# THE RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to: (1) explore the effects of religious teaching on the pre-school child, and (2) determine whether or not the child attempts to interpret religious information on the basis of his previous experience. The hypotheses to be examined were:

1. There is an important difference between the major religious concepts that adults profess and aim to teach the pre-school child, and those that the child actually forms.
2. This disparity is not due to illogical thinking* on the part of the child, but rather, is a result of his attempt to organize, assimilate and relate religious information in terms of his previous experience.
3. Religious concepts in children are like other concepts in that they are based upon concrete types of experiences.

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*Although many authorities equate logical thinking with abstract thinking, many others contend that children's thinking is based upon a "concrete" type of logic. Piaget (1955) defines logic as "the sum of the habits which the mind adopts in the general conduct of its operations" (pp. 65-66).

The sample consisted of 30 boys and girls ranging in age from 4 years, 3 months, to 5 years, 10 months, all of whom attended the Goosey Gander Kindergarten in Saanich, B.C. Since the children came from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds and home life-styles, it was assumed that the responses of the sample represented the religious thinking of boys and girls in this age group who attended the kindergarten. It was also assumed that, since all of the children involved in the study had been exposed to a more or less degree to religious concepts in the community, selection of subjects need not be based upon Sunday school or church attendance.

In order to discover how the children conceptualize such religious matters as God, Bible, Jesus, church, prayer, death and life after, and creation, individual, open-ended unstructured interviews were conducted. The wording of questions asked in the interviews was based upon information gathered through observations of spontaneous conversations of children at the school, and the questions about religion they most often asked. To obtain the adult view, parents not affiliated with religious groups were questioned, and Sunday school manuals of the Catholic, Anglican and United churches were studied.

The most typical responses of the children were then: (1) compared to those conceptions common to the teachings of the Anglican, Catholic and United Churches;

and (2) interpreted in order to ascertain whether or not the responses were attempts to relate religious information to previous experience.

The findings indicated that there is an important difference between the adults' and the pre-school child's concepts of religious matters. They also appeared to confirm the findings of a number of authorities on cognitive development, that: the more abstract and complex concepts pose the greatest difficulty for young children; and children associate information gathered from adults with that gathered through previous experience, elaborating the resulting idea with fantasy.

Implications for these findings are discussed, along with the need for further study in the area of religious education for young children.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## Purposes of the Study

The main purposes of this study were: (1) To explore the effects of religious teaching on the pre-school child in a Christian culture, and (2) To throw some light upon his intellectual struggle to seek for logical interpretations of religious matters on the basis of familiar items that have meaning for him within his past experience.

## Statement of the Problem

The problem was twofold. The first question to be investigated was whether or not the religious stimuli to which the child is exposed, regardless of source, undergo any perceptual distortion, and the second part of the problem was to explore the factors that might be involved in such distortion if it was found to occur.

## Hypotheses

The basic hypotheses of this study are as follows:

1. There is an important difference between the major religious concepts that adults profess and aim to

teach the pre-school child, and those that the child actually forms.

2. This disparity is not due to illogical thinking on the part of the child, but rather, is a result of his attempt to organize, assimilate and relate new information in terms of his previous experience.

3. Religious concepts in children are like other concepts in that they are based upon concrete types of experiences.

## Background and Significance of the Study

The impetus for this study came first of all from pre-school children themselves. Many years of working with children under school age, listening to their conversations, questions and assertions, contributed to what appeared to be a rather obvious conclusion: that there is a vast difference between the religious concepts that adults in the community attempt, in one way or another, to pass on to children, and the conceptions that the children actually develop.

Parents and students of early childhood education, many of whom are Sunday school teachers, have reported difficulty in this respect. Few deny that children of this age entertain what adults consider to be fantastic notions about religious matters. These "misconceptions" on the part of the child are the basis of countless anecdotes that

are accepted as delightfully amusing, even by those adults who are dedicated to religious or secular instruction.

It seemed strange that in no other area of education is there such a lack of serious thought or study concerning the manner in which young children construe the concepts that adults feel are important to their growth and development. Any well trained nursery or kindergarten teacher professes to the dictum that to know how children actually form concepts is a much surer basis for arranging appropriate learning experiences than to know only those concepts that adults believe children should, or ought to form.

In England, the "Plowden Report" (*Children and Their Primary Schools*, published by the Department of Education and Science, 1967) included a section entitled "Note of Reservation on Religious Education". It was submitted by a group of professors who, along with their colleagues, were concerned about the advisability of including religious instruction in the English primary schools. After considering the whole matter of concept development in young children, their conclusions were: that theology cannot be properly adapted to the understanding, needs or interests of young children; that it is absurd to suppose that the average, or even gifted child is capable of coming to terms with the credibility of religious teachings before he is twelve years old; that it is doubtful that even the

literary qualities of the Bible can be appreciated before the secondary level; that it is not necessary or even desirable to tie the moral aspects of education to theology, since no Bible stories or homilies can have as strong an effect upon the child's conduct as the examples he encounters through the personalities of his teachers in the whole atmosphere of his school (*Children and Their Primary Schools*, 1967, p. 490).

Goldman (1969) also feels that religious education is out of step with our present knowledge about how children learn. His studies confirmed that religious teaching about "holy" people who lived long ago in a far-away "Holy land" where God *was* present and miracles occurred, creates in the minds of children a dualistic world view. There is one world called "religious" and another called "scientific". "The second is the world they know of, with cars, central heating and television, in which thunderstorms can be explained by natural laws, and about which they try to think logically" (p. 53).

For many years religious liberals have expressed the opinion that adults, in their zeal to pass on to their children traditional Christian beliefs, may not only be wasting their time, but might also be adding to the confusion of young children who are presently in the process of sorting out fact from fantasy. Many plead for a post-ponement of exposure to religious concepts until the child

is better able to grasp concepts that are even difficult for adults to relate to (Hunter, 1956).

This, however, is virtually impossible to do. In a predominantly Christian community, the young child is continuously exposed to such concepts as God, Jesus Christ, heaven, prayer, church and the Bible. This exposure may or may not take place in an organized church setting. Sometimes it is incidental to other activities at the homes of relatives or friends, where songs of a religious nature may be sung, Bible stories read, or prayers repeated at meal or bed times. Exposure may take the form of casual conversations with peers; discussions with parents, relatives, family friends or baby-sitters. The child may be a participant or interested observer at a wedding; he may attend a funeral, pick up a religious book in a doctor's waiting room; or he may watch Christmas pageants or T.V. programmes that purport to depict and interpret the literature of Judo-Christian tradition.

Therefore, since no child, regardless of the wishes of his parents, is free from exposure to concepts that are so deeply imbedded in the culture of the community, it seemed to the writer that it was important to investigate the manner in which the child perceives those concepts. Such an investigation may be of assistance to both parents and teachers who are involved with young children. It may provide clues to how children think, not only about

religious matters, but about other matters as well.

## Definition of Terms

*Religion* as considered by this study is a belief, recognition or conviction that there is some unseen power or supreme being that has control over one's personal destiny and is entitled to obedience, reverence and worship. Since this particular investigation concerns itself with Christian monotheistic religion in the Western traditional sense, this definition and the one which follows are confined to that tradition, even though it is obvious that such a definition would not be applicable to other recognized forms of belief.

*Religious thinking*, for the purposes of this study is thinking directed toward the nature of God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, the church, prayer, heaven, or life after death.

*Concepts* are common responses (usually verbal) to a class of phenomena (objects, events, experiences) the members of which display certain common qualities, characteristics or relationships. Concepts reflect an individual's understanding of the world; assist him to classify his experiences, and thus give meaning to them. According to Kagan (1971), "The term 'religion' usually functions as a concept because there is no single object called religion; rather, there are many events that are

characterized by a reference to God and church and a commitment to moral principles. Religion is the concept that summarizes such dimensions" (p. 86). Kagan points out that concepts differ in many ways: those whose dimensions are close to experience (physical attributes one can see, hear or touch) are termed *concrete*; those whose dimensions cannot be experienced directly, but have dimensions which are often other concepts, are said to be *abstract*; those that rest on many dimensions that are necessary to define them, are considered to be more *complex* than those resting upon only a few (p. 87).

*Perception* is the process wherein the motivated individual, as he interacts with his environment, selects and organizes stimuli.

*Schemas* are generalizations of thought that involve concepts, percepts and images. To Piaget (1955) the schema is a general trend of thought; a pattern or system of ideas that follow a general principle or rule: ". . . objects are perceived . . . because of 'general forms' which are as much constructed by ourselves as given by the elements of the perceived object, and which may be called the schema or the *gestaltqualetät* of these objects (p. 144). Downing (1964-65) has defined the "schema" as "an organization of past impressions which modifies current perceptions immediately so that our consciousness of the current situation includes its relation to past conditions" (p. 19).

Kagan (1971) likens the schema of an object to a cartoonist's caricature of a face which exaggerates its most distinctive features (p. 84).

*Images* are more detailed and elaborated mental pictures created when the cognitive processes perform work on the schema.

*Symbols* are names for things or qualities of things. They are verbal responses that become associated with, or stand for concepts.

*Concrete* thinking is thinking that is related to the data collected through actual, concrete situations. These situations may involve sight, hearing, touch, or any other sensory activity. Many authorities acknowledge that the thinking of young children is related to such data. Lawrence (1965) notes that, since formal definitions of such religious concepts as God, Jesus, prayer, and so on cannot be concerned with concrete implications, or translated into the child's realistic experience, they hold little meaning for the child.

# CHAPTER II

## A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Three sections of the relevant published literature have been reviewed: (1) research on children's thinking about religion; (2) research on children's thinking in general; and (3) methodological studies of non-statistical or "qualitative" techniques of research.

### Research on Children's Thinking About Religion

Studies concerning the thinking process of pre-school children in relation to the attainment of religious concepts are surprisingly scarce. Elkind (1964), in his study of spontaneous religion, noted that as yet we have little information about the spontaneous religion of the child. The question of how four and five year olds form religious concepts has been largely ignored by authors of standard textbooks on educational psychology, even though that branch of the science of psychology "concentrates attention on the processes of emotional, intellectual, and moral development" (Pintner et al., 1963). As to thinking in other areas, the literature pertaining to concept

development reveals some consensus on certain problems. Few authorities dispute the thesis that the child's interpretation of events in his environment are based upon (1) his own observations and experiences, and (2) his reasoning about relationships within his experiences.

Few psychologists, however, question the teaching of religious concepts or even consider this to be a special problem area in need of attention. But in this writer's opinion it is a special problem area for what seem rather obvious reasons. Although the child may attempt to follow the same processes he uses to interpret the events in his immediate environment, in the realm of religious thinking he is faced with major difficulties not encountered in other areas. Goldman (1968) has pointed out some of these difficulties:

1. Religious percepts and concepts are not based upon direct sensory data, but are formed from other perceptions and conceptions of experience.
2. The whole structure of religious thinking is based upon "vicarious" experience.
3. The content of religious thinking is heavily laden with analogies and verbal associations.
4. Even adults who have sufficient experience of the sensory, perceptual and conceptual

> factors upon which the analogies are based, may only partially grasp the concepts involved (pp. 14-15).

Goldman remarks upon the resistance of teachers and clergy against the intrusion of psychological research into the field of religious thinking. This resistance, he feels, may be based upon the fear that psychological investigation may undermine the validity of religious belief. However, he argues that if the activity of thinking is a suitable subject for investigation, religious thinking should be equally so: "Religious thinking, not as a separate or sacred rationality, but as thinking directed toward religion, of how man thinks about the existence and activity of the divine, is therefore a valid field of research" (p. 9).

Allport (1955), noting that the contributions of psychology to an understanding of the religious nature of man is "Less than we might wish", asserts that religion is not only a valid, but a necessary field of enquiry for psychology. He maintains that if an important goal of psychological research is to add to man's self-knowledge, no shred of evidence and no level of development should be left out. Allport emphasizes, however, that the task of psychology is not to prove or disprove religion's claim to truth: "The final truths of religion are unknown, but a psychology that impedes understanding of the religious potentialities of man scarcely deserves to be called a logos

of human psyche at all" (pp. 93-98).

Almy (1955), noting the difficulties the young child faces when he attempts to deal with abstractions, has observed that there is a dearth of information about the religious thinking of pre-school children: "The effects of specific religious convictions and practices on the child's development during this impressionable period need much more study than they have had thus far" (p. 218). Jersild (1954) admits that the influence of religious instruction on children has never been studied in a systematic manner, and that in the general literature of psychology there are only miscellaneous findings which deal with the problem in a manner that is limited and inconclusive. He goes on to say that when we approach the question of teaching religious concepts to children we are dealing with an area in which we are bound to face difficulty and confusion: "...the younger the child, the more his ideas in matters of religion as in other matters will be built upon his own concrete experiences. These are likely to be elaborated by fantasies" (p. 535).

In a foreword to a study done by Ross (1950), which attempted to investigate the religious beliefs of youth, Allport commented upon the ghostly qualities of many religious attitudes; the fact that many religious concepts are hazy to those who profess them, and that the relevance of such teachings to every day life is vague. Allport (1950)

studied the diversity of religious beliefs among individuals and the forms and relative maturity of their religious outlooks. His findings led him to the conclusion that religious development "...is subject to arrest as well as growth. Some of the arresting forces leave the individual with an infantile form of religious belief, self-serving and superstitious" (Allport, 1955, p. 96).

Although there has been, over the past sixty years, intermittent research in the field of what is termed "The Psychology of Religion" much of what has been produced has been on a psychoanalytical or philosophical level (Freud, 1955; Fromm, 1950; Robinson, 1963; Berton, 1965). Among the first-hand investigations that have been conducted (Bovet, 1928; Loomba, 1944; Harms, 1944; Bose, 1959; Hyde, 1963; Ackland, 1963), few have dealt with the specific problem of pre-school children and their concept development in relation to religious thinking.

Some other investigations have been funded by traditional religious organizations anxious to borrow scientific support for theological teachings, but since these studies usually follow the outline or framework laid down by the sponsoring organization, it is difficult to classify them as free enquiries. They fail to heed the warning of depth psychology against projecting one's own biases and wishes into scientific undertakings. Godin (1965) discusses the dilemma of religious psychologists who

wish to study Christian life by systematic observation and positive methods, and yet take care not to run the risk of presenting a gnostic interpretation of religious life. Godin lists the principles that outline the framework of one of the accepted lines of religious research. They include such dicta as:

1. All question of the Transcendent must be given up. The nature or truth of transphenomenal reality eludes the work of scientific psychology.
2. It is impossible to assess the formally religious relation actually established between subjects and the reality considered transcendent. The position that the subject adopts, as a total personality, is not a matter of quantified observations. There is no psychological test for sanctity.

Mailhiot's (1965) work is representative of the type of research conducted by religious psychologists. (He is an ordained priest.) His is one of the few studies which attempt to investigate the religious world of children four to five years of age. One of Mailhiot's basic assumptions is that: "Religious teachers know from theology that at their entrance to the Infant Grade, small Catholics possess, in the infused state, belief in God, hope in God, and love

God, ever since their baptism" (p. 109). According to Mailhiot, one of the important findings of his study is as follows:

> In short, God is thought of as a Child, Jesus; a Child, like them yet unlike them, the perfect child, the Child par excellence. As soon as Our Lord is put before them as growing up or grown-up, still more when He is presented as God the Son in relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit, the children seem lost, and cease to think in religious terms (p. 117).

Since the average age of the subjects used in the study was 4 years 8 months, however, it is doubtful if the drawing tests used by Mailhiot were valid.

Many of the investigations carried out by non-affiliated educators or psychologists, on the other hand, are concerned with the stages of development of the moral or religious thinking of school-age children, using Piaget's theory of the development of operational thinking as a comparative guide. Good examples of this kind of study are those of Bull (1969); Goldman (1968, 1969); Elkind (1964); and Lawrence (1965).

Elkind (1964) used Piaget's semi-clinical interview method to explore the child's own interpretations of religious terms and practices, and to find evidence of a developmental trend from concrete to abstract thinking in the spontaneous religious conceptions of children from 5 to 12 years. Lawrence (1965) was interested in the transition

from concrete to formal operational thinking, and its significance to religious education. He relied upon parents' recollections of questions of a religious nature asked by children from 7 to 12 years, and upon diaries kept by parents and Sunday school teachers over a period of 6 months in which they recorded such questions. Although Goldman (1969) did not include children under six in his sample, and although his purposes were different, his work has been found most relevant to the present investigation.

## Research on Children's Thinking in General

Before the manner in which young children conceptualize religious matters was investigated, it seemed necessary to examine how they conceptualize other phenomena. If it is agreed that religious thinking is not specific, theory and research on children's thinking in general should be applicable to the area of religion.

Jersild (1954) reviewed investigations into children's concept development and conducted several original studies. According to Jersild: "Children's knowledge and understanding are profoundly influenced by a factor we call 'seasoning' ...It is necessary for the child to have an accumulation of impressions and experiences over a long period of development as distinguished from lessons or impressions concentrated within a limited period"

(p. 459). Jersild has uncovered much evidence that indicates that there is a discrepancy between what is expected of children and what they achieve. This discrepancy, he argues, is due to the failure to understand that what the child is taught is always interpreted in the light of his every day experiences (p. 469).

Navarra's (1956) study confirms the findings of Jersild. Navarra concluded that the young child's conceptual growth is a gradual process in which he attempts to make sense out of new experiences or explanations by relating them to information he has already accumulated. Navarra maintains, after analyzing the data gathered through recorded observations of a three year old over a long period of time, that: "The child must continually rely on his ability to make deductions from what he considers reliable rules within his past experience" (p. 101).

Isaac's (1963) records also substantiate the belief that the young child's attempt to organize, assimilate and relate new information is entirely logical in terms of previous experience. Both Isaacs and Navarra offer evidence that the child seeks relationships in any information with which he is presented. Navarra noted that: "When confronted with perplexing information, he first seeks the partially familiar items in the information, and his hypothesis is then formulated on the basis of the familiar item which has meaning within his experience" (p. 98).

James' (1949) writings support this view. He declared that adults form new ideas and opinions in much the same way. He wrote that new opinions are always grafted upon the ancient stock in such a manner that there will be a minimum of disturbance to the latter. Individuals then come up with an idea "...that mediates between the stock and the new experience and run into one another most felicitously and expediently" (p. 11).

The findings of Deutsche (1937) conflict with the notion that the child's thinking differs in *form* from that of the adult as described by James. Deutsche's results do not support those of Piaget (1929) which led him to conclude that children's reasoning develops by stages, the characteristics of which constitute a particular type of childish thinking. Hazlitt (1926) also questions Piaget's contention that children's logic is different from that of the adult. Her study pointed up that any difference in conclusion is due to lack of experience: "There is no development of a process; there is merely the acquisition of experience, which the individual can interact more or less with other experience" (p. 24).

Tolman (1951) and Woodworth (1947) conclude that the tendency of the human organism to group experiences that have properties in common demonstrates some sort of cognitive need; Bartlett (1932) suggests an effort after meaning. The "effort after meaning", however, is made

difficult for the child if what he is expected to learn is heavily dependent upon verbal interpretation.

Russell (1957), in essays dealing with the special problems of logic, discusses "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description". Russell states: "All propositions intelligible to us, whether or not they primarily concern things only known to us by description, are composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted, for a constituent with which we are not acquainted is unintelligible to us" (p. 223). "In short", as Goldman (1969) has since asserted, "little can be taught effectively which is foreign to the child and which does not arise naturally from his experience" (p. 47).

Sanford (1965), attempting to make clear the difference between concepts and the linguistic symbols connected to them, cites two studies that illustrate the subtlety of learned connections among words: (1) Brown's (1962), that indicates that the child, when faced with the task of making a proper response to a word he encounters, first notes the concrete instance wherein it is used, and subsequently learns new words through their connection with those already familiar to him. (2) Riess's (1950), that points out the phenomena of generalization in linguistic learning and indicates that children are more likely than adults to generalize to homonyms, the tendency to generalize to synonyms increasing with age and experience (pp. 409-410).

A favourite game of young children is playing with words, and much of their humour involves the use of puns. At the same time hononyms (words that sound alike but have different meanings) are the source of much confusion on the part of the child who is attempting to derive meaning from a verbal explanation. When a child first encounters the word "reign", for instance, without having had experience with the concept it symbolizes, he will connect it to the word "rain", with which, through his past experience, he is already familiar.

Such a tendency creates the comic effect that is often generated when children attempt interpretations of religious stories. The following is an example of an interpretation, which to the child is perfectly reasonable in the light of his familiarity with the words involved. To the adult, however, who has more experience with the concepts the words symbolize, the interpretation is highly humourous: A six year old was asked by his Sunday school teacher to illustrate the biblical story of Mary and Joseph's flight into Egypt. He promptly drew a picture of an aeroplane with three passengers in the back and one person in the front of the plane. When questioned, he explained that the three passengers were Mary, Joseph, and their baby, and the person in the front was Pontius, the pilot.

Koestler (1967) analyzes the adult's reaction to

such statements. Koestler reasons that:

> It is the interaction between two mutually exclusive associative contexts that produces the comic effect. It compels us to perceive the situation at the same time in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference; it makes us function on two wave-lengths simultaneously....The event is not, as is normally the case, perceived in a single frame of reference, but *bisociated* with two (p. 216).

Koestler calls this the "HAHA" reaction which results when a marriage of incompatibles debunks our expectations (p. 217).

Sanford (1965), after reviewing a number of studies that investigated the functioning of verbalized concepts in problem solving, concludes that any one word can set off its own chain of verbal or conceptual responses (p. 411). In the above problem of the six year old, the word "flight" suggested "aeroplane", and Pontius naturally followed as the "pilot". "Thus" according to Sanford, "the ready-made verbal-conceptual chains the individual brings with him into a problem situation may affect the solution he finds" (p. 412).

Many authorities have also noted that the young child's attempt to make sense out of his world is continuously hampered by misleading information, and that much of his energy is devoted to the sorting out of fact from fantasy. Most agree that the strongest ally a child can have in this respect is a rich store of credible information to which he

can refer for guidelines in his search for logical explanations.

Craig (1944) has found that many of the explanations offered to the child are not reliable, but are a mixture of fact, superstition and downright mis-information. However, the child must make the best of whatever information is available to him. Frequently, Craig says, what adults term misconceptions on the part of the child "are indications of an active mind, of attempts to associate scraps of information from various sources, and to mix them all with a fantasy of his own." He cites the following as an example:

Mildred to Henry: "How far away is the sun?"

Henry: "It is away up in heaven."

Mildred: "It isn't in heaven at night, 'cause I saw it come down."

James: "Well, God can't sleep with the sun in his eyes, so he sends it down."

Craig comments on the association of information gathered from adults with the children's own observations and every-day experiences. A process that adults often fail to appreciate because they disregard the logical elements in such thinking (pp. 6-9).

Navarra (1956) observes that when the child encounters events or explanations which appear to him as incredible (that is, he can find no reasonable explanation

for them on the basis of his past experiences), he often places them in the category of "magic"; a category that serves as a sort of catch-all for things that *appear* to happen, or have been said to have happened, but make no sense to him in the light of his every-day experience (p. 105). This point of view is supported by the number of recorded conversations that include references to "magic" as the young child's explanation of the miraculous events that occur in many Bible stories.

Huizinga (1955) notes that the normal child is quite aware that his own fantasies are "not real"; that they are apart from the "real" world; that his own play world of "just pretend" is just that - pretend. He becomes confused, however, when adults present their own fantasies to him as real happenings. Santa Claus, the Easter bunny and the tooth fairy are common examples of traditional fantasies that many adults present to children as facts.

Wolff (1947) insists that if one is to understand the thinking of young children, one must realize that this thinking is based upon concrete types of experiences. Wolff maintains that their conclusions, if regarded from this point of view, are completely sensible and logical. Maslow (1962) states that this type of thinking, because of its highly desirable qualities, should be encouraged. He lays great stress upon the importance of starting from experiencial knowledge rather than from systems of concepts

or abstract categories or a prioris. Maslow notes that many writers today are re-examining the orthodox ways of thinking common in the western world of the 20th century; that they are part of a current call back to raw experience as a basis for any concepts or abstractions. He states that we need to get closer to actual processes, to raw data, to concrete happenings. Perhaps then, according to Maslow, we would see the real world instead of our own systems of abstractions, theories and beliefs, or those of our cultural group which we project onto the real world.

Authorities on semantics believe that concrete thinking promotes problem solving and communication. Ogden and Richards (1936) agree that it is the misuse of abstractions that is one of the main problems of semantics. They contributed a technical term "the referent", by which they mean the object or situation in the real world to which the symbol, word or label refers. Chase (1938), after studying the science of communication, observes that if adults would emulate children and be more diligent in their search for referents, communication would not be so effectively blocked as it so often is. A symbol without a referent hangs in mid-air and has no meaning for a child, or for anyone else for that matter. If referents for symbols of such high-order abstractions as God, holy, heaven and so forth are difficult to find in his concrete, every-day experiences, he does the best he can, even though his

efforts may not be acceptable from the adult point of view.

Although this cannot, of course, be a survey of all the literature on children's thinking, an attempt has been made to provide a representative sampling of the kinds of studies that have been conducted in the general area of religion, and the findings of acknowledged authorities on the thinking processes of both adults and children. There is a surprising lack of study dealing with the specific problem of disparity between the religious concepts adults aim to teach the pre-school child and those the child actually forms. No studies could be found that explored the possibility that the young child's thinking in the area of religion is logical in terms of his past experience. It is hoped that this attempt to throw some light on these matters will provide some clues that will lead to further investigation.

## Methodological Studies of Qualitative Research Techniques

> In most of the behavioral sciences there seems to exist an uneasy compromise between those who conceive of research as a highly structured, objective and rigorous affair and those who are more qualitatively oriented and less concerned with rigorous proof. Claims of superiority are made by advocates of both methods, but trivial or fruitful results may be the outcome of either (Phillips, 1966, p. 83).

Phillips states this in a discussion of the goals and methods

of the social sciences. He points out that such arguments (as to the superiority or inferiority of methods) are not founded upon a rational basis, since one may be more appropriate to a given problem than another. Both types of studies are useful in contributing to scientific knowledge; the quantitative in the context of justification, and the qualitative in the context of discovery.

Many other scientists whose goals include the achievement of explanations or predictions of human behavior share Phillips' opinions. Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook (1955) suggest that research studies be classified in terms of major intent: (1) *as a formulative or exploratory study* whose purpose is the formulation of a problem for further research; (2) *as a descriptive or diagnostic study*, the function of which is to assess the characteristics of a given situation; or (3) *as an experimental study*, the goal of which is the testing of clearly formed hypotheses (p. 28). Commenting upon the tendency to apply the term "scientific" only to experimental research and to underestimate the importance of qualitative work, the same authors propose that "If experimental work is to have any theoretical or social value, it must be relevant to broader issues than the limited materials of the experiment" (p. 33).

Sampson (1967) also maintains that a more flexible approach (than that employed by the experimental researcher) is necessary for the investigation of some problems. In a

review of the uses and limitations of qualitative research, he outlines some of the areas which call for more flexible methods: (1) concept identification and exploration; (2) identification of relevant behavior patterns, attitudes, motivation etc.; (3) the establishment of priorities amongst and within categories of behavior, attitudes etc.; and (4) the definition of problem areas, and the formulation of hypotheses for further investigation (p. 30). Because his work is mainly exploratory, the investigator need not be concerned with large numbers of subjects and need not attempt to quantify his results. "Research of this nature" continues Sampson "can be termed 'Qualitative' research as opposed to 'Quantitative' research where relatively large numbers of people are interviewed on the basis of a carefully constructed sample, and where data obtained is computed on some arithmetical basis, and a degree of statistical significance attributed to it" (p. 31).

It depends then, upon the aims of the investigator. If his interests centre, as Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook suggest, on the development of insights and the discovery of hypotheses for further research (rather than upon the testing of hypotheses) the qualitative or exploratory approach is his logical choice. If his main interest is discovery, then the tools and techniques employed must be flexible enough to allow him to change the focus of his study as new insights and new evidence are encountered. In

the course of such an investigation issues and questions may be raised which might not have been previously considered as relevant (pp. 34-43).

Margaret Mead (1972), in her recently published autobiography, comments upon the role of the anthropologist as a pioneer in the use of qualitative techniques. As a student in the twenties she had been exposed to the type of psychology that emulated "scientific" standards of physics in which rigorously controlled test and measurement procedures were of prime importance. However, when she actually went into the field to study small isolated cultures, she found it necessary to invent new observational methods and felt no need to quantify her material (p. 125).

> As the physician and the psychiatrist have found it necessary to describe each case separately and to use their cases as illumination of a thesis rather than as irrefutable proof such as is possible to adduce in the physical sciences, so the student of the more intangible and psychological aspects of human behavior is forced to *illuminate* rather than *demonstrate* a thesis (Mead, 1932, p. 260).

Thus Mead defended her methods, arguing that the type of data she needed in Samoa was not the sort that lent itself easily to quantitative treatment; that routine facts may be summarized on a table, but are hardly raw material for the understanding of attitudes and beliefs (Mead, 1932, p. 11).

Navarra (1955), who was interested in just how

scientific concepts are developed in young children, gathered his information by recording the day-to-day spontaneous activities of a three year old. He has this to say about qualitative research and the case study method:

> ...*let it be clear*, the purpose is not to use the study of this one child to prove anything. The intentions are to illustrate a method of study which provides clues and leads to further investigation. That is, the process by which a particular child learns will provide *insights* concerning how other children learn (p. 2).

Turner and Robb (1971) suggest that any investigator should be informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the available data collecting instruments; some being more appropriate than others for his particular problem (p. 129). A review of qualitative studies aimed at the exploration of the concepts, attitudes and beliefs of young children reveals that this appears to be standard procedure. Each contains an initial examination of several methods of acquiring desired information, together with conclusions as to the suitability of some and the non-suitability of others to his particular problem. The writer reviewed these methods and some of the conclusions that have been arrived at concerning the strengths and weaknesses of each, in order to consider which would be more suitable for the exploratory problem of the research to be reported.

The Questionaire

While both the questionaire and the interview methods rely upon verbal reports, the former limits the information to written responses to prearranged questions. Immediately the investigator is faced with the problem of literacy. As Jahoda, Deutsh, and Cook point out, this method cannot be considered even for quantitative research if the respondents do not have reading and writing skills or are unable to handle complex questions (p. 157).

Goldman (1968) was faced with this problem when he began his study of the development of religious thinking from childhood to adolescence. Since the age range of his subjects was from six to seventeen, tests that called for reading skills and written responses could obviously not be used at all for the younger children, and although they were subsequently utilized to some extent for the adolescents, they yielded interesting, but limited results. According to Goldman, these limitations are due to several factors: (1) written responses are brief and impossible to explore in depth; (2) even for the child who can read and write, written responses may be coloured by the child's desire to impress or conceal his true opinions in case they may be unacceptable; (3) such tests are usually administered in group situations, and therefore personal rapport is not easily established; (4) written tests are tiring for all ages, and do not allow for frequent breaks as a more

flexible method might do (p. 35).

Piaget (1929), after examining several methods for their possible use in his analyses of the form and function of child thought, outlines the advantages and disadvantages of the questionaire. The test method (for those children who can read and write) fulfils the requirements for *quantitative* analysis in that (1) the questions and conditions remain the same for each child; (2) the answers can be related to a scale which may serve as a standard of comparison; (3) children may be diagnosed individually; and (4) the resulting statistics often provide useful information. However, for the purposes of *qualitative* analysis, the disadvantages were such that he was forced to give up all ideas of the fixed questionaire. In Piaget's opinion, the important defects are: (1) the stereotyped conditions yield only rough results which are useless in theory owing to lack of context; (2) the child's spontaneous thought is not allowed to flow freely, but is diverted into the artificial channels of question and answer; and (3) his primitive reactions and spontaneous interests are thus neglected (pp. 3-4).

Margaret Mead (1932), while relying heavily upon material gathered through months of observation and informal interviews, found that the results of some formal tests she gave the Samoan girls did prove to be useful in some respects. These tests (colour naming, rote memory, ball and

field, picture interpretation, intelligence) were relevant "...in regard to the variability within the group, as the smaller the variability within the sample, the greater the general variability of the results" (p. 260). The data collected through observation and interviews had pointed up a striking similarity in attitudes, beliefs and life-styles. The tests helped to confirm this small variability and thus helped to justify the generalizations that were made in spite of the fact that her subjects consisted of only fifty girls in three small neighboring villages. Furthermore, in a culture that had little respect for privacy but a great deal for (missionary type) examinations, informal interviews could be carried out with comparatively few interruptions if the adults were given to understand that their children were being tested. Also, some of the tests, particularly the colour naming and picture interpretation, intrigued the children and facilitated the interview situation considerably; the latter serving as a sort of projective technique for gaining further insight as to thoughts and attitudes. (It was not until later that Mead's friend Lawrence Frank (1939) applied the term "projective technique" to this kind of instrument.)

Bull (1969), who investigated the development of moral judgement from childhood to adolescence, also found that written tests were useful, but only to a limited degree. Since his subjects, like those of Goldman, ranged

in age from seven to seventeen years, written tests could only be used for the older children who possessed reading and writing skills. However, because of the impossibility of exploring written responses in depth, he and his colleagues found the personal interview, augmented by visual projection material, to be a far more effective information gathering device. For the older children, written tests were only used to produce further evidence, and reasons for answers were always required and those reasons were always used in the assessment (pp. 34-35).

Interview Methods

Since the main emphasis of a qualitative study is exploration and discovery, and its major characteristic is flexibility, it is not surprising that the data gathering tools chosen most often include the interview. This is especially true of child studies. However, it must be born in mind that there are many different kinds of interviews, and that the choice of one or another approach is dependent upon the aims of the interviewer. As Sampson states: "Largely as a result of clinical psychologists and anthropological fieldwork, a varied assortment of interviews has developed. Such interviews take various forms and go under various names" (p. 32). The list is fairly extensive and includes: the directive interview; the non-directive interview; the structured interview; the unstructured

interview; the standardized interview; the unstandardized interview; the focused, or semi-structured interview; and the clinical interview.

All interviews, nevertheless, regardless of name, are more flexible and less structured than the questionaire method we have been discussing. The contrast should be drawn, as Phillips points out "...not between *structured* and *unstructured* (interview) methods, but rather between *more structured* and *less structured* methods (p. 84). Sampson also notes that the amount of structure and intensity "...are relative terms and need to vary according to requirements" (p. 32).

For purposes of clarity, however, interview situations may be classified into three broad groups:

(1) The standardized, or *more structured interview* is one in which the interviewer must not change the wording or the order of the questions, or probe deeper into the meaning behind the answers by asking other questions.

(2) The semi-standardized, or *semi-structured interview* is one in which the interviewer, although armed with certain major questions in a given order, is free to change the wording of those questions to make sure that the respondent completely understands. He is also free to ask further questions which

probe beyond the answers he receives.

(3) The unstandardized, or *less structured interview* is one in which the interviewer may allow the situation to develop in any way he wishes, if that development is appropriate to his purposes. Although he is well aware of the goals of his study, and the sort of information he wishes to obtain, he is free to follow up any new ideas that may come up during the course of the interview.

The latter approach seems to be more appropriate than the others for the discovery and hypotheses development which are the goals of this present investigation. Following is a closer look at some of the forms and functions of this method.

## The Less Structured Interview

Carl Rogers is probably the best known advocate of the less directive approach to interviews conducted for psychotherapeutic purposes. In what Rogers terms the "non-directive counseling situation", the interviewer creates a permissive atmosphere in which the respondent feels free to express his attitudes, feelings and beliefs without fear of criticism or disapproval. Although as little direction as possible is given by the interviewer, he is always conscious

of the kinds of data that are relevant to his needs. He is not bound, however by any particular wording or ordering of questions. This type of interview is not entirely without structure, however. Rogers (1942) summarizes the situation in this way: "The situation is a well structured one, with limits of time, of dependence and of aggressive action which apply to the client, and limits of responsibility and of affection which the counselor imposes upon himself." Rogers credits the thinking of Otto Rank and other individuals such as Karen Horney for the development of this kind of "relationship" therapy, and suggests that its uses go beyond that of psychiatric diagnosis (p. 28).

Piaget has adopted this method of interviewing and adapted it to his particular purposes. He calls his approach the "clinical interview" and uses it to gain information from children as to their natural conceptions of the world at different stages of their development. His work has had a great deal of influence on later researchers also interested in gaining insight into the conceptual development of young children.

Merton and Kendall (1946) have also designed a form of less structured interview which is known as the "focused interview". In this situation the interviewer has prepared a list of topics which focus upon the problem under investigation, but here again the wording and order of his questions are not specified. He is free to discover whether

or not the stimuli to which the respondent was exposed have undergone any perceptual distortion, and if so, what factors were involved in this distortion. The respondent is encouraged to express his subjective experiences, attitudes and thoughts freely, but is confined by the interviewer to those issues that have to do with the particular situation about which he (the interviewer) wishes information.

Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) discuss in detail the uses of the non-directive interview in employer-employee relationships and outline a set of rules as a guide for business and industrial situations. It is interesting that the items they stress as important coincide with the opinions of Piaget in at least two main points: (1) The interviewer should not: (a) pay exclusive attention to the manifest content of the intercourse; (b) treat everything that is said as either fact or error; (c) treat everything that is said at the same psychological level. (2) The interviewer should consider not only what a person wants to say, but also what he does not want to say, or cannot say without help.

## Some Advantages of the Less Structured Interview in Qualitative Research

Researchers such as Goldman and Bull stress that in order to uncover a child's actual feelings and beliefs, it is necessary to establish a suitable rapport between

interviewer and respondent. Goldman (1968) remarks that motivation is considerably helped when a friendly, personally concerned adult conducts the discussions. Even a shy inarticulate child is anxious to cooperate if he is asked to help an adult in an important task. In an atmosphere of complete acceptance, wherein it is stressed that there are no right or wrong answers, the child is more likely to reveal his true thoughts (pp. 44-47).

With young children the problem of fatigue is always an important consideration. In a less structured interview, the interviewer is in a better position to observe the respondent and to note carefully not only what is said, but how it is said, and is free to stop the session at the first sign of fatigue. It is also notable that the more relaxed the situation is, the longer the attention span appears to be.

Although the problem of literacy is eliminated in the interview, certain other problems of verbal behavior arise. For example: How far may the child deceive the interviewer as to his true beliefs? What about verbal facility? How much influence does the interviewer have in "suggesting" answers to the child? How many of the answers convey to the interviewer that which he most desires - the spontaneous convictions of the child?

The less structured interview helps to solve, or at least to minimize these problems in several ways. The

permissive atmosphere reduces the possibility of the child having the desire to "show off" or impress the adult. The freedom to use follow-up questions ("Can you put that in another way?" "How do you mean ...?" "What makes you think ...?") helps to reveal the suspected responses as mere glib, learned verbalism; helps to uncover any obscurities in thinking; and helps to reveal a more accurate picture of the child's actual concepts.

Piaget (1929) analyzes five types of answers that were the most common responses to questions asked during the course of his clinical interviews, and suggests methods of recognizing both the suspected and most sought-after answers.

(1) Random Answers

The child is not interested in the question, and answers with the first idea that pops into his head. Further questions will undoubtedly reveal the instability of such answers.

(2) Romancing Answers

Here the child, although interested in the question and the answer, does not take the time to think, but immediately invents an answer which he either does not believe himself, or he may be convinced of its truth merely by the saying of it. This type is difficult to recognize in isolated cases, but if a number of

children are being questioned it is easier to detect. If such answers are peculiar to a particular child, they could be classed as suspect, but if they are general to children of a particular age range, they may be classed as spontaneous convictions.

(3) Suggested Conviction Answers

The child makes a considered attempt to answer, but the answer may have been suggested by the question itself; he may be trying to say what he thinks the interviewer wishes to hear. This kind of answer may be disclosed as such by further indirect questions that contain counter-suggestions, since such convictions usually have little connection with a child's other convictions.

(4) Liberated Conviction Answers

The child takes time to think about the question. It may be one that he has not thought about before, and his answer comes about as a result of drawing upon his previous knowledge and experience.

(5) Spontaneous Conviction Answers

Here the child has no need to reason because he has previously reflected upon this type of problem and has no trouble in answering. The

> spontaneous conviction reply, then, is the result of previous original reflection. Further indirect questions will reveal the stability of such convictions.

Piaget comments that although both the liberated and spontaneous conviction answers are relevant, they are difficult to distinguish from one another: (1) Both resist suggestion; (2) The roots of both lie in the true thoughts of the child; (3) Both are general in children at the same stage of development; (4) Both decrease gradually in the face of more mature thinking and experience; (5) Both in some respects are dependent upon the influence of the adult environment. *Only by recourse to pure observation can we be at all sure.* Piaget feels that the study of questions that children ask spontaneously is the most helpful way to reveal the child's natural trend of thought (pp. 11-22).

The role of the interviewer in the less structured situation is obviously a very important one. It calls for a great deal of skill and sensitivity that is gained only through experience in the study and observation of children, and through much practice of interviewing techniques. The skilled interviewer constructs the interview and conducts himself in such a manner that will put the child at ease and bring out the sought after responses. "It is so hard" admits Piaget "not to talk too much when questioning a child, especially for a pedagogue. It is so hard not to be

suggestive!" The good interviewer must walk the thin line of allowing the child to talk freely, and yet at the same time constantly bear in mind the hypotheses he is checking or seeking. "When students begin, they either suggest to the child all they hope to find, or they suggest nothing at all because they are not on the look-out for anything, in which case to be sure, they will never find anything" (p. 9).

Projective Techniques

In most of the studies dealing with concept development in young children, the investigators have used some sort of projective device (usually the thematic picture type) to supplement the information gained by other means. Many of these tests have been designed especially for the particular problems and age groups involved in a study, and have proved to be useful in obtaining data that the investigators felt would not be available in interviews or through extended observations.

Freeman (1955) describes a "projective" device as one which presents a more or less undefined (unstructured) stimulus situation, usually in the form of pictures or inkblots. It is assumed that the person being tested will impose (or project) his own private and particular personality traits, and thus reveal to the investigator more information than he would through questioning methods (pp. 17-18). The best known of these instruments are the

Roschach inkblot tests and the Thematic Apperception test. The former are used for purposes of diagnosis by some psychiatrists; the latter consist of thirty ambiguous pictures, each on a separate card, and one blank card. The person being tested is asked to make up his own story for each picture. It is assumed that as he does so he will reveal his inner feelings, attitudes and beliefs about the world around him and his relationship to it.

Other types commonly used include: word association, story telling, story completion, drawing, painting, and situational tests where a person is observed in a setting that simulates reality. Contrived play activities (play therapy), where one child is observed with certain play materials are used both to permit the child to project some inner aspects of his personality, and to serve as therapy for certain problems.

Many qualitative researchers use a combination of pictures and stories to gain further information on attitudes, feelings and beliefs, which direct questioning (because of willingness or ability on the part of the respondent) may fail to provide. Goldman (1968) used pictorial devices as part of his interview procedure; each picture being designed from the point of view of its appropriateness to the age, size and sex of the child who was interviewed. "The results" he says "in general appear to support the view that the picture items assisted the

pupils being interviewed to project their characteristic modes of response into the picture situation sufficiently to reveal concepts of church, prayer and bible" (p. 45). Many specialists, however caution that the usual specifications of standardization important to *quantitative* research cannot and should not be applied to projective techniques. Others question the assumption that projective techniques obtain more data than do interview methods.

Matson (1966), in a discussion of the "quest for measurable certainty" states: "But in marked opposition to these prevailing assumptions, the findings of numerous depth-probing tests in recent years have strongly confirmed the individual's right to be believed by demonstrating that normal persons relate by the "direct method" precisely what they reveal by the "projective method" (p. 174). Allport (1960) agrees. He concluded that: "The most urgent, the most absorbing motive in life failed completely to reveal itself by indirect methods. It was, however, entirely accessible to conscious report." In Allport's opinion, the best way to find out about what a person is trying to do in this world, and therefore what the world means to him is to *ask* him (pp. 97-98).

Pure Observation

Although Piaget's (1929) material was collected mainly by means of the clinical method, he actually made use

of a number of methods of observation. He recorded conversations with children, children's explanations of phenomena demonstrated by an adult, as well as interviews with children. "Observation he says "must be at once the starting point of all research dealing with child thought and also the final control on the experiments it has inspired" (p. 4). "The questions asked of children were based upon the data collected through painstaking observation. The form and content of those questions were determined by the form and content of those questions children of the same age ask spontaneously" (p. 5).

It should be made clear, however, that Piaget (1959) does not mean by this that the data was collected entirely through observations of the spontaneous *activities* of the child. Rather, the child's "spontaneous" questions were noted "...in the course of daily talks lasting up to two hours; each talk was a sort of lesson by conversation, but of a very free character, during which the child was allowed to say anything he liked" (p. 163).

This kind of observation has been criticized by many child study researchers. Susan Isaacs, who has published several volumes of observations taken from the records written down by the staff of her Cambridge school (from 1924 to 1927), maintains that the observation of the free activities of children is far more effective than conversation in exploring the development of certain types

of concepts. Isaacs (1963) found that her records showed clearly that the problem-solving abilities of children are discerned very clearly by observing them in direct, intimate contact with material things. Contrary to Piaget, she emphasizes the importance of watching the child's intelligence actually at work in his everyday practical pursuits and social relations (pp. 4-5).

Navarra (1955), whose basic tool in the study of the development of scientific concepts in a young child is the daily recording of observations, defines spontaneous activity, and explains its value to those who are interested in gaining information about the learning process:

> Much emphasis has been given to the factor of spontaneity in intensive studies of children. Spontaneous activity is taken to be activity which is, in so far as possible, freely initiated by the child himself. This means, of course, that an intensive study should be concerned with the free play activity of the child. An important factor in any such study would be the intrinsic significance of his activity to the child. And since it seems highly probable that self-initiated play activity would be significant from his point of view, close attention to such activity would seem to insure that the most valid indicators of the learning process engaged in by the child are being assessed (p. 22).

Navarra's study includes an extensive review of investigations which have dealt with the general problem of concept development, and which were based upon observations of self-

initiated activities. Many report instances of children responding to their environment in ways that indicated that they had attained a concept even though they may not have been able to verbalize that concept.

If the observer is to record a child's activity in a group situation, he must learn to be as unobtrusive as possible. He should be there, and not there at the same time. It is best to be stationed as near as possible to the activity to be recorded, but not so close that the observer will impinge upon it. This is no easy task. There are things that no observer does: stand in doorways or other lines of traffic, or in front of sources of supply; initiate conversation or interaction with children; hold up the activity by asking questions or by giving unasked for advice.

Pertinent information should be entered in a notebook, jotted down in some form of shorthand, and written up more fully later in the same day. Each record should contain the child's name, age, sex, and any other information that might be relevant. The time of day and the duration of the activity should be noted in the margin. The general situation or setting in which the activity occurs should be briefly described. No interpretations or subjective remarks, such as: "He was very happy"; "He was upset"; "He was cross"; "He was hostile"; and so on, should be included; only descriptions of what is actually done or said, and the manner in which it is done or said. Hartley,

Frank and Goldenson (1962) suggest that on the spot records of a child's behavior at different times of the day, in different situations is a sensible approach for observations in a nursery school or kindergarten: during routines; while using various kinds of materials; interacting with peers, and with adults. Navarra's intensive study of a three year old was on a 24 hour a day basis, and thus necessitated the involvement of the mother as a collaborator.

Cohen and Stern (1960) outline the whys as well as the hows and whats of recording observations. They emphasize that the goal of such an undertaking should not be for purposes of diagnosis or interpretation, but rather for the gathering of clues to aid in the better understanding of the ways in which children grow and develop. Since children best reveal themselves through the language of behavior, people who are interested in such things must acquire techniques of observing and recording what children do with their bodies as what they say with their mouths.

Children's religious concepts, however, are seldom, if ever, revealed through their spontaneous play. It has been observed by the writer (as well as by many students who record the play activities of children) that the young child rarely chooses religious themes for dramatic play. This is contrary to the opinions of Slade (1967), who states "... that an ever popular story for playing is the Christmas story with its Father, Mother, Baby, Journey and the star"

(p. 50). In most cases an adult has initiated and directed the acting out of such themes. Children do, however, often discuss and argue about religion among themselves, and valuable insights into their concepts of God, Jesus Christ and life after death may be obtained through the careful recording of spontaneous conversations.

## The Organization of Data in Qualitative Research

In qualitative research, data is never merely gathered, and then inspected or analyzed at the end of the study. As each item is collected, it is scrutinized for its possibility as an important lead to further data collecting. Sometimes a single incident will provide a clue to the understanding, or clarification of the situation or problem under study. Margaret Mead (1972) comments that these clues may be gathered quite incidently during the course of the investigation. In New Guinea, for instance, when she and her husband had divided up the work so that he concentrated on the culture, and she on the language, children and technology, a very important clue was almost missed. While Mead was recording the children's terminology, she discovered a lead to the understanding of the whole kinship system. Other clues might come from a ceremonial dance or other cultural event, which in turn might change the whole course of the investigation (p. 205).

Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook (1955) point out that it

is the purpose of the final *analysis* to arrange the completed observations in such a manner that they are helpful in yielding answers to research questions. It is the purpose of *interpretation* to search for the broader meanings behind these answers by linking them to other available scientific knowledge. Problems of analysis and interpretation vary from study to study, but they do present greater difficulties in qualitative, than in quantitative studies (pp. 252-257). In the former, the pattern for treating information is: the gathering of data, analysis, further collecting, further analysis and so on. It is entirely possible, of course, to count (quantify) qualities as well as quantities in research, but it is not necessary to do so. "Qualified" data usually refers to those data which are presented in the form in which they are collected, rather than in the more abstract forms of graphs, charts, or numerical scales.

If a large number of items are to be useful in illuminating a thesis, some sort of selection must be done, and the relevant items need to be organized into a meaningful pattern. Usually they are grouped into a number of separate classifications, or categories. Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook caution that a set of categories will be useful if it is derived from two main sources: a careful inspection of the evidence obtained; and a reference to hypotheses and to broader knowledge. Depending upon the aims of the

investigator and the nature of his study, different qualitative studies have solved the problem of categorization, analysis and interpretation in various ways.

Isaacs (1963) did not select out data to illustrate any particular theory, but rather to illuminate certain broad, general topics which she considered to be of importance in any genetic psychology. She therefore arranged her material into broad groupings that would describe the continuity of the children's behavior. The categories she chose were: (1) Discovery, Reasoning and Thought, with such sub-headings as: Application of knowledge; Increase of knowledge; and Social interchange of knowledge; (2) Biological Interests, with such sub-headings as: Interest in plants; and Interest in animals. Each category was well illustrated by many examples selected from the observational recordings of the children's activities. She explains her reasons for offering her material in this way:

> The total data thus brought together may then serve as a useful background for any particular series of experiments into the genetic history of intellectual development within the ages covered, and a possible source of hints for further detailed investigation (p. 7).

Navarra (1955) also decided to select a descriptive method of analysis for the presentation of his material. Since he had collected more than 4,500 entries, together

with hundreds of photographs (to illustrate non-verbal behavior), he realized that "...the analytic approach was needed to make the numerous complex records intelligible" (p. 34). The data were therefore grouped under a number of headings in order to illustrate certain tentative hypotheses: (1) Process pervades the child's activities; (2) The child is a problem solver and is problem oriented; (3) Concept growth is gradual and continuous. In so doing, Navarra expresses the hope that the analysis of the child's day-by-day activities will have a highly provocative value for future studies.

There is a growing number of scientists who plead that the qualitative research techniques described above should be considered as "scientific" as those that rely upon quantitative measurement. According to Koestler (1967), the major pillars which support the citadel of orthodoxy include the doctrine: "That the only scientific method worth that name is quantitative measurement; and consequently, that complex phenomena must be reduced to simple elements accessible to such treatment" (p. 17). Hoffman (1967), another who champions the qualitative approach, fears that the person who "...decides that only statistics can provide the objectivity and relative certainty he seeks, begins by unconsciously ignoring, and ends by consciously deriding whatever cannot be given a numerical measure or label" (p. 143).

Maslow (1962) suggests that "...we enlarge the jurisdiction of science so as to include within its realm the problems and the data of personal and experiential psychology" (p. 204). Allport (1955), in a discussion of the goals of psychology, advocates "creative controversy" about choice of methods: "It is probably a good thing to have those who favour mathematical models, animal models, psychiatric models - or no models. They cannot all be correct in all particulars, but it is essential that they have freedom to work in their own ways....Our censure should be reserved for those who would close all doors but one.... Dogmatism makes for scientific anemia" (pp. 17-18).

## Limitations of the Study

Any findings or conclusions reached in this study cannot necessarily be generalized to all pre-school children. They are limited to the thinking of this particular group of children at a private school in Saanich, B.C. However, since the population of the school is drawn from widely divergent areas surrounding the municipality, and since school fees are now subsidized by the provincial government, home backgrounds represented a cross section of life styles and socio-economic conditions.

Another possible limitation might be that all the interviews were conducted by one interviewer. However, observations of spontaneous conversations and of questions

that the children asked about religious matters were recorded by a number of observers. Some of the latter were students of early childhood education who used the kindergarten as a child study centre, and some were members of the school staff. These observations provided much useful data and many clues as to the nature of the young child's trend of thought, and influenced the type and wording of the questions used in the interviews. The following considerations influenced the decision to use one interviewer to conduct all the discussions: (1) There would be more assurance of uniformity of interview situations if the problem of a variety of skills in conversing with children was eliminated. (2) Spontaneous conviction replies would be more readily obtained if rapport between interviewer and respondents was enhanced by an interviewer who was familiar to the children and one with whom they were in the habit of exchanging ideas freely without fear of giving "right" or "wrong" answers.

The analysis and interpretation of the responses obtained in this study may raise other questions of limitations. Elkind (1964) states: "...this is present no matter what method is used, and, in fact, Piaget has given particular attention to this problem and has worked out techniques and criteria for discrimination between the significant and the trivial in children's verbalizations" (p. 132). These techniques have already been discussed, and have been found useful in the analysis and interpretation of the responses obtained in the present study.

# CHAPTER III

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

### Subjects

The subjects in this study were 30 boys and girls ranging in age from 4 years, 3 months, to 5 years 10 months. They attended the Goosey Gander Kindergarten, which was situated in the Municipality of Saanich, B.C., Canada. The programme was relatively unstructured, and was based upon the play activities that were initiated and carried out by the children. The school could be classed as an "open school" since each of its four rooms was designed and equipped for different kinds of occupations; the children were permitted to move about; encouraged to experiment in their own way with a large variety of materials both indoors and out; and expected to exchange ideas freely with one another and with the members of the staff. The majority of the children came from middle class homes, some were from working class homes, and a small percentage were from upper-middle class backgrounds. There was ongoing communication between parents and supervisors, so that information as to home life-styles and religious backgrounds was readily available.

## Procedures for the Collection and Treatment of Data

In order to ascertain whether or not there is a discrepancy between adult concepts of religious matters and those of the child, answers were sought to two questions: (1) How do adults conceptualize God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, the church, prayer, and life after death; and (2) How do children conceptualize these matters?

To obtain the adult view, parents not affiliated with religious groups were questioned. The official views of the main religious organizations were studied through an examination of the Sunday school manuals and curriculum guides used by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the United Church of Canada.

To obtain the children's views, open-ended, unstructured interviews with thirty of the pre-school children were conducted. The interviews took place at the kindergarten in an informal atmosphere, with individual children. The children's responses were then analyzed to: (1) determine their conceptualization of religious beliefs, ideas and practices; (2) explore the factors that might be involved if a disparity was found to occur between the adults' and the children's conceptualizations of religion.

The main data collecting tool was the unstandardized, or less structured interview. Since the age range of subjects was from four to six, tests that required reading, writing or drawing skills were obviously inappropriate.

Also, since children of this age seldom, if ever, (of their own accord) choose religious themes for dramatic play, observation of spontaneous activities yielded little information about their religious thinking. Recordings of spontaneous conversations, however, were more fruitful, and not only provided some data useful to the study, but also contributed valuable clues which were helpful in the choice and wording of the questions used in the interviews.

The problems of rapport, motivation and comfort were taken care of in the following manner: The interviewer was a member of the school staff who was well known to all the subjects, and was someone with whom they carried on daily conversations whenever they wished to discuss anything that interested or concerned them. Her qualifications included a knowledge of children acquired through study and observation of spontaneous physical and verbal behavior, as well as considerable practice in conducting interviews of this nature with children in this age group. To further ensure that the children would be as relaxed as possible, the interviews took place on an individual basis in a familiar room in the school they attended. Precautions were taken that no interruptions would occur, and at the first sign of fatigue on the part of the child, the interview was terminated, or postponed to another time.

Prior to the interviews, the interviewer prepared a list of the topics about which she required information:

God, Jesus Christ, the church, the Bible, prayer, and heaven or life after death. Her questions and the respondent's observations concerning these matters were taken down in shorthand during the interview, and written up in more legible form immediately after, while the conversation was still fresh in the interviewer's mind. Notes as to the age, sex and background of each respondent were then attached to the data that was gathered during the interview.

The interviewer invited the child to sit in a comfortable chair, and opened the conversation with an appeal to the child for his help: "I am doing some writing about what children do at Sunday school or church. I don't go myself, so I thought you might be able to help me out. Do you go to church, or Sunday school?"

If the answer was "yes", the interviewer asked further questions designed to encourage the child to talk about his church experiences: "Do you go often?"; "Who do you go with?"; "What sort of things do you do there?".

If the answer was "no", the interviewer followed up with other questions that might reveal the child's knowledge or impressions of religious institutions and the religious concepts associated with them: "Do you know anyone who goes to church or Sunday school?"; Do you have any idea what people do there?".

After the initial appeal for help, and the opening

questions, the interviewer deliberately did not confine herself to any particular order or wording of further questions. In order to avoid biassing the results by any preconceived set of formal questions, her comments and queries depended entirely upon the manner in which each particular conversation developed. However, the respondents were allowed to talk freely about their experiences, thoughts and feelings, while at the same time the interviewer attempted to direct the discussion toward the religious topics about which she required information.

If, during the course of the interview, the respondent mentioned one of the topics under investigation, the interviewer encouraged him to express in a little more detail his knowledge, impressions or beliefs about the matter: "Can you tell me a little more about that?" If at any time the child's observation was not clear to her, she probed a little deeper into the meaning behind it: "How do you mean ------?" If, on the other hand, the child did not bring up one of the topics under investigation, the interviewer introduced the subject herself: "Have you ever heard of ------?"; or "Can you tell me something about ------?"

If a reply was suspected as a "random answer", further questions were asked in order to confirm the stability of the conviction expressed. If an answer was suspected as one suggested by the question itself, or one

that might have been given in an attempt to please the interviewer, further indirect questions were asked in order to test its connection with the child's other convictions. Other replies that might be considered to be "romancing answers" were handled in the same way. In order to ascertain if any answer was general to the children being tested, or peculiar to one child (and thus might be suspect), each answer was compared to those of the other children. Only those answers that appeared to be "typical" were used in the final analysis.

Most of the children were anxious for their "turn" to talk intimately with a friendly adult; most were pleased to be in a position to help, and cheerfully volunteered needed information. One child pulled up her chair and said: "I'll tell you all about it, and then you can be a Sunday school teacher like Mrs. Brown!".

Example of an Interview

Subject: M.E., boy, 5 years, 3 months.
Does not attend Sunday school.
Parents are not church-goers, but mother encourages prayers at bed-time.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Mark?"

A. "No, only when I'm at Bobby's place."

Q. "Who is Bobby? Is he a relative of yours?"

A. "No, she has a dog, and she babysits me sometimes - she has a sewing machine, and she is a friend of ours."

Q. "When she babysits you, she takes you to church?"

A. "Yes - when I stay at her house."

Q. "I see...Are there other children at church, or just grown-ups?"

A. "Oh, no, there are just grown-ups."

Q. "What do you do when you go to church with Bobby?"

A. "I be *very* quiet."

Q. "Why must you be quiet?"

A. "Bobby says the rules - be quiet - don't talk - just sing - so you don't disturb the other people and they might forget what they're singing about."

Q. "What do they sing about?"

A. "I don't know."

Q. "Do you ever sing too?"

A. "Yes, but its quite complicated, you see - because I don't think I'm singing what they're singing."

Q. "Do you remember any of the words?"

A. "Yes, its all about Jesus and Christ and people like that."

Q. "Can you tell me who they are?"

A. "Well - Jesus was the son of God."

Q. "How do you mean - the son of God?"

A. "Well -- he was born -- he was born up in the sky -- he was born up in heaven."

Q. "Can you tell me something about heaven?"

A. "Heaven is a place way up in the sky, and people used to live there, because there were only cavemen and dinosaurs and God was busy creating the world, so there was only heaven to live in."

Q. "Can you tell me something about God?"

A. "God? - oh - he's just a suction of air - (kisses hand) - you kiss your hand and you kiss God."

Q. "God is not a person, then?"

A. "Oh no - he's just a suction of air - you just have to be really good and go to Sunday school a lot."

Q. "Why do you suppose Bobby likes to go to church?"

A. "She likes to go to learn all about Jesus and things."

Q. "Can you tell me anything about Jesus?"

A. "Yes - he grew up to be a big man with a grey beard and a mustache - he was a little boy once."

Q. "Is he still alive?"

A. "Yes, he is. Jesus was born on Christmas day, and Christmas day is a very important day to be born on."

Q. "Why do you think it is an important day to be born on?"

A. "Because Jesus was born on Christmas day, and - its important to know all about Jesus."

Q. "Why do you think its so important?"

A. "Well - he is the son of God, and he has almost as many powers as God has."

Q. "What sort of powers?"

A. "I don't know - I guess they're sort of *snow* powers like mother nature has."

Q. "Mother nature?"

A. "Mother nature is almost like God - she helps him make zebras and mouses and things like that. She sort of lives up in a different high mountain - I suppose."

Q. "Do you know anything about the Bible, Mark?"

A. "No - I just know about God and mother nature making squirrels and horses and - (names several other animals)."

Q. "Does Bobby talk at all about praying?"

A. "Yes - but this is all I know." (strikes pose with fingers together under chin)

Q. "Why do you put your hands under your chin?"

A. "That means you pray."

Q. "Do you do that sometimes?"

A. "Yes, but we're far too busy every day - its just on *bad* occasions - when someone is sick - then we do."

Q. "Did someone ask you to pray?"

A. "No - I just want someone to get better and not die - but I don't need to anymore - when they get better you don't need to."

Q. "Who is getting better?"

A. "Grandpa - he's not dying now - he's going to have an operation and he's getting better."

Q. "Has anyone talked to you about Grandpa dying?"

A. "Yes, he might go up into heaven and God would make *new* of him."

Q. "How do you mean - *new* of him?"

A. "You know - its just like mother nature - a new creation."

Q. "What about going up into heaven?"

A. "Well - God says magic words - or maybe he can reach down with giant hands - I don't know how he does it - I think Jesus helps him do it. You just snap your fingers (snaps fingers) like that! - and Jesus comes down and helps God and mother nature. They're all part of creation, you know. Father nature helps sometimes too."

Q. "Could you *see* father and mother nature?"

A. "Oh, no - they all live up in the sky."

Q. "This has been a long time - you must be getting tired. Do you get tired in church when you go with Bobby?"

A. "Yes, sometimes it's a long time to wait for the man."

Q. "Do you wait for the man to come and talk?"

A. "The man doesn't talk - he *shouts* - to make sure people will hear all about God!"

Example of a Spontaneous Conversation

Subjects: (1) J.P., girl, 3 years, 9 months.
Goes to church (Catholic) occasionally with her parents.

(2) B.M., boy, 4 years, 5 months.
Goes to Sunday school (Anglican)
occasionally.

The following conversation was recorded as the two children were swinging side by side on a swing set:

J.: "We're playing horses - don't you know?"

B.: "Everyday why do you always have to go on the swing?"

J.: "You ding-dong."

B.: "If you stop swinging on the swing every day I'll be your friend - I'll be your very *best* friend."

J.: "I think I'll go home."

B.: "Aren't you my best friend Jeffy? - I would never give you a yuchy picture."

J.: "I hate John."

B.: "I hate John too. I could push him right down. I'm stronger than boys like him."

J.: "You remember John too?"

B.: "Yeah - he always used to come to school eh?"

J.: (chanting) "blood - blood - blood - blood -."

B.: "But he's still alive."

J.: "Well - we'll put flowers on him - and then -."

B.: "No - we'd better not." (stops swinging and puts thumb in mouth)

J.: "Yes - we'll push him right down in the cement."

B.: (starts swinging again) "O.K. - Then we'll pull his mouth open -- then we'll push dirt- and poison flowers in."

J.: "Then we'll give him yuchy things - and then he'll die!"

B.: "Then we'll give him poison to drink!"

J.: "No - we'd better not - because - God - God likes bad boys too - God is a flower, you know - God is in a great big giant too - God is very *very* good."

B.: "Isn't there *another* God that is bad?"

J.: "No - God is Jesuses brother."

B.: "Well - there *are* telephone poles that are pointed to scare the devils away."

J.: "No - they're just to scare monsters and witches away."

B.: "God made all the dinosaurs and the cavemen - and the Indians."

J.: "God made me too - you know?"

B.: "Does he like me too?"

J.: "Yes he does - I wanted him to make you. He maked all the people in this whole *world* - and my brother too."

B.: "And your baby - I remember you for your baby! You've got three girls and three boys - right?"

J.: "But God didn't make Pamela. Unh unh. But God made Samantha."

B.: "Don't forget your little baby!" (To Samantha who just wandered by): "Hi, Samantha. Jeffy and me are talking all about God making us!"

J.: "Allan too - Allan's real bad."

B.: "Don't forget John - He's the baddest guy of all."

Example of a Group Discussion

Some days after the individual interviews had been terminated, and undoubtedly inspired by them, a discussion took place in which some children exchanged their ideas. This came up spontaneously as the teacher was about to read a story to a small group of children. She quickly abandoned the story, switched on the tape recorder, and was able to record a part of the conversation. Her role in the discussion was much the same as before: allowing the children to express their ideas freely, but this time faced with the task of seeing that each child who wished to, had his "say". Occasionally she would throw in a question or comment in order to clarify a point, or to encourage a child to express his beliefs in a little more detail.

Subjects:

(1) R., boy, 4 years 10 months.
Attends Sunday school (Anglican) on a regular basis.

(2) S., girl, 5 years, 1 month.
Does not attend Sunday school.

(3) J., boy, 4 years, 9 months.
Does not attend Sunday school.

(4) E., boy, 5 years, 2 months.
Attends church (Christadelphian) with mother.

(5) B., girl, 4 years, 11 months.
Occasionally goes to Quaker meetings with mother.

(6) K., girl, 4 years, 7 months.
Does not attend Sunday school.

(7) D., boy, 5 years, 1 month.
Does not attend Sunday school.

T.: Teacher.

R.: "God's a sort of a ghost, he can go everywhere at once - even through keyholes! He can see everything too - I think he has a big telescope. He made all of the world - He made all of creation."

S.: "He made the cave-men first - and then the Indians - and the dinosaurs too."

J.: "He did not! They were here before God was!"

S.: "He did so! My mother says!"

E.: "No! He made all the *men* - he made a shape of a bone - and then he breathed into it - and - it was a *man*!"

J.: "Adam was made by God first - but he ate a magic apple. God made everything. He can even make it rain too."

S.: "But he made the cave-men first."

B.: "God can go all around the world at the same time. There is a little *bit* of him in everybody. But he lives mostly with Jesus and the angels up in heaven."

T.: "What about angels, Bridget?"

B.: "Well, angels are beautiful, and have nice dresses, and they fly around and have shiny rings around their heads - they are rings of goodness."

K.: "Angels look after the dead people."

T.: "How do they do that?"

K.: "Well, they get a big box - and they loan God some wings, and then he flies down and they help him carry the box back up to heaven."

T.: "To heaven ...?"

J.: "That's way up in the sky where God lives. He has a big beard, and doesn't wear any clothes."

S.: "Heaven is in the clouds. God has a cloud house, with cloud furniture - and a cloud T.V."

B.: "He has a black and white T.V."

R.: "He does not!"

B.: "I know more about angels."

T.: "Yes ...?"

B.: "Well - they grow feathers in the winter time - but they shed them all off in the summer."

S.: "You said they wore pretty dresses."

K.: "I know about Mary and Joseph, too."

T.: "What about Mary and Joseph, Karen?"

K.: "Well - my granny has a big book that tells all about it, and she said that Mary was around too. There was this big lake, and there was a lady there - and it was *Mary*!"

D.: "God came to Victoria last week. Jesus is God's brother."

Further examples of interview sessions are contained

in the Appendix. Only those responses considered to be "typical" were used in the analysis and the interpretation. A "typical" response was one that, after a comparison to the responses of the other children involved in the study, appeared to be general, and not just peculiar to a particular child.

## Basic Assumptions

It was assumed in this study that:

(a) Since all the children involved in this study had been exposed to a more or less degree to religious concepts, selection of subjects did not need to be based upon Sunday school or church attendance.

(b) Since the subjects who were interviewed were fifteen boys and fifteen girls ranging in age from 4 years, 3 months, to 5 years, 10 months, the responses represented the religious thinking of boys and girls in this age group who attended the Goosey Gander Kindergarten, Saanich, B.C.

# CHAPTER IV

## RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

It was difficult to present the material gathered through observations and in the interview sessions. To list all the responses would be ponderous and entail much repetition. In the end it was decided to set out: (A) the six religious concepts that were to be investigated, together with the meanings most commonly attached to them by *adults*; followed by (B) a summary of the most typical reactions of the *children*. The responses were then *analyzed* to ascertain if any similarities or discrepancies occurred between (A) and (B); and *interpreted* to ascertain if the children's thinking was an attempt to relate religious information to their previous concrete experiences.

1. The concept of God.

   (A) He is the Father and Protector. The one all-powerful being who created and gives life to all thinks. The Bible does not encourage us to ask what God is *like*. He is too great to be likened to anything; He is invisible - a spirit who is

always with us and we can talk to Him. He sends his angels to watch over us at night. He wants us all to be good, but He loves us even when we are not good.

(B) God is very good. He likes bad boys. God is a sort of a ghost. He can go everywhere at once - even through keyholes. He can go all around the world at the same time. He can see everything. He has a big telescope. There is a little tiny bit of God in everyone. There must be lots of Gods if they're inside everyone. God has a big beard and doesn't wear any clothes. God is Jesuses brother. God is not a real person - only Jesus. God is the whole world. God is a kind of circle. God is just a suction of air. God lives everywhere. God lives in this country and in the north - but he always stays outside. God lives with Jesus and the angels up in heaven. God lives up in the sky. God lives up in the clouds. God lives on a faraway planet.

Analysis

God as an all-powerful, invisible spirit who can be talked to, was thought of by many of the children as a sort of ghost who can be everywhere, and see everything at the same time. In spite of the admonition that God

must not be likened to anything, or perhaps because of it, many of the children thought of him in ghostly terms. Most of the children reported that he lives up in the sky, in the clouds somewhere with Jesus and the angels. Some, however, placed him upon another planet and gave him a human form, usually with a beard, and often without clothes.

Interpretation

The children's schema of God appears to be formed as a result of grouping together related concepts, images and perceptions they have encountered through previous experience. Few of the children appeared to be able to think of God in abstract terms. The responses that might have indicated abstract conceptions were from those who referred to "a suction of air"; "the whole world"; or "a kind of circle". But even those children subsequently reported that God "lived somewhere".

It seems logical that if children are told that something is an invisible spirit, many would think in terms of the "ghosts" they have previously encountered. Most have had experience with ghosts through stories, cartoons, movies, and at halloween, and are familiar with their supposed characteristics. The concept of God as a big man with a beard may be a result of

confusing God with pictures they have seen of Jesus as a man. Also, since bible stories refer to God as "He" or "Him", it is not illogical for some children to envision a human form, and provide a permanent place of abode. It is also not illogical to provide a big telescope for the purpose of seeing all over the world, or to think that there must be many Gods if God is inside everyone.

2. The Bible

(A) The Bible is the Word of God. It is a long account of the history and thought of the people of Israel. It contains the message of the gospels: Christ's birth, teachings, death, and power to conquer death; a proclamation of the gracious, judging, forgiving love of God as seen in Christ.

(B) The bible is a special kind of book that tells all about God and things. Its a big book with true stories about Jesus and Christ. Its a big black book. Sometimes its a big blue book. Its a big book that people read out of in church. Its a big book with lots of little words and no pictures.

Analysis

Most of the children thought of the bible as a big, special kind of book that is very important to adults. Most reported that it contained stories about God and

Jesus, and is closely connected with church activities. No child mentioned that it is the Word of God, or alluded to it as the history of the people of Israel.

Interpretation

The concept of the bible as a special kind of book that has to do with religious matters appeared to be grasped by most of the children. Bibles are, after all, concrete objects they can see and touch. A bible is a book much like other books children have had experience with, except that it is bigger, has no pictures, and adults appear to attach more importance to it than they do to other books. However, the responses indicated that the more abstract and complex theological concepts commonly attached to the bible by adults were not attained by the children.

3. Jesus Christ

(A) Baby Jesus came at Christman. Since God reveals Himself through Christ, He shows us what God is like. He is the only Son of God, and died to save us from sin and death. He is immortal, and is with God in Heaven.

(B) At Christmas time, Jesus is the baby in the manger. Jesus is a baby way up in heaven. He lives on a cloud. Jesus was born on Christmas day. Jesus was born in the sky. It is important to know all about

Jesus. Jesus is God's brother. Jesus is the Son of God and has almost as many powers as God has. Jesus lived a long time ago. He lived in the olden days. He grew up to be a big man with a beard and a mustache. He wears a long dress and has a beard. He caught a whole lot of fish. Jesus helped people when they were sick. He was nice and never fought. He got died with bad soldiers. Bad people nailed him up and buried him in a lot of big rocks. They buried him in a cage. He moved in with God after he got dead. You can't see him anymore. He was magic. He could do a lot of magic things.

Analysis

Many of the children reported that Jesus was a baby who was born at Christmas a long time ago. Many knew that he grew up to be a man who performed unusual (magic) deeds, was kind and helpful, and met an untimely death. Most felt that it is important to know about Jesus, that he is related in some way to God, and is now living up in heaven.

Interpretation

In comparison to their difficulty in forming a concept of God, most of the children appeared to find it easier to attain a conception of Jesus. The story of

Jesus is told to children in more concrete terms: he was born, grew up, lived and died. His miraculous deeds, however, were usually spoken of as magical, and his relationship to God was hazy to many of the children. Since children often use such terms as "son", "brother", "wife" and "mother" interchangeably, this confusion is understandable. It was surprising that so many of the children knew the details of Jesus' death, since most of the modern Sunday school manuals caution teachers to play down the gruesome events of the crucifixion, and to emphasize the promise of life after death. The usual responses to questions concerning reasons for his death, were allusions to "bad people", or "bad soldiers" who didn't like him because he was good. This might be a result of T.V. programs. Those with "bad guy" versus "good guy" themes are very popular with most children. In any case, the concept of the Dying and Reviving God was obviously not grasped by any of the children.

4. The Church

(A) The Church is the "body" of Christ, and exists to do the work and will of His spirit.

(B) A church is a big building that has a Sunday school. You have to be quiet in church. You have to be good in church. There are rows of seats and

everyone comes in and sits down. People go to church to sing and sit and listen. You can't talk. You sit and wait for the man to come and talk. A big man comes and talks and talks. The minister stands up on a kind of stage and tells true stories. Sometimes the minister puts water on the babies heads. Grownups get a cookie to eat and a drink so they can swallow it. Church is cold and musicy. Church is very hot because you can't take your coats off. Its a long time in church. Its very boring. There's nothing much to do there. There are no cartoons in church. They collect money.

Analysis

To most of the children, a church is a big building where people go to sit, listen, sing, and learn about such religious matters as God and Jesus. Many respondents reported that it was necessary to be "good" and to be quiet. Many reported that church was uncomfortable and boring. Many alluded to the minister's talk, but could not say what it was about. Some mentioned such rituals as communion and baptism, but could not explain the purpose of such activities. A surprising number mentioned the collection of money.

Interpretation

The children's responses to the question of "church" appear to confirm the opinions of a number of authorities cited in this study: that children in this age group base their concepts upon actual concrete situations that involve sight, hearing, touch and other sensory activity. The physical arrangement of the rows of seats and the minister's podium; the sounds made by feet walking on the floor, the singing, the voice of the minister and the music of the organ were clearly reported by many of the children. The actual behavior expected of them, and the activities of the adults were described, but the complex symbolism involved in those activities appeared to be beyond the comprehension of the children.

5. Prayer

(A) Although God may be approached anywhere, everywhere and at any time, there are special times to seek God. There are special ways of standing or kneeling, and hushed voices, closed eyes and a quiet mind are needed.

(B) Praying is when you pray. Praying is when you talk into your hands. Praying is like this (pose with fingers pointed under chin). Praying is when you ask for things. You pray on bad occasions when

someone is sick. Praying is when you thank God for the food you eat. You always have to pray before you eat. "Our men" means "now you can eat". You're supposed to pray at church, and when you go to bed, and at Christmas. You're supposed to say everyone's name. You talk to God, but you can never see him or hear him. He's always outside.

Analysis

The "special ways" of praying seemed to impress the children more than the purpose behind the physical posture. However, most of the children reported that they were supposed to pray on such special occasions as: meal times, bed times, at church, at Christmas time, or when they wanted a special favor.

Interpretation

The physical act of pointing fingers under the chin was readily demonstrated by most of the children, although none could explain why this posture was necessary. Some mentioned that you did this to talk into your hands, and some said that you talk to God, but you could never see him or hear him. Some said that he was invisible, and some offered the explanation that he always remained outside.

6. Death and Life After Death

(A) Death is more than a physical fact. Jesus' triumph over death is his resurrection. He promised the eternal life of the spirit. We are not permitted to know the details of life on the farther side wherein Jesus lives in another dimension.

(B) When you die they put you in a big box. When you die they bury you in the ground sometimes. You go to the graveyard and get a funeral. God looks after all the dead people. The angels loan God wings and he flies down and they help him carry the box back to heaven. God says magic words and reaches down with giant hands. When you die, you go up into heaven, and God makes new of you. Heaven is away up in the clouds where God lives. Heaven is up in the sky where people used to live before creation. When you die, you go to a different country - far away from this school. You go to a different planet. You become a different kind of alive. When you die you kind of go to sleep, but you don't stay asleep.

Analysis

It seemed to be obvious that the physical facts of death and "life on the farther side" were subjects of

much interest to most of the children. Speculation about these subjects were recorded, not only during the interviews, but also were noted by observers of spontaneous conversations. Although the church attempts to teach that death is more than a physical fact, it was interesting that so many of the children talked in such a matter of fact manner about being put in a box and being buried in the ground.

Interpretation

No doubt many of the children who had attended funerals, or had experienced the burying of a dead pet, had been impressed with the physical procedures of burial. The death of a child who had attended the school was also responsible for much of the interest in death and the possibility of life in the hereafter. The children attempted to solve the problem of the manner in which dead people "get up to heaven" in many ways. Magic words, giant hands, angels with wings seemed to be among the most reasonable explanations for this puzzling phenomena. Heaven, once again, is someplace up in the sky, or for the more scientifically oriented, located on a different planet or in a different country. Coming to terms with such an abstract concept as "another dimension" appeared also to be difficult for most of the children. Attempts to translate such a

concept into concrete terms resulted in: the-sleep-but-not-sleep theory; becoming a different kind of "alive", or being made "new" of.

7. Creation

"Creation" was not on the original list of religious concepts to be investigated in this study. However, since so many of the children made reference to it during the interviews, and since it was reported as a subject of casual conversation, it has been included in a separate category.

(A) God is the ultimate cause and explanation of created order. He created and gives life to all things. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

(B) God made all of the world, he can even make it rain. God made all of creation. He made all of the people in this whole world. God made all the dinosaurs and the cave-men and the Indians. God made the cave-men first. He made the dinosaurs first. God made the first man on earth - but he was a grownup. God made Adam first, but he ate a magic apple. God made the shape of a bone, and he breathed into it - and it was a man. God took some dust and blew on it - and there was a person. It must have been magic. God doesn't have to make

people anymore, that was just in the olden days.

Analysis

Since most of the children reported that God created "the world", and all the creatures than inhabit it, they appeared to accept without question the religious doctrine that in the beginning God created and gave life to all things. However, many of the children seemed to be confused as to how, when, and in what order the creatures of the earth were created.

Interpretation

The religious information they had received about these matters appeared to be difficult to fit in with other information they had previously accumulated. Some of the children in the study, for instance, were fascinated by dinosaurs, and many knew that people did not exist during the dinosaur period. Most knew something about how babies are born, and the information that the first man on earth was a grown-up, seemed to puzzle them. The most reasonable explanation, once again, was that it must have been magic, or that it only happened in the "olden days". Since most of the children were familiar with fairy tales, the complex theological concept of original sin was translated in terms of Adam eating a magic apple.

# CHAPTER V

# SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

## Summary

This study was undertaken to: (1) explore the effects of religious teachings on the pre-school child, and (2) determine whether or not he attempts to interpret religious information on the basis of his own concrete experiences. Basic hypotheses examined were:

1. There is an important difference between the major religious concepts adults profess and aim to teach the pre-school child, and those that the child actually forms.

2. This disparity is not due to illogical thinking on the part of the child, but rather, is a result of his attempt to organize, assimilate and relate religious information in terms of his previous experience.

The sample consisted of 30 boys and girls ranging in age from 4 years, 3 months, to 5 years, 10 months, all of whom attended the Goosey Gander Kindergarten in Saanich, B.C. Since the children came from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds and home life-styles, it was assumed that the responses of the sample represented the religious

thinking of boys and girls in this age group. It was also assumed that since all the children involved in the study had been exposed to a more or less degree to religious concepts, selection of subjects need not be based upon Sunday school or church attendance. Also, since there was on-going communication between parents and the supervisors at the school, information as to religious beliefs and practices in the homes of the children was readily available.

In order to discover how the children conceptualize such religious matters as God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, the church, prayer, death and life after, and creation, individual, open-ended unstructured interviews were conducted. The wording of the questions used in the interviews was based upon information gathered through observations of the spontaneous conversations of the children at the school, as well as the questions about religion they most often asked. To obtain the adult view, parents not affiliated with religious organizations were questioned. Sunday school manuals were studied to obtain the official views of the Catholic, Anglican and United churches.

The most typical responses of the children were then: (1) compared to the meanings most commonly attached to each concept by adults; and (2) interpreted in order to ascertain whether or not the children were attempting to

relate the religious information they received from various sources, to their previous experience.

The data collected support the first hypothesis. The abstract and complex theological concepts such as: God as the Holy Spirit; the Bible as the Word of God; Christ as the representative of God, his mission on earth, and his sacrifice in death; the church as the "body" of Christ, the rituals performed in His name; prayer as a way of seeking God and communing with His Spirit; death as the eternal life in another dimension; and God as the Christian explanation of the cause of created order, did not appear to be understood by any of the children.

The interpretation of the children's responses also indicates support for the second and third hypotheses. The children tended to interpret religious concepts in the light of their previous experiences. Although they also exhibited a tendency to accept in an uncritical manner much of the religious information they had received, the children attempted to fit much of it into information they had already accumulated through observation, stories and other concrete and vicarious experiences. Any information that they considered to be incredible, was categorized as either magic, or fairy tale. A great deal of mixing of fact with fancy was found.

## Discussion

This study has implications for both parents and teachers, since it has shown that there is very little understanding by the children of those religious concepts that adults hope to teach them. Goldman's (1969) dictum that "little can be taught effectively which is foreign to the child and which does not arise naturally from his own experience" appears to have been demonstrated.

The findings of this study support the opinions expressed in the "Note of Reservation on Religious Education (*Children and Their Primary Schools*, 1967) that: theology cannot be properly adapted to the understanding, needs or interests of young children; and that it is absurd to suppose that the average or even gifted child of this age is capable of coming to terms with the credibility of religious teachings. They agree with the observations of Almy (1955) concerning the difficulties the young child faces when he attempts to deal with abstractions; with the opinions of Allport (1950, 1955) that many religious attitudes are ghostly and superstitious in quality. They do not support the conclusions of Mailhot (1965) that God is thought of by young children as the perfect child, the Child par excellence.

Many of the responses, however, confirm the findings of Jersild (1954) that the young child bases his concepts of religion, as he does his other concepts, upon

his previous experiences, and that these ideas are likely to be elaborated by fantasy. Of all the topics alluded to, the children were most interested in talking about God, angels, and the fabulous world in the sky where they all live. They seemed to be intrigued with the idea of God as being invisible, all-powerful, all-seeing, and all-knowing - a kind of heavenly magician surrounded by winged beauties with golden circles around their heads. Some persisted in providing God with a cloud house, cloud furniture, and even a cloud T.V. (black and white), in spite of the fact that Sunday school teachers are admonished to avoid idolatry and to be very explicit in their explanations that God must not be likened to anything. Angels seemed to appeal to the imagination of most of the children and were much admired by them. This, in spite of the fact that angels appear to be in the process of being phased out of church teachings. Only passing references could be found, and these mostly in hymns and prayers. Children seem to relate well to the idea of angels, if they can be looked upon as charming, make-believe things, and not presented as real.

Navarra's (1956) conclusion that the young child tends to place incredible events or explanations in such categories as "magic" or "fairy tale" seems to be born out by the data collected in this study. Many allusions to "magic" were recorded, and the remarks about the "true" stories that the minister told, or that were contained in

the bible, appeared to indicate that the question of the truth or fiction of biblical accounts was raised in the minds of some of the children.

Since a great deal of confused mixing of fact with fantasy was also found, the children appeared to do the best they could with the religious information they had garnered from adults, even though their efforts may not be acceptable from the adult point of view. The evidence of what may be termed "irrational thinking" on the part of the child indicates that religious instruction (from whatever source) at this age may be, not only useless, but actually harmful to the child's growth toward critical thinking. The fact that the children exhibited a willingness to accept in an uncritical way some ideas that were entirely inconsistent with what they observe and consider to be true in other areas, supports this view.

Other investigations have concluded that a child may reason quite logically about matters with which he has had actual experience, and then give "naive" answers to problems that deal with situations in which he has had none. This, of course, has been found to be true of adults also.

The fact that so many of the children reported boredom and actual physical discomfort indicated that church attendance does not meet the basic needs or interests of children in this age group. The evidence of lack of understanding of the symbolism behind the words, songs and

religious practices indicated that the subject matter involved concepts that were abstract, complex, and thus far too difficult for young children to grasp. The "fantastic" mixing of religious information with information the child considered to be reliable within his own conceptual framework indicated that his "effort after meaning" is hindered, not helped by religious instruction. Such statements as: "Jesus is the Son of God"; "God is great and God is good" etc. were revealed by follow-up questions as mere glib, learned verbalisms, and pointed up the danger of developing credulous attitudes in young children that will be a distinct liability to them in their later school and adult life. The uncritical acceptance of opinions of significant adults also poses the danger of the child relying upon the adult as the main source of information and failing to develop habits of searching for, and evaluating evidence from a variety of sources before forming conclusions.

It seems strange, in the face of knowledge that has been accumulated concerning conceptual development, that educators need to be reminded of certain fundamentals: that subject matter must grow out of the needs and interests of children; that subject must be suitable for the age group and not involve concepts too difficult to grasp because of lack of experience; that the essential elements in concept development are enquiry, exploration and first hand

experience; that the child's urge to understand not be subverted by information that is not reliable, or conflicts with other information he has accumulated through his own observations and experiences; and that further thought and investigation are in danger of being terminated if all the answers are given.

It is hoped that this study will provide some impetus for further, more detailed studies, and that the findings will be of value to future investigations into the effects of religious teaching on the pre-school child.

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# APPENDIX

## REPRESENTATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH BOYS AND GIRLS AGED 4 YEARS 3 MONTHS TO 5 YEARS 10 MONTHS

## Interview Data: Child I

Subject: C. H., girl, 4 years, 3 months.
Attends Sunday school with friends.
Parents are not church-goers.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school, Chris?"

A. "Yes - but not very often. I go with Mrs. Henry and Sandra and Karen - they take me and bring me home because my Mummy doesn't know the way. Sandra says you're bad if you're not a Christian and go to Sunday school and church."

Q. "What sort of things do you do there?"

A. "We learn all about Jesus - and we get juice and cookies, that's one thing - and we learn about Jesus."

Q. "Jesus?"

A. "You know - he got a whole lot of fish - a whole *bunch*, because he told them to fish on the other side. They were fishing on the wrong *side*!"

Q. "Was there a story about that?"

A. "Yes - and Mrs. Henry showed me the pictures. And we sing songs too."

Q. "What sort of songs do you sing?"

A. "We sing all about Jesus. Jesus doesn't like people to make fun of him, ever - he died."

Q. "He died?"

A. "Yes, they - the bad people nailed him up and buried him in a lot of big rocks - and he didn't get alive again - he went to heaven with God."

Q. "Do you know anything about heaven?"

A. "It's up there (points up). There are soldiers up there too - but not the bad soldiers - that's how he got died, with bad soldiers."

Q. "Oh?"

A. "Yes - heaven is a nice place. I wonder if you come alive again? We sing in the church too."

Q. "What sort of songs do you sing in the church?"

A. "The only one I remember is about the birds are sweet, and all that."

Q. "What's it like in the church?"

A. "Well - there are rows of seats, and every body comes in and sits down, and you have to be very quiet, and then they sing. It's very boring because you have to be quiet and sit - it gets very hot because you can't take your coats off. They only take the babies' coats off - it gets hot up there - the furnace is kept on right full, all the time!"

Q. "What else happens?"

A. "A big man stands up on a big round thing and talks and talks - and sometimes another man comes up and then they sing. And then they collect the money."

Q. "And then church is over?"

A. "Sometimes he reads from a Bible - that's a big book with lots of words. And then a cleaner and a tidier come in when the people go and clean up because the boy scouts use the hall and it has to be tidy for them."

Interview Data - Child II

Subject: W. T., girl, 4 years, 6 months.
Attends Sunday school on a regular basis.
Parents go to church.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Wendy?"

A. "Yes, all the time - don't you?"

Q. "No I don't - that's why I thought you might be able to give me some information."

A. "Well, I'll tell you all about it, then maybe you can be a Sunday school teacher like Mrs. Brown. I even go to *church*!"

Q. "What sort of things do you do there?"

A. "I be very quiet - and be a *very* good girl."

Q. "Are there just grown-ups there?"

A. "Yes - the big children go to the downstairs Sunday school with my mommy. My sister Margo went to church once, but she wasn't too quiet - she talked a lot and made a noise."

Q. "How old is Margo?"

A. "She's only two, and can't be quiet like me."

Q. "Why must you be quiet?"

A. "You have to be very quiet so people can hear Canon Bishop - I know Canon Bishop very well."

Q. "What does Canon Bishop say?"

A. "I don't know about that - but my Mom and Dad - they go up to the altar - and Canon Bishop, he gives them something to eat - and then they have to have something to drink so they can swallow it."

Q. "Do you do that too?"

A. "NO! - children are not allowed - they just kneel down - but sometimes they stand up - that's *allowed.*"

Q. "Do you know what they eat and drink?"

A. "It's a kind of cookie or something - but just the grownups eat and drink. But at Easter, he blesses every little child at Easter, and it's a long time - but after you get a chocolate egg - and that's nice."

Q. "It's a long time?"

A. "It's a long time when we are sitting down a lot."

Q. "Do you ever go downstairs with the other children?"

A. "Yes, and every time there are *true* stories."

Q. "Can you tell me what some of the stories are about?"

A. "They're all about God and some of the other important things."

Q. "Yes?"

A. "And now I can learn all the important words about earth and God - and things like that - I have to study all about it. God lives everywhere, you know."

Q. "Lives? Is he a person, then?"

A. "No - he's not a person - he is the whole *world* - he *made* the whole world!"

Q. "Yes?"

A. "God is *everywhere*, you know."

Q. "Is he in this room?"

A. "No! (laughs) he's not in this room - but he's outside - and Jesus moved in to live with him!"

Q. "Do you ever pray at Sunday school?"

A. "Yes, we do that all the time."

Q. "What do you do when you pray?"

A. "Well - you sort of talk into your hands - but when God talks I can't *hear* him!"

Q. "You can't hear him?"

A. "No - but sometimes God and Jesus talk - the whole world can talk without a *mouth*!"

Q. "How do you suppose it does that?"

A. "I don't know - I suppose it sort of whispers - I guess it can sleep, too. God lives in this country and also in the north - all around Victoria, but he always stays outside."

Q. "And Jesus?"

A. "He lives everywhere too - He moved in with God after he got dead." (looks down) "Look, I've got paint all over my hands and knees and I'm not *allowed* to get dirty!"

Q. "He got dead?"

A. "Yes, people get dead. You kind of go to sleep - but you stay asleep and you don't get born again - you go with God."

Q. "Where do you go?"

A. "Well, you go to a different country - far away from this school. Grandpa went to be with God - far *far* away - God looks after him - God is the whole world. It's a kind of circle - the world, you know."

Q. "And God?"

A. "He's a kind of circle too."

Q. "Do you have a Bible in your Sunday school?"

A. "Yes, it's a big black book - and I have lots of prayers in a little book. I'm learning them - I pray when I go to bed."

Q. "Does anyone help you learn them?"

A. "My Father and Mother help me learn the words - I say them after - I say to God all about things."

Q. "Is he in your room when you talk to him?"

A. (laughs) "No! he's *still* outside!"

Q. "But he can hear you?"

A. "Yes - he can hear and see us. He can hear you right now - and me and see us - he's in very country - *my* house is in Victoria."

## Interview Data: Child III

Subject: D. O., girl, 4 years, 8 months.
Periodically attends Unitarian Sunday school.
Parents are not regular church-goers.

Initial appeal for help:

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Denise?"

A. "Sometimes I do - and I know someone who goes to church - he's a grown-up and his name is Wilfred."

Q. "Is Wilfred a friend of yours?"

A. "He's a friend of Dad's."

Q. "Have you ever been to Wilfred's church?"

A. "Once my Dad and me did."

Q. "What was it like?"

A. "Well - there were angels and all kinds of people dressed up in king suits, and then they went back in and a man stood up and talked."

Q. "Angels?"

A. "Angels are not really *real* - they're just people all dressed up with wings on - not the fly-in-the-air kind of angels."

Q. "The fly-in-the-air kind?"

A. "Well - sometimes they're supposed to fly in the air - but there's really no such thing. Just a long time ago

and at Christmas there are angels. Once I got a note - when I got a tooth out, and the tooth fairy and Santa Claus met and they left me some cents or a nickle or something - but Santa Claus is only at church at Christmas."

Q. "Why do you suppose people go to church?"

A. "Maybe because they all like to go and sing and sit and listen. But a long time ago, when I was four - I used to go to Sunday school."

Q. "What was it like at your Sunday school?"

A. "We painted, and used felt pens and there was paper and things just like at this school."

Q. "Was there a Bible there?"

A. "No - that's a big book for grown-ups with lots of little words and no pictures - and it has prayers and things like that in it."

Q. "Prayers?"

A. "I have a book called the fourteen bears and they were saying their prayers - like this (strikes pose with fingers pointed under chin). And I once went to another different kind of church with a friend of Mum's - and they said prayers."

Q. "What kind of things were they saying?"

A. "They were saying something about God."

Q. "God?"

A. "God makes people and everything grow. He made the

first man on earth - but it was a *grown-up*! But nowadays people are sometimes having babies, so I guess God doesn't have to make them anymore - that was just in the olden days. God isn't a real person - just Jesus."

Q. "Jesus?"

A. "Yes - he was a real person, and he said to all the blind people 'Believe in me and you will see again!'"

Q. "He was a real person?"

A. "Yes, but he's not alive anymore - he lived a long, long time ago and then he died."

Q. "He died?"

A. "When people get old they sometimes have a heart attack and then they die and go to the graveyard and get buried."

## Interview Data - Child IV

Subject: G. S., boy, 4 years, 10 months.
Attends Sunday school on a regular basis.
Parents are church-goers.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to church or Sunday school Gordon?"

A. "Yes, I go to Sunday school all the time."

Q. "Could you tell me some of the things you do at Sunday school?"

A. "We play games and sometimes we play outside - I like playing outside the best. We make stars (takes pen from hand of interviewer and draws stereotyped symbol of star) - like that."

Q. "Yes?"

A. "And once we made a snowman - the teacher really drew it and showed us where to stick on the cotton. And we play music - alphabet music like this (goes to piano and plays random notes, and sings) A B C D E F G, and we give money too - and we sing songs."

Q. "Can you remember any of the songs?"

A. "Yes - (sings) twinkle twinkle little star - (sings first verse) and (sings the song) rockabye baby etc. - and (sings) rain rain go away, little teacher wants to pray."

Q. "Can you tell me something about praying?"

A. "Yes - (strikes a pose with hands under chin) It's like this."

Q. "Why do you put your hands under your chin like that?"

A. "Because that's how you pray - I don't know why - when you pray that's what you're supposed to do."

Q. "You pray at Sunday school?"

A. "Yes - all the time - and at church too, and at home."

Q. "When do you pray at home?"

A. "You always have to pray before you can eat - my Grandpa says the words and you just have to do this (bows head). But sometimes I pray when everyone else is asleep and there are no cartoons on - it's nice and quiet then."

Q. "Do you say anything when you pray?"

A. "Oh yes - you're supposed to say everyone's name - like Daddy, Mummy, Pamela --- (names all his family)."

Q. "You said you pray at church too - do you go with your Dad and Mum?"

A. "Yes, sometimes - but there's nothing much to do there."

Q. "What's it like?"

A. "There are no cartoons - and no toys - and they talk a lot about God and things like that."

Q. "Can you tell me anything about God?"

A. "Yes - (in a sing-song voice) God is great, and God is good, and thank us for our lovely food."

Q. "Anything else?"

A. "Well - he's not a real person - and he lives way, way up in the sky!"

Q. "Where - in the sky?"

A. "I don't know - he just lives up there. It's in heaven - I think it's another planet - another planet called God. Jesus lives up there too (points up).

Q. "Jesus?"

A. "Yes - (sing-song voice) Jesus is great, and Jesus is good, and thank us for our lovely food."

Q. "Is Jesus a real person?"

A. "Yes, but he's dead now because some bad people killed him."

Q. "Could you tell me something more about Jesus?"

A. "No - Is it lunch time? - You've made a lot of words - can I take them home with me?"

## Interview Data: Child V

Subject: E. J., boy, 4 years, 11 months.
Does not attend Sunday school.
Parents are not church-goers.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Eric?"

A. "No."

Q. "Do you know anyone else who goes?"

A. "No, but I think at churches they have somewhere where you eat."

Q. "Can you tell me something about God?"

A. "Oh, yes, I've heard about that - I think I know where he lives."

Q. "Where does he live?"

A. "He lives on a far away planet - it goes around real fast, so he never falls off."

Q. "Could you get to this planet?"

A. "Yes, but only when your blood goes away - and all the bones and things that hold you down - and then you fly up into the air to the planet - and if you fell off that, you'd just go back down, because its going around so fast."

Q. "You mean something like gravitation?"

A. "Yes, its just like gravity - thats what keeps us on this planet."

Q. "And God lives on this other planet?"

A. "Yes, and the dinosaurs went there too, because their bones and meat and blood and nerves and all the things that held them up were all gone, and they just flew off."

Q. "Did their bones fly off too?"

A. (laughs) "No, they still find those around - no - its just the rest - the lighter things."

Q. "Do you know what a Bible is?"

A. "No, I don't think so - but I think its some kind of a book, or something."

Q. "Have you ever heard about praying?"

A. "Oh, yes! - there are some kinds of birds that do that - they eat meat - they pick it up with their sharp beaks."

Q. "You mean birds of prey?"

A. "Yes, and some animals do too. They spring on things and tear them up with their claws and eat them."

Q. "Can you tell me anything about Jesus?"

A. "Jesus Christ?"

Q. "Yes."

A. "No. But he lived a long, long, long time ago."

Q. "How long ago? Before the dinosaurs?"

A. "No. (laughs) *No one* lived before the dinosaurs - it was all water and swamps and things - there was no land around then."

Q. "Oh? How did the land get here then?"

A. "Well, no one knows how this planet got here or made

itself - it might have broken off from another planet and then just floated around for awhile and then just sort of dried up. Maybe the other planet did too."

Q. "The other planet?"

A. "You know - the one I told you about. Jesus is there too. (Goes over to map of planets on the wall) It *could* be this one." (Points to Saturn) "See where the sun is? - well if you were here, it would be pretty cold - but if you were here (points to Pluto) - it would be real, *real* cold! What does it say the name of it is?"

Q. "The name of the smaller planet? That one is called Pluto."

A. "This one (pointing to Mercury) would sure be hot, and I don't think there's any air up there."

Q. "Thank you very much, Eric, you've been a big help to me."

A. "That's O.K. - I'm going out to play now."

## Interview Data - Child VI

Subject: S. P., boy, 5 years, 1 month.
Attends Sunday school on a
regular basis.
Parents go to church.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Steven?"

A. "Big people go to church, and little people go to Sunday school - I go down to the Sunday school most of the time."

Q. "Have you ever been to church?"

A. "Yes - but you have to be very quiet - and there is a minister there - and there's an organ."

Q. "An organ?"

A. "It's a *big* noise - a big loud noise - it has big pipes and big long chords."

Q. "What does the minister do?"

A. "He stands up on a sort of a stage and tells stories."

Q. "What sort of stories?"

A. "I don't know what they're about - but once he took some babies and he put some water on their heads."

Q. "Why do you suppose he does that?"

A. "I don't know - so they can start to talk, I guess."

Q. "Does the water help them to talk?"

A. "Well - when he puts water on their heads, they make little squeaky noises - when it tickles the babies heads."

Q. "Do you go to church often?"

A. "Only on Sunday."

Q. "Every Sunday?"

A. "No - some Sundays I don't go."

Q. "Why don't you go?"

A. "Because I don't like it - there are too many people at Sunday school - and boys are always crying because he wants his mummy - and I don't like it much."

Q. "What other things happen?"

A. "Well - every time, the teacher does a chord on the piano (demonstrates) with two hands - *loud*. And then we have to put our toys away - and then sit down and have some cookies - and then have the offering."

Q. "Offering?"

A. "Yes - you have to put some money in an envelope. You can't put a penny in - that's not enough - it has to be silver money. The big people have to give dollars. The red side is for the poor children, and the black side is for the church."

Q. "Do you know any of the poor children?"

A. "No - the poor children are *always* in a far away country."

Q. "Can you talk to your friends at Sunday school?"

A. "After you put your things away - the *teacher* talks. And

at church, only the people can talk who go up on the stage - there's a microphone - and the minister, and sometimes other people tell stories - but it's not real, only made-up stories I think."

Q. "After the cookies and the offering, what other things do you do?"

A. "At Sunday School? We form a round circle, and the lady plays the piano, and sometimes we play a game with a hanky box - and sometimes we sing songs."

Q. "Can you remember any of the songs?"

A. "We sing Jesus loves me." (sings the song) - "Jesus loves me This I know - The Bible tells me so."

Q. "The Bible tells you?"

A. "It's a big black book - sometimes it's blue - and there are all *true* stories in it."

Q. "Do you remember what some of the stories are about?"

A. "There is one about Jesus mummy who was on a donkey because she was going to have a baby pretty soon - do you know *who*? - Jesus!"

Q. "Why was she on a donkey?"

A. "Well, she had to get somewhere in a hurry - her tummy was getting bigger, and it got pretty sore, and she couldn't walk."

Q. "Can you tell me anything about Jesus?"

A. "He lived in the olden days. He is still alive, but you can't see him - he got changed by God."

Q. "How do you mean?

A. "Well - God changed *himself* into a person - that was Jesus - then he changed back to God again."

Q. "God is not a person, then?"

A. "No, only Jesus was a person - but you can't see him anymore."

Q. "Why can't you see him any more?"

A. "Some bad soldiers caught him and nailed him and banged him and threw him into a *cage* - and a nice lady looked after him and then she went away to do some shopping, and when she came back - he was gone!"

Q. "How do you suppose that happened?"

A. "He just got out of the cage! It was *magic*, or something - he even got all the nails out of him! He never cries and never gets hurt, and he never, *ever*, dies."

Q. "He's still living, then?"

A. "Yes - but you can't see him - I guess he's in heaven."

Q. "Heaven?"

A. "I don't know if there even *is* a heaven. No one really knows about that, because you can't come back. Stephen says that the stars are heaven - but he might have just made that up. Mike says that there's lots and lots of Gods because God is inside you and there must be lots of Gods if they're inside every one. David says heaven is only in graveyards."

Q. "Graveyards?"

A. "Yes - David says when you die, that's the end of you."

Q. "What do you think?"

A. "I think that when you die you become a different kind of alive."

Q. "Do you mean a different kind of life?"

A. "No! A different kind of *alive*. People can't see you any more - but you can see them and hear them - sort of like a ghost."

Q. "Ghost?"

A. "Yes, but it could all be just make-believe. One thing I know - it wouldn't be much fun."

## Interview Data - Child VII

Subject: D. M., boy, 5 years, 6 months.
Does not attend Sunday school.
Mother (parents separated) does not go to church.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Dale?"

A. "No."

Q. "Do you know anyone who does?"

A. "Yes, but not at this school - Andy Baden - he lives at the Cridge - and he goes - and so does Danny."

Q. "Do they ever tell you what they do there?"

A. "Not much - but there's this guy named Stephen, and he makes all sorts of things at church."

Q. "What sort of things?"

A. "Well - coloured pictures and things."

Q. "And you don't go with him?"

A. "No - I only went once. But when my mother was a little girl - she used to go to Sunday school too. Now - let me figure this out - she was a little girl, and she grew up and then she quit church."

Q. "Why do you think she did that?"

A. "Because she hated it - and then she went to Camosun College instead."

Q. "Does she ever talk about it?"

A. "No - but this guy at Bishop Cridge said if you ever went near a church, they would grab you and put you to sleep."

Q. "Why would they do that?"

A. "Well, there's a guy that owns the church - and we'd go there to climb the trees and play there - but we never got caught."

Q. "Who told you that?"

A. "Michael did - he goes to church to learn all about God. And my Grandma - she goes home and gets all fixed up - and goes to church to sing about God."

Q. "God?"

A. "Yes - he's sort of like - not really magic - but one time he took some dust and put it in his hand and blew on it - and there was a *person*! I guess it *must* have been magic."

Q. "Who told you about that?"

A. "This girl at Blanchard Court. And then Jocelyn and Heather at Grand Forkes - they went to church - and they told this girl, and this girl told my sister all about things like that, and Jesus."

Q. "Jesus?"

A. "Yes - there is a baby way up in heaven - on a cloud, I guess."

Q. "Jesus is a baby?"

A. "No - he grew up. Everyone grows up except God."

Q. "Why is that?"

A. "I don't know - but I remember this lady who showed me a picture of Jesus in a book."

Q. "Do you know what kind of a book it was?"

A. "It was a Bible book. My sister once had a Bible book. And David Stuart and Prescott and (names other people) they learn church at home.

Q. "How do they do that?"

A. "They read the Bible book."

Q. "What's it like?"

A. "Well - once I saw a big, big book in a grave where people get buried."

Q. "Where people get buried?"

A. "Yes, they have a funeral - and then they get buried. This is a story - (tells with lively gestures about a T.V. program that involved a hospital, ambulances, fire trucks etc.) It was called Emergency!"

Q. "When you saw the Bible book in the graveyard was someone reading it?"

A. "No, no one - it was on a stone - it was carved on a stone in the graveyard."

Q. "Have you ever heard of praying?"

A. "We used to have to sing and prayer all the time at the Cridge."

Q. "What were some of the words - can you remember?"

A. "God - thank you for the food and our men - and stuff

like that - and then you eat."

Q. "Our men?"

A. "That means you can eat."

Q. "Did any one ever tell you why you pray before you eat?"

A. "No - but Jocelyn at Grand Forkes always has to sing and pray. I know a song about Jesus Christ. (strikes pose as if playing a guitar, and sings) "Jesus Christ, Superstar, Jesus Christ, Superstar. How I love my dee of Superstar - I can teach you the words if you like!"

## Interview Data - Child VIII

Subject: K. G., girl, 5 years, 8 months.
Attends Sunday school.
Parents attend church intermittently.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Kirsty?

A. "Yes, except when we go up to the farm. My mother goes to church sometimes."

Q. "What sort of things do you do when you go to Sunday school?"

A. "We coloured pictures and sang songs."

Q. "What sort of songs did you sing?"

A. "The songs were all about Jesus."

Q. "Jesus?"

A. "The teacher says Jesus is our Lord and our Father."

Q. "Like your Daddy?"

A. "Yes - no - he doesn't look like him, and he isn't alive anymore - he lived a long, long time ago."

Q. "Where did he live?"

A. "A long time ago in a place called Jerusalem."

Q. "Do you know where Jerusalem is?"

A. "I don't really know where Jerusalem is - I think it's in the desert somewhere."

Q. "What sort of things did Jesus do in Jerusalem?"

A. "Well - he helped people, and made them feel better when

they got sick and things like that."

Q. "Like a doctor?"

A. "Yes - sort of like a doctor - but he doesn't look like a doctor - he wears a sort of a dress and has a long beard."

Q. "How did you find out about that?"

A. "It's in a book of Jesus songs - a book you sing from."

Q. "Is it like a Bible?"

A. "No, I have a baby Bible where you learn all about Jesus and how he was good to people and then he died."

Q. "Died?"

A. "Yes, when people get old and sick they die. Once we had a friend and he got very, *very* old and then he went into care - that's a hospital that takes care - and then after awhile he died."

Q. "And then what happened?"

A. "Well, then you have a funeral - and dress them all up and puff up their cheeks and put make up on - and after, they put them in a furnace - a hot, *hot* furnace - and then they put all the ashes in a box and bury it in a big hole."

Q. "Do you ever go to church with your mother?"

A. "Yes, sometimes I go."

Q. "What's it like at church?"

A. "It's cold - and musicy - and noisy at first."

Q. "Noisy?"

A. "Yes, people make lots of noise when they walk in on the wooden floor and cough and things like that, and then they sit down."

Q. "Then what happens?"

A. "Then you have to be quiet, because when the people sit down they sing songs and say prayers about Jesus and God, and things like that."

Q. "Do you pray too?"

A. "You're supposed to pray at church, and when you go to bed and at Christmas."

Q. "What do you say when you pray?"

A. "Well - you thank God for things - like food, and things like that - you talk to God, and he can hear you and see you, but you can't hear him or see him."

Q. "You can't?"

A. "No - only in a book you can. There are pictures of him as a little baby with his Mother, then as a boy - then as a big man with a beard."

Q. "You mean Jesus?"

A. "Yes."

## Interview Data - Child IX

Subject: E. E., girl, 5 years, 10 months.
Does not attend Sunday school.
Parents do not go to church.

Initial appeal for help.

Q. "Do you go to Sunday school Elizabeth?"

A. "No - I went once with Susan - she's a friend of ours - but I didn't like it at all."

Q. "Can you remember what it was you didn't like?"

A. "Yes, I believed about Jesus, but not about God - he's not a real person, you know."

Q. "Why did you believe about Jesus?"

A. "Well - Jesus was a real person who lived a long time ago. He was a very nice person - he was so nice that people were afraid of him and they killed him."

Q. "What did he do that was so nice?"

A. "He was just nice to everybody, and helped them out - and he didn't even fight back."

Q. "Why do you suppose people were afraid of him because he did things like that?"

A. "Because they weren't nice at all and he was. When I grow up there is going to be a new *rule* - everybody will have to be nice to *everybody*, and not fight back!"

Q. "Have you any idea when Jesus lived?"

A. "Yes - it was quite a few years ago in another faraway

country. But God isn't a real person. Santa Claus isn't real either - he's just pretend - oh, there might be a real person named Santa Claus who lived somewhere, but it's really your Dad and Mum who give you presents at Christmas. Bunnies don't bring you the easter eggs either - that's your Dad and Mum too."

Q. "Do you know any other people who go to church or Sunday school?

A. "Some friends of my Dad and Mum's do."

Q. "Have you any idea why they go?"

A. "Yes, they go to listen to people talk - and to sing songs."

Q. "Do you know what they sing about?"

A. "Oh - the Bible tells me so - and things like that."

Q. "The Bible - ?"

A. "Yes - that's a big book that tells all about religion and things."

Q. "Could you tell me something about that - religion I mean?"

A. "Well - its about Jesus and God and praying - like this (strikes pose with hands under chin).

Q. "Could you tell me something more about praying?"

A. "No - I don't know why they do that."

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"Play Patterns and Culture" in *Developmental Drama*, No. 3, 1973.

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IN A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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October, 1974.

*Date*