THE IMAGES OF GOD AS PERCEIVED BY ABANDONED CHILDREN: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

PATRICIA BONGI ZENGELE

Supervisor: Prof Susan Rakoczy
Co-supervisor: Dr Beverley Haddad

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts Degree in Theology

University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus

December 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration
Abstract
Acknowledgements

DECLARATION

I, Patricia Bongi Zengele, do hereby declare that unless otherwise indicated in the text, this dissertation is my original work.

Signature: _____

ABSTRACT

This research study explores the ways in which children from diverse family backgrounds can construct or reconstruct their God representations. These were probed by using *'object relations theory'* and *'maternal deprivation theory'* as means of further gaining insight into children's initial formulations of interpersonal and emotional relationships and how these were translated into the way they imagined God to be for themselves, given their age-group. Parallels were drawn between the interface of psychology and theology by using theories on faith development. There is a clear acknowledgment that there are certain steps of development that individuals go through in their growth at both psychological and spiritual levels. This confirms that there is a need for these two disciplines to draw from each other as means of creating conducive climate to allow for an integrated approach towards formulations of spiritual development among children. Through the use of questionnaires the children were given the opportunity to explore images of God and to also express these in the form of a drawing. The content analysis of this study demonstrated that there were no distinct differences on how children perceived God between abandoned children being raised in an institutional setting and those children being raised by biological parents. This finding highlighted the fact that there are other factors that impact children's spiritual development. These include care, nurture and emotional security. This study contributes to future research on developing new theologies by children, thus enabling them to play a central role in formulating contextual and relevant curriculums on religious education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter One
Introducing the Study

1.1   Introduction

In the last eighteen years the researcher has done trauma counselling with emotionally, physically and sexually abused children who have been abandoned. From this experience she became aware that little attention is given to the spiritual care of abandoned children. The spiritual aspects are often a neglected area in child development theory. This neglected area of spiritual care has prompted the researcher to do this exploratory study on children's images of God.

Different views as to the causes of desertion and abandonment of children, especially in urban settings, has prompted the researcher to undertake this research study. The researcher agrees with the line of thinking that spiritual and religious development begins within the family, that is, nuclear, single or extended families. It is here that children gain their first clues about God and God's characteristics. Although the researcher is a Christian and will therefore be using Christian categories of how God is understood, an open attitude towards non-Christian concepts of God will be maintained. The study further investigates a link between a child's relationship with parents or a caregiver and the way he/she perceives and relates to God.

1.2   Child abandonment

Mom dumps baby: Cries lead to discovery of week-old infant
Police are still searching for the mother of a week-old baby that was dumped on pavement on Saturday. Cries from the little boy attracted the attention of passer-by, Mr Linda Sakha, who found the blanket-clad baby lying on a grubby piece of cardboard with two unused diapers. Further investigations revealed that a hospital issued umbilical cord clamp was still attached to the baby, indicating that it may have recently been born in a local hospital. Hardened policemen of Midlands Dog Unit, who were summoned to the scene, shook their hands in disbelief as they confronted the child, which was later taken to Northdale Hospital by ambulance (*Maritzburg Sun*, 1 July 2005).

A second article has the caption, *Where is my mummy?* There is a photograph of a three to six month old baby crying. Pietermaritzburg Child and Family Welfare Society currently host the baby and the social workers are attempting to trace the whereabouts of the mother who is nowhere to be found. Contact details and the name and surname of the baby are given to the public (*Maritzburg Sun*, 20 May 2006).

These articles give graphic details on how the babies were found and they both end with a plea to the public about the whereabouts of the parents. In most cases the parents do not show up, and children are referred to a place of safety where there is limited space. Each case is unique, but the common factor is that these babies were deserted by their biological mothers, who left no trace of their whereabouts. All cases were broadcasted in local radio stations, and articles with babies' photographs were written on the local newspapers as means of finding next of kin. These incidents show a deliberate plan of abandoning a baby in the streets or hospitals. When one reviews the cases on abandonment there are various factors which influence this situation. For instance, a sick child can be transferred from one hospital to another without the parents' knowledge, to such an extent that they really do not know where their child is. In this case the blame falls on the hospital concerned, because this is caused by their negligence. However, in some instances there is a pattern, which reflects a possibility of a planned decision to abandon a child.

There are a number of reasons why children are abandoned. There is a lack of sufficient sex education in schools that results in an increase of unplanned teenage pregnancies. Because teenagers are children themselves and are unable to make informed decisions, when faced with this crises some abandon their own children in hospitals and elsewhere. These acts of desperation raise a number of concerns regarding guidance and psychosexual support given to teenagers.

Socio-economic issues also impinge severely on poor people. Sometimes leaving a child in the hospital is the best option because the child will be well cared for and receive nutritious food as opposed to the reality of a poverty-stricken home background. Political contexts where violence is prevalent results in families being

ambushed and some have to flee to safety. In a situation where a child is hospitalised during war situations, there is no way that the child can be taken away from the hospital because it is the only safe place. In some instances the whole family has died and there is no one to care for this particular child. As a result the child becomes orphaned and abandoned.

Furthermore, health issues like a diagnosis of HIV and AIDS results in children being abandoned. Some patients who are diagnosed as infected with HIV go through a difficult phase of accepting their status. Some abscond, especially after giving birth, thinking the baby will die. Often this is not the case. Some children do live, because it is possible for a mother to be HIV positive and on the contrary the baby to be HIV negative. This means the hospital is left with a healthy child who is abandoned by an HIV positive mother. Death of a parent from whatever illness is another major contributory factor towards abandoned orphans who spend their early childhood in hospitals.

Psychologically there is more damage that is done to the emotional development of the abandoned children. The disruption of emotional ties from their mothers leaves them psychologically vulnerable and there is a need for healing of emotional scars.

1.3   Theoretical considerations

Object relations theory forms an integral part of this study and will be used in parallel with theological theories on spiritual development in order to lay the foundation for the interpretation of God representations by children. In object relations theory, there is a strong focus on the relationship of early life that leaves a lasting impression on the psyche of the individual. According to St Clair (1986) these residues of past relationships and inner object relations, shape perceptions of individuals and relationships with other individuals. As a result individuals interact not only with an actual other but also with an internal other; a psychic representation that might be a distorted version of some actual person.

Alongside with object relations theory, a study on attachment and maternal deprivation theory by Bowbly (1969) will be used in assisting to define and explain the nature of mother-child relationships. Bowbly (1969) coined the term, *maternal deprivation*, referring to mother-child separation. He claims that the mother-child relationship may be inadequate under three conditions: firstly, where the child never had any relationship with a mother-person; secondly, where the relationship with the mother-person is discontinued and thirdly, where the relationship with the mother-person is insecure.

The first two conditions imply real separation; either through absence termed `privation' or through loss termed `deprivation'. According to Bowbly (1969) a child gradually becomes dependent on a single person. It is at this moment when he/she has reached dependence that the effects of separation seem the most dangerous. Throughout the study, the impact of these separation experiences as felt by children will be reflected upon, to ascertain if these influence their spiritual development.

Bowbly has argued that "...there is a strong causal relationship between an individual's experience with his parents and his later capacity to make affectional bonds..." (1979:135). Thus, for abandoned children, there is a complete disruption of parental or maternal bonding or attachment. All the initial bonding expressed by Bowbly's concept of attachment does not necessarily develop with the biological mother of the child. Instead the child is taken care by a multiple number of people ranging from the police, nurses, social workers and child-care workers. As a result these children have more than one mother figure within the first five years of life.

So when viewing the situation of abandoned children through the eyes of Bowbly's attachment theory, these children are deprived of the opportunity to form a basic mother-child relationship after birth because their mothers absconded from the hospital or dumped them in the rubbish bin or deserted them in the city. This abrupt move takes place before the formation of a stable and secure bonding, or what Bowbly (1969) terms as a secure dependency relationship can develop. This has an effect on the child's future relationships.

This study does not attempt to test the causal effect of a lack of a secure dependency relationship as expressed by Bowbly. However, it does focus on a child's interpretation of his or her own circumstances in an attempt to ascertain whether early experiences of complete deprivation have impacted the way he or she perceives and relates to God. Furthermore, this study attempts to find out whether there is a relationship between the type of emotional bonding with a mother figure and the way children develop their spiritual bonding with God, of whom they have never seen but relate to him or her only through their imagination. It also explores the images of God as perceived by children who were abandoned and deprived of basic parental bonding.

1.4   Children and God

The Bible has much to say on the subject of children. In Matthew 19:14,[1] Jesus openly invites children, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for such belongs the kingdom of Heaven". In this way children have always been attracted to Jesus, and He never told them to wait until they fully understood all the theological concepts before they could come to him. He did not preach to them or reprimand them; instead Jesus "Laid his hands on them" (Mt19:15) and he touched them and exhorted adults to "turn and become like children" (Mt 18:3). From these examples, it becomes apparent that children hold a special place in the heart of God. Jesus called a child and told his disciples, "Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:14). Jesus recognized the potential for trouble and exhorted his disciples, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew18: 5-6). Receiving a child in the name of Jesus means loving them as Jesus does. That love needs to be consistent so that children feel safe and secure, assured that their needs would be met (1 Jn 4:18). It is an unconditional love which means they do not have to repress their real selves in order to please; they know they are accepted as they are (Rom 3:23-25). It is a love, which seeks the very best for the

---

[1] All citations from the Bible are from the New International Version.

child and is sometimes expressed as firm discipline (Heb 12: 6). It is a warm, touching love, which is personal and treats each individual as special (Mt 18: 12-14; 19:15). This is a sacrificial love which does not seek personal gain and glory (Is 43:1-7).

Shelley has argued, "God encourages a person through other redemptive personalities or communities around the individual" (Shelley, 1982:13). For Shelly (1982) ideally the first 'redemptive personalities' are parents, then expand to include the rest of the family, the church, the neighbours, the school and the health community. Shelly (1982) argues that adults represent God to children by everything they do and say. If adults communicate to children that they do not care, cannot be trusted, have unrealistic expectations or intend to hurt them, children may transfer these attributes to God. Vulnerable children never develop a healthy relationship with God (Shelly 1982:14).

The first twelve years in childhood are crucial to spiritual development. According to Shelly (1982) each childhood crisis has the potential to be a spiritual crisis. Meier (quoted in Shelly 1982) notes that children from homes which expect unattainable behaviour, will eventually either reject God as non-existent or will see God as a stern, distant God who exists but who they must constantly try to placate through good deeds. Thus adults are the earliest reflection of God to a child. On the other hand children need adult caretakers who are dependable and consistent to foster the continued development of trust. When adults are inconsistent and unreliable a child learns not to rely on the environment of God. Thus children have a natural interest in God and inborn sense of the divine, the numinous, which must be nurtured by the family and community.

> "Parents and other adult caretakers will help to determine if future spiritual growth and development will be healthy or unhealthy by their actions and attitudes during these formative years". (Shelly 1982:34)

When there is no trust between parents and children, as is the case with abandoned children, there are spiritual consequences to the development or non-development of trust. If an individual really believes that others cannot be trusted, then she or he

cannot reach out and accept their love and remains isolated. When a child has not lived with a sense that she or he is loved, this can lead to feelings of frustration, anger and the child may think he or she is not worthwhile and incapable of being loved at all. If the message of God's love is communicated, such a child may have difficulties in conceptualizing this on a spiritual level. They may in fact feel angry at the mention of a loving God when no one has ever showed him or her love. There is a deficit in this particular person's development of trust, which blocks relationships of love towards others and thus leads to a negative impact on their spiritual development.

1.5   Research Design

The study is based on the hypothesis that the way people perceive God is related to the manner in which they related to their parents or those who cared for them in their childhood years. It aims to firstly, ascertain the way in which children formulate their images of God. Secondly, to ascertain children's understanding of God and to establish whether children's understanding of God varies according to different home environments.   Thirdly, to make recommendations regarding the ever-changing spiritual needs for children from diverse family backgrounds. Finally the study aims at equipping pastors, religious educators and childcare workers with a deeper understanding of the spiritual needs of children, paying special attention to vulnerable children.

In order to achieve these aims two groups of children between seven and eight years of age were targeted for the study. One group was made up of eight children from a secure home environment where they were never separated from their biological parents. The second group of children were from SOS Children's Village, in Pietermaritzburg. This group of children have never met their biological parents or family because they were deserted or abandoned in different cities and were taken to this place of care. A comparison of the perceptions of God was made between the two groups of children. It was found that there was not a significant difference between these two groups in their perceptions of God. The findings suggest, in line with Ana Maria Rizzuto's (1979),

that "God-representatives" do not necessarily have to be the biological parents of a child.

1.6   Outline of the study

In the next chapter, the theoretical background to early childhood relationships will be explored using a psychological framework. The focus of the chapter will be on Freudian Object Relations Theory and John Bowbly's Attachment Theory. This is followed in chapter three, by a theoretical exploration of spiritual development in children. The focus is on the theories of Ronald Goldman, Roger Gobbel, James Fowler and Ana Maria Rizzuto. The fourth chapter outlines the research process and presents the research findings. This is followed by a chapter that attempts to analyse the research findings. The sixth chapter pays special attention on the interpretation of the findings as translated or perceived by children establishing possible theoretical links related to spiritual formation in children. The final chapter concludes the study by summarising the study and proposing recommendations for future work with abandoned children.

1.7   Conclusion

Firstly this chapter began with an introduction of the study. Secondly, material was presented on theories on attachment, maternal deprivation, object relations and child abandonment. These form the integral part of the research study. Thirdly, the chapter described broadly the concept of child abandonment, and presented different circumstances that lead to the abandonment of children as well as defining concepts around this issue, and presented possible factors that may impact directly or indirectly on children who were abandoned. Finally it explored psychological factors that may influence or shape images of God by children and the theoretical framework to support God formulations by children

Chapter Two

Early Childhood Relationships in Psychological Perspective

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the theoretical framework of early childhood relationships between mother or caregiver and the child. There are various studies that have been done to explore the nature and responses of new born babies and their parental figures. The theories of attachment started this process in the field of psychology, with the emergence of theories of object relations rooted in the school of psycho-analysis led by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). The character of mother-child relationship plays a central role in exploring the possible dynamics that can take place in a life of a child with regards to the formation of his or her relationship with God. This concurs with the first hypothesis of this study, that adults are the earliest reflection of God and embodiment of religion to a child.

2.2 Object relations theory

"Object relations theory means interpersonal relations. The term object, a technical word originally coined by Freud refers to that which will satisfy need... a target of another's feelings or drives... In combination with relations, object refers to interpersonal relations and suggests the inner residues of past relationships that shape an individual's current interactions with people" (St Clair 1986:1).

Sigmund Freud (1907) is regarded as the father of psychoanalysis, which is where object relations theory is rooted. This work was further developed and applied in working with children by the following theorists, his sister Ana Freud (1932), Ainsworth (1962), Erikson (1963), Piaget (1969), Bowbly (1979), Winnicott (1981).

According to St Clair (1986) the term object relations means interpersonal relations. Freud originally coined the term "object"; it refers to that which satisfies needs; in combination with "relations" object refers to interpersonal relations and suggests the inner residues of past relationships that shape an individual's current interaction with

people. This theory forms another tool for investigating the nature of past close relationships of abandoned children, and results in findings as to how this shapes their current perceptions of God.

The object relations theory investigates early formation and differentiation of psychological structures, i.e. inner images of the self and the other, or objects, and how these inner structures are manifested in interpersonal situations (St Clair 1986). There is a strong focus on the relationship of early life that leaves a lasting impression, i.e. a residue or remnant within the psyche of the individual. For St Clair (1986) these residues of past relationships, theses inner object relations, shape perceptions of individuals and relationships with other individuals. As a result individuals interact not only with the actual other but also with an internal other, a psychic repression that might be a distorted version of some actual person.

2.3   Attachment theory

Attachment theory originated with John Bowbly's attempt to synthesize principles from psychoanalysis in order to illuminate the nature of young children's attachment to their parents. Young children are said to be innately predisposed to be engaged in behaviour strategies that ensure proximity to their caregivers.

The theory of John Bowbly (1959, 1960, 1965, 1973, 1975, 1979 and 1982) on attachment behaviour of infants forms the basic tool to assess his arguments on maternal deprivation and effects of separation before secure bonding. This study pays particular attention to the lives of children who were deprived maternal attachment, because they were abandoned at a very early age. So it is of utmost importance unpack theories that deal with attachment and lack of attachment as felt by children.

These concepts are selected to suit possible experiences, which abandoned children must have had. According to Bowbly, this condition is known as 'complete privation'. According to Bowbly (1979) an attachment figure can be considered as providing his or her secure base from which to operate. It is in the context of these early attachment

behaviours and reciprocal interactions that children come to develop an attachment bond to caregivers. John Bowbly (1979) argues that at the emotional level, attachment connotes 'felt security'.

Children discriminate their caregiver from others and prefer to be in this person's presence, especially under conditions of threat. Later on, the focus of attachment shifts from maintenance of physical proximity to achieving a balance between attachment and exploratory needs and ultimately to an elaboration of an internal working model of relationship and interpersonal relationship in general. The way in which the mother responds to her infant is crucial in producing attachment outcomes. In particular, Bowbly has noted three maternal difference variables that are thought to affect the development of attachment. First is the mother's degree of acceptance or rejection of a child and secondly is her degree of co-operation or interference and finally her accessibility or ignoring.

Bowbly argues that an accepting mother is characterized as having an open emotional awareness and as having the ability to integrate these feelings so as not to suppress awareness either. Then, the co-operative mother possesses balanced attempts to guide rather than control her infant's behaviour. Finally, the interfering mother has been described as trying to 'train' her infant, to shape it, to fit her own conception of good infant.

> "The requirement of an attachment figure, a secure personal base, is by no means confined to children though because of its urgency during early years, it is during those years that it is most evident and has been most studied. There are good reasons for believing, however, that the requirement applies also to adolescents and to adults as well. In the latter, admittedly, the requirement is commonly less evident, and it probably differs both between the sexes and at different phases of life" (Bowbly 1979:103-104).

Bowbly's theory does not specifically address the question of whether there are innate, discrete expressions of emotions in early development. His theory assumes that infants are pre-adapted to display a number of differentiated signals that are activated by

appropriate stimuli and that typically elicit different kinds of responses from care givers. Three of these signals present at birth, or shortly after are the following: crying, orientation and smiling. Attachment is concerned with the organizational aspects of behaviour and with the role of affection in the development of social relationships and personality. Attachment argues that individual differences in competence and styles of adaptation in earlier childhood are the consequences of the early affective bond that is established between caregivers and infants.

Bowbly (1982) concludes that one cannot rule out the possibility that maternal patterns may be in part reactive to infant predispositions. The theoretical literature assigns an important role to maternal affective responses in altering the trajectory of children's expressive development. How mothers respond to the emotional signals of their infants early in life is a major influence on both the outcome of attachment and the infants' emotional expression. Bowbly's hypothesis has been developed by Klein (1932) that the actual physical separation from the mother in early childhood, to such an extent that it involves privation or deprivation of a relationship of dependence with a mother figure, will have an adverse effect on personality development particularly with respect to the capacity of forming and maintaining satisfactory object relations. Such a relationship may be inadequate under three conditions; firstly where the child never had any relationship with the mother-person. Secondly is the relationship with the mother-person is discontinuous and thirdly where the relationship with the mother-person is insecure.

The first two conditions imply real separation, either through absence (privation) or through loss (deprivation). A child only gradually becomes dependent on a single person. It is at the moment when he or she has reached dependence that the effects of separation seem most dangerous. At a later stage: "the child's autonominization requires that he should be capable of bearing at least temporary separation" (Bowbly, 1982). Furthermore Bowbly's attachment theory asserts that there is a wide range of circumstances that can illustrate deprivation in early childhood development.

The following are the classifications for defining the conditions of separation of child from the mother, according to Bowbly's attachment theory. Firstly, separation from the mother before a stable and secure dependency relationship has been established and a lack of subsequent opportunity to form a stable relationship with any one mother figure, as in institutionalization, illustrates the case of complete privation. A temporary lack of opportunity to form a stable relationship with any one mother figure but later opportunity to establish one either with the natural mother or with a mother substitute, illustrates the case of temporary privation of greater or less duration. Immediate substitution for the mother with a substitute mother with whom the child can establish a stable and secure relationship, as in early adoption, probably results in no appreciable privation. (Bowbly, 1982)

Secondly, separation from the mother or substitute mother after a stable and secure dependency relationship has been established results in the most severe case of deprivation. According to Spitz's findings quoted in Klein (1932) based on direct observation of groups of children, it was statistically analyzed that the period for the establishment of true object relationships occurs in the second half of the first six months of a child's life. During the first few months the child lives with its mother in a pre-object relationship, which is based only on its needs, and the anonymous satisfaction it receives. The smile at the sight of the mother's face is the first trace of a true relationship between mother and child, and is observed from the third month onwards. Towards the ninth month the child is capable of recognizing the mother without needing her. Spitz (in Bowbly 1979) observed during these periods real manifestations of anxiety when the mother disappeared.

According to Bowbly's (1973) this theory raises awareness on the needs of children. These may manifest in the following situations, attachment, separation, anxiety anger and loss. He argues that attachment is the primary need as opposed to what Freud in his drive theory refers to as a need for food and sex. Learning theory confirms that we become attached to those who give us positive reinforcement, but this also applies to those who never give positive reinforcement.

Bowbly (1982) states the fact that what is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his/her mother (or permanent mother substitute) in whom both find satisfaction and enjoyment. In phase one, from 0-6 months, the infant's attachment increases with most adults. Whereas in phase two, from 4-9 months the mother becomes the main focus, and the infant develops specific attachment towards her. A child learns to discriminate and withdraws from strangers, this condition Bowbly refers to as stranger anxiety. He further argues that these phases do not develop in institutionalised children, i.e. maternally deprived children, because affection bonding fails to develop. The disruption of the maternal bond results in protest, despair, detachment and anger. It is in the context of these theoretical positions through which the research study is conducted.

2.4   Conclusion

This chapter dealt with theories of faith development in children. Bowbly's (1982) attachment theory, in the previous chapter explained that attachment behaviour is held to characterize human beings from cradle to grave. Thus there is a strong causal relationship between an individual's experiences with his or her parents and his or her capacity to make affectional bonds. This view is complemented by Erikson's (1977) perspective of basic trust versus mistrust; he argues that the capacity to love and relate to people will be dependent upon the degree of developed trust. Then if this trust has been damaged or disrupted, an individual becomes psychologically vulnerable. Given these circumstances abandoned children face even greater risks. As a result this situation may impact on their spiritual development and distort their perception of God, because of their lifetime search for a parent.

The following chapter will focus on the theories on religious and faith development in children. This forms the main backbone of this dissertation and a tool of creating an in-depth understanding of psycho-social and spiritual development of children in their early stages in life and draws special attention to how these can be impacted by their family background.

Chapter Three

Theories of Christian Faith Development in Children

3.1   Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed various psychological theories that are pertinent to this study regarding children who have been abandoned. The patterns on which initial relations are developed lay the foundations of a person's relationship with the transcendent and thus form the basis for the creation or construction of the images of God.   These images may, however, change as they are shaped by the individuals' growth and cognitive development. This chapter will discuss the theories of Christian faith development with specific reference to children.   The theoretical insights of the following theorists will be drawn upon: Ronald Goldman (1965), Ronald Gobbel (1986) et al, James Fowler (1981) and Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979).

3.2   Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence: Ronald Goldman

Goldman's (1964) research study on religious thinking from childhood to adolescence views religion and life in the early years as interwoven and indistinguishable. The child has his/her first sensory experience of the material world in which things and people are at first undifferentiated. The child then forms general perceptions and concepts based on experiences, symbolizing them first in images, and later when the child learns language, in verbal images or words. The whole structure of religious thinking is therefore based upon the fact that there "are no definite religious sensations and perceptions" (Havighurst in Goldman 1964:14). So religious thinking is the process of generalizing from various experiences, previous perceptions and already held concepts to interpretative concepts of the activity and nature of the divine. Because of this, Goldman argues that it is not possible to supply specific first steps in the religious experience of the young child, other than by enriching his or her general experience.

For example, at the beginning of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd", the concept of God as a personal and caring God is based on the analogy of the function of a shepherd caring for his sheep. For a child to grasp this concept in any way, he or she must have some concept of sheep farming. So what happens if the child has no idea of a shepherd or pastoral farming, such as in the present context? Most of the children in South Africa who grow up in a township or urban settings, far away from the countryside where the symbol of a shepherd can be understood within that particular context, may not understand this symbol. Children may associate the qualities of a shepherd with something else that gives them support, security and care. It could be a taxi or a school bus that takes them daily to and from school. So a symbol of this vehicle, rather than a shepherd, could become the analogy associated with care provided by God. Furthermore, Psalm 23 could be perceived in a more meaningful way if it is associated with the images that are commonly understood by children. These images need to reflect the types of relationships within their context that can be reinterpreted as images of caring, trust, or nurture which makes the child feel safe and secure. Expression could vary according to an individual child's interpretation and experience associated with such images. For instance in image of 'the Lord is my school bus'; the child may perceive the qualities of being driven safely on a dangerous road and arriving at school everyday feeling secure and taken care of. This reinterpretation may make the concept of a caring God more meaningful and easier to understand. Other examples could be 'the Lord is my teacher', 'the Lord is my mother', or 'the Lord is my father'. Children who perceive the qualities of a caring and nurturing teacher or parent associated with the images of God might find it easier to express these statements. If a child has bonded more with his or her toy or teddy bear than with a parent, then this particular child might perceive God in prayer, as 'the lord is my teddy bear'.

Images may change as the child develops intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. In this way the child interprets the word of God within their limited cognitive developmental phase within a given context. It is important to note at this juncture that in some circumstances it may be extremely difficult for a child to create an image of

any of the objects mentioned because of negative experiences with these images. For an example, in a context where there are many road accidents involving taxis and school buses, it is of utmost importance to create spaces for the child to also explore the good qualities of the particular images. In a context where children may be familiar with the image of a shepherd, they may be challenged to explore not only the caring shepherd, but consider those shepherds who are not fulfilling their duties and through negligent leave others vulnerable to danger. This research thus argues that these examples of everyday expressions may be the possible hermeneutic through which children can interpret, translate and make sense of the Bible and their images of God.

Goldman, in his critique of the way in which children are taught the Bible (in the English system at that time), utilizes Piaget's theory of cognitive development. In the English school system the subject of religion was an ongoing study requirement of all students. The Bible was regarded primarily as a body of knowledge or a collection of facts and formation to be transmitted through teaching activity. When the child could remember, recall and recite the information, s/he could be regarded as knowing the Bible. Goldman challenged this underlying assumption and questioned its usefulness, adequacy and appropriateness. Gobbel et al (1986) was later critical of Goldman, asserting that he did not articulate fully his own understanding of what it is 'to know' the Bible. Nonetheless, Goldman's assertion that 'to know' the Bible is something more than knowing about it or reciting information. This remains an important insight.

Goldman (1965) argues repeatedly that the Bible is not a children's book; adults wrote it for adults. Examining responses that children and adolescents gave to questions related to several biblical stories, Goldman (1965) concluded that it is an 'impossible task' to teach the Bible to children before adolescence. Echoing the Piagetian (1969) model of cognitive development, he concluded that children would always interpret the Bible in some literal, concrete manner. He thus insisted that the Bible be taught to adolescents, not children. He argued that any attempt to make the Bible a 'children's book' is to do damage to it, and it is to abuse it. An attempt to make the Bible

understandable for children is to reduce it to something it is not. Apparently the concern was that a child's literal, concrete interpretation of a Bible passage would be fixed and final 'misunderstandings' would be regarded by the child as the answers or the truths of biblical materials. Having the answer to a passage the child would have no need to examine and explore it anew. The 'misunderstanding' would be retained in adulthood. Calling for a 'severe pruning' of the Biblical content in religious curricular materials for children, Goldman argued that the greater bulk of the Bible be reserved until adolescence, when larger abilities and a wider range of experiences could be brought to an engagement with the Bible. Gobbel (1986) later argued that such assertions cast a very dark shadow upon efforts to produce a child's complete Bible or children's Bible stories. However, Goldman's argument drew attention to the possibility that attempts to teach children large amounts of the Bible may do more damage than good to a child's religious understanding and growth.

3.3   The Bible, a child's playground: Roger Gobbel and colleagues

Gobbel (1986) and his colleagues assert that the Bible should not be viewed s a children's book because its imagery and symbolism are totally strange to children. The socio-cultural context in which the Bible emerged is alien to them. The Bible's myths, stories, parables and miracles present severe difficulties, and children do not have the tools, intellectual, emotional or experiential ability to understand the Bible as adults do. For Gobbel (1986) and his colleagues, it was important to understand how to teach children the Bible while retaining its essential character as a book written by adults for adults. They were concerned that if this essential character was lost, we may offer children something other than the Bible.

Goldman's assertion that children will inevitably 'misunderstand' the Bible raised critical questions for Gobbel and his colleagues. They probed whether there is one acceptable way of understanding the Bible, arguing that lived experience might result in different meanings. While children are exposed to many of the same objects, events

and stress that adult's encounter, they do not necessarily understand it as adults do. This is particularly so in relation to strange, frightening and difficult situations for children such as sexual abuse, violence and death. Adults may attempt to explain these events from their own world and try to provide guidance. But ultimately, children acting upon and interacting with that world must make their own sense of it. According to (Gobbel et al, 1986) children must 'name' that world for themselves. How children come to name, understand, and cope with that world will be vastly different from that of adults.

Because children have their own understandings of the world, for (Gobbel et al, 1986) it is not sufficient to say that children 'misunderstand' the adult world. It is critical to remember that children understand it in ways *different* from adults. And so the same applies to the Bible. Children feel, consider and come to their own understanding of biblical passages. (Gobbel *et al* 1986) argue that there is no reason to expect or assume that children will or can achieve the same understanding that adults may have. Rather we should expect children's understandings to be very unlike those of adults. Instead of labelling children's understandings as "misunderstandings", we need to recognize that we are primarily considering differences of understanding.

Those differences result from a number of factors. Children are active interpreters of the world, making sense of it and coming to an understanding of it in their own pace and as they are able. Likewise, as they meet the Bible they need freedom and encouragement to engage the content at their own pace and within their own abilities and experience.

> Children are complex human beings, loved and cherished by God. We are called to love and cherish them, to celebrate and respect their distinctness and complexity. We are called to both honour and nourish them. That call demands that we utilize our energies and best thinking as we respond to it (Gobbel et al 1986:15).

So in their encounter with the Bible children will make their own sense of it. Whatever that may be is significant to children and must be understood as such. This is the focus of this study, finding out children's perceptions of God and paying special attention to those who were abandoned.

Gobbel *et al* have further argued that,

> Not all children, not even those of the same age, possess the same range of experiences or the same abilities. Thus within any group of children we should expect diversity in abilities to engage the Bible and in the results flowing from the engagements. We should not expect or demand conformity of understandings, stories and responses from all children of the same age. It is necessary that we be sensitive to limitations, calling forth abilities, yet not demanding beyond limitations (Gobbel et al 1986:154).

This notion of understandings of faith conforming to different developmental stages has been mostly substantially theorised by James Fowler.

3.4   Stages of faith development: James Fowler

James Fowler (1981), informed by others such as Jean Piaget (1969) and Erik Erikson (1963), posited that a person's way of being in faith also develops through recognizable and sequential stages. He further argues that a child's faith differs from that of an adult, not just in its content, but also in the inner patterned structure of the child's faith. Fowler's research indicates that six distinct and recognizable stages can be discerned in the developing human capacity for faith activity (Groome 1980:69). Each stage is its own structural whole, yet the stages are related to each other hierarchically and consequentially.

The first stage of faith development (0- 4 years) is primal faith (Fowler, et al 1992:24). In this stage, pre-language disposition of trust forms in "the mutuality of one's relationships with parents and others, to offset the anxiety that results from separations which occurs during infancy" (Fowler, et al 1992:24). The second stage (4-7 years) is known as intuitive-projective faith. Here, "imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures,

and symbols not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting images that represent both the protective and threatening powers surrounding one's life" (Fowler et al 1992:24). The third stage (8-12 years) is known as mythic-literal faith. "The developing ability to think logically helps one order the world with categories of causality, space and time, to enter into the perspectives of others; and to capture life meaning in stories" (Fowler et al 1992:24-25).

The fourth stage is synthetic-conventional faith, in adolescence and beyond. According to (Groome 1980:70) this stage can last into adulthood, and for some it becomes a permanent home.

> New cognitive abilities make mutual perspective taking possible and require one to integrate diverse self-images into a coherent identity. A personal and largely unreflective synthesis of beliefs and values evolves to support identity and to unite one in emotional solidarity with others (Fowler, et al 1992:25).

The fifth stage is known as individuative – reflective faith in young adulthood and beyond.

> Critical reflection upon one's beliefs values, utilizing third person perspective taking; understanding of the self and others as part of a social system; the internalization of authority and the assumption of responsibility for making explicit choices of ideology and life style; all open the way for critically self-aware commitments in relationships and vocation (Fowler, et al 1992:25).

The sixth stage is conjunctive faith in mid- life and beyond.

> The embrace of polarities in one's life, alertness to paradox, and the need for multiple interpretations of reality mark this stage. Symbol and story, metaphor and myth from one's own tradition and others are newly appreciated as vehicles for expressing truth (Fowler et al 1992:25).

According to (Groome 1980:72) this stage involves "a re-appropriation of past patterns of commitment and ways of making meaning".

21

Finally stage seven is universalizing faith in mid- life and beyond. (Groome 1980:73) asserts that for people at this stage the community is "universal in inclusiveness". "In theological terms the kingdom of God is an experienced reality. In spiritual terms, it is the most complete state of union with God that is possible in this world" Groome 1980:73).

For Fowler (1981), the first level is the foundational core of a person. It is through this position that a person makes, maintains or transforms human meaning. The second level suggests that faith not as a static possession, but an activity of knowing, constructing and interpreting experience. For him faith is an active participatory knowing process, and the knowing is in the activity. In the third level, faith is seen as relational. Fowler argues that the relationship is between ourselves, the everyday world, and other people is important to faith. In this sense he perceives faith as bipolar and is always social or interpersonal. The fourth level refers to faith as both rational and passional. For Fowler, since faith is an active knowing of the world and because we are in relation to it, there are both cognitive and affective dimensions to faith activity. Faith is knowing or constructing in which 'cognition', the rationale, is inextricably intertwined with affectivity or valuing 'the passional'.

> The passional dimension is the affective emotional aspect that arises from faith as a mode of being in a relationship. It includes loving, caring, valuing and it can also include awe, dread and fear. This affective dimension carries with it the integral component of commitment. To have faith is to be related to someone or something in such a way that our heart is inverted, our caring is committed, and our hope is focused on the other (Groome 1980:68).

The age group where half of the study population are located is the faith development stage known as intuitive-projective. In this particular age group, meaning is made and trust established intuitively and by imitation. Trust is grounded in the parents and other primary adults, and the world is known intuitively by projecting meaning in imitation of those adults. Thus knowing is primarily by the examples and actions of the visible

human faith of significant others, primarily parents. At this developmental stage, new tools of speech and symbolic representation develop in order to organize the child's sensory experience into meaning. With words and names the child explores and sorts out a world of novelty, daily encountering new elements for which he or she has no previously developed categories or structures. The respondents were from two stages of faith development, intuitive-projective (4-7 age group) and mythic- literal (8-12 age group).

Fowler (1981) asserts that a child at this stage has endless questions of what and why? The cause and effect relations are poorly understood and the child's understanding of how things work and what they mean is dominated by relatively inexperienced perceptions and by the feelings these arouse. They exhibit egocentrism; being unable to co-ordinate and compare two different perspectives on the same object, they simply assume without questioning that the experiences and perceptions they have of a phenomena represents the only available perspective. Many conversations are dual monologues, each speaking in a way that assumes identity of interest, experience and perception, while neither co-ordinates his or her perspective with that of the other. From the cognitive developmental perspective the child's thinking is fluid and magical. It lacks deductive and inductive logic. It has an episodic flavour in which associations follow one another according to imaginative process not yet constrained by the stable logic operations.

According to Fowler (1981), faith in this stage is characterized by a fantasy-filled initiative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions, and stories of the invisible faith of primarily related adults. The child is continually encountering novelties for which no stable operations of knowing have been formed. The imaginative processes underlying fantasy are unrestrained and uninhibited by logical thought. The forms of knowing are dominated by perception, imagination and extremely productive of long lasting images and feelings both positive and negative, that later become more stable and self-reflective valuing and thinking. This is the stage of first self-awareness.

23

> The self-aware child is egocentric as regards the perspective of others. Here we find first awareness of death and sex and of the strong taboos by which cultures and families insulate those powerful areas (Fowler 1981:133).

Fowler argues that the gift or emergent strength of this stage is the birth of imagination. There is an ability to unify and grasp the world in powerful images. The danger of this stage arises from the possible 'possession' of the child's imagination by unrestrained images of terror and destructiveness or from the willing or unwilling exploitation of his or her imagination in the reinforcement of taboos and moral or doctrinal expectations.

In the mythical-literal stage of faith development (8-12 years), where the other half of the study population is located, children view the world as more linear and orderly than that of the previous stage (Fowler, et al 1985:49). Here the child becomes a young imperialist, separating the real from the unreal on the basis of practical experience, alongside this more orderly empirical world (Fowler, et al 1985:49). However, there is usually a very private world of separate fantasy and wonder. This is also a world of hope and terror, of reassuring images and myths in daydreams, of undermining fears in nightmares and waking consciousness (Fowler, et al 1985:49). Cognitively the child has acquired concrete operations, though still subject to errors and omissions. He/she can mentally review a sequence of observed actions and decide casual relationships (Fowler, et al 1985:49).

Fowler, et al (1985:50) further asserts that thinking at this stage is reversible; the child spontaneously generates and uses categories and classes based on the physical characteristics of objects. In these ways concrete operations brings about the gradual freeing of thought and reasoning from the domination of perception and feeling. In this stage thoughts remain tied to the concrete world of sensory experience and do not yet make extensive use of abstract concepts (Fowler et al 1985:50).

The mythic-literal stage marks a major gain in role taking ability. Now the child spontaneously makes allowance for the fact that from another person's vantage point an object he/she is viewing will appear different. The skill of projecting oneself imaginatively into the position or situation of another is developing at this stage (Fowler, et al 1985:50). Groome views this stage as "when a person has a greater awareness of the differentiation between the self and collective of immediate others" (1980:70). As a result the way of making meaning is more linear and narrative rather than episodic as in the previous stage (Groome 1980:70).

For Fowler et al (1985:51) the boundaries have been extended in this stage as the family matrix is continually supplemented by relationships with teachers and other school authorities, with friends and their families, perhaps with leaders or other participants in a religious group, and by encounters with street life, television, movies or books. Family characteristics such as ethnic or racial heritage, religious affiliation, and social class become important aspects of the child's self image (Fowler et al 1985:51). Children in this stage of development take into account the needs and demands of others in the pursuit of their own goals. Likewise, they expect others to make allowances for their demands (Kohlberg cited in Fowler et al 1985:51).

However, for Fowler, faith really begins even before the age of two years:

> Our first experiences of faith and faithfulness begin with birth. We are received and welcomed with some of fidelity by those who care for us. By their consistency in providing for our needs, by their making a valued place for us in their lives, those who welcome us provide an initial experience of loyalty and dependability. And before we can use language, form concepts or be said to be conscious, we begin to form our first rudimentary intuitions of what the world is like, of how it regards us and of whether we can be at home here (Fowler 1981:14).

From this account, even this rudimentary form of faith exhibits what can be called a covenantal pattern of relationship. In the interaction of parent and child not only does a

bond of mutual trust and loyalty begin to develop, but also already the child, albeit on a very basic level, experiences the strange new environment as one that is either dependable and provident, or arbitrary and neglectful. This covenantal pattern of faith as relation comes clearer as one reflects on what the parent or parents bring with them to the care and nurture of the child. They bring their way of seeing and being in the world. They bring their fidelities and infidelities to the other persons and to the causes, institutions and transcending centres, of value and power that constitute their lives' meaning. Long before the child can sort out clearly the values and beliefs of the parents, he or she senses a structure of meaning and begins to form nascent images of centres of value and power that animate the parental faith. As love, attachment, and dependence bond the newborn into the family, he or she begins to form a disposition of shared trust and loyalty to or through the family's faith ethos.

Richard Niebuhr (quoted in Fowler 1981) sees faith taking form in our earliest relationships with those who provide care for us in infancy. He sees faith growing through our experience of trust and fidelity and of mistrust and betrayal with those closest to us. He sees faith in the shared visions and values that hold human groups together. And he sees faith at all these levels, in the search for an overarching, integrating and grounding trust in a centre of value and power sufficiency worthy to give our lives unity and meaning.

> A structural theory of faith must be a theory of personal knowing and acting. This means neither an individualistic theory, nor one that gives up the commitment to generalizability. Rather, it means a commitment to take seriously that our previous decisions and actions shape our character, as do the stories and images by which we live. It means a commitment to take seriously the fact that we are formed in social communities and that our way of seeing the world is profoundly shaped by images and connections of our group or class. It means further, a commitment to relate structural stages of faith to the predictable crises and challenges of developmental eras and to take life histories seriously in its study (Fowler 1981:105).

For Fowler (1981) in the pre-stage called undifferentiated faith, the seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way and content with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivation in an infant's environment. "The emergent strength of faith in this stage is in the fundamental of basic trust and the relational experience of mutuality with one(s) providing primary love and care" (Fowler 1981:121). So Fowler (1981) argues that the danger or deficiency in the stage is a failure of mutuality in either of two directions. Either there may emerge an excessive narcissism in which the experience of being 'central' continues to dominate and distort mutuality or experiences of neglect or inconsistencies may lock the infant in patterns of isolation and failed mutuality.

Shelly (1982) refines Fowler's ideas in the stages of development by identifying the nature of children's prayers in each stage. God is initially described according to his/her actions such as loves, helps, watches over us. Out of this there a growing sense of personal relationship with God develops. Prayer consists of making verbal requests to God, gradually developing into private conversation with God as the child matures. Later understanding of the Bible is concrete and fact- oriented as the child can begin to apply it to daily life. In addition, conscience continues to develop and the child begins to see moral decisions in their context. Rules become more important in both games and religious observances. Parents' authority begins to be questioned and the influence of teachers and peers is felt more and more. A child can now distinguish between God and parents (or other adults). Any faith commitment is based more on a desire to please God than from a deep sense of sin. Sin is viewed as specific acts of misbehaviour rather than rebellion against God.

3.5   Children's construction of the images of God: Ana Maria Rizzuto

In creating a deepened insight into the initial formulation of images that further form the basis of how the child relates to what is seen and what can be imagined, the psycho-analytic study by Ana-Maria Rizutto (1979) *'On the birth of the living God'*, is a key study. In this study, she explores the idea of "God-representatives" at length. She

argues that from object relations perspective, religious experience both conceals and reveals experience with significant objects from the past and present. Furthermore, the transformations of God and object representations in the course of life offer a means to modulate universal human tensions obviously demonstrated between dependence and autonomy, loving and being loved. These relate directly to the core themes of this study.

Her research suggests that the earliest God representations are populated with the dominant emotional characteristics children have experienced in their relations with those all-powerful ones upon which they feel absolutely dependent, namely the images of their parents (quoted in Fowler 1996). Where defences like splitting and dissociation have been necessitated by parental or either abuse or neglect, either God is likely to undergo splitting as well or the child constructs images of the ' bad' self as being the deserving recipient of inevitable and deserved punishment of a demanding but justifiably angry God. Where inadequate mirroring in the previous stage has resulted in an empty or incoherent sense of self or where conditions of worth and esteem are such that the child must suppress his or her own processing of truth and experience these result in the formation of a 'false self'. In faith terms Fowler (1981) argues that this can correlate with constructions of God along the lines of a task master deity who requires performance and perfection or shame and guilt about failures, for one to qualify for grace approval.

Rizzuto (in Fowler 1996:47) claims that virtually all children by the age of about six construct an image or representation of God. She recognizes that it is possible for children or adults to have a representation of God in which they do not believe or which they do not find sustaining. She rejects Freud's claim that, '...the God representation comes from the boy's resolution of the Oedipal struggle and castration anxiety through the perception of a benign but stern father image unto the universe" (Freud in Rizzuto: 1979:34).

Rizzuto argues that the "projection dynamic" is an important one to examine, but she rejects Freud's version of it for three reasons. Firstly, it is incomplete in that it gives no account on how and why girls should construct God representations. Secondly, she claims that the God representation begins to take form before the oedipal period, and has its origin earlier in infant's life. Thirdly, she suggests that God representations based on her research partake of both the parental images both the mother and the father, and perhaps other significant adults who are present in the life of the child as well. So Rizzuto affirms that the representation of God takes form in the 'space' between parents and the child. This 'space' ties well with what Winnicott (1981:48) says about how we construct 'transitional objects'. Transitional objects relate to symbolic representations of our relatedness to important other persons. The example of a linen blanket that a toddler drags around is a transitional object, symbolizing the security, the care and the assurance of return of his or her parents. The teddy bear can be a transitional object that symbolizes the qualities of steadfastness, innocence and love the child counts on from parents or extended family. God takes form in the same transitional space, and becomes a transcending representative of a dependable presence and confirming 'constancy' (Rizzuto in Fowler 1996).

Furthermore, Rizzuto maintains that God is a very particular and unique kind of transitional object. Children construct many others, for instance images of monsters, representations of the devil, and depictions of superheroes, all of which are transitional objects that capture their imagination at certain periods in their childhood. But God is different from all these, because with God there is no physical present 'other' on which the symbolization can be projected. She argues that there is no tangible model on which God can be based. Another significant difference between God and the other transitional objects like the devil, monsters, witches etc, is that an adult world takes God seriously. There are cathedrals, church buildings, art and architecture, solemn ceremonies, and impressive people standing in resplendent pulpits, wearing elaborate garments, and using their most adult voices, addressing the other. These are powerful actualizations of the reality of God inviting children to construct their mental and emotional representations of God.

How the child constructs this transitional object we call "God", Rizzuto (in Fowler 1996:47) suggests that when the child looks for analogies of an almighty, mysterious, transcendent, caring or dangerous other, the child draws on those experiences he or she had of those qualities especially with his or her parents. The composing of the child's representation of God employs the child's experiences with the parents or their surrogates. The child constructs a representation of God that has some of the characteristics of the parental figure or figures. "The God representations children form based on their parental models have not only some of the strength and virtues but also of the flaws, and blind spots of the parental images"(Rizzuto in Fowler 1996:50).

Rizzuto has suggested that children do idealize their representations of God as to correct and compensate for some of the deficiencies of the actual parents. In fact, God representations can do a great deal to replace, restore, and heal the wounds from absent or badly distorting parents. Her research study founded that a certain group of persons who had lost one parent before the age of five, had constructed a representation of God which had immense power. So deep going and primal was the attachment to God that Rizzuto called them 'totalizers' persons whose relationship with God was so integral to their selfhood that they could not imagine loss of God. The conception of a faith that contained doubt had very little meaning for these persons. This may have occurred because their God representation had played such a significant part in their finding and maintaining security after death of a parent.

Rizzuto analyses the relationship between the construction of a God representation and possibilities of belief and unbelief from her psychoanalytic standpoint. The first stages of infancy, corresponding with the emergent and core self, the experiences on which the child would draw and construct a God-representation, involve sensory experience mirroring eyes and responses of those who provide primary care. For those who find a God-representation in which they can rest their hearts, in which they can believe, experience connected with being fed, held, nurtured and being reflected and mirrored

seem to be very important. And the opposite of that seemed to be a factor in those who have a God-representation that is not nurturing and not believable.

The account of children's composing of the images of God drawn from Rizzuto helps us to understand how we form the central religious symbol of our culture and of our lives. Her findings about the way in which children's representations of God incorporate aspects of their parent's ways of being, underlines the role of adults as a means of revelation for children. It also makes more obvious how adults' weaknesses, neglect or abuse can deeply impair children's emerging faith and cripple their spirits.

3.6   Conclusion

Linking developmentalist perspectives on child development with spiritual development, the following theorists were discussed: Groome (1980) on Christian faith development, Goldman's (1965) description of religious thinking was presented, together with a critique of Goldman by Gobbel (1986) and his colleagues on children's ability to interpret the Bible. Then Fowler's theory of faith development (1981, 1985, and 1996) and Rizzuto's (1979) reflections on children's constructions of their images of God and a reflection on theology of children concluded the chapter. These theories are essential as heuristic tools to interpret the research data of this particular study. The following chapter will look at the research data.

Chapter Four

Research process and methodology

4.1   Introduction

Having discussed the theoretical framework of this study in the previous two chapters, this chapter will present the research design and methodology of this particular study. This study seeks to understand whether there are any differences in the formulation of the concept of God between the children from secure homes, living with biological parents and those from the SOS Children's Village in Pietermaritzburg

4.2   Historical background to the SOS Children's Village

According to Kutin (1991) the first SOS Children's Village was founded in Austria, near the small town of Imst in the Tyrol, in 1949 at a time of dire need. The disastrous effect of the Second World War and the chaos that followed the end of hostilities on many children were all too apparent. "Countless children and young people of all ages were victims of the tragedy and bore the marks not only of material suffering but also of an unparalleled disintegration of the whole moral and spiritual fabric" (Kutin 1991:16).

These children were suddenly confronted by tasks far beyond their years; insurmountable barriers were placed in the way of development. Many children grew up amid the ruins of the bombed cities or shared the mass quarters provided for the millions of refugees.   Kutin (1991) expressed that desperation, confusion and hopelessness prevailed among their elders. In this unwholesome atmosphere, the adults around them exemplified the worst possible environment for education, integrity and upright character. As a result children grew up often in want, exposed to moral weakness, indifference, even cruelty. They had no roots that stem from one generation to the next. Briefly this is the context that moved the heart of the Austrian man by the name of Hermann Geiner, who thought of the SOS Children's Village, which takes up

the old realization that every child needs a family if he/she is to grow up into a healthy human being.

Recognition of this simple fact inspired the idea of the SOS Children's Village. The more closely institutions for the care of orphaned and abandoned children resemble a normal family and the more they succeeded in taking the place of the child's own family the better must function. The first SOS Village set out to fulfil this need for education within the framework of the family in the fullest sense (Kutin 1991:8). Thirty five years after the foundations stone was laid for the first family house in the SOS Children's Village in Imst in the Tyrol, there were five hundred SOS Children's Village projects in seventy-six countries in the world (Kutin 1991).

The idea of opening a children's village in Pietermaritzburg was prompted by the increasing number of homeless and abandoned children in the area. Existing children's homes could not cope with the ever increasing needs of these children. The situation became worse during the political violence of the early 1990s when many people fled their homes in search of safety. Many died leaving their orphaned children behind. Many children were left in the hospitals without trace of their next of kin. The opening of SOS Children's Village was a positive response to the plight of orphaned, displaced and abandoned children that needed a family environment to survive.

SOS Children's Village in Pietermaritzburg was officially opened on the 28th of March 1998. Currently there are fifteen five-roomed family units that form a children's village complex. Each family unit is given a special name that embraces values and principles used to nurture children's moral development such as, *Nhlonipho* [respect], *Thembelihle* [good hope], *Thembelisha* [new hope], *Uthando* [love] and so forth. There are six to ten children in each family unit, one house mother and an assistant house aunt. These women are trained as childcare workers and provide parental security to children under their care. There are house rules and regulations that guide all children and childcare workers. There is only one Village Father who is the Director of the Village. He resides in the village with his own biological family and oversees to the smooth running of the village. There is also a social worker who deals with the

screening of newcomers, organising a state subsidy for each child, and counselling children in the village. There is a youth house for children who are out of school and those who attend tertiary education. There are two drivers that take children to local schools on a daily basis and the house mothers for shopping and assisting them in doing their daily chores. The administrative office sees to the financial matters of the village.

There are children who cannot be accepted in SOS Children's Villages. These include children who are over the age of ten unless they are siblings of current children, children who are physically and mentally disabled and children who only need short-term placement. This means that the SOS Village, Pietermaritzburg cannot care for all abandoned children in the area.

4.3 The Research Process

4.3.1 Selecting the study participants

In targeting the first group of study participants (Group A), the researcher approached SOS children's village father, who is the legal guardian of the children. She shared with him her interest to do research study within the premises of SOS and asking for the permission to work with a group of children between the ages of 7-9 years old. She explained the important contribution this study will make to improve understanding of the children's spiritual needs using genuine life experiences as shared by children from diverse family backgrounds.

The children needed for the research were those who were abandoned as babies and who knew about their particular life history. The names of the children remained confidential for ethical reasons. The village father took this particular request to his management team who had a discussion on the matter and the social worker was given responsibility to deal directly with the researcher as she is the one who works with children directly and would know different cases that would be needed for research purposes. She communicated to the researcher by making a phone call inviting her to the village for a meeting with her, in relation to the proposed research study with

children from SOS children's village. The social worker explained to the researcher the importance of confidentiality given the fact that all the children in village are alive and are looking forward to a brighter future. The Social worker made it clear that she would not want to expose children to a study that would make their lives miserable later in life. She clarified that the children are growing and one day they would be able to read this particular research study, she would like children to be proud of taking part in the study and not embarrassed by it.

The researcher assured the social worker that children were not in any danger but their participation would give more insight into the spiritual needs of children expressed by them. To ensure that proper care to the children is given the researcher asked the social worker to be part of the research team to support the children and at least one housemother. The next task after a meeting with the social worker was a meeting with the housemothers in SOS children's village. The main aim of this meeting was to explain in details about the research and how the children were going to be involved in the process.

A meeting was held with the house-mothers and they welcomed the idea of involving children in a research study. One housemother shared an experience where one of the children was given homework from one of the local schools where they were asked to do a family tree. She explained that it was extremely difficult for her to assist a child who had no contact with his or her biological family and knew that the circumstances that led her to be admitted to SOS children's village were linked to the fact that her biological family was unable to raise her as their child.

Allowing children to explore their spiritual development was seen as a positive step for children. One housemother remarked that it would have been better that the study involved all children in the village as way of opening more spaces for children to reflect and learn more about themselves. The housemothers suggested that the researcher comes back to inform the children in the whole village about the research study and why it was important that they take part in it. They mentioned that they

wanted all children to support this study even those who were not directly involved in the research study.

An informative meeting was held with the 7-9 year old children from SOS and they welcomed the idea and showed interest in participating although only eight of the children were needed as participants. The researcher suggested the presence of a social worker and one housemother during the research session to assist children as they respond to questionnaires. Each child was given a pack of stationary so that they can use them independently without disrupting the research process.

A follow-up meeting with the social worker was held to do selection of participants. The social worker was highly essential in this process because of confidentiality reasons for she has access to individual files of children. The researcher explained her special interest in children with a history of being abandoned as babies. This particular category of children was very important for research purposes. The names of the children were not written but coded on separate papers which were folded and mixed with the other coded list in two hats, one for boys and the other for girls. This was done to safeguard gender balance for the purposes of research. One housemother who was not involved in the research study was called in and was asked to randomly select a single folded paper one by one from the hat, until there were four from each hat. From a pool of sixteen names eight of them were selected randomly.

In targeting the second group of study participants (Group B), the researcher approached the local pastor of the congregation and explained to him her interest to do research study on the spiritual needs of children. The pastor was interested in the study but was not sure whether the parents of the children of will agree. He then took the matter to the church council. They discussed the matter and felt that they would allow the researcher to work within the church as long as she will protect the identity of the participants as well as keep the name of the church confidential. They asked the pastor to communicate that with the researcher and that she needed to meet with the Sunday school teachers to explain the main objectives of the research study.

The day that was set apart came and the researcher went to the church and after the church service she met with the Sunday school teachers. The researcher was asked to write letters to the parents of 7-9 year olds, informing them about the aims and objectives of the research study. Parents were encouraged to support this particular research study as it allows more insight and new learning opportunities into spiritual development of children, coming from diverse family backgrounds. The researcher made it clear that the children that were needed for research purposes were those from families where mother and father were staying together in the same building from the time of birth until the present time. The Sunday school teachers suggested that it was important that all the information needed for the research process remains open and the parents are well- informed about the research study as they are responsible for their children. They were interested in the study and were intrigued about the idea of the research study and asked the researcher to bring back to the church the research findings and recommendations once the research study is completed. The Sunday School teacher's positive attitude was very helpful to the researcher as she was involved step by step in the process in preparing for the research to take place.

A follow-up meeting with the Sunday school teachers of the seven-nine year olds group took place in a church hall after the service. From a group of twenty children only twelve parents gave permission for their children to participate in the research study. A special meeting with the parents of the age group of children selected for research purpose was very important as it created a safe space for parents to vent out their fears, expectations and concerns emerging from giving permission that their children take part in the research study.

One parent expressed her anger at one journalist who visited the area and took photos of families in this particular community. The next thing the photos of groups of children were on the news paper and these children were all called AIDS' orphans yet all their parents are still alive. For this reason, the parents were assured the names of the children and their parents would be kept confidential. An explanation was given highlighting the fact that diagrams drawn by children would be scanned into the computer, but the identities of the children would be protected.

Two Sunday school teachers helped the researcher when doing selection of the participants. Twelve children were given permission to take part in the research study. The task of the selection team was ensuring gender balance and home environment with both parents. A pool of twelve samples was coded to protect identity of participants. They were put in a hat and were selected at random by one person who was not directly involved in the research study. Only eight codes were selected, four males and four females. They were grouped in the hall and the researcher and two Sunday school teachers explained to the participants what was required from them and they were encouraged to ask questions if they were not clear about the process.

4.3.2 Profile of the Participants

Sixteen respondents formed a pool of participants in the research study. Group A included eight children from the SOS Children's Village who had been abandoned as babies by their biological parents. Group B included eight children from lower and middle class communities such as Sobantu, Pelham, Scottsville and Grange. They were from Christian families and they were living with their biological parents.

This situation highlighted a major contrast between these two groups, which is the parental involvement in the upbringing of children. Group B were brought up by their parents, while Group A were raised by absolute strangers without any biological connection or relationship. To ensure that the there was gender balance in the research and to allow different views to be expressed across gender lines the participants were divided into four males and females in each group. The age group ranged between 7-9 year olds. Group A had eight children who were eight years old, a year older that the children in group B where there were seven children who were seven years old and one nine year old. The difference in age grouping might have impacted on how children responded to questions given the fact that some of the older children could have moved out of the intuitive-projective phase into the mythic-literal phase (Fowler 1981).

4.3.3 Administering the questionnaire

Both groups of participants were taken step by step on each question. All questions were stated in two languages English and isiZulu. So they were read in both languages to enhance understanding of what the question was asking for. The participants were not allowed to discuss questions but they were allowed to ask the researcher if they did not understand a question. This was done to encourage participants to respond in their own way without taking what has been said by others. This was a very important step that prepared the participants on the task at hand and also allowed the participants to ask questions as a way of dealing with their anxiety and the fear of the unknown.

The questionnaires were administered to Group A in the SOS Children's Village main hall. A social worker and a housemother availed themselves to support the children through the research proceedings. The commitment to keep all information confidential was read clearly, and the participants were told that they are free to leave if they change their minds about participating in this research. There was a clear check on the fact that the children were not coerced to do take part in this particular study. Each child was given a pack of stationary to enable them to write and draw easily. The participants were promised that their names would remain confidential and were not going to be mentioned in the dissertation to protect their identity. Each question was read out loudly and translated in isiZulu, the children were given time to ask for clarity and to write on the spaces given in the questionnaires.

In each step in the process children were checked whether they were not lost or confused. Discussion was not allowed during the session as this would distract children and make research process difficult. This was done to allow children to think and respond in their own way without taking points from the discussion in this way their responses were going to be contaminated or influenced by suggestions from the discussion. Children were not allowed to move in and out of the hall once the research started to reduce chances of disruption during the research process. Question 25 needed to be responded to on a separate piece of a drawing paper, because the children were

asked to draw the image of God and how they imagined him or her to be. More time was given to the drawing session this work took an hour and half

One of the participants asked as to how they can draw God because 'he is big and cannot be contained in a piece of paper'. This was a very deep theological question asked by one child and from this question more interaction took place informally as they were busy with their drawings. The fact that there were no focused groups in this research methodology posed as a weakness in that more of what children talked about as they drew their images of God could have enriched the meaning associated after the drawing. Taking seriously the fact that the 7-9 year olds have limited verbal and drawing capabilities depending on how they have mastered their skills, so it was essential to use verbal and written tools interchangeably. This would allow children to use different faculties in a supplementary manner, for instance verbal skills with non-verbal skills in a form of art.

The drawing exercise enabled children to play and in this way they were doing something they were familiar with and in the process they were engaging with a task of sharing their view or perception of God. Drawing can be seen as limitation as well in that children were not familiar with drawing God and yet they were more at home with drawing other things at free play sessions. This particular question was not familiar at all such that some of the children protested by saying 'how can we draw God on a piece of paper?' Maybe children should have been allowed to mention some images that they were unable to draw on paper. For an example sea, mountain, sky, lightning, sun, moon etc. This would have thrown more insight into what children think about when they imagine God. The children were allowed to quietly leave the hall without disturbing others once they were finished answering the questions. Those who were finished were allowed to join other children at play in the village. All children completed questionnaires and the researcher thanked all who participated in the research.

A similar administration process took place with Group B the day after Group A. The research session took place in a church hall. Participants were allowed to leave the hall and play with other children when they had finished answering their questionnaire. In

the end the researcher thanked all who participated in the research study and promised to give a copy of the research study to the church as requested by the church council.

4.4   Construction of the questionnaire

According to (Bailey 1982:109), constructing a questionnaire is done once the concepts and hypothesis have been carefully formulated and a good sample drawn. This was a long and intensive process since I am an adult trying to enter into children's way of thinking and doing things.

It is important to note that children are in a process of learning new things; their growth involves exploring and adventure. So in order to probe into different developmental areas that may impact on the spiritual development of children it was necessary to divide the questionnaires into core themes such as the holistic development of the child. These included the psycho-social background of the child, their self-esteem, and their spiritual development. The fact that data for the research study needed to be gathered using children as respondents made it essential to administer the questionnaire to the group by reading out the questions so as to enhance communication process (Bailey1982:111).

In order to enhance non-verbal communication, an opportunity to draw images of God was included. This was used purposely to allow children to express their fantasy filled reality, given the limitation of language development as well as writing skills. This concurs with Bailey's (1982:203) view that there are problems that are encountered when interviewing children because of their limited vocabulary and ability to understand. So getting the children to draw set the mood of "play", which is one of the ways children express themselves. This was to purposely create a friendly and informal environment to enhance play and allow children to express themselves freely. Play through the drawing activity enabled children to do something they were familiar with during the research. Play was used as a tool to unlock some potential that could contribute towards what children associate with God representatives in their own minds; these were expressed within their private space within the familiar space of

41

expressing themselves through creativity. This tool also took seriously the fact that children can expressed themselves in different ways other than talking since their vocabulary is limited based on the level of their cognitive development. Play through creative art stimulates thinking and imagination.

According to Courtney (1974) cited in Klein (1975) play is part of the law of growth in four ways. Firstly, it expresses body and mind in the actions towards which their growth is directed. Secondly, play activity follows the order of growth and mental powers are established instinctively, as play calls them forth. Thirdly children develop more fully and normally if they have the opportunity to play, than if they have not, and finally play always aims beyond existing powers of the child and play is the method of learning. Thus it is through their play that children "...arrive at their relations with reality" (Klein 1975:128)

Similarly in normal development, play functions as the essential means through which children negotiate and renegotiate their relations with reality. According to Winnicott (1971), play offers the opportunity for projection and consequent exploration of aspects of the self. It offers the child opportunities to discover and rehearse behavioural changes that are consequences of changing cognitive schemata. Once a child has become a social being, the interactional aspect of play offers child natural opportunities for the rehearsal of social skills. Furthermore Winnicott suggests that an important aspect of playing is that "...perhaps only in playing the child or adult is free to be creative" Winnicott (1971:53). Here, he does not refer to products of creativity like painting or drawings but rather to an experience of the existence of self as it arises in opportunities for ... "formless experience" (Winnicott 1971:75) in the free play of impulse (inner reality) with the shared...reality of the world that is external to the individual (Winnicott 1971:75).

In summary, play functions in the psychosocial, physical and cognitive growth as well as in the development of children. An opportunity for play is essential. It is therefore not surprising that through play, children as well as adults can reveal so much about their inner world, which is beyond their understanding. Thus this study used one form

of play, which is drawing, as a tool to interact with the inner world of children as they expressed their perceived image(s) of God, according to their level of cognitive development and understanding.

4.5   Contents of the questionnaire

4.5.1   Identifying particulars

In this category the first five questions (1-5) focused on identifying the particulars of each participant. These included age group, gender, nature of family background and the grade they are at, in the present school. This part is crucial in that it identifies the nature of the participants and defines their age grouping, gender and a brief idea about their family background, since this research study intends to compare and contrast children from secure family background and those from alternative place of care. In the data analysis it will be interesting to establish whether there are any differences according to categories created above.

4.5.2   Educational background

The second category, four questions (6-9) paid special attention to the educational background of each participant. These investigated academic interests like their favourite subjects and probed deeper as to why they find the subjects they chose interesting. The questions further investigated whether they liked school and what they wanted to become in the future as adults, as well as the kind of role models they adore or find attractive. It is important to note that at this age group children's grade levels may not have an impact on how they perceive the world, but it was important for the researcher to start with simple and engaging themes that the participants were familiar with on a day-to-day basis. In this way these questions were meant to create rapport between the researcher and participant as a way of encouraging positive communication. These questions allowed participants to explore their possible dreams for the future, and gave the researcher an opportunity to engage at a deeper level with the participants and allowed freedom of expression of what they were interested in at

school. In this way the researcher was given permission by the children's response to probe into what they liked to be when they were older. Here again it was an attempt to engage to what the participants regarded as role models, what or who they really aspired to become when they were older. Although this question was more abstract it allowed participants to move away from the present and share their dreams as well as what was their ideal in life, this was expressed in their own cognitive development level.

4.5.3 Child's self-esteem and image

The third category, three questions (10-12) focused on the child's self-image, as to what are the likes and dislikes about him/her self. These questions probe as to why this is so; the child is allowed to express his/her reasoning, understanding and feelings too. This created self awareness on the part of the participants and an increased insight on the researcher about how they perceived their self -confidence. This question tried to ascertain whether was there a relationship between the participants' home environment and how they perceived themselves or related to their inner self. This question also challenged participants to be realistic about themselves and explore what they really liked and disliked about themselves. Even if these were young children it was important to allow them to explore and expressed how they viewed themselves in their own special way. This was preparing the participants for more demanding and abstract questions that were to follow in the questionnaire.

4.5.4 Spiritual development

Ten questions (12-21) paid special attention to the spiritual development of the child. The participants were asked as to whether they pray, and who taught them to pray. In this way the participants were helped to recall the earliest experiences of relating to God through prayer, and who were the first person(s) who introduced them to prayer and talked about God. Furthermore the questions probe into the deeper reasons as to why the child prays, to whom and who is God for him/her. This section of questions forms the core theme of the research study, which tries to explore children's spiritual

development. Children were encouraged to describe God in their own particular way. Questions like what makes you want to pray?, created an awareness of people's need to pray and was asked purposely to ascertain whether is there such awareness to children. These questions were treated very seriously as they impacted on the following questions that were directed to what children perceived to be the image(s) of God.

To assist this kind of thinking and reasoning, questions such as 'who resembles God in your life?' were meant to enable the child to personalize his/her experience or perceptions of God. The probing goes deeper in asking why is it so, and the child explains in his/her own words what does God do and how he/she relates to God. In this area issues like object relations, interpersonal relatedness and God representations are explored. The child is helped to give his/her meaning as well as image(s) of God.

4.5.5 Artistic expressions of interior thoughts and images

The last five questions (22-25) focuses on the artistic expression and creativity of the child. This is taking into consideration the cognitive development of the children in this age group, while understanding the fact that children need to express themselves in a number of ways, using their senses. So they were asked to draw God, to express artistically what images they associate or perceive God to be like and to explain why they chose them, as well as the meaning associated with the images according to the child's perceptions. The final question requested the respondents to state three wishes, and this was meant to allow children to share their personal dreams, which could further demonstrate their perceptions of God

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research process and methodology. It gave a detailed account of how the questionnaire was formulated including the sub-divisions into core themes such as identifying details, educational background, self-esteem, spiritual development and creative art as an outlet for what cannot be articulated verbally. Finally a theoretical input on play was discussed as a technique of communicating with

children at different levels. This aspect influenced the formulation of a question in which the respondents needed to draw what they perceived as their image(s) of God. The following chapter will present the research findings and undertake a critical analysis there of

Chapter Five

Experiences of children: field research

5.1 Introduction

Having outlined the research process and methodology, this chapter will present and analyze the findings of the field research. An attempt will be made to compare the responses of the two target groups: Group A, a group of children placed at SOS Children's Village; and group B, a group of children that came from the local community attending Sunday school in one of the local churches.

5.2 Presentation of findings

5.2.1 Age and gender of respondents

All the participants in Group A were 8 years old (50%) which suggests that according to Fowler (1992), they were in the "mythical-literal" stage of faith development. In group B there was a slight difference in that 7 (43.75%) participants were seven years old and only 1 (6.25%) participant was nine years old. This suggests that most of this group was in the "intuitive-projective" stage of faith development. This could pose a limitation to the study, given that the two groups were possibly at different stages of development. It must be noted here that it was not possible to get eight year olds in group B because of the less structured group as opposed to that of group A where the social worker was able to select children according to their age grouping as presented in the filing system. Group B relied on the positive responses of parents who were interested in allowing their children to participate in the research study. So it happened that all children who were given permission to participate in the study were not eight years old, as mentioned earlier that seven were seven years and one was nine years old. However, it must be noted that Fowler himself suggests that these stages are not always clear cut according to these ages. Given that these two groups were close in age, it can be safely assumed that their faith development was very similar.

As far as gender was concerned, there were 8 (50%) males and 8 (50%) females, who participated in this research study. There were four males and four female respondents in each group.

5.2.2   Socio-economic background of respondents

While all the participants of Group A were living at SOS Children's Village, there were socio-economic differences in Group B. This group of came from different geographic locations even though they worshipped at the same church. It is important to draw attention to the reality that group A receives funding from local companies and abroad. The life style in group A is more likely to reflect a middle class category, while the situation in group B is different. Here, the life style of these children varied according to the family's income

As a result group A represented a homogeneous group with equal spread of resources and a balanced financial background. Group B represented a diverse economic background. This reality is linked to the present context in South Africa, where there is a huge gap between the poor and the rich. So people can live side by side but that does not necessarily mean they are enjoying similar economic benefits.

5.2.3   Educational background of respondents

As far as the educational backgrounds were concerned, there were seven participants who were in grade zero; two were in Group A, while five were in Group B. Three participants were in grade one; two were in Group A and one in Group B. There were four participants in grade two; three in Group A and one in Group B. There was also one in grade three from group A and one in grade four from Group B. The levels of educational background had no major significance on how the participants responded to each of the questions. Some participants did not have strong reading and writing skills, so from the research point of view, some participants who could read and write were privileged. This may highlight a limitation of the research tool. There was no

significant difference in the type of schools the two groups attended. Thus, both groups shared similar experiences of school religious education.

5.2.4 Subject choices

There was no significant difference in the subject choices between the two groups. In addition, the reason the children chose particular subjects also indicated no significant difference. Instead there were remarkable similarities in that from six participants half from each group expressed clearly that they liked the English language. The reasons given were obvious as to why we learn a foreign language and in this context English is the medium of instruction in all schools, so it is a priority that children learn it. Group A and group B expressed a need to communicate in the English language and to be able to communicate in Zulu language comfortably.

5.2.5 Why children liked or disliked school

Twelve children (75%) expressed that they liked school very much. Half of these were from Group A and half were from Group B. The remaining four responses were equally divided between the two groups. One child from each group indicated that they disliked school, and one child from each group were not sure. Sometimes they liked school and sometimes they hated school and wanted to stay at home. The two groups showed no differences in this category.

5.2.6 What the respondents wanted to become when they were older

The section of the questionnaire dealt with the way children imagined themselves as adults and what they wanted to become when they grew up. Three children wanted to be teachers, two from group A and only one from group B. Three respondents wanted to be nurses, two from group A and one from group B. Two respondents wanted to be fire-fighters. Both were from group A. One respondent from group A wanted to be a doctor. Two respondents wanted to be social workers, one from each group. One

respondent from group B, wanted to be a soldier, another a pilot, and a third wanted to be a soccer star and play for the National Bafana-Bafana team, while a fourth wanted to be a pastor.

In this section, Group A presented the usual careers that they often encountered in an institution, whilst on the other hand group B presented a wide variety of choices of careers ranging from the known and those who are rare for instance the pilot, the soldier and professional soccer player. The home environment may have impacted the way these children chose their dream careers.

5.2.7 Self-image category

Despite being in an institution, many of the respondents from Group A had a positive self-image. They viewed themselves in the following way:
"I am a clever boy at school; this is what my teacher tells me"
"I sing very nicely, my music teacher told me"
"I am very kind and friendly"
"I swim well"
"I keep my body clean"
"I clean the house very well"
"I am very polite"
"I write very well"

Similarly, the respondents from Group B had a positive self-image:
"I am kind"
"I am strong"
"I am friendly"
"I am kind and I like travelling"
"I work hard to clean the house and I like to buy my own things"
"I am very respectful of others"
"I am friendly"
"I like other children they, are my friends"

It should be noted that two respondents in Group A acknowledged that they had been affirmed by teachers. This demonstrates the impact of affirming children and how these positive comments stay in the memory of a child and he/she believes in him/herself because of the collection of positive inputs especially from those who hold authority in their lives.

When asked what they disliked about themselves, Group A suggested the following:
"I cry easily"
"When I jump on the sofas and my mother hates it!"
"When I am lazy"
"When I am not listening because I want to do my own thing, my own way"
"I beat and punch other children and they cry"
"I am lazy"
"Nothing"
"I am not sure"

Group B responded in the following way to this question:
"I am short, I like to be taller and have a nice figure"
"Sometimes I am naughty"
"When I fight with my brother"
"I am always fighting and I hate it!"
The other four respondents indicated that there was nothing that they did not like about themselves.

Respondents in both groups reflected similar behavioural problems that lead to be disciplinary action when they disobeyed. The respondents in group A mentioned being lazy as one of the reasons that they disliked about themselves. This may reflect some pressures impacted on children to please and rewards that are based on performance which might reflect the institutional setting. There appears to be some difference in the two groups, given that half of Group B felt that there was nothing that they did not like about themselves. This perhaps shows greater self-confidence.

5.2.8   Verbal images of God

To examine the spiritual development of the children, questions 13-21 were meant to allow children to explore and share their background knowledge about their own spiritual development. What was significant was the fact that 81.25% of the study population said that they prayed. Of these, all of the eight children in Group A said they prayed. Five participants in Group B said they prayed, while two said "sometimes" and one said that they did not pray. The fact that all the children in Group A prayed could be as a result of house rules of the Village. The more varied response from Group B may reflect a possible lack of strict structures and rules as to when is prayer time in the family context.

When children were asked who taught them to pray, six of the eight respondents in Group A said that the village mothers taught them to pray. One respondent in this group could not remember who taught her to pray and another one mentioned that "he was taught by Jesus". In Group B the responses were more varied. Two respondents said they were taught by their granny, three respondents said they were taught by their parents, two respondents said no one taught them how to pray, they just knew it, while one respondent could not remember who taught her to pray. This section showed that the "God representative" for the children in Group A, was the house mother. The "God representative" for children in Group B was more varied, although tended to rest with some biological parent figure.

When asked why they prayed, Group A responded in the following way:

"I pray to ask God to bless our food and protect us in the car as we go to school"

"I pray because I love Jesus"

"I pray to ask Jesus to help me to pray"

"To pray with God"

52

"That God may forgive me my sins"

"To pass my exams at school"

"I pray so that Jesus helps me not to punch and kick other children"

"Because everybody does it"

Group B responded to this question in the following way:

"I pray to ask for forgiveness when I have done something wrong"

"I pray to ask Jesus to give us life"

"I pray to ask for good things"

"I pray because it is good"

"To listen to God"

"Because granny prays always"

"I don't know" (x2)

There are few differences in the reasons why the respondents in both groups prayed. Group A clearly illustrated praying for specific needs ranging from safety, security, help control bad behaviour at school and to pass exams. Group B reasons are more general like praying because it is good, praying for good things, and praying because granny does it. These reasons may reflect a sense of security and less emphasis on survival because they are in a secure environment. The children's sense of security is heightened by the fact that their vulnerability as children who experienced rejection in the early stages of their development, so for them whether they are aware or not they must ensure that they pray for safety. It is important to note that in both groups children reflected an element of guilt as reasons that compel them to pray. For example, 'praying for the forgiveness of sins'. These responses indicated the kind of religious socialization that both groups have received from their immediate environment. Some children may have used these statements without understanding what they really meant.

When asked when they pray, two from Group A and one from Group B said that they prayed at anytime. Four respondents from Group A and four from Group B mentioned that they prayed at night before going to sleep. One respondent from Group A and one from Group B mentioned that they prayed in the mornings. One respondent from group

A prays at meal times. In group B, two mentioned that they prayed in the church. These responses indicate that there are no significant differences on when children from both groups prayed. Interestingly, none suggested that they pray "all the time". Their prayers tended to be "time-specific" and all follow a similar pattern. The fact remains that all the respondents knew about prayer and they knew how to pray and they are praying at different times in some sort of routine which is related to their institutional or different family backgrounds.

Children expressed a variety of feelings, which made them remember or want to pray. The following responses were made in Group A:

"I pray when I am afraid"

"Because I like praying"

"To help myself and my life"

"I pray when I feel guilty and very sad"

"When I am angry or happy"

"I pray because God is in my heart"

"It makes me to think about God"

"If I go to church"

The following responses were made in Group B:

"When everybody prays"

"Because Mah wants me to"

"Because my mother says so"

"I pray to God and ask him to help me pass exams"

"I pray when I am upset and missing my parents"

"I don't know" (x3)

Respondents from group A and group B drew from a wide range of experiences in expressing what makes them to pray, all the responses were dominated by a need to express deep feelings such as fear, love, anger, anxious, confused and when instructed to pray by the significant other. It is interesting to note that on the whole, prayer is not

54

something foreign in the lives of these children and forms part of their daily lives, with the exception of the three respondents in Group B who were not sure why they prayed.

When asked to whom they prayed, Question 19 probed deeper into who do the children pray to. Four from each group identified "Jesus" as the one to whom they prayed. Two from each group identified "God" as the one to whom they prayed, and the other two from each group suggested that they pray to "Jesus and God"

In trying to probe what God meant for the children, four respondents from Group A and four from Group B said that God is Jesus. The other respondents from Group A tended to use language from the persons of God such as "Creator" or "Father". On the other hand, the other four respondents from Group B tended to refer to God in language used in a church setting, for example "Yahweh", "Church", and "King".

Group A and Group B tried to define who God is for them, doing this was an attempt to allow children to articulate what they perceive God to be. These definitions were strongly rooted on what they were taught from Sunday school as well as what they have imagined God to be and does to them. Some of the examples highlighted the way children remembered what is written in the bible about who God is. Children in both groups attempted to project the image of God as a provider, a protector, one who poses power, the creator God and king. There were interesting parallels made by children who used the name 'God' and 'Jesus' interchangeably, as if they meant the same thing. This particular observation reflected what children hear when adults pray and how they use the name of Jesus and God interchangeably. Since children in both groups attended the same church and were exposed to similar experiences of praying which impacted what they perceived God to be. In this way these questions enabled children to review their understanding of God and to link this with the formulations of the images of God.

A further question investigated the influences and their impact on the embodiment of God in children's lives. This is how the children in Group A responded:
"Mr. President Mandela"
"My granny in church"

"Bianca my best friend"

"The air I breathe"

"The village father"

"Mrs. Martin who is my class teacher"

"The village mother"

"Aunty Thandi who cared for me in hospital"

Group B responded in the following way:

"Jesus and Mary the mother of Jesus"

"My parents"

"Both of parents and my brothers and sisters, they are God to me."

"My father"

"Daddy"

"Mah"

"Jesus and my Mah"

"I don't know"

Respondents from both groups presented similarities by mostly naming the "significant others" as people that resembles God in their lives. These would be their "God-representatives". There were no major differences as the respondents in both groups related to either their care-givers or a parent as their God-representative. Both groups associated qualities such as carer, protector, and the image that is always there for them with God. This observation concurs with the theoretical input on object relations theory that prioritises the fact that the way children perceive God is impacted by their initial relationships with significant others in their lives. Respondents gave examples of parental figures, people they respected and really hold in high esteem. Furthermore when analyzing responses from the two groups, the respondents in Group A identified images of authority figures who holds high positions and resembles power, like for an example President Mandela and the village father. Whilst other children from the same group chose images closer to them and who have a personal relationship with them such as, the village mother, aunty Thandi a child care worker from the hospital, and the class teacher. For these children these relationships are so positive in that they resemble God in their lives.

In Group B, most the responses were strongly linked with the family members such as their father, mother, both parents, brothers and sisters. The remarkable observation here is the fact that the respondents from both groups reflected positive images of God and they showed an advanced insight in articulating these images, whether biological relations or caregivers. Another important observation is the fact that they both presented some kind of a interpersonal relationship with the images they identified as resembling God in their lives. There was no significant difference in their response to who God was, despite their different family backgrounds. Children in both groups presented what they were thinking in the present moment and they were no references to the past.

When asked to describe God, respondents in Group A, suggested the following:

"He is our creator, he cares for us, he died for us on a cross"

"He is our shepherd, he does all good things in the world, he forgive us our sins"

"Jesus does all the good things for us"

"God the father is the father of Jesus, Jesus is my father, my father is Jesus' brother and God loves us as his own family."

"He created us all even the animals and small insects"

"He gives us food and money to go to school"

"He cares for us and give us all what we want. He is very good to all of us, especially children"

"God care for people, even bad people, he loves and cares for them he is nice to me"

Group B responded in the following way:

"God is Jehovah, Holy Spirit; he does all the good things for us"

"He cares for us all; He loves us, and protects us against dangers like, being crushed by the car. He guides us home and gives proper support."

"She is very kind and happy" "He is very big, big like the whole world and the sea. He made us and cares about us. If we sin he is hurt, we must always please him"

"He provides us with food; he gives us light and electricity"

"Jesus does everything for us, he helps us in our lives, cares for us, make us feel happy, he makes our brains, and we work because of his support"

"He does all nice things to us, praise God for he does all good things for us"

"I don't know"

The positive attributes of God were carried through in this question by participants in both groups.

5.2.9   Non-verbal images of God

Group A; see Drawings 1-8 in Appendix 3

Group B; see Drawings 9-16 in Appendix 3

Reasons for drawing God:

Group A, Drawing 1: "I drew birds for God created birds, butterflies, he gave us beautiful sun, he created caterpillars".

Group A, Drawing 2: "Jesus on the cross gives us all that we need. People like Jesus' help. Flowers and grass are created by God too, and I love God for he gives us the world, the hippo, birds, butterflies and some clouds".

Group A, Drawing 3: "A lady wearing long clothes is the village mother. She is beautiful and there are flowers and grass".

Group A, Drawing 4: "I drew the church because it is a house of God, and the cross inside. The flowers, clouds and blue sky"

Group A, Drawing 5: "My drawing resembles God; there are five crosses, the soldier and two men, who crucified Jesus".

Group A, Drawing 6: "My God created everything, the bees and the butterflies. The trees, my God is like Jesus who rides on a donkey".

Group A, Drawing 7: "This is Jesus my God he is on the cross, because cruel people wanted him dead, you see he is looking at them"

Group A, Drawing 8: "I drew a house of Jesus, the church, with windows. I also drew birds because they were created by God".

Group B, Drawing 9: "I drew baby Jesus, because he was born in the stable".

Group B, Drawing 10: "Because Jesus died for us on the cross and he died for our sins".

Group B, Drawing 11: "I drew a church because I like to go to church. The church is a place of God, you know...".

Group B, Drawing 12: "I drew a church of God, this is where God stay. And people visit him on Sundays".

Group B, Drawing 13: "I drew Jesus on the cross, and the tomb in which he was buried. Then a big door fell out when he rose up".

Group B, Drawing 14: "Jesus on a cross crying and people are shouting, kill him! Kill him! Kill him! There were other people on the crosses".

Group B, Drawing 15: "I love God and she is in the sky. God's hanging on the cross; the soldier is the one who killed him"

Group B, Drawing 16: "I drew Mary and baby Jesus, because I see this picture in a church".

The reasons given for the drawings made by both groups show little significant differences. Most children refer to the cross, to Jesus, and to the church. These are all images from Sunday school or from the church. The only noticeable difference was the response of two children in Group A. One child drew the village mother as her God representative, and another represented the creation in his/her drawing.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter gave a thorough presentation of the responses to each question and explored comparatively how the children in Group A and Group B tackled the questionnaires. The following chapter will discuss in detail the research findings and analyze some of the responses given by the two groups of children. It will also draw possible conclusions on the core theme of this dissertation which focuses on the image(s) of God as perceived by children.

Chapter Six

Experiences of children: analysis of field research

6.1   Introduction

Having presented the findings of the field research in the previous chapter, in this chapter there is an intensive focus on the interpretation of the findings as translated by children given their as well as possible stages of faith development. Children who are in the age group 7-12 years are able to express themselves through talking, although this particular skill is not mastered completely. It is at this stage where the real personalities of children become clearly visible and can be observed. They argue and debate as they become fascinated by new developments in their world.

Some can express autonomy, as they are able to do a number of things without direct assistance from a parent or a caregiver, for example, eating and bathing in some cases, choosing appropriate clothing to wear. Most of the children have left home to go to school by this time and are facing their new life at school and are trying to survive with a wide variety of other children coming from different homes. This is where new relationships are established and develop. As a result, all children undergo an enormous transition phase, from a more stable environment at home to a more challenging and often unpredictable school environment. New ways of adapting to life seem to manifest at this age group, and possible interpretations of images that have been perceived or felt earlier in life, are verbalized. So it was proper to allow these children to share in the research on how they perceived God.

6.2   Interpreting the research findings

6.2.1   Children's views on their self-image

Both groups of respondents presented a very positive self-image. This was expressed openly by statements such as *'I am a clever boy at school; this is what my teacher tells me'. 'I sing nicely, my music teacher told me'.* These attributes were linked to what

they have done well at in school. It is remarkable to observe that this is what they associate as what they really liked about themselves. The self-image is strongly characterized by what other people have said to them, to boost their self-esteem. This is very important to them as they still remember these positive comments as they filled in the questionnaires. At this stage one can observe how destructive negative comments can impact on the self-esteem of a child.

The responses on self-image moved to a deeper lever for other respondents as they gave credit to themselves in the following remarks: *'I am kind'*, *'I am strong'*, *'I am friendly'*, *'I keep my body clean'*, *'I am very polite'*, *'I like other children they are my friends'*, *'I help others'*. These responses showed an understanding of what they perceived to be qualities that generated a positive impact on other children and made them feel more comfortable to share as highlights of their personality.

What they were not happy about themselves was remarkably based on playful behaviours that adults always mourn about in children. For instance *'when I jump on the sofa my mother hates it'*, *'sometimes I am naughty'*. It is interesting to note that there were respondents that wrote *'I don't know'*. There could be a number of reasons; one related to the abstractness of an explanation needed which left the respondent unable to express what he or she really wanted to say. Or they were just not sure what to fill in the questionnaire. There were no major differences between the group of children from SOS and that from local families, on how the participants responded to this section of the questionnaire which probed some information on family backgrounds.

6.2.2 Spiritual formation and religious history of children

As a way of tapping into possible elements that contributed to a respondent's spiritual and religious formation, it was important to ask whether they remembered who taught them to pray, and furthermore to investigate whether they know how to pray and how often do they pray. The research study tried to ascertain whether there is a possible link between children's relationships with God and those who bonded with them earlier in

61

life. This, according to Rizutto (1979), could be anyone who cared and supported the child early on in life, as they became the child's "God-representative". This forms the basis of the assumption underlying this dissertation that states that the way people perceive God is related to the manner in which they related to their parents or those who cared for them in their childhood years. The findings, as outlined in the previous chapter, seem to support Rizutto's argument. In terms of the spiritual development of the children, it was either the village mothers in the case of Group A or biological parents in the case of Group B that was significant.

The research findings show that from the two groups of children, eighty-one (81%) percent of respondents mentioned that they knew how to pray and they were taught by significant adults in their lives. Only one respondent gave a surprise answer in that he/she said Jesus taught him/her how to pray. This child was from Group A, suggesting that this child felt the absence of a "significant adult" in their life. Or perhaps the respondent was imitating what adults have said to him/her. These findings also concur with object relations view, that the way people relate to God can be influenced by socialization into that particular religion.

One respondent from Group B mentioned that she does not know how to pray. It is not easy to ascertain whether this particular respondent had a difficulty in understanding the question, or if she was raising a genuine concern. This raises an interesting awareness on some of the things we often take for granted. For instance we assume that children raised in Christian families automatically know how to pray. This suggests that there is a need for a conscious decision on the part of the parents to teach children how to talk and relate to God. However, it is also interesting to note that children are unique and they respond to these questions in a variety of ways.

On asking why children pray, it was an attempt to find out whether the reasons for praying are related to how they perceive or imagine the one they are praying to. Furthermore, it was meant to probe unexpressed motives for praying and how these are linked to the child's spiritual development. The responses outlined in section 5.2.8, demonstrate a clear indication of some kind of an imagination of whom it is that they

pray to. (As noted in the previous chapter, there were no significant differences in responses between the two groups.) For example, the respondent that prays and ask God to bless food may relate to God as a provider of food and who cares for their well being. Shortly a prayer for protection follows; here once more the respondent imagines a God who is caring and protects against danger. He/she is aware that the car can be a danger and he/she sees a need for praying in order to prevent any kind of accident that may harm him/her.

Another image is that of a judging God, who punishes when one does something wrong. Yet at the same time an image of a forgiving God is demonstrated by the fact that he/she knows that when he/she has done something wrong she/he can pray to a God who will forgive. Whether guilt feelings could be a driving force to pray to this God is not clear from this particular response. The same image can be linked to the response that says '*I pray so that Jesus helps me not to punch and kick other children*'. Here the respondent acknowledges that he/she has been behaving badly and hurt others; his/her image of God can be that of a forgiving father as well as the one who judges.

The respondent, who prays and asks Jesus to give life to the people, illustrates an image of God the creator of which all life comes from him/her. This is a transcendent image that may be linked to the story of creation, which is commonly taught in Sunday schools. So this respondent might be reflecting that image. Praying for Jesus to help praying is linked to the image of God as a teacher, who teaches us how to pray. This image can be associated with the response that says 'To pray with God' and 'To listen to God'. These images can also be linked to that of a God who is a friend who listens to the child.

The respondent who prays in order to pass her exams is a classical example of the common images of God illustrated by most of the children. This is often carried through life, a God who is remembered in a time of crisis. This is an image of God who performs miracles, making the impossible possible. This God is called when there is fear, pressure and anxiety; in this particular example it is related to examinations. There were very typical responses from children who mentioned that they prayed because

they were following those who were praying or because they were instructed to do so. These responses reflected that there was no real meaning given to this particular act and they were following instructions. This can be perceived as following a routine, depending on how often the prayers were recited and for what reasons.

In trying to investigate as to what motivates children to pray, the responses moved from a shallow to a deeper level in both groups. They begin from simple expression of fear, as a driving force to pray. In this instance the circumstance that calls for security prayer seemed to be the answer. The respondents expressed a variety of emotions for instance anger, guilt, happiness, being upset, missing parents, lonely, sad, anxious about exams and liking to pray. Motives for prayer were triggered by intense emotions, and where they were uncertain; prayer is seen as the best way to deal with their challenges. The reasons exposed the level of vulnerability as experienced by the respondents and how they viewed praying as way of coping with their individual struggles at this particular point in time.

A significant response in Group A, was by the respondent who expressed that he prays when he is missing his parents. This respondent has never met his biological parents. It is remarkable how this particular respondent was able to create images of parents of whom he has never seen and use prayer as a tool to express his innermost desire to be with them. Prayer seems to provide him with space to deal with his inner longing to meet his parents. Prayer seems to enable him to mourn the loss of very important people in life, and provide a venue to channel these emotions in a positive way. This motive to pray may tap into a child's resilience that forms a firm foundation for survival as he faces the diverse challenges in life.

In responding to whom did they pray, both groups of children were using the concept of God and Jesus interchangeably. This illustrated a strong and clear representation of God as a parental figure and a provider. This question led to the probing of who resembles God in a respondents' life. The responses were diverse, starting from President Mandela, granny, a best friend, father, mother, parents, village father, village mother, class teacher, and aunty who cared for them.

The respondents created their transitional objects that had qualities that represented God; these were associated with characteristics of parental and "hero" figures in their lives. These illustrations were observed in both groups, and there were no major differences whether the respondent was from a biological family or an alternative placement. This can be connected to Rizzuto (1979), as she suggested that children tend to idealize their representation of God as to correct and compensate for some of the deficiencies of the actual parents. This was clearly defined by the reasons given by respondents on why they chose those who resembled God in their lives.

6.2.3 Interpretations of the images of God as created by children

The key objective of this research study was to investigate whether children's formulation or perceptions of God is affected by the nature of biological family relationships or lack thereof. Using object relations theory that says that people create their images of God according to how they have related to their parents as babies, this study has established that the way children viewed God had no real direct link with who raised them. This is a significant observation which suggests the importance of other people outside the family network that can provide care and support to children whose biological families have failed in this task. Both groups of children responded in similar ways to most questions. While it is true that children who were abandoned as babies carry emotional trauma of being rejected, this study shows that there is a tremendous contribution that caregivers can make to the spiritual and emotional life of a child in alternative places of child care such as the SOS Children's Village. Their early intervention through providing maternal care helps to sustain the emotional well-being of the child at a vulnerable stage of psycho-social development.

Descriptions of God started from viewing God as a transcendent being and a holy spirit who created all things, to a trusted parental figure and beloved friend. These findings draw our attention to a significant aspect of religious and spiritual formation in children that often goes unnoticed.

The drawings illustrated a diverse reality of respondents and how their views about God can be articulated through drawings (see Appendix 3 for the children's drawings). The activity of drawing focused on the cognitive level of each respondent and stimulated imaginative processes which were then transcribed in the form of a drawing. The drawing was seen as one of the tools that can be used to allow respondents to communicate what they were not able to communicate in writing. This then is linked to play which allows for more creativity and free expression of self in a genuine manner.

The great advantage here was the fact that all children knew the skill of play which is part of their everyday world. Klein (1975) asserts that play is part of growth, as it expresses body and mind as well as acts as an avenue for children to arrive at their relations with reality. From observations made during this session the children were happy to draw, although there were some reservations on how one can draw God on a piece of paper. This is an interesting acknowledgment and illustration of how the thinking patterns of the children were challenged by this particular activity. This response shows the level of imagination and the struggle to match it with possible formulations of a transcendent God, who could not be put on a small piece of paper.

This could explain the strong emphasis in the drawings on the house of God, the church. This image was very prominent amongst the participants in both groups. This was acknowledged as the place God and Jesus stayed. Some mentioned that they visit them on Sundays. This can be linked with responses on prayer, where some of the respondents mentioned that they pray in church and they pray to God when they are inside the church.

Furthermore, the respondents drew the cross and Jesus hanging on it. The following were reasons given: *'My drawing resembles God, there are five crosses, the soldier and two men, who crucified Jesus'. 'Jesus on a cross crying and people are shouting, kill him! Kill him! Kill him!' 'This is Jesus my God he is on the cross, cruel people wanted him dead.' 'I drew Jesus on the cross, and the tomb in which he was buried. Then a big door fell out when he rose up', 'Jesus died for us on the cross, and he died for our sins'*

These images reflected the history of Jesus Christ, his birth, suffering, death and resurrection. It is noteworthy that each respondent who drew this image expressed some

sadness and in one way or the other relived the pain that he/she imagines Jesus might have felt. These stories are shared with the children at Sunday school and read over and over again in churches, especially during allocated times according to the church calendar. For instance, in some churches the Stations of the Cross are hung on the walls and children get to see them all the time they go to church. So this kind of image is represented in an on-going manner and they are clearly visible in most churches. These representations meant that the children were not necessarily responding from their personal experiences, but they seem to give what they thought may have been expected of them.

There were two respondents that drew a different image of God, not the one found in the church or in the bible. This is how they expressed it: *'A lady wearing long clothes is the village mother. She is beautiful and there are flowers and grass'. 'I love God and she is in the sky'.* These images were that of a woman, which is interesting to note that the first response was from Group A and the second response was from Group B. This clearly describes a positive image of beauty given to the village mother, and there are flowers and grass. The respondent reflected a meaningful and positive relationship with the village mother who became the child's "God-representative". This particular expression has nothing to do with whether this lady is the biological mother of this child; the mere fact remains in that this child associated the attributes that came from a caring and beautiful person, as that of God. This response poses a breakthrough into the assumptions of this particular study. This asserts that children's formulations of the images of God do not necessarily need to be rooted to biological attachments. The images of God can be formulated by children, despite their difficult early emotional developments.

6.2.4   Critical assessment of the research findings

The study findings challenge the major principles of Bowbly's concept of maternal deprivation theory. The study seems to suggest that the biological mother is not that important to the emotional and spiritual well-being of a child. What is important is that the child has a caring, nurturing, and supportive care-giver. From the research study it is clear that there is more than maternal bonding that must take place to ensure that a child develops emotionally and that there is a way of replacing a mother-figure or parental-

figure and still nurture positive affection that can result in well-balanced and emotionally sound children. So for Bowbly to argue that maternally deprived children do not develop affectional bonding, is limited and undermines other possibilities that can facilitate strategies for survival. These findings indicated that special attention needs to be paid to other substitute care for children that have been disrupted earlier in life. They indicate that children can be made to love and be integrated into a normal life that is experienced and lived by other children who grow in biological families.

These findings also raise the issue of resilience in children, especially from deprived backgrounds. From these study observations, there seems to be a natural ability for children to cope in adverse circumstances. This does not deny the fact that abandoned children undergo a grieving process that becomes an integral part of their lives, but children do adjust and learn to trust and love again.

The findings of this study further suggest that a child from a deprived background, where she/he has never met any of the parents, is able to create an image that soars above all he/she has never had. I argue that the alternative placement, such as the institutional care of the SOS Children's Village, contributes positively to the emotional well-being of vulnerable children. They are shielded from the impact of deprivation and thus can develop into a well-integrated human being in the midst of life's short comings

In summary the research findings draw together the theoretical basis of Winnicott (1971) and Rizzuto (1979), who are object relations theorists and raise awareness that all children learn to carry within themselves, ideas and feelings to persons, places and things which give rise to mental representations. These self-definitions through thoughts and interests, likes and dislikes, fantasies and dreams, affection and involvements can be regarded as 'God representations'. It is important to note here that the image(s)of God that are portrayed by the respondents is that of a western God and a Christian God that children acquired early in life, from what they hear at home, at schools, in church and in the neighbourhood, regardless of where they have been brought up.

This research study provided a space that gave meaning to various attempts by children to image God. The responses illustrates a wide variety of images that are encountered by

children as they grow and these deliberations are affirmed by Rizzuto (1979) who argues that it is the nature of human beings, from early childhood until the last breath, to sift and sort, and to play, first with toys as games and teddy bears and animals, then with ideas and words, and images and sounds.

The images that the respondents mentioned can be associated to Fowler's faith development theory (1981). While there were two faith groups represented in the study according to Fowler's categories, the study population in the two groups were close in age to represent a faith characterized by a fantasy-filled intuitive phase. In this phase, the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by the examples, moods, actions and stories of the invisible faith of primarily related adults. This connects with Groome's (1980) reference to Christian faith as a gift from God's grace that works within the person without violating the freedom of the individual. So faith is more than believing but finds embodiment in the lives of people.

The last section of the questionnaire was focused on each respondent's personal wishes. This was meant to explore some areas of concern, which may not have been dealt with in the questionnaire and may be of great relevance in the study. This was a way of giving participants space to dream and share their personal wishes, which could be later developed into possible prayers. There was no difference in the wishes between the two groups. A common need to have different types of toys to play with was expressed by all the children. Some of the responses moved from this simple wish to careers they would like to pursue when they get older. One difference was expressed by some respondents in Group A who mentioned that they wish to be united with their families one day. This expresses a very deep longing for identity and a sense of belonging.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter dealt extensively with the findings and possible interpretations that were made by the respondents in both groups. It paid special attention to how children viewed themselves and how they then create and interpret the images that represent God. In this way this study attempted to establish possible links related to the theoretical formulations of spiritual formation in children.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

7.1   Introduction

This has been an explorative study that attempted to bring to the surface some of the hidden realities in the spiritual development of children. This study began by setting a scenario that demonstrated the life circumstances that impacted on the lives of abandoned children. Two local newspaper articles presented two case studies of children who were abandoned as babies; the articles illustrated an unfortunate personal background of the majority of the children that are abandoned in South Africa at this present moment. Unfortunately there seem to be limited attempts or none at all that paid attention to what kind of internal questions these children might have as they grow up and later learn that they were abandoned as babies. The study attempted to explore and reflect on possible causes of abandonment of children by biological parents and how these can be viewed from different angles. Then, within this particular contextual framework, the challenges were brought to the surface that tried to interrogate what could be possible formulations of the images of God by children who were deprived of maternal bonding (parental bonding) earlier in life.

Using separate groups of children from different family settings was helpful in illustrating similarities and differences on how these children formulated their images of God, as well as how they perceive God to be. Special attention was placed on how these God representations were rooted in a possible type of socialization that children were exposed to in their given families.

This study has argued that the normal accepted theoretical material on psycho-social needs of children must not be taken for granted but children also have a role to play that is pivotal on how certain circumstances beyond their control can impact on them as well as on how these may be perceived by children. The aspect of allowing children to inform the researcher on what images they make up to represent God has been an intense, powerful and rich experience that can only be found and expressed by children.

Furthermore this study tried to explore possible theological tools that can be created to accommodate children at their level of development, and allow their creativity to flow freely. This then led to new possibilities that were observed from what children associated their images of God with and these can form the basis of creating new theologies that can respond to children's diverse family and community's contexts. New theologies created by children from diverse backgrounds may challenge the present ones and allow new life-giving interactions that can give birth to innovative ways that can be used creatively to suit children from all walks of life. This can only be possible if simple things mentioned by children are taken seriously and strategically formulated to be implemented and nurture a holistic development in children.

7.2 Summary of the research findings

The assumption that the way people perceive God is related to the manner in which they relate to their biological parents, did not seem to hold in this study. It was clear that abandoned children places in the alternative placement of SOS Children's Village, provided the needed parental care for their spiritual and emotional development. All the participants from this group, presented positive attitudes towards love and attention that was provided for them by the caregivers in this institution. So in this way, it became less important as to whether they were abandoned or not. The findings suggest that the most significant fact is that they were happy, secure, and their immediate needs were attended to. This also reflects the potential resilience of children, and their determination to survive regardless of very difficult life situations.

The fact that all the children attended school and Sunday school may have impacted on how they responded towards the formulation of the images of God. This was observed in the way they drew their images of God and how they responded to questions that were trying to establish initial influences in the formation of God images. There was a clear significant acknowledgment that there is a God who is a provider, creator and wants all children to be happy. These sentiments were expressed in various ways and they were spread equally between the two different groups of respondents. It was not easy to detect any significant differences in the responses of those raised by biological parents and those raised by surrogate parents.

This research thus highlighted the need to create reasonable safe spaces for children to share their own impressions and experiences of God, how these impacts on how they perceive God, and how these particular God images assist them in facing life's challenges. The study was a very rich explorative exercise that needs to be developed in a wider context and be expanded to a larger population and also with children of different age groups. This could provide more opportunities to interact with children's reality and develop new themes and concepts that may be used in Sunday schools to enrich children's spiritual experiences. This could stimulate the formation of new theologies that are created by children and need to be heard by adults. Increased attention given to this type of research may help to unearth some important decisions taken by adolescents as to why they do not go to church on Sundays or become involved in their church communities.

7.3 Recommendations

This study calls for the following recommendations:

- To create safe spaces for children to creatively draw and share their perceptions of God and how the images created make sense of their own world.

- To create art workshops and spiritual retreats for children that would make it possible for them to creatively share their diversity in a protected environment.

- To create child-friendly learning materials in religious education, such as child-friendly contextual Bible studies.

- To engage children in contextual bible studies that would enable them to autonomously interpret the bible in the way that speaks to them and in this way develop profound new hermeneutics from children's experiences of God.

- To create an environment that does not separate spiritual issues and day-to-day life challenges, so as to nurture a profound and balanced spirituality that is rooted in all aspects of a child's life.

- To encourage children to have personal journals to record some experiences and how these can indicate a child's spiritual development.

In conclusion, in the New Testament, Jesus draws our attention to the fact that until we become like little children we will not enter the kingdom of God. This research study has made this a reality. It has been an attempt to enter into the world of the child. It has been a rare opportunity to hear children's religious voices, and for this, they are owed a great deal of thanks.

Bibliography

Allport, G.W.1960. *The Individual and his religion: a psychological interpretation.* Macmillian CO. New York.

Ainsworth, M.D. 1962. *Deprivation of maternal care: a reassessment of its effects.* WHO, Geneva.

Ashbach, C. and Schomer, V. 1987. *Object relations, the self and the group: a conceptual paradigm.* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Axline, V.M. 1969. *Play therapy.* London: Ballantine Books.

Andry, R.G. 1995. Harnow, R.G. Lebovici, S. Mead, M. Prugh and Wotton Barnes P (ed.). *Personal, social and emotional development in children.* United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Barnes, P. 1995. *Personal, social and educational development of children.* Oxford, Open University Press.

Bailey, K.D. 1982. *Methods of social research* (2nd ed). New York Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.

Bowbly, J. 1973. *Child care and the growth of love.* England: Penguin Books Ltd.

Bowbly, J. 1973. *Separation: anxiety and anger.* New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers.

Bowbly, J. 1979. *The making and breaking of affectional bonds.* Tavistok Publications, London.

Bowbly, J. 1982. *Attachment.* New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers.

Brandow, B.A. 1975. "An analysis of the relationship between positive and negative self-concept and the variables in children spontaneous paintings". PhD thesis: California School of Professional Psychology, 1975. Dissertation Abstracts International, New York.

Brown, L. 1988. *The psychology of religion: an introduction.* Great Britain.

Bruner, J. and Haste, H. (Eds.). 1987. *Making sense: the child's construction of the world.* London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.

Burns, R. and Kaufmann, S.H. 1970. *Kinetic family drawing (K-F-D): introduction to understanding children through kinetic drawing.* New York: 1970.

Burlingham, D. and Freud, A.1942 *Young children in wartime*. London: Allen and Unwin Publishers.

Chaloner, A.J. 1994. "Children in residential care: an evaluation of current practice and recommendations for differential placements". Unpublished MA thesis (Clinical Psychology), University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Derry, E. 1979. *Growing up in religion*. London: The Christian Community Press.

Duska, R. and Whelan, A. 1977. *Moral development: a guide to Piaget and Kohlberg.* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd.

Eisenberg, L. 1981. *Cross cultural and historical perspective on child abuse. child abuse and neglect.*

Evoy, J.J. 1981. *The rejected: psychological consequences of parental rejection.* Pennsylavia State Univ. Press, USA.

Erikson, E. H. 1977. *Childhood and society*. Paladin Grafton Books. London: Collins Publishers.

Finn, M. and Gartner, J. (Eds.). 1992. *Object relation's theory and religion: clinical applications.* London: Praeger Publishers.

Fowler, J.W.1981. *Stages of faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning.* Harper and Row, Publishers, San Fransisco.

Fowler, J. W and Keen, S 1985. *Life maps: conversations on the journey of faith.* edited by Berryman, J Waco, Texas: Word Books Publishers.

Fowler, J., Nipkow, J. and Schweitzer, F. (Eds.). 1992. *Stages of faith and religious development: Implications for church education and society.* London: SCM Press Ltd.

Fowler, J.1996. *Faithful change the personal and public challenges of postmorden life.* Abingdon Press Nashville.

Finn, M. and Galner, J. 1992 Object r*elations theory and religion: clinical applications.* Praeger Publishers USA

Freud, A.1960. *Psychoanalytic study of the child.* New York

Freud, A. 1982. *Psychoanalytic psychology of normal development, 1970-1980.* London, the Hogarth Press, and The Institute of Psycho-analysis.

Golomb, C.1992. *The child's' creation of a pictorial world.* University of California Press, Los Angeles.

Garbarino, J. Kostenly, K. and Dubrow, N. 1991. *No place to be a child: growing up in a war zone.* Massachusetts: Lexington Books.

Garbarino, J. 1992. *Children in Danger: Coping with the consequences of community violence.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Garmezy, N. and Rutter, M. (Eds.). 1983. *Stress, coping and development in childhood.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Gerkin.N.C 1989. *Crisis experience in morden life. Theory and theology for pastoral Care.* Abingdon Press Nashville.

Giles, C. 1982. "Children found to be in need of care: a study of current management and practice". Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Cape Town.

Gobbel, G and Gobbel, R 1986. *The Bible: a child's playground.* SCM, Press Ltd London.

Goldman, R. 1964. *Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence.* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited.

Goldman, R. 1965. *Readiness for Religion: a basis for developmental religions.* Education: Routledge, London.

Groome, T.H. 1980. *Christian religious education sharing our story and vision.* Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco.

Hanson, R. (Ed.). 1982. *Institutional abuse of children and youth services.* Volume 4, No. 1/2. New York: The Haworth Press.

Hibbard, R.A. & Hartman, G. 1990. "Emotional indicators in human figure drawings of sexually victimised and non abused children". *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 40(2): pp211-9.

Hull, J 1991. *God talk with young children: notes for parents and teachers.* Trinity Press International, Philadephia.

Kellner-Pringle, M. 1978. *The needs of children: a personal perspective.* London: Hutchison Press.

Killian, B. & Willows, C. 1988. *Causes of child abuse: a South African perspective.* Pietermaritzburg: SASPCAN.

Klein, M. 1975. *Love, guilt and reparation and other works 1921-1945*. London, Virago Press.

Knopf, I.J. 1979. *Childhood psychopathology: a developmental approach*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Kohlberg, L. 1963. "The development of children's orientations towards moral order". *Vita Hamana* 6, 14.

Koppitz, E. 1969. *Psychological evaluation of children's human-figure drawings*. New York: Grune Stratton.

Kutin, 1991. *SOS kinderdorf-verlag innesbruck-munchen*. Austria.

Lazarus, R.S. and Musen, P. (Eds.). 1973. *The psychological development of the child*. 2nd edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs.

Maluccio, A.N., Fein, E. & Olmstead, K.A. 1986. *Permanency planning for children, concepts and methods*. New York: Tavistock Publications.

McKendrick, B. and Hoffman, W. (Eds.). 1990. *People and violence in South Africa*. Oxford: University Press.

Miller, A. 1981. *The Drama of being a child and search for a true self*. New York: Basic Books.

Miller, A. 1983. *For your own good. The roots of violence in child rearing*. London: Faber and Faber.

Morris, T. 1991. *Our idea of God: an introduction to philosophical theology*. London University of Notre Dame Press.

New International Version of the Bible, 1978. Cape Town, Bible Society of South Africa publishers.

Perrott, M. 1993. "The development of Zulu children's concepts of health and illness: An exploratory investigation". Unpublished MA thesis (Clinical Psychology), University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Piaget, J. and Inhelder, B. 1969. *The Psychology of the child*. New York: Basic Books.

Rapholo, J.G. 1996. "The self-concept of street children compared to that of placement children". Unpublished MA thesis (Clinical Psychology), University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Rizzuto, A. 1979. *The birth of the living God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rizzuto, A. 1991. "Religious development" in Oser, F.K. and Scarlett W.G. (Eds). *Religious development in childhood and adolescence.* San Fransisco. Jossey Bars.

Roberts, J.I. 1981. *Children's homes for abused and neglected children in South Africa.* Unpublished paper. Department of Social Work, University of Durban-Westville.

Rutter, M. 1979. "Maternal deprivation: new findings, new concepts, new approaches". *Child Development Journal.* 50, pp285-305.

Rutter, M. 1981. *Maternal deprivation reassessed.* 2nd edition. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.

Sadler A. (ed.). *Personality and religion the role of religion in personality development.* London SCM Press Ltd.

Sandstrom, C.I. 1966. *The psychology of children and adolescence.* Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

Sharman, C., Cross, W. & Vennis, D. 1995. *Observing children: a practical guide.* New York: Cassell Publishers.

Shelly, J.A. and Fish, S. 1988. *Spiritual care: the nurse's role.* 3rd ed.

Shelly, G. and Andiman, W. Gruendel, J. (eds.). 1995. *Forgotten children of the AIDS Epidemic.* London: Yale University Press.

Shelly, J.A. 1982. *The spiritual needs of children: a guide for nurses, parents and teachers.* Illinois: Inter Varsity Press.

Shmukler, D. 1975. "Origins and concomitants of imaginative play in young children". Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Simon, A.M. 1979. *A guide to practical social research for students.* Department of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Slipp, S. 1984. *Object relations: a dynamic bridge between individual and family treatment.* London: Jason Amison Inc.

St Clair, M. 1986. *Object relations and self psychology: an introduction.* California Books/Cole Publishing Company.

Thomas, G.V. 1990. *An introduction to the psychology of silk, a children's drawings.* New York: Varsity Press.

Tripodi, T., Fellin, P. and Meyer, H. 1978. *The assessment of social research.* Illinois: Hasca, Peacock Publications.

Werner, E.E. 1982. *Vulnerable but invincible: a longitudinal study of resilient children and youth.* New York: McGraw Hill Press.

Winnicot, D. W. 1971 Playing *and reality.* Tavistok/Routledge Publication New York.

Winnicot, D. W. 1981. *Boundary and space.* London.

Wood, D. 1988. *How children learn to think.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

APPENDIX 1

Letter to SOS Children's Village

A research project conducted by Miss Bongi Zengele, a Master's student in Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal Pietermaritzburg Campus, on how abandoned children perceive the images of God.

Dear Housemother/Village Father/Social Worker

I am a Master's student currently doing research at SOS Children's Village. I am investigating the spiritual development, which results in coping abilities and resiliency of SOS children, within an integrated SOS family set-up programme.

Aims

To study a group of abandoned children who live in SOS family and a group of children who have both parents living in the local community in order to ascertain:

1. The way in which children formulate their images of God.

2. Children's understanding of God and to establish whether their understanding varies according to different home environments.

3. On the basis of findings 1-2 above to make recommendations about how children's spiritual development may be enhanced.

Instructions:
    a) The interview schedule will take an hour to answer.
    b) Please tell children to relax, and answer all questions as instructed and the drawings.
    c) Children's responses will remain confidential and their identity will not be disclosed.
    d) A special permission to scan or photocopy the original drawings by the children during this session is requested as this will form the appendix of this study.

I hope this study will assist in gaining insight into a deeper understanding of possible faith development in children with special needs.

Thank you,
Bongi Zengele

APPENDIX 2

Research Questionnaire

Ngicela uphendule yonke imibuzo elandelayo:
Please answer all the following questions:

1. Iminyaka yakho......................
   Your age is.............................

2. Ubulili ....
   Gender...................

3. Ekhaya kuse...
   Your home is at...

4. Ufunda bani? ....
   What class are you in? ....

5. Ukusiphi isikole? ....
   Which school are you? ....

6. Isiphi isifundo osithandayo esikoleni? ....
   What is your favourite subject at school? ....

7. Kungani usithanda lesisifundo?
   ....
   ....
   ....
   Why do you like this subject?
   ....
   ....
   ....

8. Uyasithanda yini isikole? ....
   Do you like school? ....

9. Uma usukhulile/usumdala uthanda ukuba yini? ....
   What would you like to be when you are older? ....

10. Yini oyithanda kakhulu ngawe?

....
....
....
....

What do you like about yourself?

....
....
....
....

11. Kungani?

....
....
....
....

Why?

....
....
....
....

12. Yini ongayithandisisi ngawe?

....
....
....

What is it that you dislike about yourself?

....
....
....

13. Kungabe uyakhuleka/thandaza yini?

....
....
....

Do you pray?

....
....
....

14. Ubani umuntu wokuqala owakufundisa ukuthandaza...............................

....

....

Who is the first person that taught you to pray?

....

....

15. Uthandaza kanjani?

....

....

....

How do you pray?

....

....

....

16. Kungabe uthandazelani?

....

....

....

Why do you pray?

....

....

....

17. Uthandaza nini?

....

....

....

When do you pray?

....

....

....

18. Yini eyenza ufune ukuthandaza?

....

....

....

What makes you want to pray?

....

....

....

19. Uthandaza kubani?

....

....

Who do you pray to?

....

....

20. Ungubani uNkulunkulu?

....

....

....

....

Who is God?

....

....

....

21. Empilweni yakho ngubani ongumfanekiso kaNkulunkulu? ....

....

....

In your life who resembles God? ....

....

....

22. Ubani lo okukhumbuza uNkulunkulu?

....

....

....

Do you know anyone who reminds you of God?

....

....

....

23. Kungani?

....

....

....

Why?

....

....

....

24. Ngokwakho chaza ukuthi uNkulunkulu ungubani, futhi ukwenzelani?

....
....
....

In your own words describe how does God do for you?

....
....
....

25. Dweba umfanekiso kaNkulunkulu, ngendlela ombona ngayo ngamehlo engqondo (bhala ephepheni eliseceleni).

Draw a picture of God, in a way you imagine him/her to be like (on a separate page)

26. Ungachaza yini wenabe mayelana nomdwebo wakho, usho ukuthi ngabe usho ukuthini kuwena

....
....
....

What does your drawing say about God?

....
....
....
....

27. Izinto ezintathu othanda ukuzicela kuNkulunkulu? ....

....
....
....
....

Three things you would like to ask God?

....
....
....
....

Ngiyabonga
Thank you

Bongi Zengele.

85

Group A, Diagram 1

ladybird

bird

my

apes

butterfly

god

sun

caterpillar

Group A, Drawing 2

I love if Good because he gaviis the helpt

Group A, Drawing 3

church of c...
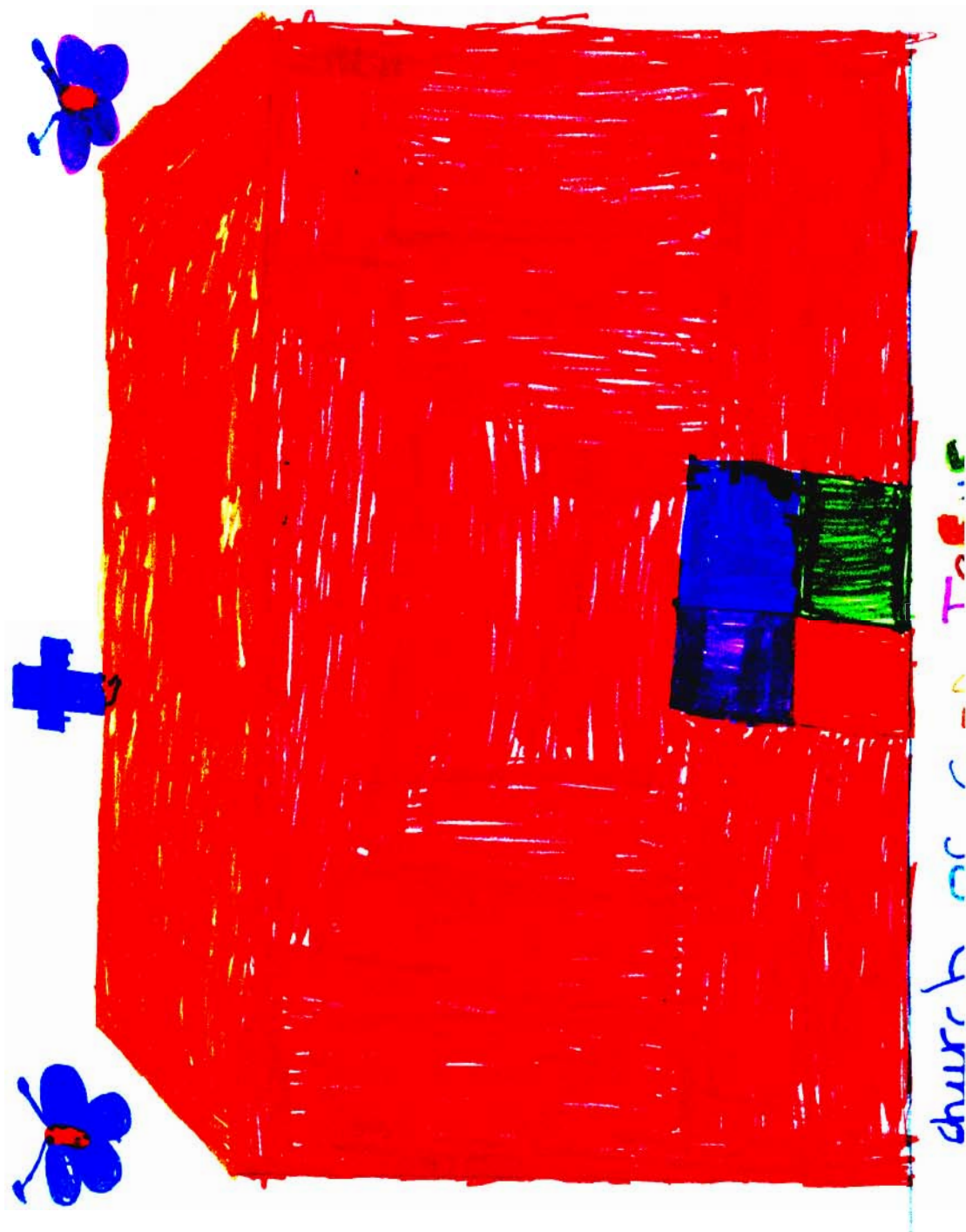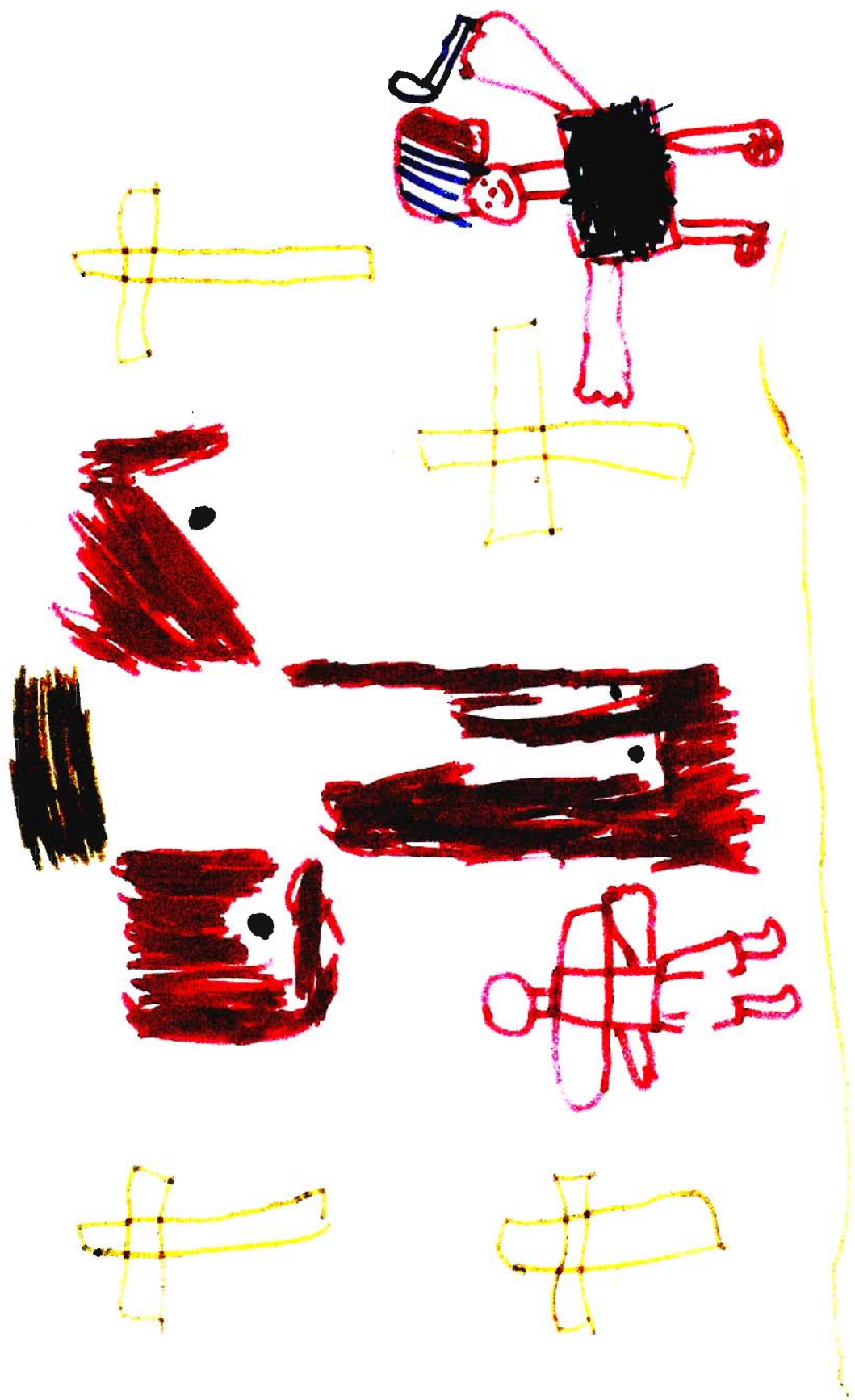
Group A, Drawing 6
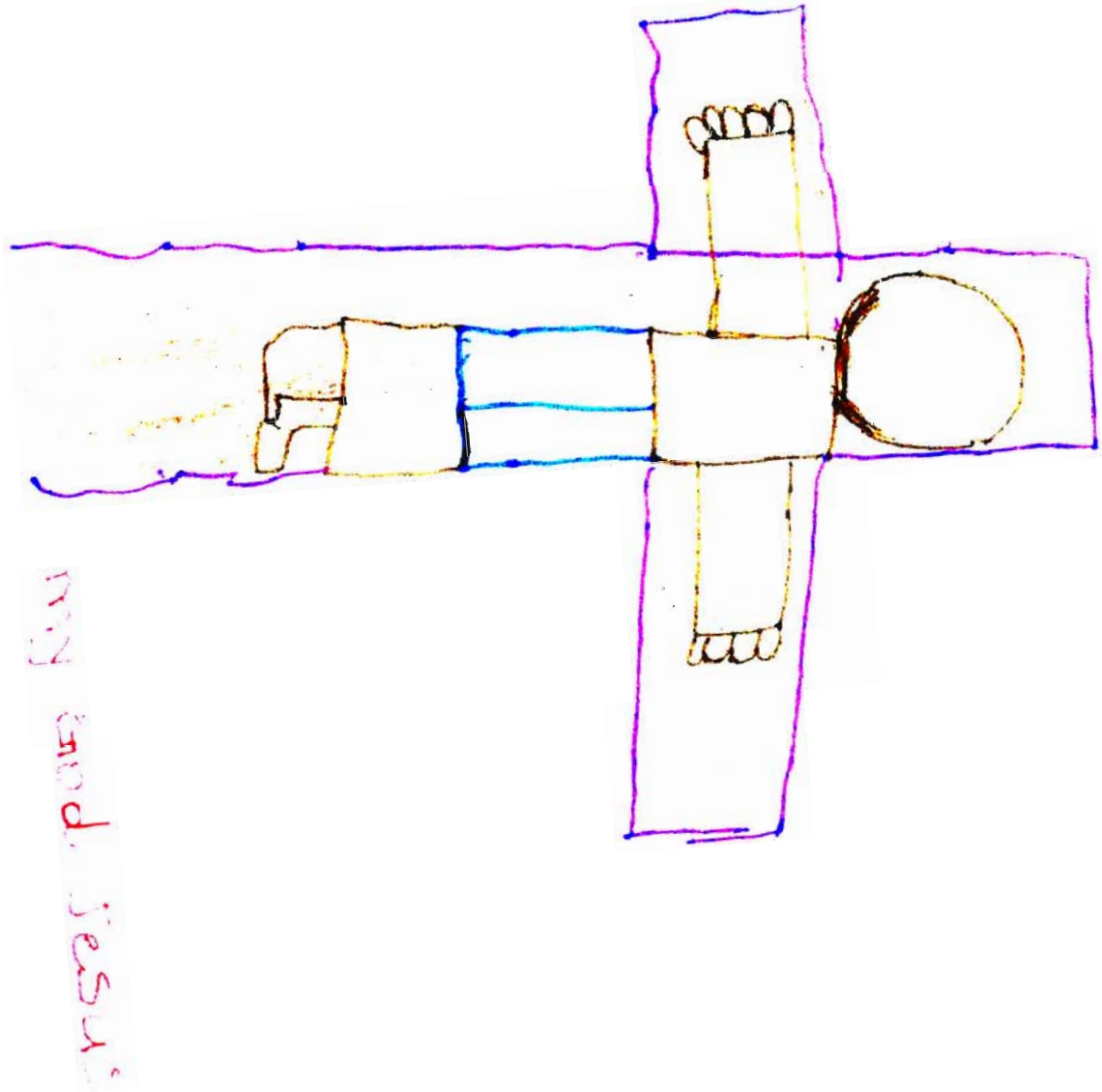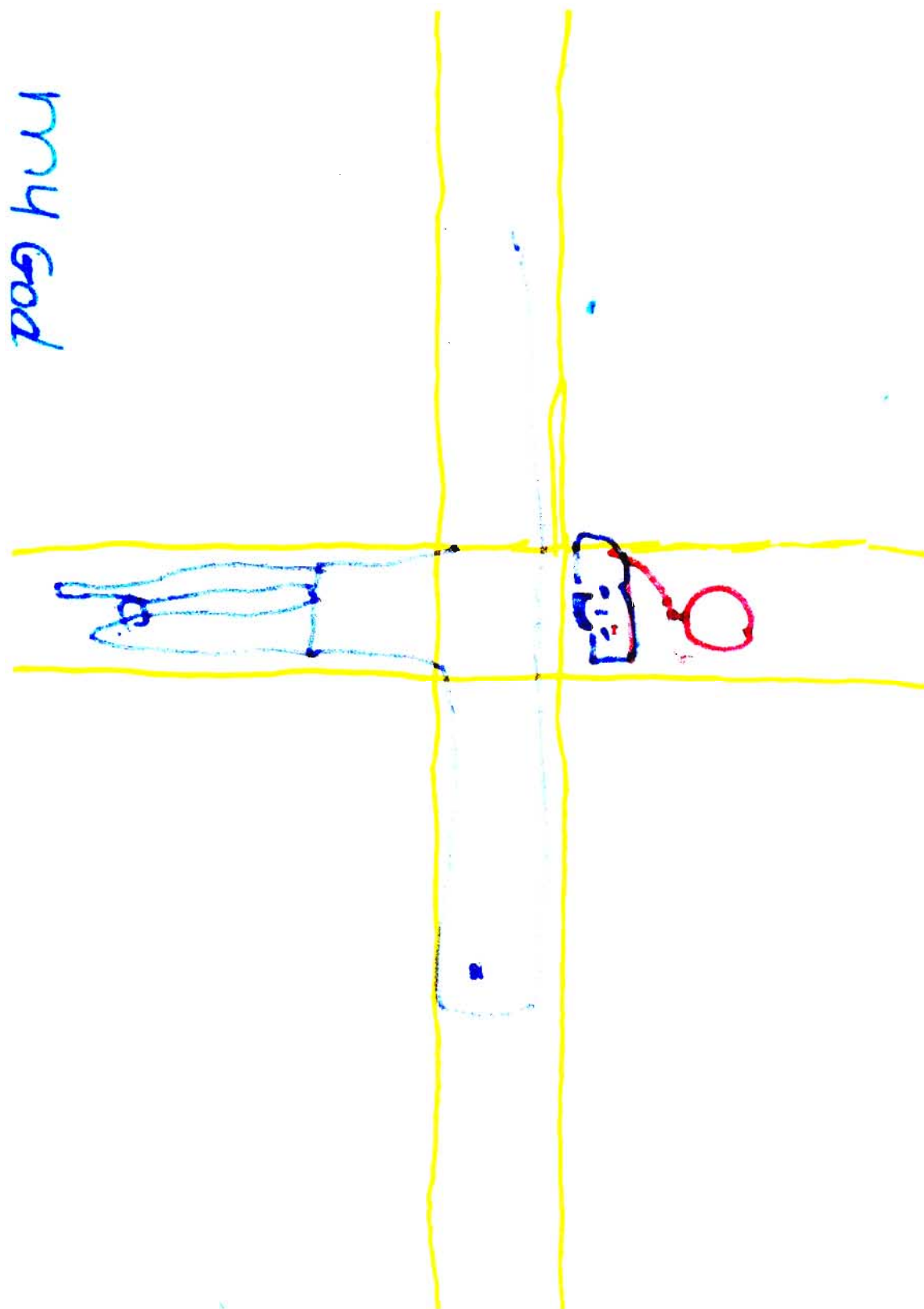
Group A, Drawing 8

Group B, Drawing 9
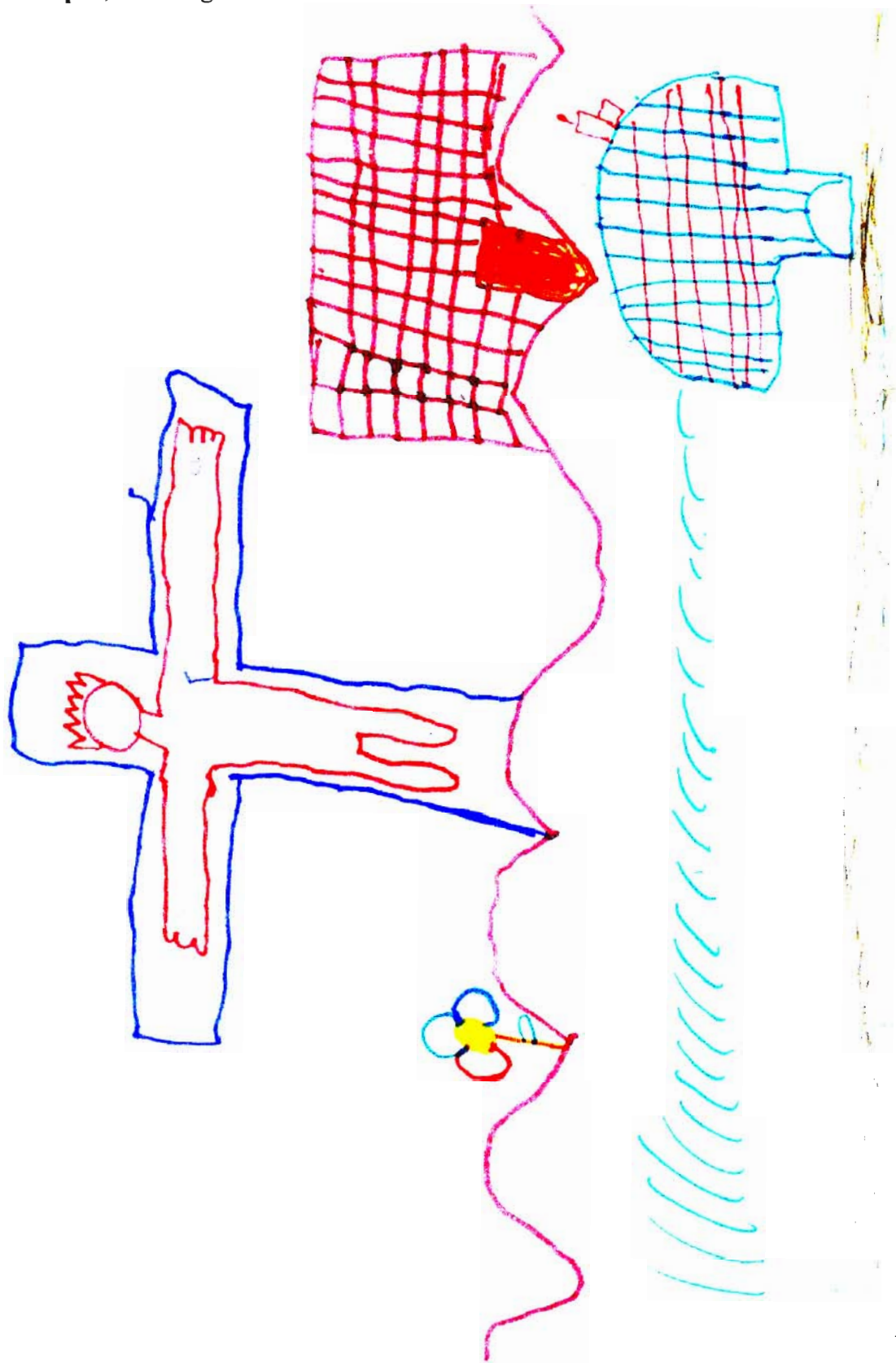
Group B, Drawing 10

Group B, Drawing 11

Group B, Drawing 15