paint strokes are readily visible in the illustrations as a means of illustrating and enhancing the *action* of creation, describing forms and allowing the natural properties of paint, e.g., thick, thin, opaque, transparent, splashy, layered, etc. to also participate in activating the visual stage. This method expresses and extracts an emotional experience in this book not seen in Keens-Douglas and Czernecki. Most of the scenes throughout the book are created by using a narrow range of cool nearly colorless grey tones. This chromatic grey color scheme both enhances the feeling of mystery and establishes the pace of the book unifying the sequence of images in the story. When a moment of creation is introduced, brighter more prismatic colors illuminate/activate the scene.

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<sup>41</sup> Nancy C. Wood and Timothy B. Ering, *Mr. and Mrs. God in the Creation Kitchen*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2006).

This timely use of color provides more impact for the moment of creation and even creates anticipation for the child as new moments of creation follow.

Children are invited to learn the creation story by experiencing god as mother and father figures—something noted in the text and enhanced by the expressionist approach to the illustrations—in an emotional way. Children are invited to participate in this emotional experience. The objects illustrated in this book are items most children would be able to relate to, i.e. kitchen appliances, tools, etc. However, the illustrator also creates strange and unfamiliar “creation contraptions” in the kitchen scenes; their structure is whimsical and somewhat clumsy offering suspense and mystery. An important element of emotionally captivating children with a story illustration is providing this link to real life.

Wood and Ering accomplish this link with reality without making the story too real, however.<sup>42</sup> There are many rather troubling events that occur in this book, including the creation of monsters, the killing of various creatures, and the total destruction of the first batch of creation. Without the illustrations, the content would likely seem frightening. The illustrations soften the text through its expressive and whimsical approach, however, and ensure that these real things stay within the context of the story. The story itself ends happily.

## Heaven

In *How the Ox Star Fell from Heaven*, color is used as a primary means of conveying the distinct realities of heaven and earth.<sup>43</sup> When depicting people in the fields of earth, the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Lily Toy Hong, *How the Ox Star Fell from Heaven* (Morton Grove, Ill.: A. Whitman, 1991).

illustrator utilizes dull colors—also known as chromatic gray colors—to express a more neutral tone. Colored outlines around each of the forms help to soften the scene and establish mood. It should also be noted that none of the faces of the workers in the field are shown until the very end when the faces we do see are that of children hence making a connection to the child. When depicting heaven, however, the illustrator utilizes bright colors—also known as prismatic colors specifically red-orange, yellow and violet bringing emphasis to the two main figures—to convey a more welcoming and excited emotional tone. When the ox is banished from heaven and sent to earth he is subtly distinguished from the other oxen in the field by the use of a unique combination of colored lines outlining the bridge of his nose.

This distinction between the dullness of earth and brightness of heaven is important to the text as well. The text tells children that life on earth is hard and that people worked hard and did not eat much. In heaven, however, the ox lived very easy lives on “billowy clouds.”<sup>44</sup> In heaven the ox never had to work; yet on earth, the ox fell into an eternity of work. In this way, earth is a punishment—a penalty for the ox star’s mistake.

A certain distinction is also made in *Up in Heaven*.<sup>45</sup> In this book, where a child loses his dog to illness, the dog is depicted both on earth and in heaven. Depictions of earth utilize darker blues and greens as well as value contrast, while depictions of heaven utilize bright and warm yellows. Children transition, therefore, from low to high keys in relation to earth and heaven. In a particularly important illustration, the dog is depicted looking down on the child from heaven. At

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Emma Chichester Clark, *Up in Heaven*, 1 American ed. (New York: Doubleday Book for Young Readers, 2004; 2003), [32].



this point the distinction is most notable, as both opposing color keys are depicted on the same page. The lowest color key in the illustrations occurs when the dog is depicted as actually dying. The text serves to lighten the illustration, however, as it makes no mention of *death*; rather, the dog simply falls asleep.

It is interesting that Chichester shows a distinction between heaven and earth similar to Hong, given that the former *text* does not support this illustrated distinction as heavily as the latter. In Chichester, heaven is certainly glorified—as noted by descriptions of its beauty, love, lakes, sun, etc.<sup>46</sup> Earth is not noted in the text as a significantly worse place, however. The children still play and have fun on earth. This could be an element of the connection between earth and heaven made by the author. The dog sends dreams and pictures to the boy from heaven. In Hong's book, the ease and joy of heaven makes it very disconnected from earth.<sup>47</sup> In Chichester's book, however, earth is allowed to participate in certain elements of heaven. The two books make different textual references about heaven and earth, but both use illustrative techniques to convey clear distinctions.

## Church

In *Rock of Ages*, the church is depicted using a number of actual historical portrayals, e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglas, etc.<sup>48</sup> The connection of these individuals—

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Hong, *How the Ox Star Fell from Heaven*

<sup>48</sup> Tonya Bolden and R. Gregory Christie, *Rock of Ages :A Tribute to the Black Church*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002).

successful and important members of the civil rights movement—with the black church highlights the value of church attendance. Children have likely been introduced to these historical figures, and the depiction of them at church can serve to increase positive affiliation of children with the church.

The book is illustrated with loose but descriptive paint strokes that are explicitly tailored to depict expression and emotion in the human form. The people in the book are almost caricatures of their actual selves. This is done in a positive way to increase a child's ability to associate with the individual. This oversimplification of the human form more closely resembles what a child might be capable of drawing—increasing the child's relation to the book characters.

This relationship is highlighted in the text, which describes the church as warm and filled with song. Women in *Rock of Ages* also play central and prominent roles in the actual church service, furthering the ability of female children to relate to the story. The church itself is female in the story, as the text notes that *she* is “strength for body and soul.”<sup>49</sup> This female strength is noted in the physical structure of the church, made of timber, brick, and stone—all of which make-up tall and strong physical structures. The illustrations depict church services as exciting, church members as important members of society, and church buildings as counterparts to female strength—all serve to embellish the text.

In *Billy Finds Out*, the people are not illustrated as expressively as in *Rock of Ages*.<sup>50</sup> Most of the illustrations in this story are also created emphasizing shape, color and value contrast, however the illustration style offers a completely different mood. The compositions

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Edna B. Trickey et al., *Billy Finds Out* (Boston: United Church Press, 1966; 1964), [48].

utilize a steady rhythm of verticals and right angles echoing the framing reference at the top and bottom of each page. Even the figures in most of the scenes are designed to complement the vertical and right angle rhythms. In contrast, the figures and architectural elements in *Rock of Ages* appear much more organic and irregular in shape. The subject matter is placed in each scene using diagonal and circular alignments offering a completely different mood and pace to the story. In fact, the landscapes and physical structures in this particular book seem to maintain prominence over illustrations of individual people. This is particularly interesting given that the church structure is destroyed by a fire early in the story. Given the textual elements of the story, it is possible that this prominence of physical structures serves the purpose of extending the theme in the book that the church is more than the building itself. Rather, the church is made-up of the people who attend it, and it is only through these people that the actual structure can exist.

The text notes that *old* wiring was responsible for the fire, possibly pointing to an older tradition that focused on the importance of buildings and physical objects. By making the physical structures prominent in the illustration, and then destroying these very structures, the illustration compliments the text's motif that the real church is not the building, but rather the people. It is interesting to note that by placing the figures in the scene (especially near the end of the story where they surround the foundation stone) as a repeated vertical rhythm they resemble an architectural structure when they stand in a group. This visual design element not only sets the pace for the book but also enhances the message in the story.

The text's emphasis on the people of the church is shown in the illustration through the use of prismatic reds for the main character's clothing. Amidst the dull, dark tones of the burned

landscape, Billy's red sweater makes him the focal point of [nearly every scene] the illustration despite his small size relative to the buildings.

## Angels

In the picture book, *Angels, Angels Everywhere*, the illustrator introduces the visual setting by making it appear as though the figures are interacting on a stage.<sup>51</sup> DePaola's artistic style frequently includes this colorful border treatment and pastel color palette. The sense is one of intimacy, as if we are inside watching a play. The use of colored borders houses the text and complements the color scheme of the internal image. Figures and objects that make up each single page or double page spread are composed in such a way that the viewer's eye is guided by strategically arranged visual rhythms and implied lines leading from left to right and right to left as we move through the scene.

As noted by Fehrman & Fehrman, the color scheme is comforting, making use of pastels and warming, soothing colors.<sup>52</sup> The use of pink unifies the images and color is used to cause us to focus on certain content. Additional structure is lent to the presentation subliminally by a letter "A" structure to the illustrations. The illustrative structure also gives the book coherence, as the book begins and ends with a similar scene.

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<sup>51</sup> Tomie DePaola, *Angels, Angels Everywhere* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> Fehrman, Kenneth & Fehrman, Cherie, *Color: the Secret Influence* (2nd Ed.)

DePaola's illustrations of the angels appear more *static* in contrast to the *dynamic*, depiction of the angels illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully in *What Do Angels Wear?*<sup>53</sup> That is not to say that a static picture cannot hold our attention, but action makes a story lively and dramatic. *What Do Angels Wear?* uses child-like angel figures, suggesting that we are seeing angels from a child's point of view. The story, as with many children's books, ends in the same setting in which they began—fulfilling a complete action. In between, the scene moves from the exterior of the house to the interior. Angels are shown in common, everyday situations. A double page spread is used to change the rhythm. The double page spread offers change, a necessary element in creating a picture book because it keeps the viewer from getting bored.

## **Jesus**

*The Christ Child* is the oldest book in the sample.<sup>54</sup> It was published in 1931, and the lack of color may be accounted for by the available technology of the time as much as by a commitment to using black and white to produce an effect. Classic geometric shapes can be observed on every page (e.g., triangles, circles, and directional lines), with the effect of an upward look that leads us to focus on either Mary or the Christ Child. As noted earlier, this book follows the *classical* illustrative techniques of line simplicity, symmetry, and dignity of subject matter.<sup>55</sup> The focus is enhanced by the employment of Classical idealized figures and the use of

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<sup>53</sup> Eileen Spinelli and Emily Arnold McCully, *What do Angels Wear?* 1st ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Maud Fuller Petersham and Miska Petersham, *The Christ Child: As Told by Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1931).

<sup>55</sup> Michael Zellman, *300 Years of American Art* (Secaucus, NJ: Wellfleet Press, 1987).

halos. Even when the symmetry changes to asymmetry, there are implied lines that can be noted. The lines give a sense of energy or movement, corresponding to the text, while the curved lines add a soothing or gentle feeling. Curvilinear lines, then, are used to produce emotional impact, and a noble representation of the human figures. Illustrators in the next two decades (1940s-50s) changed to more individualized and expressive techniques and styles grid patterns and away from the Classical abstract and idealized approach of an earlier era—inviting other options for illustrating emotion by way of expressive paint application.

*Cobweb Curtain* uses a simple style that contains many circular lines (even the faces are egg-shaped) and uses them in the same way as does the previous book, namely to produce a comforting effect.<sup>56</sup> Color is important in this book to allow the reader to contrast figures: the important figures are more colorful than others, (e.g., the shepherds in the cave). Diagonal patterns encourage movement through the pages. The message is that a simple gift (the spider's web) is more valuable than gold.

## God

There is a full range of colors in *I See the Moon*.<sup>57</sup> The book features stylization of wind currents. The lines may have a comforting effect on the child who fears going to sleep. The child is central, yet detached. There is plenty of room for interpretation in this work.

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<sup>56</sup> Jenny Koralek, Pauline Baynes, and William Barclay, *The Cobweb Curtain: A Christmas Story*, 1 American ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1989).

<sup>57</sup> Kathi Appelt and Debra Reid Jenkins, *I See the Moon* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997).

*God is in The Mountain* also has curved lines for the wind.<sup>58</sup> This book covers many kinds of religious tradition from many parts of the world—African, Egyptian, Aztec, Confucianism, Greek, and more. An abstract, experimental form is used, with simple shapes. The drawing is influenced by modernism and employs splashes and drips. Everything is symbolic and poetic, utilizing lyrical interpretation. Unlike the previous work, the color scheme is monochromatic, based on a single orange hue. This visual interpretation features nature and embellishes those elements of creation through variations in shape, texture, line, pattern and orange and grey. The decision to use only orange as the single color choice may be driven by the feeling that orange expresses radiation and communication, it is also viewed as receptive and warm, characterized as a fire burning in a hearth.<sup>59</sup> The combination of both vertical and horizontal visual forces may have an affect on the viewers emotion state. *Vertical* structures tend to imply a stately presence, a feeling of safety and protection like that of pillars supporting a roof, while the *horizontal*, curvilinear lines bring a sense of calm and tranquility. A perfectly flat horizontal line may elicit a feeling of lifelessness like the reading of an EKG when a heart ceases to beat. Both books tend towards being dreamlike. Both are non-dogmatic and naturalistic in tone.

## Conclusions

As previously stated, the initial level of analysis was an effort to categorize the contents of each sub-topic into themes. The books addressed issues that can be characterized as applying

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<sup>58</sup> Ezra Jack Keats, *God is in the Mountain*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), [44].

<sup>59</sup> Fehrman, Kenneth & Fehrman, Cherie, *Color: the Secret Influence (2nd Ed.)*

to the spiritual or the physical world. For the realm of spirituality, the theme of “Emotion” was found in the church, Heaven, and Religion subtopics, while the theme of “Leadership” was seen in the subtopics of God and Religion. For the realm of physicality, “Location” was an important theme for books dealing with Heaven and Jesus. “Creation” was a theme found in books on God and Religion. And “Sacrifice” was a theme observed in titles about Church and Jesus. None of these connections is surprising. One would expect that the church would learn Sacrifice from studying the life of Jesus, or that Emotion is connected to Church, Heaven and Religion. It may be more surprising that some sub-topics do not evidence certain themes. Writers and illustrators could easily find opportunity, for example, to address issues of Emotion in their treatment of Jesus or God.

Other relationships are likewise sometimes expected and unusual. Books about Church fit the realm of the physical, describing what happens there and where it is located. Books dealing with the topic of Religion revealed a lack of consistency in the use of terminology, as compared to those dealing with Church. Similarly, books about Jesus dwelt on His physical presence on earth. Contrary to this, books on Heaven avoided the subject of death. For the most part, people simply arrived in heaven, or at best journeyed there. Perhaps this was an attempt to void the difficult issue of death when writing for children. It would be interesting to study children’s books about death to see how the subject of heaven is treated when it is not the main theme of the work.

When the distinction between spirituality and physicality is set aside, common sub-topics that dealt with Leadership were Church, God, and Religion. Leadership is needed in the church



and in the practice of Religion, and is a characteristic of God. The theme of Location was seen to be important for books on God (whose home might be seen as in Heaven) and Jesus (His life on earth). Fun was a theme seen in books on Angels (they like to play and dance) and Heaven (a place of enjoyment).

Interestingly, while Angels have fun playing, flying, and dancing, people in Church are seen as fitting into certain Regulations or expected behaviors (e.g., wear certain clothing, meet certain gender expectations for the roles played in church activities, etc.). Also, Angels engage in activities involving action while Jesus is seen doing something cerebral, namely, teaching.

The themes observed would vary depending on who is doing the coding. These themes may also be possible to blend. For example, Creation, Inspiration, and Nature are somewhat similar in application. Emotion and Sensuality share meaning. Leadership and Structure correspond in meaning or application. If themes like these are combined, it might be possible to see further correspondence across picture books about different sub-topics.

Another question to ask is how did our study support or dissent from the findings of others as reported in the literature reviewed earlier. With respect to pluralism, the authors did see differences among the religious traditions that were represented in the books. Most often, these differences were in obvious reasons such as the naming of congregational leaders (minister or priest vs. rabbi) or the physical appearance of the meeting place. The sources used for this study show a difference in the way spirituality is represented. In traditional settings such as church or synagogue, there are Bibles or a copy of the Talmud. In the books about creation or angels, the source of insight is oral tradition or myth. In these ways, then, our study tends to agree with the

findings of others. In the one area of effect of the era of publication on content, our study showed no impact of publication date, whereas the literature suggests that date is significant. This may be an uneven comparison, however, seeing that our study was confined the late-twentieth century and early-twenty-first century books and the literature is sometimes is peaking of seventeenth century publications versus twentieth century ones. Our study did not cover that wide a range of dates.

Neither could our study answer the question of how secular and religious publishers differ (if they do) in their coverage of religious themes. There were two books in our sample from the Lutheran publisher Concordia and one from the evangelical Protestant publisher, Eerdmans, but almost all the fifty-six titles in the sample came from secular publishers.

It is also important to note how the illustrations worked with the text. Emotion is one area in which the illustrations complimented the text. They tended to soothe the harshness of the actual words, especially when these words deal with difficult issues such as death or destruction. Illustrations also helped to simplify the complexity of the theological elements noted in the text, e.g. the Incarnation, Creation, etc. The illustrations were often done from a child's point of view and with simple lines to help the child connect. Illustrations also can convey things that the text cannot, e.g. color adds emotion, relieves anxieties.

Further insights would be gained by broadening the sample. A collection the size and scope of the Marantz Picture Book Collection is ripe for mining by researchers from any number of disciplines (English Literature, Psychology, Sociology, Library & Information Science, disciplines in the Visual Arts, and others).

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