THINKING ABOUT GOD THROUGH CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this interdisciplinary study was to examine children's and adolescents' (aged 6 to 16) thoughts of God that were hypothesized to reflect the child's religious context and to be related to a child's cognitive maturity and gender. The following **four** objectives guided the study: (1) to examine children's thoughts of God within a particular religious school environment, (2) to investigate age-related changes in children's representations of God as indicated by their narrative texts, (3) to explore children's (female and male) representations of God as described in their narrative texts, and (4) to suggest transitions in the developmental structure of children's narrative texts about God across levels of cognitive maturity.

The children (N=114) selected for the study were chosen from a Christian school setting where religious instruction was part of the curriculum focus. Each child, upon parental consent, participated in a one-to-one interview and accomplished a series of developmental tasks including generating a story about God, responding to a story about Jesus, answering questions about God, and completing a short memory task. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire about religious life inside and outside the family home. A review of the religious education curriculum was conducted. The collected data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

The results were **fourfold**. *First*, the study found that the religious school environment (e.g., religious education program and religious activities both inside and outside the family home) had the potential to influence children's changing thoughts about God. *Second*, there were differences in female and male representations of God. *Third*, there were significant changes in children's representations of God as they matured. These changes were based not only on children's cognitive maturity but also as a result of the children's religious knowledge acquired within their religious environment. Also, these changes reflected unique subtle differences in children's conceptual understandings of God. *Fourth*, as children cognitively matured, there were changes in the structure of their narratives about God. These changes paralleled the narrative structure posited by McKeough (1992a) and the stages and substages posited by Case (1992a).

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For:

My Father in Heaven

CHAPTER ONE

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S AND ADOLESCENTS' RELIGIOUS THINKING

> *OK, I'll tell a story from the Bible. Moses was building the ark, and people were laughing at him and saying, 'That thing will never float are you going to test drive it or something?' And they keeped on laughing and had a party and stuff. And Moses ignored them and stuff and he did what God told him to. Cause he knew a storm would come and stuff. They would want to come in when the storm came. They would be sorry but God wouldn't let them. And he's taking like, all the animals, two of every kind. And like, the earth opened up and water came spraying out and stuff. Then, like, another earthquake was under the water. It was pushing and pushing against a big huge mountain and it broke from the mountain and came spurting down. And it destroyed the whole world. ... People actually saw it on Mount Seymour. It got struck in two. It went on one side and then the other side. It was big. There where the water came crashing out on Mount Seymour. That where the big hole was.*
>
> David (age 8)

This was David's (age 8) version of the Biblical story of Noah's ark. David's recounting of the above Biblical story was based on religious knowledge acquired and shared within his active learning environment. He drew from his own understanding of the Bible story but mixed up some of the details. David believed that it was Moses not Noah that built the ark. Also, David blended his own life experiences into the story and referred to Mount Seymour (a mountain David viewed from his classroom window) as a place where the spectacular event happened.

JCS[1] was the religious school environment where David's religious knowledge and experiences were intermingled to shape the Noah event. Here was my initial reaction to JCS' religious community:

> *I don't know what I was expecting. As I walked in, there were kids in the hallway and teachers rushing to the staffroom to get their last bit of java from the cantina before recess was over. The school was just like a normal school (i.e., public school).*
> *I thought that a religious school was going to be different. In some way, I thought there would be crucifixes everywhere, nuns holding rosaries and Bibles, stringent rules whereby children would not be allowed to 'dash' down the hallway, ... and teachers with rulers in hand.*
> *I guess my 'religious school picture' had been developed from other people's childhood tales or even the movie channel. I had never been in a religious school before! ...*
> *This school was not overtly religious with religious artifacts and protocol. Instead the atmosphere was friendly, comfortable, and warm. Everyone appeared 'smiley.' The principal, dressed in casual clothing, took time to tease a few senior kids about their basketball efforts before he greeted me. ... [Researcher's Journal]*
>
> *In the main office, there is this beautiful stained glass picture about six feet by four feet. It is a picture of Jesus and two of His disciples. ... Jesus is holding a little child with His left hand and with His right hand He is caressing a child's head. There are more children waiting to greet Him. ... [Researcher's Journal]*
>
> *This stained glass scenario depicted the following Biblical passage (Mark 10:13-16):*
>
> > *People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.' And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them. (NIV) [Researcher's Journal]*

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1 'JCS' was chosen as a modifier for the school. The actual name of the school is withheld.

From the main office, where the stained glass window was illuminated, I was taken by the principal and introduced to the staff. When I first arrived, one teacher said, "The researcher is here," and another said, "Quick, change the results."

Frequently, the staff commented to me how much they liked working at this school. The staffroom was a jovial place and in efforts to sustain a community atmosphere, parents were encouraged to "communicate freely with the staff" (JCS Handbook, 1994, p. 11). Many times I noticed a parent 'freely' engaging with teachers in the staffroom, especially when one placed a freshly baked cake on the coffee table.

Further communication with parents was emphasized through weekly newsletters (*All God's Children*). These weekly newsletters were placed in my staffroom mailbox alongside the monthly *Christian Home and School* magazine. Also, I received both elementary and senior yearbooks at the end of the research term in my mailbox.

The cover on the *Elementary Yearbook*, drawn by a grade one student, had children doing a variety of activities such as singing, playing ball, listening to a story, and reading a magazine in the library and a teacher at her desk. The pictures were bordered with *God loves you, God loves me, God loves us, and God loves everybody*. The principal's message, on the first page, read:

> It is my prayer that, at school, we continue to strive to provide a place where love, joy, and perseverance are the rule by which we live. Congratulations to all you students in their efforts [sic] throughout this year. May the Lord 'make His face shine upon you' throughout all your years!

Also, the contents of the Elementary Yearbook contained engaging, fun-loving photographs collected from the year, writings from children's journals, and hand-drawn pictures. For instance, one picture depicting a tree, sun, and clouds was captioned, "I like to see God's creation."

The cover on the *Senior Yearbook*, drawn by a grade ten student was somewhat reminiscent of John Travolta dancing to the Bee Gee's tune, *Staying Alive*. (I thought that this Yearbook Club had a sense of humor.) The principal's message read:

> As you look through the pictures in this yearbook, think back and reflect on what the Lord has done in the life of [JCS] but also, more importantly, on what He has done in your life. As our grade ten students leave us, I would ask them (and all our middle school students): 'Have you made your commitments in life?' It has been a joy and challenge to have you as students! May the following words guide you throughout life: 'In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.' (Proverbs 3:6)

The closing comment in the yearbook, from a grade ten student, said, "I hope that next year I can have as much fun at my new school as I did here at [JCS], but I don't know if that's possible. Everyone here is so positive and kind that I hate to leave!"

Overall, JCS was a learning community that encouraged students "to explore and begin life under God" (JCS Handbook, 1994, p. 2). Biblical materials were an immediate source for these references to God. JCS was a caring environment where a 'sense of community' was acknowledged and where relationships formed and nurtured within this community provided the foundation for learning about God to take place. For instance, JCS' newsletters, yearbooks,

and religious art demonstrated that the principal, teachers, and parents believed that God was actively involved in their community and not just a distant entity. The JCS Handbook (1994) stated that "as a Christian school we feel that the idea of **community** is central to our operation" (p. 18) [Bold in original].

It was within JCS' community that this investigation of children's and adolescents'[2] thinking about God took place. To introduce this study, **Chapter One** is divided into **seven** main sections. They are: (1) background, (2) research purpose, (3) research objectives, (4) interdisciplinary focus, (5) definition, (6) significance, and (7) summary.

BACKGROUND

Existing studies have focused on different aspects of changes in children's thinking about God. Fowler (1981) proposed a *universal* approach to stages of faith development based on a lifespan of religious experience (i.e., growth of faith) but paid little attention to religious context or gender. Heller (1986) provided elaborate descriptions about how children were thinking about God in four religious contexts (Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, and Protestant)[3] with

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2 This study examined thinking about God through childhood and adolescence. Children/child was frequently used to indicate the full range of participants from ages 6 to 16.

3 Heller (1986) stated that "the four religions, each represented by ten children, were Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism (Baptist), and Hinduism (American Ashram Group). These religions were selected because of contrasting beliefs and because of the accessibility of their members" (p.8). Yet, Heller (1986) did not acknowledge that the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant faiths are monotheistic (one God) with Catholic and Protestant being Trinitarian monotheistic (three equal parts to one God), and Hinduism is polytheistic (many gods).

minimal regard given to the specific age groups of the children. Nye and Carlson (1984) examined the development of the concept of God by dividing children (aged 5 to 16) into three age groups (5 to 8 year-olds, 9 to 12 year-olds, and 13 to 16 year-olds) from three religious contexts (Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish);[4] they did not address the specific content of the children's thoughts of God in each age grouping nor how such thoughts of God change as children mature cognitively and how such thoughts are related to children's religious contexts. Jaspard (1972, 1980) indicated that there are distinct differences in the way girls and boys think about God but gave little emphasis to age and religious context. McIntosh (1995) acknowledged the role of the environment in shaping *God schemas*,[5] but did not define or describe the structure and content of such schemas (Paloutzian & Smith, 1995). These studies addressed one aspect of children's changing thoughts about God.

A review of the research in *children's religious thinking* demonstrated that (a) children's thinking about God could be influenced by their religious context (e.g., Coles, 1990; Elkind, 1978; Erikson, 1959; Francis & Gibson, 1993; Heller, 1986; Janssen, De Hart, & Gerardts, 1994; Rizzuto, 1991; Vergote, 1980), (b) children's thoughts of God could be related to a child's particular age (e.g.,

---

4 Nye and Carlson (1984) stated that "180 children, 5 to 16 years of age [were] equally divided into Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish" groups (p. 138). They did not acknowledge the distinctions between each religious grouping; for instance, the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant faiths are monotheistic whereas the Catholic and Protestant faiths are Trinitarian. The notion of one God (Jewish) versus three-in-one God (Catholic and Protestant) was not indicated in their study.

5 McIntosh (1995) stated that "a God schema might include, for example, assumptions about the physical nature of God, God's will or purposes, God's means of influence, and the interrelations among these beliefs" (p. 2).

Elkind, 1978; Fowler, 1981; Goldman, 1965; Heller, 1986; Hyde, 1990; Nye & Carlson, 1984; Reich, 1989; Tamminen, 1994), and (c) females and males could view God differently (e.g., Goldman, 1965; Heller, 1986; Jaspard, 1972, 1980; Nelsen, Cheek, & Au, 1985; Savin-Williams, 1977). These studies addressed children's thinking about God from various aspects of religious context, age, or gender. Although the research was valid, it was limited.

Therefore, it was important to examine children's and adolescents' thinking about God in a more comprehensive way; a way that simultaneously considered the child's religious context, cognitive maturity, and gender in shaping his or her ever-changing thoughts of God. This investigation was important because it took into account the possible (a) effects a particular religious setting had on a child's thoughts about God, (b) age-related changes in a child's thoughts about God, and (c) gender differences in a child's thoughts about God. An interdisciplinary perspective provided a framework for examining all three considerations together.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine children's and adolescents' (aged 6 to 16) thinking about God that was hypothesized:

(a) to reflect the child's religious context,

(b) to be related to a child's level of cognitive maturity, and

(c) to be gender-related.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Objective One: to examine children's and adolescents' thoughts of God within a particular religious school environment.

Objective Two: to investigate age-related changes in children's (aged 6 to 16) representations of God as indicated in their narrative texts.

Objective Three: to explore children's (female and male) representations of God as described in their narrative texts.

Objective Four: to suggest *transitions* in the developmental structure of children's narrative texts about God across levels of cognitive maturity.

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOCUS

Research in *children's religious thinking* demonstrated that children ARE thinking about God (e.g., Bassett, Miller, Anstey, & Crafts, 1990; Bucher, 1991; Coles, 1990; Heller, 1986; Hyde, 1990; Rizzuto, 1979, 1991). Several researchers have acknowledged that children's thoughts of God change over time (e.g., Barnes, 1989; Elkind, 1978; Fowler, 1981; Francis, 1979; Goldman, 1965; Harms, 1944; Nye & Carlson, 1984).

What was missing in the field of *religion in childhood and adolescence* research was an examination of children's and adolescents' thoughts of God from an interdisciplinary focus -- a focus that took into account the contextual, conceptual, and structural features of children's changing thoughts of God through middle childhood into adolescence.

This interdisciplinary study examined changes in children's and adolescents' thinking about God, between the ages of 6 and 16, with consideration of a child's cognitive maturity and gender, and the influence of religious context. Also, this interdisciplinary study (a) acknowledged the 'child-in-context' by examining the child's religious-cultural influences on his or her thoughts of God, (b) surveyed the research in *children's religious thinking* by identifying the conceptual representations of a child's thoughts of God, and (c) utilized a developmental model for assessing the structural changes in a child's narrative texts about God. To do so, three research domains were incorporated.

First, the anthropological domain emphasized the 'child-in-context' as a cognitive model of culture. A child's ideas about God were fashioned within the context of his or her religious environment. Mostly, a child's ideas were shaped by the religious knowledge acquired within his or her religious environment whether it be at home, church, and/or school.

Second, the religious studies domain acknowledged children's thinking about God as evidenced by their representations of God. These representations of God were formed early in life and were influenced by the religious knowledge that a child acquired through experiences in his or her religious environment (church, school, and home). Also, they were governed by the child's age and gender and influenced by his or her own desire to have a personal relationship with God.

Third, the developmental psychology domain demonstrated that changes in children's development, in general, can at least be partly explained by stage theory. Several researchers (Elkind, 1971; Goldman, 1964; Nye & Carlson, 1984) used Piagetian theory to examine religious development and religious constructs such as the development of prayer (Long, Elkind, & Spilka, 1967) or religious identity (Elkind, 1961, 1962, 1963). This study used a neo-Piagetian model to assess children's religious thought. To date, a neo-Piagetian developmental model has not been used to assess children's understandings about God.

By drawing from the contributions of anthropology, religious studies, and developmental psychology, this interdisciplinary study offered a multi-dimensional investigation of children's and adolescents' emerging thoughts of God. Contextual (religious environment), conceptual (individual religious understandings), and structural (developmental characteristics) considerations, as they related to children's thoughts about God, were investigated. All considerations were important. Together, this study provided an encompassing interdisciplinary perspective toward understanding changes in children's and adolescents' (aged 6 to 16) thinking about God.

DEFINITION

This study acknowledged that children's and adolescents' religious thoughts can be fashioned by their experiences within their religious environment. However, the focus of this study was on children's **religious thinking** rather than their religious experiences.

Religious thinking is considered distinct from religious experience as it is concerned with how children cognitively construct their religious ideas. To aid in the definition of religious thinking, Francis (1979) suggested that religious thinking covered **three** general areas.

First, religious thinking was defined as "thinking about religion" (Francis, 1979, p. 110). The primary focus of this definition was on how children process their thoughts about religious material.

Second, religious thinking was defined as "thinking religiously" (Francis, 1979, p. 110). This definition was "used to talk about the aspects of thought which characterize the religious person as distinct from the non-religious person" (Francis, 1979, p. 110). Religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices were of primary concern.

Third, religious thinking was defined as "thinking in religious language" (Francis, 1979, p. 110). This definition was concerned with the language that characterizes religious discourse; this included the language used to express the faith and practice of the religion.

This study was concerned with Francis' (1979) first definition of religious thinking wherein the developmental progression of children's religious ideas was the focus. This study acknowledged that religious thinking was connected to the process of cognitive development.

> Studies are broadly agreed that religious thinking is essentially developmental in nature, in the sense that it is dependent on the acquisition and development of basic cognitive capacities and that, in accordance with general principles of psychological development, it develops in an orderly, sequential, and predictable pattern of series of age-related changes. (Slee, 1991, p. 143)

Therefore, the focus of this study was to investigate the changes in children's and adolescents' thoughts about God.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The benefits of this study were **threefold**. *First*, this study contributed to the research base in "childhood and religion" by investigating children's thoughts of God from an interdisciplinary perspective. *Second*, this study contributed to the research base in developmental psychology by examining the developmental aspects of children's (aged 6 to 16) thinking about God. *Third*, this study provided suggestions for religious educators wherein if they understood the developmental characteristics of children's thinking about God they could plan purposeful religious instruction. Overall, this investigation was important because a child's thoughts about God developed and formed during childhood

become the inner cognitive convictions that color the entire religious life of the child (Rizzuto, 1979).

SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the study. This interdisciplinary study examined children's and adolescents' thinking about God from an encompassing perspective that took into account the influence of the child's religious context, cognitive maturity and gender in shaping his or her changing thoughts of God.

The research purpose was to examine children's and adolescents' thinking about God that was hypothesized (a) to reflect the child's religious context, (b) to be related to the child's cognitive maturity, and (c) to be gender-related. The next chapter -- *Review of the Literature* -- discussed the review of the literature relevant to the research purpose. This review incorporated research in the domains of anthropology, religious studies, and developmental psychology.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> *"You don't know what God looks like, because He may not even look like us.... I think He might be some force, like the winds -- a tornado, a hurricane! -- Or He might be the stars, maybe some invisible rope that holds all the stars together. How can we ever know until we die?"*
>
> Sara (Fifth Grade)
> (Coles, 1990, p. 58)

Early in life, a child's thinking about God is fashioned in a basic and fairly simple way; for example, Andrew (age 4) described *God as a ghost* because He cannot be seen (Smoliak, 1994). Later, as a child matures cognitively, these concepts of God become more flexible and elaborate. For instance, an eleven-year-old described God in the following manner: "I do not think of him as handsome, not the kind of man I want to meet when I grow up. God is different. He is the only one who looks like he does -- I mean no one looks like him" (Coles, 1990, p. 57).

Research pertaining to *religion in childhood and adolescence* is extensive.[6] As a result, this study has had to glean from different areas of

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[6] Hyde's (1990) book -- *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review of the Research* -- categorized research in the following ways: (a) religious thinking, (b) children's ideas of God, (c) parental images and the ideas of God, (d) religious beliefs and their development, (e) understanding parables, allegories and myths, (f) religious education, (g) religious attitudes, (h) religious experience, (i) personality and religion, (j) the development of religiousness, (k) religious beliefs and practices, and (l) religion and morality.

research in order to inform how children's thinking about God may change over time.

For instance, research in children's *religious beliefs* indicated that children begin to believe in God at an early age and that such religious beliefs are based on their parental bonding (Rizzuto, 1979, 1991); research in children's *religious experiences* implied that there is a decline in the child's closeness to God as he or she moves through adolescence (Tamminen, 1994); research in children's *religious concepts* indicated that a child's representation of God begins with his or her symbolic relationship with a parent (Vergote, 1980; Vergote & Tamayo, 1981); research in children's *religious readiness* suggested that the content of religious education should be relevant to the child's cognitive maturity (Goldman, 1965); and research in children's *religious development* proposed a developmental framework for children's *religious knowing* (Fowler, 1981) and *religious judgment* (Döbert, 1991; Oser, 1991; Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Each of these research areas are relevant to this interdisciplinary investigation.

This chapter focuses this investigation of children's thinking about God in **four** general ways. First, the influence of the religious environment in shaping children's religious ideas is introduced. Second, the development of God representations as fashioned by children's age and gender is examined. Third, the role of Piagetian theory for assessing children's religious thinking is presented. Fourth, the neo-Piagetian developmental model (Case, 1992a) utilized in this study is described.

Chapter Two is divided into **six** main sections. They are: (1) the religious environment, (2) God representations, (3) Piagetian theory, (4) Case's neo-Piagetian developmental model, (5) research hypotheses, and (6) summary.

THE RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

The importance of a child's environment in shaping his or her general understandings was affirmed by many psychologists (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 1990; Harkness, 1992). Harkness (1992) confirmed:

> The developmental niche is a theoretical framework for studying cultural regulation of the micro-environment of the child; it attempts to describe this environment from the point of view of the child in order to understand processes of development and the acquisition of culture. (p. 117)

To acknowledge the religious contextual factors which shape children's understandings of God, this study combined a developmental focus with an anthropological one.

Several researchers recommended a combined approach to studying human development (Harkness, 1980, 1992; LeVine, 1980; Schwartz, White, & Lutz, 1992; Super, 1980). Harkness (1992) asserted that "a synthesis of the anthropological and psychological perspectives would enhance research on children in both disciplines" (p. 4) and suggested:

> Anthropological thinking and research on human development ... have undergone a shift in paradigms from the behaviorally orientated research ... to more recent studies on cognitive models of culture.... This methodological shift has resulted from a change in how culture and person are conceptualized. Especially important in this regard is the new perspective, derived from cognitive approaches in several fields, that

> sees the developing human as actively acquiring and indeed constructing knowledge of how the world works and what it means to be a person in it. (p. 117)

This dual perspective utilized *ethnographic research strategies* (e.g., Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Hammersley, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Spradley, 1979, 1980) in examining the religious contextual factors which influence children's understandings of God.

Specifically, ethnographic strategies have the potential to capture more information about a child's thoughts about God by assessing the child's religious environment as a 'cultural scene' (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). According to Spradley (1980):

> Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view. The goal of ethnography, as Malinowski put it, is 'to grasp the native's point of view, his [or her] relation to life, to realize his [or her] vision of his [or her] world' (1922:25). (p. 3)

Ethnographic strategies aid in describing children's thoughts about God within their religious setting and the central aim is to capture children's thoughts of God from their perspective. For instance, Heller (1986) stated his purpose "to enter the inner world of the child and, through this excursion into phenomenology, to gain an insider's appreciation of the [children's] deity representations and their personalized meanings" (p. 5).

These personalized understandings of God are expressed within a child's religious context where relationships are nurtured and religious knowledge acquired. This section discusses children's thinking about God in **three** ways

based on (a) their relationship with their parents, (b) their personal relationship with God, and (c) the knowledge acquired through religious education.

Relationship with their Parents

Hyde (1990) asserted that "at home [children] first hear of God, reverently or irreverently, and [they] begin to perceive the significance of religion to their parents. Before long their environment is enriched through the wider society to which the family belongs" (p. 11). Consequently, a parent-child relationship is the child's first step toward a relationship with God (Blazer, 1989; Coster, 1981; Honig, 1989; Swick, 1989; Vergote, 1980; Vergote & Tamayo, 1981).

As a result, a child's first image of God tends to be consistent with his or her parent's image of God (Janssen, De Hart, & Gerardts, 1994) and the parent-child relationship influences the child's emerging relationship with God (Vergote & Tamayo, 1981). Buri and Mueller (1993) suggested that there is "a strong relationship between an individual's evaluations of the nurturance of God and their evaluations of the nurturance-related characteristics of their parents" (p. 18).

Heller's (1986) findings revealed that a child's developing notions of God are primarily dependent on his or her socialization into the family. Heller (1986) described three levels of interpretation in the socialization process. They are the family's interpretation of institutional religion, child's interpretation of the family, and child's self-interpretation. Heller (1986) stated that "while other

institutions like church or state do indeed play a role in religious socialization, the family interprets scripture and stricture and seems to act as the final and most influential socializer of religious imagery" (p. 94). For instance, the "socialization of children into church commitment requires not only commitment on the part of the parents but also successful transmission of those values in a family whose climate is free of tension, conflict, and rebellion" (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978a, p. 360). Thus, it is membership in a particular family that defines the level of the child's religious commitment (Finney, 1978).

Hyde (1990) claimed that "it is in their homes that children first learn about religion, or are taught unconsciously not to be religious, and their religious beliefs and behavior are encouraged or discouraged by their parents throughout childhood" (p. 237). Therefore, research has confirmed that parents exert some influence when it comes to their child's changing thoughts about God (e.g., Coster, 1981; Francis & Gibson, 1993). Hyde (1990) stated that "the image of God is thus seen to develop in early childhood from children's perceptions of their parents -- what they are and what ideally they should be" (p. 96).

Family plays a significant role in nurturing that God-child relationship and preparing a child for a life of faith. On a simple level, Bridger (1988) described faith in a threefold manner. Faith is *believing* in God, *trusting* an invisible God, and *doing* things that please God. She added that "when children are constantly nourished in the faith through prayer and Bible teaching in the context of a loving family and a supportive Christian community, they are likely to encounter the living God and develop a deep stable faith" (Bridger, 1988, p. 20).

On a complex level, Fowler (1981) described the family's socialization process in a relational way and suggested that a child's thoughts about God are shaped by his or her family's commitment to a shared center of values and power and also by the interplay with others who share the same center of values and power. Fowler (1981, 1989) proposed a *covenantal pattern of relationship* (Figure 2.1) that defined the child's emerging 'faith' as reflected by his or her family. Fowler (1981) stated:

> This covenantal pattern of faith as relation comes clearer as we reflect on what the parent or parents bring with them to care and nurture the child. They bring *their* way of seeing and being in the world. They bring *their* trust and loyalties. (p. 16) [Italics in original]

The *covenantal pattern of relationship* is a triadic one. At the baseline, there is a two-way relationship between the self (S) and others (O). At the apex is the family's shared center of values and powers (SCVP) that defines the relationship (Figure 2.1). For instance, the relationship between the child (SELF) and parent (OTHER) is defined by the religious experiences (e.g., prayer, Bible reading, and church) (SHARED CENTER OF VALUES AND POWER) that they hold in common.

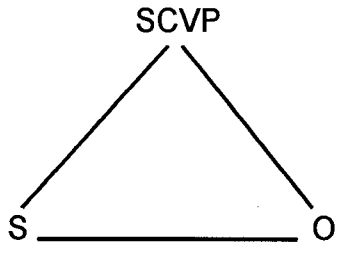

Figure 2.1: The Covenantal Pattern of a Relationship

Furthermore, as a child matures, he or she could have numerous covenantal patterns of relationships; for example, the relationship between the child (S) and teacher (O) could be defined by the religious education program at school (SCVP) or the relationship between an adolescent (S) and his or her friend (O) could be defined by their youth group experiences (SCVP). This triadic process is a social one in that "it includes thinking and knowledge about the self and others as individuals, about social relations among people, and about social customs, groups, and institutions" (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993, p. 223).

Fowler's (1981) covenantal pattern of a faithful relationship can be expanded to include Boff's description of faith. Boff (1992) described the faithful relationship in the following way: "Faith, then, establishes a vertical communion with God and the risen Jesus Christ, to which corresponds a horizontal communion with those that share the same faith" (p. 19). This is illustrated in Figure 2.2.

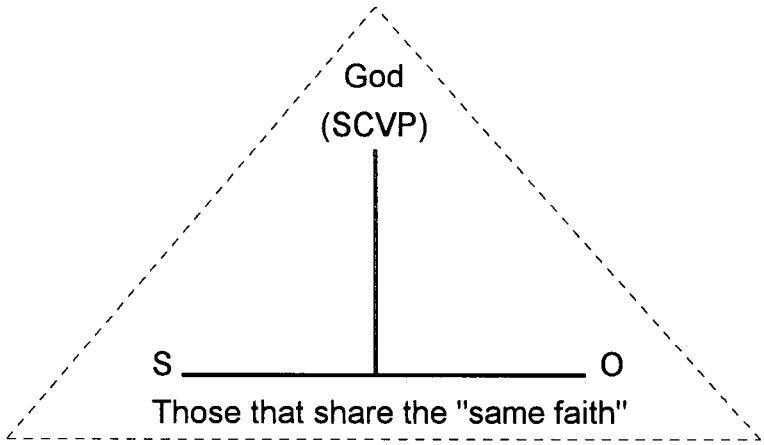

Figure 2.2: A Depiction of a Faithful Relationship with God

In Figure 2.2, the child (self = S) has a relationship with members of his or community (others = O). The factors which characterize God between the self and other are illustrated by the shared center of values and powers within the religious community.

This study took into consideration the family's commitment to a shared center of values and power within their religious community. This is defined by the child's religious activities within the family home (e.g., grace, family prayer, personal prayer, Bible study, bedtime stories, and Bible reading) and outside of it (e.g., church going, Sunday school, worship group, youth group, boys and girls club, and religious school).

Personal Relationship with God

A child's thoughts about God are dependent on the child's developing relationship with "the Divine, who are called God, Jesus, or Lord" (Jaspard, 1980, p. 139). Nelson (1996) suggested that "an image of God is a precise and dynamic element within the self. It is the reality with one's being which one carries on a conversation" (p. 33). Rizzuto (1979) proposed:

> *Belief in God* or its absence depends on whether or not a *conscious* '*identity experience*' can be established between the God representation of a given developmental moment and the object and self representations needed to maintain a sense of self which provides at least a minimum of relatedness and hope. (p. 202) [Italics in original]

The above quotation suggests that a child's God representations are formed in a relational way between self and other (other being either a person or a 'God-

object.') These relationships are formed and maintained within a child's religious environment.

Research has suggested that there is an integrative connection between the relationships with self, others, and God and one's varying representations of God (Spilka, Addison, & Rosensohn, 1975). These representations are dependent on the child's personal relationship with a personal God.

This integrative relationship, between a child and God, is further developed through prayer (Long, Elkind, & Spilka, 1967; Rosenberg, 1989; Scarlett & Periello, 1991). In efforts to establish a personal relationship with God, *prayer* becomes a central activity in a child's life. Tamminen, Vaniello, Jaspard, and Ratcliff (1988) suggested that children, as young as four to six, know the basic purpose of prayer. Scarlett and Periello (1991) proposed that prayer "begins as a talking *at* rather than *with* God" (p. 66). Scarlett and Periello (1991) proposed a twofold sequence of prayer. First, a child views God as all-powerful and separate from him or herself (i.e., praying *at* God). Second, an adolescent brings the act of praying to an inner level to acknowledge his or her relationship with God "who is more a partner and friend than parent" (i.e., praying *with* God) (Scarlett & Periello, 1991, p. 67).

Research has confirmed that a child's representation of God is a determinant in the quality of the child's personal relationship with God (Heinrichs, 1982). Vergote (1980) stated that the "most important factor in the representation of God is the personal relationship with a personal God" (p. 107).

Because of the interest in children's relationships with a personal God, Oser (1980, 1991) and Oser and Gmunder (1991) adapted Kohlberg's moral problems into a series of religious dilemmas and posited five *religious judgment* stages. These stages address "the changing interpretation of the relationship between an individual and what he or she recognizes as Ultimate Being (God for Christians)" (Reich, 1993, p. 157). Bucher (1991) described these stages in the following way:

> In Stage 1, the Ultimate Being [God] protects or hurts, dispenses health and illness, and influences each of us directly but without our influence and control (deus ex machina). The Ultimate Being is an anthropomorphic and powerful being who intervenes directly into the affairs of people. In Stage 2, the Ultimate Being continues to be human like and to act directly, but now he or she can be influenced by prayers, offerings, adherence to religious rules, and so on (do et des, 'give so that you may receive'). In Stage 3, we assume full responsibility for our lives; transcendence is outside ourselves and may be either rejected or doubted as irrelevant to everyday living. In Stage 4, the Ultimate Being becomes the condition for human freedom, independence, and so on via the divine plan. And in Stage 5, the Ultimate Being inhabits each human interactional commitment but also transcends it at the same time. (pp. 101-102)

Overall, Oser (1980) and Oser and Gmunder's (1991) religious judgment stages place religious-moral judgment at the forefront. Yet, a problem lies in distinguishing *what is moral* versus *what is religious* (Hyde, 1990). Oser (1980) and Oser and Gmunder's (1991) work has been criticized for its 'individualistic' research (Gorsuch, 1995). Gorsuch (1995) stated:

> Each author starts anew as if no previous work had been done, never extrapolates the previous work to their own area, and never runs comparative tests. There is no test of whether Kohlberg-trained raters could make sense out of these religious stories or whether Fowler's stages might be sufficient in this area as well. (pp. 134-135)

Nevertheless, Oser's (1991) theory is "a description of the relationship between the Ultimate Being and the human individual as a 'growingly integrative relationship' and 'conjointly' a 'growing autonomous way of being' in this relationship" (Nipkow, 1991, p. 84).

Knowledge Acquired Through Religious Education

Hyde (1990) stated that "adequate religious learning in childhood arises only from the spontaneous religion which children create for themselves out of the religious material which they are taught, and only by their own religious activity can full religious understanding be achieved" (p. 364). For instance, Coles (1990) depicted Martha's God[7] as one who brought "magical power to the task of doing what seemed to be impossible -- clean a city of serious injustices" (p. 57). Martha's response of a 'super-hero God' is reflective of her avid Saturday morning cartoon involvement.

Hyde (1990) maintained that the "child spontaneously attributes to his parents the perfections and abilities which he will later transfer to God if his religious education gives him the possibility" (p. 97). Consequently, the role of religious education in shaping children's understandings about God cannot be ignored.

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[7] Coles (1990) did not mention Martha's age.

Goldman (1965) was interested in the acquisition of Biblical knowledge as it related to *religious readiness* for religious education. Goldman (1964) indicated that children (aged 5 to 7) often misunderstood the details of God but that they nevertheless had a respect for the Bible. Later, at age ten, children discarded their rudimentary ideas about God. They entered into a dual world where God existed in an active Biblical way in their lives and where God's supernatural realm emerged with scientific thought.

Goldman's (1964, 1965) findings revealed that elementary children could not comprehend Biblical texts. He concluded that children should not receive formal Bible instruction before they acquired formal operational (ages 11 to 15) reasoning. Goldman's (1964, 1965) findings demonstrated that the child's level of cognitive maturity determines the child's ability to comprehend the Biblical text and that religious education curricula need to be geared toward the cognitive ability of the students.

Hoge and Petrillo (1978b) tested Goldman's (1964) findings and proposed the following 'simple path model' (Figure 2.3) to study the impact of religious education on religious thinking. The model indicates that a child's level of religious thinking continues to be influenced by his or her 'general' cognitive capacity and the amount of religious education received.

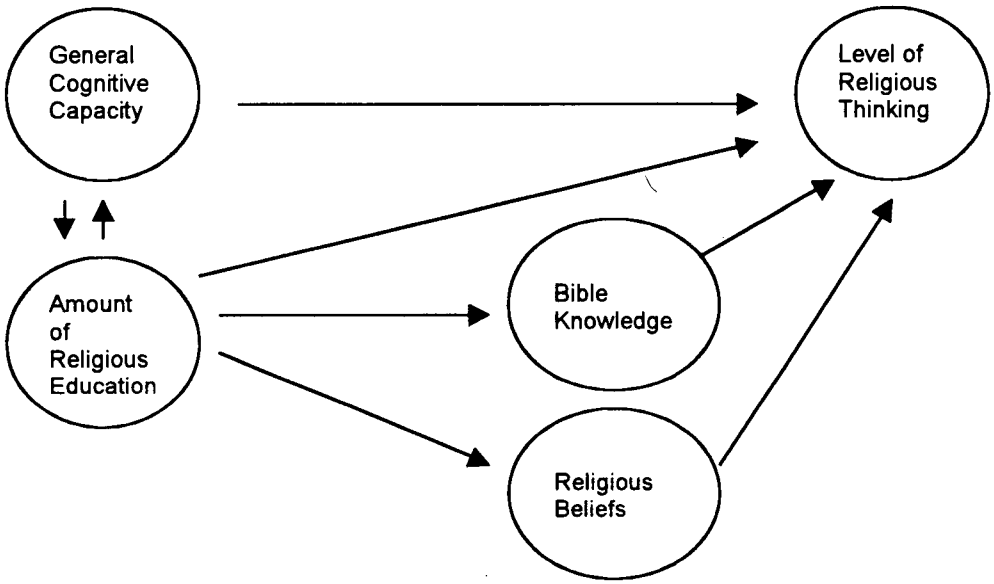

Figure 2.3: Path Model of Impacts of Religious Education (adapted from Hoge & Petrillo [1978b] p. 150)

Hoge and Petrillo's (1978b) findings suggested that the impact of religious beliefs on the level of religious thinking is "consistently strong" (p. 151). Also, they concluded that "greater Bible knowledge causes more abstract thinking, while stronger [religious] beliefs cause more concrete thinking" (Hoge & Petrillo, p. 151).

GOD REPRESENTATIONS

A child's thoughts of God begin with his or her parents who are the core of his or her representations of God (e.g., Boghosian, 1980; Fowler, 1980; Meilaender, 1990; Nelson, 1996; Rizzuto, 1980, Vergote, 1980; Wallace, 1986). These early representations of God are based on "the objects of early life which provide the sensory, subjective, and interpersonal experiences to form the representation of a (for the subject) living God" (Rizzuto, 1980, p. 119).

Rizzuto (1979, 1980, 1991) and others suggested that it is during childhood that a child's thoughts of God are developed, and that this emerging journey toward God is the first stage of religious thought (Fowler, 1981; Oser, 1980). Consequently, it is in childhood that children begin to gather their ideas about God and begin the simplest of constructions in building their representation of God. For instance, early in life, a child's thoughts of God may represent the child's perception of him or herself (Coles, 1990). Mark's response, which follows, is an illustration of an 'egocentric' view of God. Coles (1990) stated that when Mark[7] was asked to draw the *face of God*, he constructed God with a pale face because Mark perceived his own face as pale and thus transferred his own image of himself to his representation of God.

A child's representations of God start simply and then expand as he or she matures. A child's maturity plays a key role in defining his or her thoughts about God. Rizzuto (1991) concluded that human development partly accounts for the change in children's representations of God and that the 'psyche' (the human mind) is the "essential mediatory tool" (p. 47).

The God representations a child develops and forms confirm the child's religious reality. These representations are fashioned in **two** ways based on the child's (a) maturity and (b) gender.

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7 Coles (1990) did not mention Mark's age.

Based on Maturity

Rizzuto (1980) stated that "one must remember that God is a particular being that the child can neither see nor hear and that he [or she] has to strive creatively to give concrete shape to the being" (p. 129). This creative process of 'giving shape' to God is a continuous one in that the child's thoughts of God are in flux. In other words, as the child matures or acquires more knowledge about God his or her representations of God change.

Tamminen, Vianello, Jaspard, and Ratcliff's (1988) research indicated three successive stages of preschooler's ideas of God. The first stage -- *God as object/God as human* -- (before age 3) indicates that preschoolers have (a) learned that God lives in a church, (b) an interest in objects depicting the cross, and (c) an understanding of Jesus as a human character. The second stage -- *God as superhuman* -- (up to age 4) demonstrates preschoolers' growing interest in and recognition of God's power as distinct from that of humans. With this interest comes an understanding that God is there to help children although there is some discomfort at not being able to view God in a visible way. Finally, at the third stage -- *God as divinity* -- (ages 4 to 6) preschoolers begin to question God's control (i.e., God's ability to control the weather or answer prayers).

Wright and Koppe's (1964) findings indicated that children's descriptions of God follow a sequence. This sequence begins with children expressing very simple ideas about God (age 4), to having a real interest in the power of God

(age 6), to understanding God's attributes and God's relationship to nature (age 8), to having a sense of a personal relationship with God (age 10), to engaging in expressions of a faith reflected by their religious culture (age 12), and finally, to acquiring a sense of responsibility and a search for meaning (age 14 and onward).

Heller's (1986) study compared ten children (5 females and 5 males) between the ages of 4 to 12 from four religious orientations (i.e., Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism, and Hinduism). Heller (1986) categorized children into the following groupings: (a) 4 to 6 year-old children [Group 1], (b) 7 to 9 year-old children [Group 2], and (c) 10 to 12 year-old children [Group 3]. The children in *Group One* had a minimal knowledge of God, perceived God with a certain playfulness, and viewed God in relation to themselves. The children in *Group Two* viewed God with increasing interest, knowledge, and curiosity. They became aware of themselves as "independent actors" (Heller, 1986, p. 47) and they suggested "that sleep and dreams are a common meeting place between God and man" (Heller, 1986, p. 48). The children in *Group Three* tended to view God either in a definitive or an uncertain way. They were concerned with God's role in suffering, everyday living, and the afterlife. However, Heller (1986) did not acknowledge the differences in the concept of God for each religion. For instance, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant are monotheistic (one God) with Catholic and Protestant being Trinitarian monotheistic (three equal parts to one God) and Hinduism is polytheistic (many gods).

Many studies have confirmed that a child's thoughts about God shift dramatically at adolescence (Babin, 1965; Fleck, Ballard, & Reilly, 1975; Greer & Francis, 1992; Hauser, 1981; Janssen, De Hart, & Gerardts, 1994; Ozorak, 1989; Sloane & Potvin, 1983). During adolescence, he or she begins to view God more critically (e.g., Fowler, 1985; Nipkow & Schweitzer, 1991; Scarlett & Periello, 1991). For instance, Francis (1987) reported that as adolescents grow older they adopt less positive attitudes toward both religion and religious education. Janssen et al. (1994) characterized adolescents' religious ideas about God as a "contradictory picture of belief and disbelief" (p. 116). Vianello's (1991) findings suggested that children aged twelve are passive and less critical about religion whereas children aged fourteen reflect more critically on the traditions of the church. Tamminen's (1994) research indicated that a child's religious experience (i.e., closeness to God) "decreased as the child moved from childhood to adolescence" (p. 81). Ludwig, Weber, and Iben (1974) found that at the onset of adolescence, emotional concerns are paramount wherein the adolescent desires a closer personal God.

Elkind and Elkind (1962) asked 144 Junior High students when they felt closest to God. Several religious experiences emerged from their data. The adolescents felt closest to God during church prayer and moral action and during anxious and fearful experiences. This closeness was magnified through appreciation, meditation, lamentation, initiation, and revelation experiences.

Hence, research has confirmed that there are changes in children's and adolescents' understandings of God as they mature. Hyde (1990) surveyed 33 studies between 1943 and 1981 and 20 of the applicable 21 studies (i.e., 95%) demonstrated that age was a significant factor in children's religiousness. Hyde (1990) asserted that "chronological age was significantly related to religious thinking" (p. 27).

Based on Gender

Research has suggested that there may be differences in the way boys and girls conceptualize God (e.g., Heller, 1986; Hyde, 1990; Jaspard, 1972, 1980; Savin-Williams, 1977; Tamminen, 1994; Tamminen, Vianello, Jaspard, & Ratcliff, 1988). Table 2.1 indicates the gender differences based on research.

Table 2.1: Gender Differences in Children's Thinking About God

CHARACTER OF GOD (Heller, 1988) (Hyde, 1990)		**RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD** Heller (1988) Jaspard (1972, 1980) Tamminen et al. (1988)		**RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT In Adolescence** Jaspard (1972, 1980) Savin-Williams (1977)	
Girls	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**
God is compassion. God as the Father. God is aesthetic (i.e., music, art, and drama are a part of God's domain). God is passive.	God is powerful (i.e., He has the authority). God as the Spirit. God is a rational and thinking God. God is active.	Concerned with the relational aspects of a intimate God. • God is a friend. • God cares. • God loves. Stronger relationship as they mature.	Not concerned with the relational aspects of a distant God. Less interested in the relationship as they mature.	More dedicated to God. Adhere to traditions.	Less dedicated to God. Question traditions.

Hyde (1990) surveyed 33 studies done between 1943 and 1981 and 23 of the applicable 25 studies (92%) indicated that gender is a significant factor in children's religious thinking. Hyde (1990) stated that "boys tend to think in terms of God's power and authority and regard God as a spirit but tend not to envisage Him as a father except when it is a term of authority. Girls tend to think in terms of relationships and of His love" (p. 82).

Much of this research suggested that "gender socialization" is responsible for the transmission of such differences in thinking about God (Nelsen, 1981). Elkind and Elkind (1962) confirmed:

> In American middle-class society the expectations for boys and girls with respect to religion are not the same. Girls are expected to be more pious and God-fearing, whereas boys are supposed to be rebellious and 'full of the devil.' (p. 105)

Tamminen et al. (1988) suggested that, as early as preschool (age 4 to 6), sex differences exist. Girls are disappointed because they cannot perceive God directly and consequently, they struggle to have a relationship with an *invisible* God. In contrast, boys identify with the limitless power of God and Jesus; they are intrigued by the duality of good versus evil and are not at all concerned with the relational aspects of the invisible deity. In addition, Heller's (1986) findings suggested that boys view a rational, active 'deity' who is an "emotionally distant" (p. 61) role model whereas girls view an aesthetic God who is passive, intimate, and emotionally near.

Jaspard's (1972, 1980) and Savin-Williams' (1977) research suggested that as girls mature they have a stronger relationship with God and view God as

a friend whereas as boys mature they are less interested in God and begin to test their image of God with their own reality. Savin-Williams (1977) revealed that, by the age of fifteen, adolescent boys were less likely to believe in God and to participate in the traditions of their religion whereas adolescent girls were more dedicated to God and more established in the traditions of their religion.

More recently, Tamminen (1994) was interested in the gender differences of Finnish children's (aged 7 to 20) religious experiences:

> Clear differences in religiousness between girls and boys were revealed in this study. Girls were generally at all ages religiously more committed than boys. ... The difference between girls and boys was not only quantitative but also qualitative. For example, the concept of God was a little more legalistic for boys than for girls. Boys also stressed the power of God and His effect on the morale of human beings more than girls did. ... Girls in almost all grades experienced God's nearness and guidance more often than the boys did. (p. 79)

Thus, research has suggested that there are differences in the way males and females perceive God.

PIAGETIAN THEORY

Most research acknowledged that there are age-related differences in the way children think, in general, about religious concepts (e.g., Heller, 1986; Oser, 1981; Oser & Gmunder, 1991, Tamminen, 1991; Tamminen, Vianello, Jaspard, & Ratcliff, 1988; Wright & Koppe, 1964). Some of the research in the development of children's religious thinking was grounded in Piagetian theory (e.g., Elkind, 1961, 1962, 1963; Fleck, Ballard, & Reilly, 1975; Goldman, 1964;

Harms, 1944; McGrady, 1996; Nye & Carlson, 1984; Peatling, Laabs, & Newton, 1975; Vianello, Tamminen, & Ratcliff, 1992). The Piagetian paradigm has provided a framework for "significant understanding of cognitive development in religion" (Hyde, 1990, p. 380). Piagetian ideas have remained influential in studying religious understanding (Harms, 1944), religious education (Goldman, 1964, 1965), and children's understanding of religious identity (Elkind, 1961, 1962, 1963), and in measuring children's religious thinking (McGrady, 1996).

Harms (1944) used pictures to probe children's religious understanding and demonstrated that children view God in three stages. The first stage is a *fantasy* one wherein children (prior to age 6) view God like 'a king that lives in the sky.' The second stage is a *realistic* one wherein children (ages 7 to 12) conceptualize God in concrete and personal terms as reflected by the symbols in their religion. The third stage is a *individualistic* one wherein the adolescent's own ideas of God are shaped not only by conventional ideas but also by his or her own ideas. Harms' (1944) findings revealed that children's thoughts of God change during early, middle, and late childhood. These changes parallel Piaget's periods of cognitive development.

Goldman (1964, 1965) and Elkind (1961, 1962, 1963, 1971) confirmed Piaget's periods of cognitive development in that they found that "there was uniformity in ideas at a given age and those often extended over several years ... [and] the appearance of ideas from an earlier-year level were part of, or added to, the more advanced ideas of a higher level" (Hyde, 1990, p. 18). Piaget's periods of cognitive development are summarized in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Piaget's Periods of Cognitive Development
(adapted from Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993, p. 13)

PERIODS	DESCRIPTION
Pre-operational (2-7 years)	Children begin to use representations (mental images, drawings words, gestures) to think about objects and events. Their thinking is limited by egocentrism.
Concrete-operational (7-11 years)	Children begin to acquire organized operations to construct their logic. Operations are applied only to concrete objects that are present or mentally present.
Formal-operational (11-15 years)	Children can apply mental operations to the possible and real AND to the future and present. They can understand highly abstract concepts.

Elkind (1961, 1962, 1963) was instrumental in bringing the work of Piaget to the forefront with regards to the development of children's religious identity. Elkind's (1961, 1962, 1963) findings revealed three stages of religious identity among Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant children (aged 5 to 14). In the first stage -- *global and undifferentiated* (ages 5 to 7) -- a child perceived his or her religious identity as no more than a name. At this stage, a child thought he or she was a 'Catholic' because God made him or her one! In the second stage -- *generation and participation* (ages 7 to 9) -- a child perceived his or her religious identity as influenced by the way he or she thought and behaved. This included wearing particular symbols or attending Mass, church, or synagogue. At this stage, a child recognized that he or she can be a 'Catholic' and also a citizen of a country. In the third stage -- *initiation, practice, and ritual* (ages 10 to 14) -- a child perceived his or her religious identity as 'something' that emanates from within. At this stage, a child displayed abstract and differentiated concepts of

God and his or her denomination was considered a sub-category with respect to all other categories of religion.

Goldman (1964, 1965) conducted a series of interviews with children (ages 5 to 15). The children were asked specific questions about three Bible stories. Goldman (1964) acknowledged that children's religious ideas were stagelike and aligned with Piaget's periods of cognitive development. Goldman (1964) labeled his developmental stages (a) *intuitive* (preoperational) religious thinking, (b) *concrete* religious thinking, and (c) *abstract* religious thinking. *Intuitive religious thinking* corresponds with preoperational reasoning wherein preschool children think about religious concepts by blending both physical and fantasy thought; this stage is characterized as pre-religious (Goldman, 1965). *Concrete religious thinking* corresponds with concrete reasoning wherein children tend to view religious concepts in a realistic, physical and materialistic way (Goldman, 1965). *Abstract religious thinking* corresponds with abstract reasoning wherein adolescents tend to incorporate their own ideas when thinking about religious concepts (Goldman, 1965).

Elkind's (1961, 1962, 1963) and Goldman's (1964, 1965) research demonstrated the continuing relevance of Piagetian theory as an important model for examining religious thinking. Both took account of stage theory whereby children develop from stage to stage, assimilating and integrating new religious ideas.

Peatling, Laabs, and Newton (1975) also used Piagetian constructs to test children's and adolescents' religious thinking. Their results suggested that there is more rapid development in children's religious development between childhood and adolescence than there is between adolescence and adulthood. Also, McGrady (1996) used Goldman's (1962) and Peatling's (1973) Piagetian paradigms to measure religious thinking. McGrady's (1996) findings indicated stage-related development (i.e., abstract religious thinking) over the period of secondary schooling.

This stage-related development was recognized, as a whole, in cognitive developmental research which acknowledged "that the thinking of the adolescent differs radically from that of the child" (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, p. 335). For instance, Reich (1989) noted that with the advent of formal reasoning, adolescents opted for a rational explanation of God and discarded inadequate 'worldviews' as they struggled with the dichotomy of scientific and religious reasoning.

These cognitive shifts in children's religious thinking, from the preoperational to formal operational stage, were acknowledged in Shelly's (1982) practical guide for nurses, parents, and teachers. Shelly (1982) described the following Piagetian stages of cognitive development as related to spiritual development. Much of Shelly's (1982) stage sequence in Table 2.3 was adopted from Elkind's (1971) research and others (e.g., Daniel, Wade, & Gresham, 1980).

Table 2.3: Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development as Related to Spiritual Development (Shelly, 1982, p. 22)

PERIODS	DESCRIPTION
Pre-operational (2-7 years)	Anthropomorphic view of God, physical characteristics predominate. Beginning to understand God as Creator. Meaning of prayer vague, but prayer rituals become important. Understands simple Bible stories with one clear theme. Visual aids reinforce words and ideas, especially if they can be touched and manipulated. Conscience beginning to emerge. Young preschoolers behave for fear of punishment; later behavior is based on desire to please. Sees right and wrong as absolutes. Can be taught to love Jesus and please Him. Major spiritual growth is in the forming of attitudes toward God, the Bible, and church.
Concrete-operational (7-11 years)	God described according to His actions (He loves, helps, watches over us). Growing sense of a personal relationship with God. Prayer consists of making verbal requests to God, gradually developing into a private conversation with God as the child matures. Understands cause and effect relationships, scientific facts, mathematical computation, and reasoning. Bible understanding is concrete and fact-orientated, but can begin to apply it to daily life. Conscience continues to develop, begins to see moral decisions in their context. Commitment based more on a desire to please Jesus rather than from a deep sense of sin. Sin viewed as specific acts of misbehavior rather than rebellion against God.
Formal-operational (11-15 years)	Sees God as a personal friend and confidant. Focuses on attributes such as mercy, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. Prayer remains a private conversation with God, but greater emphasis on thanksgiving and sharing intimacies, less on personal requests. Able to deal with meaning of Biblical material beyond facts, and sees how it fits into God's overall plan. Abstract reasoning facilitates understanding of symbolic literature, empathy, introspection, idealism, and philosophizing. Establishing own value system based on internal rationale. Concerned about meaning and purpose in life. The problem of evil in the world and the significance of God's grace become meaningful.

Shelly's (1982) spiritual development sequence paralleled Vianello, Tamminen, and Ratcliff's (1992) research on children's religious concepts. They

were interested in how religious concepts change with age and to what extent Piagetian tendencies affect children's acquisition of religious concepts. For instance, egocentrism serves to focus children's religious concepts at an early age. Vianello et al. (1992) acknowledged the role of anthropomorphisms in influencing children's religious concepts and proposed a threefold sequence of anthropomorphism. Prior to age eight, *simple anthropomorphisms* predominated wherein God was regarded as a human man. (This paralleled the pre-operational stage of spiritual development in Table 2.3.) From eight to twelve, *mitigated anthropomorphisms* prevailed in which God was considered human but different than other men. Finally, children between eleven and thirteen were considered at the transitional point whereby they demonstrated *pseudo-anthropomorphisms*. In general, the developmental trend was away from a humanized God toward an understanding of God as spirit (Viannello et al., 1992). Viannello et al. (1992) stated that "anthropomorphism is a complex issue; we cannot speak of God without using expressions that in some way are linked to human life" (p. 63).

Hence, Piagetian methodologies continue to advance research in the development of religious thinking (Fowler, 1981; Nye & Carson, 1984). The following section addresses the Piagetian paradigm in **three** ways: (a) a general pattern of faith development: Fowler's Theory of Faith, (b) the development of God concepts: Nye and Carlson's study, and (c) reaction to Piagetian Theory.

A General Pattern of Faith Development: Fowler's Theory of Faith

Fowler's (1981) lifespan *Theory of Faith Development* acknowledged its "intellectual inheritance from Piaget, Kohlberg, Selman, and (lately) Kegan, but also Erik Erikson" (Reich, 1993, p. 161). According to Fowler's (e.g., 1980, 1981, 1986, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c) universal lifespan theory, **faith** was defined as the way humans make and maintain meaning in their lives.

Fowler (1981) tried to universalize his theory to include all those who (a) believed in a God, (b) did not believe in a God, (c) believed in traditional religion or (d) did not believe in traditional religion. Also, Fowler (1981) attempted to acknowledge both polytheistic (many gods) and monotheistic (one God) religions in his universal stages of faith development.

Fowler's (1981) six stages of faith development were differentiated by age with individual attainment of one stage assuming the incorporation of elements present in the lower stages. Fowler's (1981) universal stage sequence included the following stages: (i) Pre-stage: Infancy and Undifferentiated faith stage, (ii) Intuitive-Projective stage, (iii) Mythic-Literal stage, (iv) Synthetic-Conventional stage, (v) Individuative-Reflective stage, (vi) Conjunctive Faith stage, and (vii) Universalizing Faith stage. The first three stages of faith development were relevant to this study because of the age groupings outlined in this study.

The *Intuitive-Projective* stage (2 to 6 years) paralleled Piaget's Pre-Operational Stage where play and fantasy defined a child's religious growth.

During this stage, children's ideas about God were "awakened and shaped by ... the images, symbols, rituals and conceptual representations, offered with conviction, in the language and common life of those with whom [they] learn and grow" (Fowler, 1981, p. 25).

The *Mythic-Literal* stage (6 to 13 years) was congruent with Piaget's Concrete Operational stage wherein the child begins to organize or classify his or her religious ideas into meaningful units. At this stage, "narrative constitutes one of the first and most durable strategies human beings employ for the creation and shaping of experiences" (p. 126), and children "capture, conserve, and communicate their experiences through stories. Stories come to provide linkages with their families and communities ..." (Fowler, 1991a, p. 127).

The *Synthetic-Conventional* stage (13 to adulthood) corresponded with Piaget's Formal Operational Period where an adolescent's emerging faith was related to his or her evolution of "self." At this stage, the adolescent's faith was dependent on (a) his or her bonding in infancy, (b) the narratives he or she had heard in the past, (c) his or her emerging self-identity, and (d) the views of significant others and society (i.e., the "mirror" effect).

Fowler's (1981) lifespan approach to religious development was pertinent to this study because it depicted a general developmental pattern of children's religious thought which incorporates cognitive development. However, Fowler's (1981) broad epistemological focus has been criticized because little attempt was made to differentiate any substages within a major stage. Substages may

further illuminate the aspects of faith development that are presumed to be specific to an individual at a given age.

This study intended to focus primarily on children's religious thinking as it pertained to their developing thoughts of God. The focus was to examine specific aspects of the more general *religious knowing* described in Fowler's (1981) faith developmental theory.

The Development of God Concepts: Nye and Carlson's Study

Nye and Carlson's (1984) study was also based on Piaget's theoretical paradigm. They focused specifically on the developmental progression of children's concepts of God within Piaget's general stages of cognitive development. Their concerns were twofold. *First*, they wanted to investigate (a) whether or not there were stages in the child's concepts of God and (b) whether or not these stages were congruent with the general cognitive stages suggested by Piaget. *Second*, they wanted to investigate whether or not the stages had characteristics that may or may not differentiate children from different religious backgrounds (Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish).

Nye and Carlson studied 180 children between the ages of 5 and 16 with an equal representation of three religious groups and with male and female participants. This age range was divided into three groupings such that (a) *group 1* represented 5 to 8 year-olds, (b) *group 2* represented 9 to 12 year-olds,

and (c) *group 3* represented 13 to 16 year-olds. The children were asked a series of thirteen questions in an individual interview.

Nye and Carlson's findings revealed that "the development of the concept of God in children, even within a consistent religious training environment (religious school) follows a developmental pattern that seems to be congruent to general developmental patterns" (p. 140). Their study emphasized that children's thinking about God parallels Piaget's general stages of cognitive development. Nye and Carlson (1984) stated:

> A concrete (Level I) response was identified as tangible, visible, or measurable. An abstract (Level II) response was identified as more general, not related to specific descriptors. For example, a concrete response to the question 'What does God look like?' was 'Brown hair, blue eyes.' An abstract response to the same questions was 'No one knows, no one has ever seen Him.' (p. 139)

In addition to the cognitive shifts in a child's thinking (concrete versus abstract), Nye and Carlson found that there were not any structural differences in the way that children from different religious orientations (i.e., Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic) thought about God. They stated that "the general lack of differentiation between religious groups was an unexpected finding, as it was expected that children trained or reared in a particular religious faith would demonstrate some of the unique characteristics of that religious orientation" (Nye & Carlson, 1984, p. 141). For instance, although the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant religions are considered monotheistic, Catholic and Protestant are Trinitarian. The notion of one God (Jewish) versus three-in-one (Catholic and Protestant) was not acknowledged in their findings.

Regarding their findings, Hyde (1990) concluded that, "The lack of any substantial difference between the development of children nurtured in three quite separate traditions indicated that the development depended on general cognitive development and upheld the Piagetian view of cognitive development" (p.33).

Overall, Nye and Carlson (1984) concluded that formal religious instruction is not advantageous prior to the age of 10 or 11. Significantly, their study reported that the "effects of religious instruction are dependent on the child's general level of cognitive development; i.e., the understanding of the concept of God is limited by the child's level of cognitive development" (Nye & Carlson, 1984, p. 142). Nye and Carlson's (1984) Piagetian paradigm for examining children's concepts of God had at least two limitations for the present study.

First, Nye and Carlson did not describe any of the conceptual information emerging from the 180 children's responses to the following interview questions:

> Where does God come from? What does God look like? Where does God live? Where did God get His name? Does God have a family? Does God get mad? Does God know who you are? Can God see and hear you? How old is God? Is God like a person? What are some things God cannot do? What are some things God can do? If you had to compare God to one person do you know who would it be? (Nye & Carlson, 1984, pp. 138-139)

Providing descriptive detail of the children's responses to the above questions may provide a richer understanding of children's representations of God. In addition, the conceptual information may indicate differences in children's thoughts of God related to gender. Nye and Carlson did not mention if there

were any gender differences in their findings, even though the sample had an equal representation of females and males.

Second, Nye and Carlson quantified the answers to the thirteen interview questions into two groups (Level I - Concrete and Level II - Abstract) without identifying the age groupings for each Level (I or II). This was described as a "global assessment" (p. 139). Yet, this assessment seems too broad because 180 children between ages 5 and 16 were categorized into only two groups without acknowledgment of how children think about God at a particular age and how these concepts of God changed as the child cognitively matures. At best, the only shift that was acknowledged was a shift from concrete to abstract thinking and little was revealed about the conceptual meanings of God when that shift occurred.

This study acknowledged Nye and Carlson's (1984) contributions to the Piagetian paradigm in religious thinking and in particular, how children's religious thinking shifted from the concrete to the abstract stage. Yet, there was a need to go beyond the Piagetian stages (i.e., concrete and abstract) and consider children's religious thought within each of those stages (i.e., substages). The neo-Piagetian paradigm introduced in this study had the potential to inform children's thinking about God (as evidenced by their narrative texts about God) from stage to stage and substage to substage.

In addition, this study adapted Nye and Carlson's, along with Heller's (1986) interview questions to assess children's thinking about God not only from a structural perspective but also from a conceptual perspective. The conceptual

information provided rich detail about children's individual and unique thoughts about God.

Reaction to Piagetian Theory

Since the late 1960s there has been a reaction to Piaget's classical theory because it neglected to describe (a) how children's cognitive structures change from substage to substage within stages, (b) how a particular context influences the child's performance, and (c) how individual differences can be accounted for in conceptual development (Case, 1987; Donaldson, 1978). Neo-Piagetian theorists began to de-emphasize the notion that children's cognitive development is dependent on a general system of logical operations (Case & Okamoto, 1996). In this way, "rather than focusing on system-wide logical structures, neo-Piagetians focused on concepts, control structures, and skills that were a great deal more specific in nature" (Case & Okamoto, 1996, p. 3).

As a result, neo-Piagetian theorists began to focus on *central conceptual structures* which are the constructs by which children make sense of different knowledge domains. McKeough, Yates, and Marini (1994) stated:

> Specifically, Case's theory accounts for the developmental performance differently than that of Piaget. Piaget saw children's cognition as a function of the general logical-mathematical structures they assembled and of their general level of development. As a replacement to Piaget's structures, which were subject to consistent theoretical and empirical criticism, Case proposed 'central conceptual structures.' (p. 286)

Central conceptual structures (CCSs) are similar to Piaget's periods of cognitive development because they (a) consist of cognitive structures that are formed in a stage-like hierarchical manner, (b) require active participation of the child's cognitive structure (i.e., assimilation and accommodation), and (c) have a sequence of structural levels unique at each stage. CCSs are different from Piaget's periods of cognitive development because each CCS emerges independently of one another. They exist not only in children's logical thought but also across different domains (e.g., spatial or social).

Studying central conceptual structure provides both qualitative and quantitative information about children's general conceptual development across and within different knowledge domains. Central conceptual structures have a conceptual focus and are a clear departure from Piaget's general structure of cognitive development which emphasizes logical operations. Neo-Piagetian theorists "assert that children's conceptual development was less dependent on the emergence of general logical structures than Piaget had suggested and more dependent on the acquisition of insights or skills that are domain, task, and context specific" (Case & Okamoto, 1996, p. 2). (This is explained further in the next section which introduces Case's [1992a] neo-Piagetian developmental model.)

Furthermore, Case and Okamoto (1996) stated:

> The difference in the way that structural change is thought of in the two theories is perhaps most clearly evidenced by the way in which school learning is treated. In Piaget's theory, school learning was seen as dependent on cognitive development but not as contributing to it. In the present view, the relation between conceptual development and school

> learning is seen as being reciprocal. General conceptual development may influence specific school learning, but school learning may also influence general conceptual development in powerful ways. (p. 23)

Case and Okamoto (1996) suggested that both experience and motivation were key factors regarding the influence of school learning on general conceptual development. Schooling played a major role in providing the experiences that "enable children to profit from the common neurological developments that are taking place" (Case & Okamoto, 1996, p. 17). Also, the children's desire to explore and solve tasks that were of interest to them aided in the operations that they performed within their experiential world (Case & Okamoto, 1996). This study acknowledged the role school learning (i.e., religious education) had on children's thinking about religious concepts.

CASE'S NEO-PIAGETIAN DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

Case's (1992a) neo-Piagetian developmental model (Figure 2.4) was chosen to focus this interdisciplinary investigation of children's thinking about God for three main reasons. *First*, Case's developmental framework provided a well-defined specific explanation of how children's cognitive constructs change, sequentially, from stage to stage and from substage to substage. *Second*, Case's developmental framework allowed for the acknowledgement of the conceptual underpinnings of a child's thoughts at different levels of cognitive growth vis-à-vis central conceptual structures. *Third*, Case's developmental

framework recognized the role of the environment in shaping children's thinking in general.

In order to understand how Case's developmental framework assessed children's narrative texts of God, it is important to address **three** aspects of Case's developmental model (Figure 2.4). They are: (a) developmental progression, (b) central conceptual structure, and (c) working memory and narrative structure.

Developmental Progression

Case's (1992a) neo-Piagetian theory retained some of the general tenets of Piagetian theory. Beilin (1987) stated:

> What is preserved from Piaget is the stage concept (four stages), with operational structures of equilibrium at the end of a stage ('stable systems'); the differential products of a stage, which when integrated, become the building blocks of the next stage; circular reactions ('control structures') that arise in sequence in infancy; and the same general progression (vertical décalage) observed in later stages. (p. 56)

In Case's developmental framework (Figure 2.4), there are four levels of stages (Sensorimotor, Interrelational, Dimensional, and Vectorial) and three levels of substages (unifocal, bifocal, and elaborated bifocal) within each stage. (These stages parallel Piaget's operational periods.) These stage and substage structures are hierarchical in nature wherein the higher structure incorporates the lower one (Case, 1992a). Each stage or substage depicts an 'age range,' in that, "the question is not so much the 'true age' at which something develops,

but about what it is exactly that develops at different ages" (Kohn, 1993, p. 1638).

Case (1992b) explained his cycle of cognitive growth in the following way:

> What the figure is meant to convey is this: (1) During the period of birth to adulthood, four major stages may be identified in children's intellectual development, each of which involves a higher 'level of processing.' (2) Transitions to each new level of processing takes place as a result of differentiation, consolidation, and coordination of quantitatively different units from the previous stage (these units are symbolized in the figure by the letters A and B). (3) As children actually enter any new level the following sequence of further changes takes place: (i) First, two qualitatively different units are integrated and used to construct some new form of mental unit. (ii) Next, the focus of children's attention expands, and two or more (potentially conflicting) units of the new sort are differentiated. (iii) Next, as the working memory expands further, there is a further expansion in the attentional field, with the result that two or more units can be synthesized into a coherent system (thus potentially overcoming any conflict that may have been present). (iv) Finally, as children become capable of moving from one unit to another in the new system and back in a flexible and principles ('reversible') fashion, an overall consolidation of the system takes place. This consolidation prepares the system to function as one of the two fundamental units from which the higher order structures of the next stage will be constructed. (p. 63)

The above explanation of Case's cycle of cognitive growth was evident in his developmental model which was fashioned like a staircase (Figure 2.4). The model illustrated that as a child matured he or she was able to synthesize an increasing number of cognitive characteristics as they moved from substage to substage and stage to stage. In this way, Case's developmental model offered a "multilevel cognitive system" (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993).

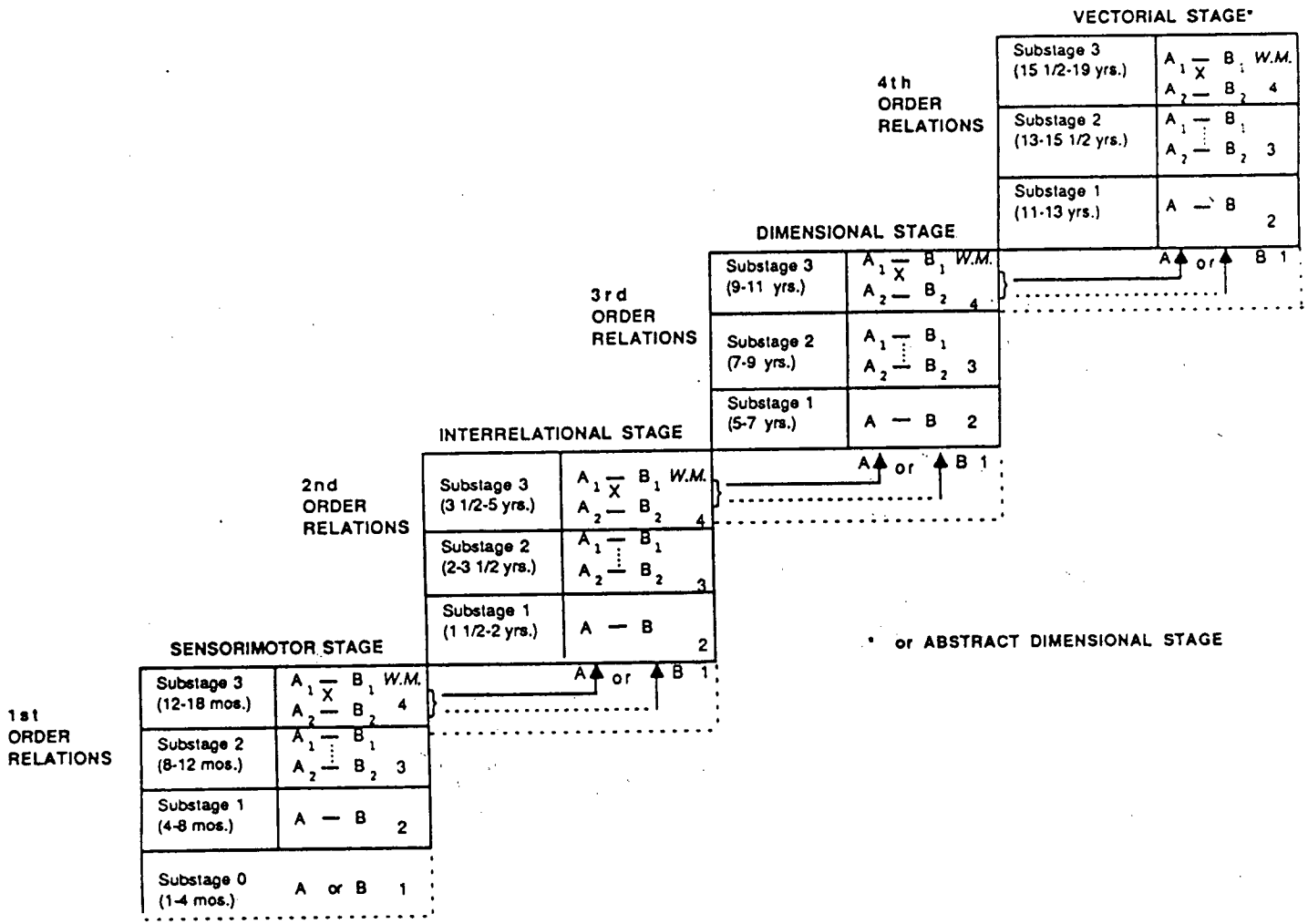

FIG. 19.1. Hypothesized structure of children's knowledge at different stages and substages of development.

Figure 2.4: Case's (1992a) Staircase Model

Note. From *The Mind's Staircase: Exploring the Conceptual and Underpinnings of Children's Thought and Knowledge* (p. 346) by R. Case (Ed.), 1992, Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Central Conceptual Structure

Case and Sandieson (1992) defined a *central conceptual structure* in the following manner:

> By a '*structure*' we mean an internal mental entity that consists of a number of nodes and relations among them. By '*conceptual*' we mean that the nodes and relations are semantic; that is, they consist of 'meanings', representations,' or 'concepts' that the child assigns to external entities in the world, rather than syntactic devices for parsing such meanings. Finally, by '*central*' we mean structures that (a) form the core of a wide range of more specific concepts and (b) play a pivotal role in enabling the child to make a transition to a new stage of thought, where these concepts are of central importance. (p. 130) [Italics for emphasis]

In addition, Case and Okamoto (1996) suggested that the structure is 'central' in three ways: (a) "they form the conceptual 'center' of children's understandings of a broad array of situations, both within and across culturally defined disciplines or content areas" (p. 5), (b) "they form the core elements out of which more elaborate structures will be constructed in the future" (p. 5), and (c) "they are the product of children's central processing" (p. 5). These three general commonalities of structure transcend the specific domain to which they apply (Case & Okamoto, 1996).

Central conceptual structures (CCSs) operate at both a general and specific level. On a general level, all CCSs pass through the same sequence of substages and stages which are parallel at different points in development related to age wherein there is an upper limit to how fast development can proceed.

On a specific level, there is domain specific knowledge which aids in the development of central conceptual structures in particular domains. For instance, there has been research into the role of central conceptual structures in the development of children's logico-mathematical thought (Capodilupo, 1992; Griffin, Case, & Sandieson, 1992; Marini, 1992), children's social and emotional thought (Bruchkowsky, 1992; Eikelhof, 1995; Goldberg-Reitman, 1992; Griffin, 1992; McKeough, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; McKeough & Martens, 1994), and children's spatial thought (Dennis, 1992).

Central conceptual structures provide a unique understanding of children's thinking across and within many domains of thought (Case, Griffin, McKeough, & Okamoto, 1992; Case, Hayward, Lewis, & Hurst, 1988). They provide an understanding of the developmental change that takes place at certain substages and stages.

Also, central conceptual structures provide a detailed account about children's conceptual knowledge within a specific domain. In particular, the social cognitive domain "has its own underlying 'central conceptual structure' to represent social understanding" (Eikelhof, 1995, p. 3) because "on the surface, the problems that the child encounters in the social world are quite different from those that he or she encounters in the physical world" (Case, 1985a, p. 191). Research about central conceptual structures within the social cognitive domain has explored children's understandings of the mother's role (Goldberg-Reitman, 1992), chronically-ill children's perceptions of the nurse's role (Eikelhof, 1995), and children's narrative development (McKeough, 1992a).

The study was modeled after McKeough's (1992a, 1993) research in 'narrative knowing.' McKeough's (1992a) research on narrative was considered within the social cognitive domain because "narrative is thought to be a window through which children construct and integrate commonly occurring social events" (McKeough, Yates, & Marini, 1994, p. 287). This premise was consistent with an anthropological cognitive mode of culture which suggested that a child's cultural experiences influence his or her thinking about phenomena in his or her social world (Schwartz, White, & Lutz, 1992).

McKeough (1993) stated:

> The narrative mode of thought is based on a temporal and causal ordering of events of two sorts, those that take place in the physical world, (i.e., on 'the landscape of action') and those that take place in the mental life of the characters (i.e., on 'the landscape of consciousness').... (p. 2)

Therefore, one way to tap into a child's narrative texts about God (landscape of consciousness) within his or her religious context (landscape of action) is to acknowledge the role of central conceptual structure, or more specifically, central narrative structure.

Working Memory and Narrative Structure

Central conceptual structures are subject to a general pattern of developmental constraint which is hierarchical and recursive. This constraint is most likely to have a neurological basis and operate on various aspects of the working memory system (Case, 1992b).

Working memory (also referred to as short-term storage space) plays an important role in determining the upper bound of a child's cognitive functioning (Case, 1992a).

> The number of goals children can maintain (and hence the complexity of problem they can solve) is determined by the size of their short-term memory for the particular class of operations in question.... [A] further assumption is that the Short-Term Storage Space (STSS) can hold 1, 2, 3, and 4 items at the preliminary, first, second, and third substage of each period [i.e., stage], respectively. (Case, 1992a, p.32)

Case (1992b) indicated that "there is a clear relationship between children's progression through this sequence and the development of their working memory" (p. 56). Also, a child's working memory capacity is a determining factor in the child's developing central conceptual structure (CCS) as she or he moves from stage to stage or from substage to substage because the child's basic cognitive functioning affects the existence and development of CCS.

A parallel between central conceptual structures and working memory has been demonstrated in several studies (e.g., Dennis, 1992; McKeough, 1992a; Porath, 1992). McKeough (1992a) compared children's processing demands of story structure with their scores on working memory measures and found that the processing demands of the working memory measures paralleled the complexity of children's narrative compositions (Table 2.4).

This study attempted to articulate a similar relationship between the processing demands of children's narrative structure (as depicted in their narrative texts about God) and the processing demands of their working memory

(as depicted in their scores on the Counting/Ratio Span Test). Demetriou, Efklides, and Platsidou (1993) examined 72 subjects using the Counting/Ratio Span Test in the dimensional and vectorial stages. Their findings supported the relationship of working memory capacity to conceptual level.

Table 2.4: Narrative Structure and Working Memory Capacity

WORKING MEMORY CAPACITY	SCORE	NARRATIVE STRUCTURE
PRE-DIMENSIONAL	SCORE ONE (store 1 item)	EVENT or OUTCOME (A)
INTENTIONAL NARRATIVES *Contains connections between event(s) and outcome of the story with a set of intentional states associated with the action of the story*		
TWO UNITS coordinated into a one-dimensional substage **UNI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE**	SCORE TWO (store 2 items)	EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) ONE INTENTION
THREE UNITS coordinated into a two-dimensional substage **BI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE**	SCORE THREE (store 3 items)	EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) TWO INTENTIONS
FOUR UNITS coordinated into an elaborated two-dimensional substage **ELABORATED BI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE**	SCORE FOUR (store 4 items)	MINOR/MAJOR EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and MINOR/MAJOR OUTCOME (B) THREE INTENTIONS
INTERPRETIVE NARRATIVES *Contains a connection between events and outcome of the story with interpretation(s) that may include both self-reflection and a message to the story and an interpretation of others' intentions in the story. Literary devices are used to achieve episodic sequences.*		
TWO UNITS coordinated into a one-vectorial substage **UNI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE**	SCORE TWO (store 2 items) (SCORE FIVE)	EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B)
THREE UNITS coordinated into a two-vectorial substage **BI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE**	SCORE THREE (store 3 items) (SCORE SIX)	EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B)
FOUR UNITS coordinated into an elaborated two-vectorial substage **ELABORATED BI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE**	SCORE FOUR (store 4 items) (SCORE SEVEN)	MINOR/MAJOR EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENTS (A) and INTERPRETIVE MINOR/MAJOR OUTCOME (B)

The processing demands of each type of story structure are indicated in Table 2.4 (adapted from McKeough, 1992a, p. 178). Case and Okamoto (1996) refered to this story structure as "central narrative structure" (p. 10). McKeough, Yates, and Marini (1994) stated:

> The complexity of these central conceptual structures [i.e., central narrative structure] is thought to be constrained by working memory capacity limitations. As children grow older, their working memory capacity increases as a function of maturation and operational efficiency, allowing for the assembly of increasingly elaborate structures. (p. 286)

Table 2.4 illustrates how narrative structure is largely sequential. At the *dimensional stage*, "children articulate an increasingly elaborate set of mental states and intentions associated with the action of the story" (McKeough, 1992a, p. 5). *Intentional states* are characteristic of this stage and include: (a) feeling states [i.e., an emotion such as happy or sad], (b) personal judgments [i.e., having a personal opinion on a particular matter], (c) others' judgments [i.e., someone else's opinion on a particular matter], and (d) social judgments [i.e., an opinion that is common to a group of people or society] (Griffin, 1992).

At the *vectorial stage*, the complexity of the events and outcomes are intermingled with the adolescent's ability to interpret the story with more psychological understanding (McKeough, 1993; Salter, 1993). The knowledge of others' intentions at the interpretive level (i.e., vectorial stage) are higher-order to the expression of one's intentions at the intentional level (i.e., dimensional stage).

Overall, the interpretive stage (vectorial) is higher-order to the intentional stage (dimensional). This is evidenced by the simple literary structure of the narratives at the intentional level versus the complex literary structure at the interpretive level as summarized in Table 2.5 (adapted from McKeough & Martens, 1994, p. 10). The plot, literary, and affective structural changes "demonstrate a marked change in narrative knowledge from childhood to adolescence" (McKeough & Martens, 1994, p. 2). McKeough and Martens (1994) stated:

> the literary devices, such as story-within-a-story and surprise endings, allow the reader to interpret the intentional states of the story characters (i.e., to take a meta-position of the intentions underlying the actions) and mark a shift in the quality of the productions from intentional narratives to interpretive ones. (p. 5) (Underline in original)

Table 2.5: Changes in Narrative Structure from Intentional to Interpretive

	Intentional Structure	**Interpretive Structure**
Plot Structure	Events and states in physical world are related to mental states (I do 'a' and 'b' because I feel/think 'x' and 'y')	Mental states are related to character's psychological makeup (I feel/think 'x' and 'y' because I am a certain type of person)
Literary Structure	Simple Plot Event sequences are temporally, causally, and referentially bound wherein each event is selected for a purpose	Complex Plot Episode sequences are temporally, causally, and referentially bound wherein each episode is selected for a purpose with literary devices imposed (foreshadowing or flashback or surprise ending or telling a story-within-a-story)
Social/Affective Structure	Affect occurs trans-situationally. One affect transforms into another via external events	Situational affect is long term and so defines character independently of external situation. Past feelings are cast on to the present

McKeough's (1992a, 1993) research in narrative structure has been used to examine, for example, moral decision making (McKeough & Martens, 1994), family stories (Salter, 1993), and mental and emotional disturbances (McKeough, Yates, & Marini, 1994). McKeough's (1993) research confirmed that "'narrative knowing' follows a developmental sequence, in that it progresses through hierarchically ordered major stage changes, as well as minor sub-stage shifts" (p. 7).

Thus, McKeough's (1992a, 1993) research in 'narrative knowing' was used in this study to examine children's narratives about God. As a child matures, it is hypothesized that hierarchical changes will occur in the narrative structure of his or her religious texts. These changes will parallel the narrative structure posited by McKeough (1992a, 1993) and the stages and substages of development posited by Case (1992a).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The review of the literature considered research in **three** general areas. First, the influence of the religious environment in shaping children's religious ideas was introduced. Second, the development of God representations as influenced by children's age and gender was examined. Third, the contribution of Piagetian theory for assessing children's religious thinking was discussed and the neo-Piagetian developmental model (Case, 1992a) utilized in this study was described. The research hypotheses were guided by the review of the literature.

The following **three** research hypotheses focused the research approach presented in Chapter Three. Several strategies were used to assess the child's religious environment. For instance, the researcher become a part of the child's religious reality by participating in their school, the researcher reviewed the school's religious education curriculum, and the parents completed a questionnaire about religious life at home. Also, three narrative tasks were used to allow children to communicate their personal representations of God. For instance, children were asked to tell a story about God, respond to a story about God, and answers questions about God. Lastly, Case's (1992a) and McKeough's (1992a) research provided the developmental framework for examining the structural changes in children's narratives about God. On a general level, Case's (1992a) model offered a developmental framework (i.e., stages and substages) for understanding the changes in children's thinking. On a specific level, McKeough's (1992a) research offered developmental criteria for examining the narrative structure of children's religious texts.

The research hypotheses were organized in **three** ways. They are: (a) religious education context, (b) God representations, and (c) narrative development of religious texts.

Religious Education Context

1(a) There will be elements in the children's religious school environment that influence children's understandings about God.

1(b) There will be elements in the religious education program that shape children's understandings about God.

1(c) There will be religious experiences, both inside and outside the family, that influence children's understandings about God.

God Representations

2(a) There will be narrative texts of God that reveal children's general representations of God.

2(b) There will be narrative texts of God that reveal children's representations of God based on their age.

2(c) There will be narrative texts of God that reveal children's representations of God based on their gender.

Narrative Development of Religious Texts

3(a) There will be changes in children's narrative texts about God (as evidenced by central narrative structures) that are consistent with the stages and substages hypothesized by Case's (1992a) developmental model.

3(b) There will be increases in children's working memory capacity as they mature cognitively. These increases will parallel the developmental progression of their narrative texts about God.

SUMMARY

This chapter provided a review of the literature relevant to focusing this interdisciplinary investigation of children's (aged 6 to 16) thinking about God. Research pertaining to *religion in childhood and adolescence* is extensive and several areas were explored.

First, the role of the religious environment in shaping children's religious ideas was introduced. This discussion included research about how children's thoughts about God are influenced by the socialization process within and outside the family unit. Then, research which emphasized the integrative relationship between a child and God was explained. Following this, the influence of religious education in providing religious knowledge that fashions children's understandings about God was presented.

Second, the development of God representations as fashioned by children's age and gender was investigated. Third, the relevance of Piagetian theory in assessing changes in children's religious thinking was discussed. This was necessary in order to describe Case's (1992a) neo-Piagetian developmental model used in this study for assessing children's narratives about God. In particular, central conceptual structures were explained and research using Case's (1992a) developmental framework was summarized.

The threefold research hypotheses were guided by the review of the literature and focus the research approach. The next chapter -- *Research Approach* -- describes the school setting, participants, data collection procedures, research tasks, and research lenses.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH APPROACH

My first day.
At 8:15 this morning. I prayed with the staff. Someone made snack for the morning meeting. Everyone is really friendly. The principal said that he was glad that the teachers were talking with me (the researcher) without his 'push'. He talked about his willingness for the research project and that he was encouraged to see everyone enthusiastic also. [Researcher's Journal]

... During the morning assembly, I was introduced to the students. As he said my name, the principal asked me to stand-up. Then, the principal said, "We are going to be her guinea pigs." I wondered what the students and teachers were thinking. I wish I could have spoken and told them about the research project. [Researcher's Journal]

When I was walking a student back to class, I asked her how she enjoyed the interview. Linda (age 10) said, "Good, I was glad to miss French!" ... Josie (age 14) said, "It was a lot of questions. They were pretty good questions." ... Veronica (age 14) said, "At first, I was scared, cause I did not know what to expect. But then, I just sort of went with it." [Researcher's Journal]

Today, David (age 16) came dressed up for his video-taped interview. He was wearing a Hawaiian shirt, bright colored shorts, sandals, sunglasses, and a hat. He adjusted himself as he sat in the chair and asked, "Am I on camera?" I got up from my seat to adjust the video frame. And then said, "Yup." [Researcher's Journal]

Chapter Three is divided into **six** main sections. They are: (1) school community, (2) participants, (3) one-to-one interview process, (4) research tasks, (5) research lenses, and (6) summary.

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

> *As you look through the pictures in this yearbook, think back and reflect upon what the Lord has done in the life of JCS but also, more importantly, on what He has done in your life. (JCS Principal)*

This section introduces the school community in **three** ways. They are: (a) theoretical supposition, (b) religious supposition, and (c) JCS: A Christian school.

Theoretical Supposition

Case (1992a) suggested that children must have some knowledge or representation of the domain that the tasks represent in order to perform the tasks. Case and Sandieson (1992) stated that "if a child does not possess this specific knowledge, he or she will fail the particular task in question" (p. 117). In other words, a child must have been introduced to a certain phenomenon in order to accomplish a set of tasks that were relevant to that phenomenon. Since this investigation was about children's thoughts of God, it was imperative that a

child had been previously introduced to knowledge about God in order that his or her understandings about God could be assessed.

Therefore, the children selected for this study were those from a particular religious context wherein they had exposure to knowledge about God. Children were chosen from an educational setting where religious instruction was part of the curriculum focus. A Christian School, known as **JCS**, was chosen because it offered religious education from kindergarten to grade ten.

Religious Supposition

JCS was a Christian school community. In this community, religious education emphasized the tenets of the Christian religion. In the Christian traditions, God is thought of as 'three-in-one' or Triune. It is the Triune nature of God that makes the Christian religion distinct from other monotheistic religions (e.g., Judaism or Islam) where believers believe in one God. A Christian school community initiates children into their religious inheritance.

JCS: A Christian School

JCS met British Columbia's curriculum requirements; was a member of the Federation of Independent Schools Association; and a member of the Society of Christian Schools (SCS). To elaborate, the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC) pamphlet (n.d.) read:

> SCSBC is an association of more than 40 schools, 8,000 students, and 5,000 teachers from Kindergarten through Grade 12. SCSBC transcends denominational and ethnic groupings. SCSBC is a community in which schools strengthen each other in living the gospel of Jesus Christ in teaching and learning. We share knowledge, wisdom, resources, and leadership. ... Christian schools are called to teach 'the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord' and to enable children to develop the gifts God has given them so that they might serve the Lord in everything they do.

As a member of the SCSBC, JCS emphasized the Bible as a primary resource in religious instruction as implemented by the Christian Schools International (CSI) (1989) curriculum guide. The CSI (1989) guide stated, "The whole point of this curriculum is not to fill students' minds full of Bible knowledge, but to open the richness of the Bible up to them so that it makes a difference in their hearts" (pp. T13-14). JCS would support Van Brummelen's (1994) statement that "if the Bible is relevant for all of life, then it is also relevant for education" (p. 25).

Concerning religious instruction, the JCS Handbook (1994) introduced **three** components of Biblical significance. They were (i) mission statement, (ii) philosophical basis and principles, and (iii) school logo. (The following information was not intended to be evaluative nor predictive but rather as defined by JCS.)

Mission statement. JCS' Handbook stated the following mission statement:

> *JCS*, a denominationally diverse educational community, seeks to serve Christian families by providing a secure learning environment in which the young person can begin to explore and evaluate all of life under God. Recognizing a variety of student abilities, we aim to uncover and develop

> the unique giftedness of each student so that he or she may become a faithful steward of His word. (JCS Handbook, 1994, p. 2)

In other words, JCS' community was Christian and within this community there were various Christian denominations represented (i.e., denominationally diverse).

Religious education principles. The JCS Handbook (1994) stated that "the basis of the Society... is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the infallible Word of God ..." (p. 2).[8] In addition, the following **ten** principles were highlighted for religious education at JCS:

(1) The Bible: That God, by His Holy Word, reveals Himself ... and therefore guides His people also in the education of their children;

(2) Creation: That in their education, children must come to learn that the world and human beings' calling in it can rightly be understood only in relation to the Triune God;

(3) Sin: That because human sin brought upon all people the curse of God -- ... -- human sin also corrupts the education of children;

(4) Jesus Christ: That through our Savior Jesus Christ there is a renewal of our educational enterprise because He is the Redeemer of, and the Light and Way for our human life in all its range and variety;

(5) Schools: That the purpose of the Christian school is to educate children for a life of obedience to their calling in this world as image bearers of God;

(6) Parents: That the primary responsibility for education rests upon parents to whom children are entrusted by God and that Christian

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[8] The Word of God is defined as 'infallible' because in the Christian tradition, 'the Word' is considered to have written by God through the hands of men. 2 Timothy 16-17 (NIV) reads: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Therefore, the Word is considered 'true' or 'perfect' just as God is.

parents should accept this obligation in view of the convenantal relationship with God established with believers and their children;

(7) Teachers: That Christian teachers, both in obedience to God and in cooperation with the parents, have a unique pedagogical responsibility while educating children in school;

(8) Pupils: That Christian schools must take into account the variety of abilities, needs and responsibilities of young persons; ... that such learning goals and such curricula will be selected as will best prepare them to live as obedient Christians; and that only with constant attention to such pedagogical concerns will education be truly Christian;

(9) Community: That because God's covenant embraces not only parents and their children but also the entire Christian community to which they belong and because Christian education contributed directly to the advancement of God's Kingdom, it is the obligation of the entire Christian community to establish and maintain Christian schools, to pray for them, work for them, and give generously to their support; and

(10) Educational Freedom: That Christian schools ... should be fully recognized in society as free to function according to these principles. (JCS Handbook, 1994, pp. 2-3)

School logo. JCS' logo was "a constant reminder of God's love and of the unity of the body of Christ" (JCS Handbook, 1994, p. 3). The logo was shaped like a 3/4 circle (to represent God's out-stretched hands) with a smaller circle on top (to represent God's head) (Figure 3.1). Inside the 3/4 circle were three figures holding hands with one another whilst being embraced by God's out-stretched hands (the 3/4 circle). The school's name outlined the logo around the 3/4 circle and was defined by a border. The logo was blue and white.

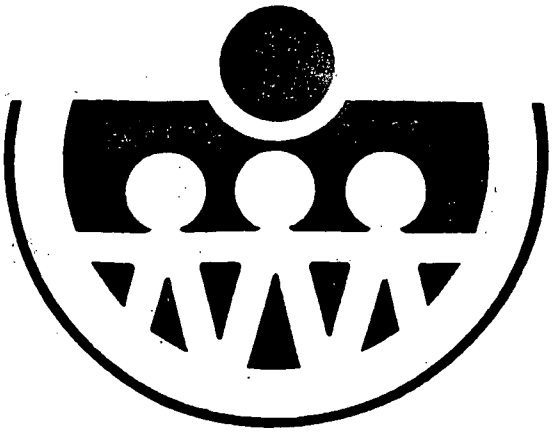

Figure 3.1: JCS School Logo

The logo symbolized "God's all-embracing love for His children. It also represents our oneness in the Lord which is the bond that unites our interdenominational Christian school" (JCS Handbook, 1994, p. 3). This logo was displayed on report cards, stationery, T-shirts, and other school items.

The school's logo may also be interpreted as three equal parts of the Trinity; that is, God being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. JCS did not indicate this to be the case, but it is possible, given that three figures are embraced by one larger figure.

PARTICIPANTS

Parents of the participants involved in the study were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the research. A copy of the *Parental Consent Form* is outlined in Appendix A.

The total number of *Parental Consent Forms* distributed for grades K [kindergarten], 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 was 179. All parents of the children in these age groupings received a form. The total number of returns were 149 (83.24%

of the total number of forms distributed). The number of returns steadily dropped as the grade increased, especially at the high school grade level. The breakdown of the number of returns versus number of forms distributed was as follows: Grade K: 33/38; Grade 2: 29/34; Grade 4: 32/33; Grade 6: 23/28; Grade 8: 19/28; and Grade 10: 13/18, illustrating that as the participants' age increased, the return rate decreased. For instance, when the homeroom teacher asked the grade eight or ten students for their return forms many said they had forgotten them or had not yet received consent from their parents. In addition, many of the students at the high school level were waiting to see which of their friends were going to participate before they consented to participate. At the grade eight level, there were fewer male participants than female participants; perhaps this was so because the researcher was female.

In total, 114 children were given consent by their parents to participate in the study (76.5% of the total number of forms returned). It was <u>not</u> necessary to exclude any of the participants who were willing to participate as all children that consented were able to perform the research tasks. Initially, some *Special Needs students* who were developmentally delayed were expected to be excluded because of the nature of the working memory tasks and some *ESL students* were expected to be excluded because the research tasks required a certain degree of verbal acuity based on English language acquisition.

If the parent gave consent for his or her child to participate, then the parent was requested to answer a *Parent's Background Information Form* (Appendix B). This form was presented at the same time as the Parental

Consent Form; all of the sample (N=114) responded and completed the form. (This is discussed in the section *Contextual Lens*.)

The 114 children selected to participate in the study were between the ages of 6 and 16. The age and gender differentiation is represented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Sample Breakdown (N=114)

Age		Female	Male	Group
	M	n	n	n
06	5.67	7	21	28
08	7.71	9	14	23
10	9.68	12	11	23
12	11.80	9	8	17
14	13.61	10	3	13
16	15.76	6	4	10
		53	**61**	**114**

The ages represented in the sample reflect the developmental substages as suggested by Case (1992a). The *Dimensional Stage* indicates the age acquisition of (a) the first substage as 5 to 7, (b) the second substage as 7 to 9, and (c) the third substage as 9 to 11. The *Vectorial Stage* indicates the age acquisition of (a) the first substage as 11 to 13, (b) the second substage as 13 to 15.5, and (c) the third substage as 15.5 to 19.

Accordingly, the ages in this sample are the mid-points of each substage. Choosing the mid-points for sample selection is congruent with other studies done within this perspective (e.g., Eikelhof, 1995; McKeough, 1992a; Porath, 1992). Hence, this study not only addressed children's thoughts of God in the

younger years (i.e., age 6) but also children in the middle years (i.e., ages 8, 10, and 12) and adolescence (i.e., ages 14 and 16).

ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW PROCESS

In total, 114 children (ages 6 to 16) were interviewed (one-to-one) during JCS' school hours. This interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes (for the younger children) and 60 to 75 minutes (for the older children). The interviews were conducted in two rooms; the first room (i.e., a math supply room) was near the children who were aged 6, 8, and 10 and the second room (i.e., an empty classroom) was near the children that were aged 12, 14, and 16. In each room, there was a video camera and a tape recorder. The interviews were taped and transcribed.

The audio-tapes reflected the entire interview process (i.e., the child listening to the task instructions), and the video-tapes captured the child's expressions and other non-verbal actions. (The parents were given an option whether or not they wanted their child video-taped. A subset [n=39] of the total sample was video-taped [i.e., 34%]. All of the sample (N=114) was audio-taped. [See Appendix A: *Parental Consent Form*]). All of the audio and video tapes were coded according to age (i.e., A06, A08, A10, A12, A14, and A16), sex (i.e., female [F] and male [M]), and position interviewed in age grouping (i.e., 001, 002, 003, etc.,); for example, A06M001, means the participant was age 6 (A06), a male (M), and the first (001) to be interviewed in his age grouping.

The children gave verbal assent (on audio-tape) to participate in the interview. This procedure is consistent with Abramovitch, Freedman, Thoden, and Nikolich (1991) who stated that "very few children have any difficulty making a choice regarding being in a research study, and typically they assent to the research" (pp. 1100-1101) and Spradley (1979) who stated that "recording explanations" include telling the informant "reasons for tape recording the interview" (p. 59).

During the interview, the research tasks were administered in a *Counter Balanced Order* (e.g., Tasks 1, 2, 3, and 4 OR Tasks 2, 3, 4, and 1 OR Tasks 3, 4, 1, and 2 etc.) (See Appendix C: *Counter Balanced Order Check List*). This was to ensure that the order of the tasks would not influence the child's response in a particular way. For instance, if Task 2 ["Who is this Jesus"] was given prior to Task 1 ["Tell me a Story about God"] the child may have told a story about Jesus.

After the interview, each child was given a *participation certificate* (See Appendix D: *Participation Certificates*) and a gift or treat (i.e., chocolate or cookie). Finally, each child was walked back to his or her classroom; this allowed for closure to the interview.

RESEARCH TASKS

JCS' religious education program indicated that Bible stories play a primary role in their religious education curriculum (as suggested by the Christian Schools International curriculum guide). Because JCS' religious education program emphasized storytelling, using religious narratives was viewed as an appropriate research method to explore children's religious thinking.

In this study, narrative texts were the vehicle by which children were free to discuss and explore their imaginative thoughts about God. This study's research approach was consistent with (a) anthropological research which used narrative as a tool for assessing the social realities of its participants (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994; Marcus & Fisher, 1986; Mishler, 1986; Rosaldo, 1993; Schwartz, White, & Lutz, 1992) and (b) research in religious development which demonstrated the utility of using religious narratives in assessing children's religious growth (e.g., Bucher, 1991; Johnson & Goldman, 1987; Ludwig, Weber, & Iben, 1974; Murken, 1993; Webster, 1975).

This study asked children to generate a story about God (Task One), respond to a story about Jesus (Task Two), and answer a series of questions about God (Task Three) in a one-to-one interview. In this interview, each child accomplished a series of **four** research tasks. They were: (a) Task One: "Tell me a story about God," (b) Task Two: "Who is this Jesus?" (c) Task Three: "Questions About God," and (d) Task Four: "The Counting/Ratio Span Test."

Task One: "Tell me a Story about God"

Task One -- *Tell me a story about God* -- allowed children to generate a story about God in their own words. The purpose of this task was *to examine the changes in children's (ages 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) narratives about God.*

This task was modified from McKeough's (1991a) study which asked children to generate a story. The children were given the opportunity to tell any kind of story; that is, they could tell a Biblical story, a family story, a personal story, or even a story someone had told them about God. Accordingly, the children developed their own story after they were given the following simple instructions:

> *I am interested in learning more about what children think about God. Could you tell me a story about God?*

Task Two: "Who is this Jesus?"

Task Two -- *Who is this Jesus?* -- allowed children to respond to a story from the Bible. The purpose of the second task was *to examine the changes in children's (ages 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) responses to a Biblical story.*

The following story *Jesus Calms the Sea (Mark 4:36-41)* (New International Version [NIV] Bible) was chosen because it can be easily understood by all age levels. *Jesus Calms the Sea* is considered by most Biblical scholars as a miracle story (Anderson, 1976; Schweizer, 1970; Wessel

1984). Anderson (1976) claimed that this miracle story was a "believing testimony" in that the recounting of the miracle was "not for the sake of the miracle in itself but in order to challenge the reader to say faith's Yes to the divine reality to which the story is only a pointer" (p. 143). In this story, *Jesus Calms the Sea* points the reader to the life of one person -- Jesus.

Jesus Calms the Sea:
Mark 4:36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.
Mark 4:37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.
Mark 4:38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"
Mark 4:39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.
Mark 4:40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"
Mark 4:41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

An examination of the three versions in the New International Version [NIV] Bible (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and Vos' (1977) version led to the decision to use the Markan perspective of *Jesus Calms the Sea*. The Gospel of Mark was chosen as the version which would best serve children between the ages of 6 to 16 because (a) the Biblical passage was descriptive and the event could be understood by children aged 6 to 16, (b) Jesus was called 'a teacher' to which the children could relate, and (c) there were 'built-in' questions to the text. In this way, the children were free to generate their individual understandings of the Biblical passage.

The story was recorded and presented to the children. This was to ensure the consistency of story-telling and to reduce the effects of the interviewer's involvement or story-telling ability that may vary from day to day. After the story was told, the children were asked the following **five** questions:

1. *Have you heard this story before?*
2. *Why did the disciples ask, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*
3. *Why did Jesus ask, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*
4. *What is the answer to the question, "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"*
5. *Do you think this story has a message? If so, what is the message to the story?*

The interview was conducted in a semi-structured format. This format allowed for clarification and probing until the child had exhausted his or her answers to the above questions.

Task Three: "Questions About God"

The purpose of this third task -- *Questions About God* -- was *to examine the changes in children's (ages 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) responses to a series of open-ended questions about God.* Open-ended questions have the potential to capture additional information about the children's thoughts about God (Heller, 1986; Hutsebaut & Verhoeven, 1995; Janssen, De Hart, & Gerardts, 1994). This research task was designed "to help children to think imaginatively about story material, exploring it in terms of their own experiences, not just supplying verbally correct answers" (Dewar, 1964, p. 146).

The questions posed for Task Three provided rich detail about children's representations of God. The following questions, adapted from Nye and

Carlson's (1984) and Heller's (1986) studies, were expected to tap into children's imaginative understandings about God and to reveal the child's religious reality. The categorical headings (1-8) were added to organize the interview questions and to focus the interpretation utilized in the conceptual analysis.

CATEGORY 1:
Description of God: *Where does God come from? How old is God? Is God like a person? Could you describe in words, using one word or many, what God looks like?*
CATEGORY 2:
Home of God: *Could you tell me where you think God lives? What is God's home like? Does God have a family or does God live alone there?*

CATEGORY 3:
Activities of God: *What are some things that God can do? What are some things that God cannot do? What are God's everyday activities? How is God involved in your life every day?*

CATEGORY 4:
Communication with God: *Does God know who you are? Can God see and hear you? Is it possible to have a conversation with God? How is it possible to let God know about something?*

CATEGORY 5:
Questions about God: *Are there questions that you would like to ask God if you could? Are there some things that you are wondering about God?*

CATEGORY 6:
Changes about God: *Are there things you would like to change about God? If you could give God a suggestion, what would it be?*

CATEGORY 7:
Learning about God: *Where did you learn about God from? From anyone in particular? From any ways that do not involve other people?*

CATEGORY 8:
Thinking about God versus friends and parents: *How do you think the way you think about God might be the same as or different than your friends' ideas? How do you think the way you think about God might be the same as or different from your parents' ideas?*

Task 4: "The Counting/Ratio Span Test"

Case (1992a) stated that "among the factors that play an important role in determining the upper bound of children's function is the size of their working memory" (p. 12). The *Counting Span* and *Ratio Span Tests* were administered in order to assess the "bounds" of each child's memory because the complexity of the child's narrative texts about God were hypothesized to be related to the child's working memory capacity. Both tests are working memory measures and aided in the structural analyses of the children's responses to Tasks One and Two.

Case (1992b) described the "steps that are required in order to create a simple measure of working memory" (p. 60) in the following way:

> First, subjects must be asked to execute a simpler operation whose product would normally be a prerequisite for executing one of the more complex operations that are tapped by measures such as the Counting or Spatial Spans. Next, subjects must be asked to execute a series of highly similar operations and recall the entire string of results that they generated when they did so. ... Both measures are converted to a standard working memory format: i.e., a format in which several operations were executed in a row, and their products recollected. (p. 61)

The processing demands of these working memory measures are sequential; that is, "subjects must (1) execute a series of highly similar operations, (2) store the products of those operations under conditions of strong interference, and (3) output these products in a sequence" (Case, 1992b, p. 54). Finally, Case (1992b) stated:

> Eventually the point is reached where the subject can no longer remember all the totals for any trial: numbers from previous trials or from

> interpolated counting acts intrude, and the interference becomes too great for the subject to overcome. The number of card-totals that the subject *can* remember on the majority of trials within a block is then noted and referred to as his or her working memory for numbers. (p. 54) [Italics in original]

In other words, all children start with the simplest trial level and the administration of the test ceases when the participant cannot recall all of the totals in a trial. Overall, this procedure describes a *basal-ceiling method of administration.*

The *Counting Span Test* was administered to the 6, 8, and 10 year-old participants. The *Ratio Span Test* was administered to the 12, 14, and 16 year-old participants. (This age distinction is congruent with Case's (1992a) dimensional and vectorial stages.) "The only difference between the ratio-span test and the counting-span test is that the former requires a vectorial rather than a dimensional operation" (Case, 1985a, pp. 325-326).

Both working measures were chosen because they are verbal in nature and complement the narrative nature of Tasks One and Two. The working memory measures are presented in **two** parts (i) Counting Span Test and (ii) Ratio Span Test.

Counting span test. The *Counting Span Test* was organized on sets of 8 1/2 by 11 inch white cards with green counting dots affixed in random patterns. Scattered around the green dots were yellow distractor dots. This test required that the participant count and remember the number of green dots while ignoring the yellow dots. The administration of the *Counting Span Test* was as follows:

ADMINISTRATION OF COUNTING SPAN TEST

1. *Participants are given a practice card.* They are told that once it is turned over, they are to count the green dots out loud (ignoring the yellow dots) and point to each one. Counting can be done at whatever speed is comfortable for each child. After the card is counted, a blank card is placed over it and the participant is asked *How many dots are there?* If the child answers correctly and indicates the procedure is understood, the test begins. If not, another practice card is given. (Case, 1985b)

2. *Participants are given sets of cards presented one card at a time.* Participants are instructed to begin counting each new card as soon as it is presented. When a subject finishes counting the last card in the set, a blank card is presented as a signal to recall the totals. Participants are instructed to attempt ordered recall. This task requires only a minimal degree of numerical talent and verbal ability because the totals range from 1 to 9. (Case, 1985b)

Ratio span test. The *Ratio Span Test* was administered in a similar fashion to the *Counting Span Test* (Case, 1985b). The *Ratio Span Test* was organized on sets of 8 1/2 by 11 inch white cards with blue and yellow counting dots affixed in random patterns. Scattered around the blue and yellow dots were green distractor dots. This test required that the participant count and remember the number of blue dots in comparison to the number of yellow dots while ignoring the green dots. The administration of the *Ratio Span Test* was as follows:

ADMINISTRATION OF RATIO SPAN TEST

STEP ONE: *This game involves ratios. Another word for ratio is fraction. Do you know what ratios and fractions are?*
If NO -- CONDUCT the Counting Span Test

STEP TWO: If YES-- show first practice card and explain the following:
Imagine that the blue and yellow dots are marbles. The blue dots are marbles which have been given away and the yellow dots are the marbles that are left. How many marbles are left for each marble given away? Please do your counting out loud and touch each dot as you count it.
(Remind if necessary.)

STEP THREE: If INCORRECT, ask the following:
How many marbles have been given away? Two, that's right. How many marbles are left? Twelve, right. Now, how many marbles are left for each marble that's given away?

STEP FOUR: If STILL INCORRECT, say the following:
Two marbles were given away and twelve marbles are left, right? Then how many groups of two are there in twelve?
If STILL INCORRECT, move on to next card.

STEP FIVE: If CORRECT say the following:
Let's try one more practice card. I'm going to show you the card but this time I want you to remember the answer until I turn the page, O.K.?
Turn page as soon as counting is finished.
STEP SIX: Continue with trials until the subject misses all three trials at one level or finishes all the levels.

(Adapted from Case, 1985b) [*Italics* to indicate talking].

RESEARCH LENSES

The research approach presented in this interdisciplinary investigation incorporated the contextual (religious environment), conceptual (general representations of God), and structural (changes in religious narrative) components of children's thoughts of God. All three components (contextual, conceptual, and structural) were important in the analysis of the research data. In combination, these three components addressed the research purpose; that

is, whether or not a child's thoughts of God are a reflection of his or her religious context and related to his or her cognitive maturity and gender.

In addition, the research approach took into consideration 'three voices' which emerged during the research process. The *school's voice* was defined by JCS' mission statement, ten religious principles, and religious education program. The *participant's voice* was defined by the children's and adolescents' (age 6 to 16) understandings of God as expressed in their religious narratives. The *researcher's voice* was defined by her own inferences, opinions, or ideas expressed relative to her own religious understandings.[9]

The three voices (school, participants, and researcher) complement the three components (contextual, conceptual, and structural) and form the basis for three research lenses. This section is divided into the following **four** subsections: (a) rationale, (b) contextual lens, (c) conceptual lens, and (d) structural lens. (The first subsection provides a rationale for combining three lenses and the last three subsections describe each lens.)

Rationale

To focus this interdisciplinary investigation of children's and adolescents' thinking about God, the contextual, conceptual, and structural components were

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[9] I am a Christian. I have a Professional Teaching Certification. I am authorized to teach in the public schools of British Columbia. I have not been formally involved in a religious education program nor a religious school environment prior to my participation at JCS.

combined. There were **four** reasons for using a combined research approach.

1. There was a discovery of a 'culture' (a religious school community) alongside implementation of developmental theory (Case's Neo-Piagetian Model).

2. The school community, where religious instruction was imparted, was contrasted with the formal interview process (four tasks in an one-to-one interview).

3. The researcher's interpretations of the religious narratives (Tasks One, Two, and Three) focused on the meanings expressed from the children. This placed the children's reality, within their school community, alongside a theory of development.

4. The researcher became a part of the school community alongside the children's understandings of God.

Contextual Lens

The *contextual* component of the research explored how children's religious environment shaped their thoughts about God. This analysis was conducted on **three** levels: (i) general examination of JCS' religious education program, (ii) discussion of children's language of the divine, and (iii) results from the *Parent's Background Information Form*. These findings are presented in Chapter Four – *The Religious Education Context*.

General examination of JCS' religious education program. An examination of JCS' religious education program aided in understanding the contextual factors that may have shaped children's understanding of God in this

particular school. Therefore, an investigation of JCS' religious education program included a general discussion of religious school life.

To do so, I collected routine fieldnotes to gather an impression about the school community. I became immersed in the school community. I held regular teaching hours, took lunch with the staff members, had regular recess supervision, participated in Monday morning prayer time, attended all assemblies, and was visible in the school community. These activities happened over a three-month-period. In this way, the *researcher's voice* emerged as a result of participating within the school community.

Also, an investigation of the religious education program included a general examination of JCS' religious education curriculum. (It should be noted that this investigation was not intended to evaluate JCS' religious education curriculum.) This investigation provided information about the children's acquisition of religious knowledge which shaped their understandings of God as defined by JCS.

Information about the religious education program was obtained in **four** ways.[10] *First*, I examined the Christian Schools International (CSI) (1995) curriculum guide; this was an optional resource for JCS teachers. *Second,* JCS teachers (only for grades K, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10) were asked to submit their 1995/1996 objectives for Bible Study. *Bible Study* was JCS' religious education curriculum component. *Third*, students shared their comments about Bible study

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[10] I intended to include classroom observations of Bible Study lessons. However, this was not possible because (a) many of the teachers did not regularly schedule 'Bible Study' and (b) some of the teachers felt uncomfortable about a classroom visit.

instruction during our interview time. *Fourth*, I observed an Easter program. Concerning this information, (a) the *school's voice* was defined by JCS' religious education program which included the teachers' Bible Study objectives, (b) the *participant's voice* about the religious education program was expressed during the students' one-to-one interview with the researcher, and (c) the *researcher's voice* was revealed when she shared her observations from an Easter concert.

Discussion of language of the divine. The children's and adolescents' *Language of the Divine* as described in their narrative texts about God were the focus of this investigation. This investigation moved away from Francis' (1979) first definition of 'religious thinking' which emphasized how children process their thoughts about religious material. (See *Definition* in Chapter One.) Instead, this investigation examined the language children use to express specific religious concepts pertaining to the uniqueness of their Christian community.

In this investigation, the *researcher's voice* was defined by the Christian traditions to which she belongs. Further, these traditions became the template by which the *participant's voice* (i.e., children's thinking about God) could be interpreted.

To do so, six classic categories in the language about God in the Christian tradition were used as a template. They were: (i) a Triune God, (ii) God is personal, (iii) God the creator, (iv) God is eternal, (v) God is all-ness [omni-ness] including omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, and (vi) God

offers salvation and redemption. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Eliade, 1987), *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (Achtemeier, 1985), *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Elwell, 1996), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Metzger & Coogan, 1993), and *The Catholic Encyclopedia: Revised and Updated* (Broderick, 1987) guided the discussion.

Results from the parent's background information form. The *Parent's Background Information Form* asked for specific information regarding the child's religious experience. This experience was based on the family's religious orientation which included the family's denomination and the family's religious activity (i.e., grace, family prayer, personal prayer, Bible study, Bible reading, and church-going). In addition, the child's weekly religious involvement was estimated; this included Sunday School, choir and/or worship group, youth groups, boys and girls clubs, and bedtime stories.

The activities generated on the 'form' were not inclusive. Instead, these activities served to represent *some* of the factors which may shape a child's changing thoughts of God. These factors represented the parent's perceptions of the family's and child's religious activities.[11]

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[11] The nature of the parent-child relationship was not specifically addressed in the *Parent's Background Information Form*. However, if a child wished to talk about his or her parental relationship, he or she could in the interview. Also, the form did not address the child's 'conversion' (i.e., the child's baptism or confirmation). This was not a focus in this study. The nature of the child's commitment to the 'Christian Faith' was not addressed unless the child personally disclosed it during the interview.

Overall, the *Parent's Background Information Form* was designed to provide insight into the child's thinking about God based on his or her religious experience both inside (e.g., family prayer) and outside the family environment (e.g., boys and girls club). Together, this information provided some understanding of the religious contextual influences on the child outside the religious education curricula as defined by the parents.

Conceptual Lens

The *conceptual* component of the research examined children's representations of God as evidenced by their religious narrative texts. The focus of this examination was on the 'participant's voice' wherein the conceptual richness of the children's understandings of God across tasks (One, Two and Three) could emerge.

The children's responses to a story about God (Task One) were based on the meanings expressed by the participants rather than assigning theological categories, and their responses were ordered into post-hoc categories. The children's responses to the Biblical story *Jesus Calms the Sea* (Task Two) were examined per question (1, 2, 3, and 4) across age groupings (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16). The children's responses to a series of open-ended questions about God (Task Three) were examined in accordance with the eight prescribed categories across age groupings (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16). These findings are presented in Chapter Five – *Conceptual Representations of God.*

Structural Lens

Case's (1992a) developmental model served to focus the structural analysis. On a general level, Case's model offered a framework for assessing the stages and substages of children's thought. On a specific level, McKeough's (1992a, 1993) research on narrative development served to focus the structural dimensions of children's narrative texts about God. Two of the tasks had a narrative focus. They were telling a story about God (Task One) and responding to a story about Jesus (Task Two). The final task (Task Four), a working memory measure, was used to assess the bounds of the child's working memory capacity. (The relationship between working memory and narrative structure has already been emphasized in Chapter Two.)

The children's responses for each task (One, Two, and Four) were assigned a developmental level score (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) that corresponded with the stages and substages of Case's (1992a) developmental framework. The developmental level mean scores for each child at every age level were statistically analyzed (i.e., ANOVA and MANOVA). These findings are presented in Chapter Six – *Narrative Development.*

In order to analyze the developmental progression of children's narrative texts of God, **two** procedures were necessary. They were: (i) developmental levels and scoring procedures and (ii) inter-rater reliability procedure.

Developmental levels and scoring procedures. Each child's interview for Tasks One (Tell a Story about God) and Two (Jesus Story) was assigned a developmental level response (score 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) in accordance with the hypothesized narrative structure described in Chapter Six. The narrative structure descriptors were adapted from McKeough's (1992a, 1993; McKeough & Martens', 1994) and Salter's (1993) research on central narrative structure.

For Task Four (Counting/Ratio Span Test), children were asked to calculate a series of mathematical operations. Again, the *Counting Span Test* was for age groupings 6, 8, and 10 and the *Ratio Span Test* was for age groupings 12, 14, and 16. The developmental level scores (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) for the working memory task were assigned in accordance with a set of numerical answers relevant to the mathematical operations performed as described in Chapter Six.

Inter-rater reliability procedure. In order to assess the reliability of the developmental scores assigned for Tasks One and Two, responses were coded by an independent rater. The independent rater was not familiar with the features of this study except the scoring procedures. The independent rater had a Ph.D. degree and was familiar with Case's (1992a) developmental model.

An *Inter-rater Reliability Booklet* was designed to familiarize the independent rater with the scoring criteria for Task One: Tell a Story About God

and Two: Who is this Jesus? The focus is on the substantive aspects of narrative structure.

The Booklet was divided into **three** main sections. The *first section* provided an introduction to the developmental levels (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) and scoring procedures for Task One (Tell a Story about God) and Task Two (Who is this Jesus?). The *second section* had 114 interview transcripts, numbered from IT1-001 to IT1-114, for Task One: Tell a Story About God and the *third section* had 114 interview transcripts, numbered from IT2-001 to IT2-114, for Task Two: Who is this Jesus? (IT1 means "Inter-rater Task One" and IT2 means "Inter-rater Task Two.")

The total number of interview transcripts contained in the Booklet was 228. Each set of transcripts for Tasks One and Two was randomly ordered by computer to ensure that the transcripts were not ordered by age. In this way, both the independent rater and researcher were unaware of the child's age when assigning a developmental score. Specifically, a developmental score for each child per task was assigned by the independent rater. These scores were compared with the developmental scores assigned by the researcher.

In addition, the 'degree of agreement' of the developmental levels and scores, as they pertained to each child's transcript on a given task, were assessed. The degree of agreement between the assigned independent rater's and researcher's score is called a *percentage agreement*. An accepted level of percentage agreement is 80% (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). The percentage agreement for Task One was 85.08% and for Task Two was 78.07%.

The *Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients* for Tasks One and Two are r=.96 and r=.96, respectively. These coefficients illustrate the strength of the relationship when the scores assigned by the researcher and the independent rater are inter-correlated (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989).

Furthermore, the *Pearson r* is best suited when the scores are an equal interval of 1 on both scales; in this case, from 1 to 8. For the analysis, each child's interview for Tasks One and Two was assigned a developmental level response (score 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) in accordance with the narrative structure described in Chapter Six.

SUMMARY

This chapter identified the research methodology utilized in this study. The population consisted of children who were exposed to knowledge about God through their religious environment (school, home, and church). The sample was comprised of 114 children between the ages of 6 and 16 within one Christian non-denominational school.

The data collection procedures included: (1) the parental consent form, (2) the parent's background information form, (3) a general examination of the religious context, and (4) the interview process regarding the four research tasks. During the interview, the children participated in four research tasks. They were: (1) *Tell me a story about God* -- in which children were asked to generate a story, (2) *Who is this Jesus?* -- in which children were asked to

interpret a story, (3) *Questions About God* -- in which children were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions about God, and (4) *The Counting/Ratio Span Test* -- in which children were asked to respond to a short memory task.

The research approach brought attention to three lenses, namely, contextual, conceptual, and structural. The next chapter -- *Religious Education Context* -- presents the contextual findings. JCS' religious education program is described. The children's 'language of the divine' is discussed. The results from the *Parent's Background Information Form* are also presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONTEXT

A poster in the Grade Two classroom read:

Christian Living

- *Pray*
- *Read the Bible*
- *Obey God's Word*
- *Show You Want to Please God*

Miedema (1995) stated, "The core of the process of education ... is the relation between child and culture.... The educational process is a dynamic equilibrium between the individual and the society or culture" (p. 403).

In this study, it was important to ascertain the 'cultural scene' as depicted in the day-to-day religious education life of the students and the teachers at JCS. To elaborate, Spradley and McCurdy (1972) stated that "our society consists of different subgroups and social situations. Each has its own rules for behavior. The knowledge people learn and use in particular social situations with a limited group of people constitutes a *cultural scene*" (p. 356) [italics in original]. In a broad sense, JCS' religious school environment represented a specific "cultural scene" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972).

Chapter Four describes JCS' religious education context where knowledge about God was imparted. This chapter is divided into the following

four main sections: (1) Religious Education Program, (2) Language of the Divine, (3) Parent's Background Information Form, and (4) Summary.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

A particular religious education environment "offers a particular type of God" (Rizzuto, 1991, p. 55). "Meaning is created communally as a result of the cooperation and coacting of teachers and pupils" (Miedema, 1995, p. 404).

JCS' religious education program had the potential to transform a child's and adolescent's thoughts of God. The religious education program at JCS was reviewed in the following **four** ways: (a) Christian Schools International (CSI) curriculum resource guide, (b) teachers' objectives for Bible Study, (c) students' comments regarding religious instruction, and (d) Easter program. (It is important to note that this section was not intended to be an evaluation but rather an exploration of the religious education curriculum at JCS.)

CSI Curriculum Resource Guide

The religious education curriculum from kindergarten to grade ten was the focus of this section. According to JCS, they met British Columbia's curriculum requirements in all subject areas. JCS was a member of three external organizations - Christian Schools International (CSI), the Society of Christian

Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC), and the Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA) (JCS Handbook, 1994).

Most of the religious education curriculum at JCS was patterned by the religious education philosophy and resource guides offered by Christian Schools International. For instance, regarding JCS' general religious education philosophy, Christian Schools International (CSI) (1995) provided the following premise:

> God saw us walking in the darkness, and He sent us the perfect light. Jesus not only lights our path; He also walks with us on it. We have the promise that 'He will not let your foot slip' (Psalm 121:3). Walking in the light makes the path clear.
> Christian schools point children to the Light. Teachers in these schools help students see the Light of the world, and they help students walk confidently in His light. In a dark world, children need guides to help them stay on the well-lit path. At home, at church, and at school, children need to be shown the Light so they can walk in the way of the Lord. (p.1)

In addition, as a member of the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC), the religious education program at JCS was defined by the CSI (1995) resource guide. The introductory paragraph in the resource guide stated:

> The Story of God and His People is designed to help students learn about God in the Bible as a record of God's loving concern for His people and their response to His faithfulness. God provided the Bible for us so that we might learn to know Him and to be a guide for our lives. It is impossible to draw direct parallels between the lives of people in the Bible and our lives today. But God had the events of the Bible recorded so that we might learn from them that salvation is possible only in Jesus Christ. The Bible message teaches people how to live for God.... (CSI, 1995, p. 1)

Like most curriculum resource guides, CSI (1995) had a scope and sequence for grades K through 8. For instance, the emphasis for kindergarten

was God's family, grade two was God's promises, grade four was recording God's nation, grade six was witnessing to the gospels, and grade eight was focusing on being 'a light to the Gentiles.' Each grade covered a series of units with lessons and activities, and strategies. The appendices were complete with exercises and assignments which included, for example, story telling, memory work, devotional work, and self evaluation (beginning at grade three).

The CSI (1995) resource guide described the importance of telling Bible stories and the role of the teacher in reinforcing religious understanding:

> Students enjoy a well-told story at all levels of the elementary grades. Telling Bible stories so that they are fresh and exciting becomes increasingly more difficult as students develop familiarity with the stories. They hear them at home, at Sunday School, and in the Christian school classroom. Stories need to deepen student's understanding of the Biblical message. Each time a story is told another layer should be added to the students' understanding. It is, therefore, important that teachers in preparation for telling the story not only consult the Teacher Guide that accompanies a Bible program or children's story Bibles but they become familiar with the context and background in which the story is set. That means reading the story in the Bible in the context of the Bible book in which it occurs. What are the events of the story, where and why does it occur, and what is God through the author, showing us?
> Also try to determine what students already know about the story so that you can build on this knowledge. Then try to find fresh new angles, different viewpoints that will continue to make the story come alive for the students. ... It is important that your interpretation does not stand in the way of the students' understanding of the nature and purpose of the Bible. (p. 9)

Overall, JCS defined their religious education program by the CSI curriculum resource guide. In particular, CSI is based in the United States where "the use of commercially published curricula, particularly textbooks and teacher's guides, is widespread in ... programs of religious education" (Lewis, 1994).

Teachers' Bible Study Objectives

Even though JCS defined their religious education program by CSI, the curriculum resource guide was viewed as an option for teachers at JCS. Mostly, teachers were left to design their own religious education curriculum which was called *Bible Study*. As a result, the principal suggested that there was little uniformity regarding Bible Study across the grade levels at JCS.

Some of the teachers commented that Bible Study was sometimes 'the first to go' if other curriculum needs were not fulfilled. Many commented that there were few guidelines for Biblical teaching. Most of the teachers categorized themselves as having 'little' or 'no' religious education experience. As a result, many teachers made their own decisions about what and how to teach Bible Study. Lewis' (1994) research about Sunday School teachers, who used published material but re-designed the lessons based on their own level of religious experience, indicates the teaching tactics employed by some of the teachers at JCS.

The Bible Study curriculum at JCS was geared for at least two periods per week with 20 minutes of instructional time for the primary grades and 45 minutes instructional time for the secondary grades. This was not to say that Biblical teaching was not integrated into other parts of the curriculum. For instance, one kindergarten boy wrote in his daily journal "God made the world and plants and that is all." Concerning JCS kindergarten curriculum as a whole, their introductory pamphlet stated:

> Our kindergarten curriculum is based on a strong belief in developing the whole child. Therefore the child's spiritual growth cannot be neglected. It is important that their growing trust and understanding of God's love in Jesus is nurtured in the school as well as in your home. ... The kindergarten child is encouraged to explore God's world in an unpressured yet guided way.

The initial plan was for the researcher to observe Bible Study lessons within the classroom. However, some of the teachers expressed their concern over scheduling an observation and someone being in their class during Bible Study instruction. As a secondary plan, the researcher asked the principal for the Teacher's Bible Study goals which were submitted at the start of the year (See Appendix E: *Teachers' Bible Study Goals*).

A first glance at the Teacher's Bible Study Goals indicated that the CSI (1995) resource guide was not represented. (Perhaps, the teachers had not had the time to incorporate the most recent resource guide into their goals.) Any attempts to review the CSI (1989) curriculum guide that some of the teachers used as a resource for their Bible Study goals was complicated because just one copy was being shared amongst many teachers.

The Teachers' Bible Study goals (in Appendix E) expressed an integration of faith and learning which incorporated a desire to learn who God is, understand His Word, and in turn, understand oneself. (It should be noted that whether or not these goals were accomplished was not part of this review.)

The role of the Bible in Bible Study was represented at all grade levels where lessons were divided into Biblical units (e.g., Parables and The Lord's Prayer). The Bible was a primary resource in JCS' Bible Study program. The

JCS Handbook (1994) confirmed that the Bible "guides His people also in the education of their children" (p. 2).

The social development goals of the kindergarten Bible Study curriculum emphasized community and stated that students would be able to:

- *develop a positive Christian way of living.*
- *develop worthwhile relationships with family, peers, and adults in the community.*
- *develop an awareness, respect, and appreciation of the richness of cultural variation within the society.*
- *develop an acceptance of individual differences and an awareness of the needs of others.*
- *relate the world at large to God.*

These Bible study goals appeared relevant to the entire school population which placed community at the forefront.

The Teachers' Bible Study goals appeared conducive to JCS' mission statement which proclaimed that "recognizing a variety of student abilities, we aim to uncover and develop the unique giftedness of each student that he or she may become a faithful steward of God and neighbor, and a steward of His Word" (JCS Handbook, 1994, p. 2).

Students' Comments Regarding Religious Instruction

The children's responses to Task Three (Questions About God) yielded a few comments about the religious instruction program at JCS. Some children described their thoughts about reading the Bible and the Bible Study program.

At JCS, the Bible played an important role in children's and adolescents' learning about God. Without prompting, three students commented on the role of the Bible in their lives. Archie (age 10) recognized that finding time to read the Bible was difficult even though 'it was better to read the Bible.' Also, Archie acknowledged that reading the Bible was a solitary activity and that playing with others was more fun.

> Do you read the Bible?
> *Yeah, like not everyday but I try to.*
> When you have a chance?
> *I could but I like doing other things better even though it is better to read the Bible. ... It could get boring if you think you could do some things by yourself. It's kind of hard too because you like playing with others and things because it is funner than reading the Bible.*
> Is it hard to read the Bible?
> *Well, it's not really hard to read the Bible but there are some words that are hard to understand and some scriptures are hard to understand.*

Nancy (age 16) indicated that the content of the Bible was somewhat contradictory. As a result, she struggled to find understanding with regard to God being both a 'loving' and 'jealous' God.

> Are there things that you are wondering about God?
> *Sometimes it seems that the Bible is contradictory. Like it will talk about how He is a jealous God and He's a loving God. I find it kind of hard to accept a loving, forgiving, and jealous God. Like it is hard to put those three together. It seems like people have to walk on pins with Him....*

Angela (age 16) suggested that God should make the Bible clearer in order to avoid possible misunderstandings during class discussions. Angela did not consider the role of the teacher nor the student in making suggestions to 'make the Bible clearer.' Angela believed that it was God's responsibility to 'clear it up.'

> If you could give God a suggestion or some advice what would it be?
> *Less arguments about the Bible. Make the Bible clearer. Cause at school it is really hard when you are doing discussions and you have your own idea and they get into these big fights and sometimes in our class we end up insulting people about their faith. Not me but other people. So it is kind of difficult. ... Even if there are little discrepancies then you can argue about it but some of the bigger ones should be cleared up a little bit.*

Overall, Archie, Nancy, and Angela acknowledged the importance of the Bible in learning about God. Also, they recognized at times that it was difficult to find time to read the Bible, to understand its contents, and to respond to the contradictions. The Teachers' Bible Study Goals (in Appendix E) did not account for these apparent contradictions and did not focus on the variety of historical contexts in the Bible. Using a historical approach to Biblical teaching may eliminate some contradictions for students' understandings about God and may illustrate to them, for example, how God can be both 'jealous' and 'loving.'

The Bible Study Program was an important part of the religious education program at JCS. Four students described their thoughts about the program. Noelle (age 14) shared her enthusiasm for Bible Study. She indicated that others did not have the same degree of interest as her and that they found 'Bible reading boring.' Furthermore, she acknowledged that the teacher could make Bible classes more interesting by relating everyday issues to God.

> Who do you learn about God from?
> *Well, there's always church and sermons and stuff. I'm the only one who really listens to them – I don't like that. But, then there's youth group. It is awesome. I love it. We do fun things with our friends. I like it because at certain points in the discussions, when the youth leader is trying to tell us something, then other people are actually listening. [Otherwise] sometimes I feel all alone, like I'm the only one who's actually interested in God.*
>
> Does this happen at school?
> *Yes. Almost even more so. And this is a Christian school and everything. All my friends are supposed to be Christians. None of them are interested in church or Christian music. Praying and Bible reading are considered boring.*
>
> Do you think that the teachers play a role in not making it boring?
> *I'm not sure. I mean it helps. Here. Teachers try to tie everything together. Mrs. ____ is really good. We get taught by her sometimes. She has this way of relating everything to God and everyone seems interested. I love her classes because I understand everything that she says. There's just this click or something [in my head]. She's really good because you can talk to her about anything. Anything about God too. And I find that really helpful because, I mean, helpful in one way and harmful in another. Like helpful in the way where I can always feel free with what I believe and I always have someone to go to with problems. And there's always someone who knows something that I could learn from. But in another way its kind of harmful because then if I start going to a public school or something, I won't know what to do. I'd be sitting there and I would not know what to say.*

Susan (age 16) mentioned the connection between the regular science curriculum and religious instruction. She indicated that during a science class debate they were able to discuss the prevailing issues, for example, evolution versus creation.

> Do you learn about God at school?
> *Sometimes. It depends what the subject is. Because sometimes it is related like science and the Bible but mostly it is just straight school work. ... Sometimes like the topic of evolution will come up and like how did God create the world. And so there is this big discussion. Last year we had a science class debate on whether God used evolution to create the world or whether He created it in some other way. (Susan, age 16)*

Elana (age 16) noted that religious instruction should include more discussion and not just Biblical facts. She indicated that religious instruction should place less emphasis on the past and more emphasis on the present. Also, she

suggested that a discussion about God should be related to everyday life, for instance, a discussion about how God is involved in our personal problems or in a news event.

> Do you think that school teaches about God?
> *Yeah. But I think that there should be more discussion like instead of direct studies. I think that we should have more discussion about the different problems people may be having and where God comes in the news and stuff that is happening. ... Like studying. Like sort of history. Studying stuff that happened before. That's also good but I think that there should be less of that and more working on stuff that happens today. Cause I mean you don't want people to be just a 'fact recycler' of whatever.*

Sandra (age 16) shared her thoughts about a move from a public school to a Christian school. She acknowledged that at JCS there was an opportunity to talk and learn about God. However, Sandra was frustrated over the length of religious assignments in Bible Study. Furthermore, Sandra was concerned that she did not always have the correct answer to the questions asked in those assignments.

> Where did you learn about God from?
> *From my parents and Sunday School. ... I've been coming since September so it's been a year now. I was at a public school before. It is about the same but it is sort of different.*
> So it is the same but different?
> *It seems to be a smaller atmosphere cause it is a smaller school but how we learn is also a bit different because people don't talk about different things. Because now that we're in this school we talk more about God. And like in Bible class we watch Bible videos.*
> So now that you have had the opportunity to be in both a public and Christian school, what seems to suit you?
> *Um, at the beginning here it was a little hard adjusting to. It was different than my old school because back at my old school it was a little bit more fast pace. But here it is a little bit slower.*
> *But here we learn about God and stuff. But our Bible class is a little bit hard for me and the rest of the class. We have Bible questions like maybe 30 questions a page. Sometimes it is harder for me to open up and to find out what the actual answer is when I read the Bible. Like I read it but then it doesn't really come in right away. It just takes me a little while to look at it and read it. ...*

> *Yeah like there is no wrong answer but sometimes there IS a right and wrong answer ... it is kind of hard to explain yourself and how you feel.*

Mostly, the adolescents expressed a desire to learn about God. They recognized the role of the teacher in Biblical instruction. Also, the adolescents illustrated their eagerness to integrate their faith and learning within JCS.

Easter Program

As a participant in the school community, I was able to observe any religious artifacts that may be present. Overall, there were not any overt religious artifacts (e.g., crosses) in JCS. Some of the teachers chose to place posters with religious themes in their individual classrooms. This was most evident at the grade one and two levels wherein Biblical stories were depicted in cartoons or even on a felt board. The religious posters became less evident in the classrooms as the grade levels increased; particularly, there was little evidence of religious symbols or artifacts at the junior high years.

However, during Easter preparation, in the month of April, the school became more adorned with religious posters than at any other time during the research term. These posters were placed in the main foyer so that all members of the community could view them. The following journal entry illustrates the Easter poster atmosphere:

> *As I walk into the main foyer today, it is decorated with Easter posters done by the grade four and fives. They depict the Easter scene starting with Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem on a donkey, ... to Jesus' prayer in the garden as His followers slept, to Judas' betrayal of Jesus, to the last*

> *supper, to the crucifixion, and finally the resurrection. ... Moreover, on the walls near the French room are huge posters in the French language decreeing that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. ...*
> *Also, I notice that someone has placed in the window display beside the main office, four ceramic tiles done by children depicting the resurrection. ... [Researcher's Journal]*

In addition to the posters, a grade five teacher chose to re-enact the last supper with her students. Another teacher shared the Easter story with her primary class and when Jamie was asked to retell the story he said, "On the third day He rose and an angel came and pushed the bulldozer away." Again, this illustrated how children draw from what they have heard and experienced in shaping their religious ideas.

The Easter celebration centered around the evening Easter Program for grades six to ten, where many parents were in attendance. The music ensemble included the principal in the senior choir, the grade eight teacher in the senior band playing tuba, a teacher at the piano, and another teacher controlling the lights. (This further emphasized the role of community at JCS.) There were guest artists called *Soul Motion* singing contemporary Christian music. The main event was the grade ten play entitled *The Verdict*.

After the Easter event, the weekly newsletter, *All God's Children* contained the following grade ten review:

> This year the Grade Ten class put on a play for the Easter Program. The play was called 'The Verdict' and it was about the trial and sentencing of Judas Iscariot. It was quite a controversial play and we felt that it would give the audience something to think about. The idea of the play was not to offend people but to make them look at things in a different way and maybe a bit more with the feelings of Judas Iscariot as he faced the future. I know I personally had never really thought about Judas with much more sympathy and this play has made me take a different view. ...

> It was a more serious play than a lot of us are used to and some of us had to push ourselves to be serious and to not make a joke of everything. ... I think the play was a pretty good experience and one that the Grade 10 class is glad to have had.

The play was 'avant-garde' in depicting the Easter celebration in a new and provocative way. It showed not only the ingenuity of the grade ten teacher to involve her students in religious understanding in a creative way but also the community's acceptance of different religious perspectives and contemporary Christian music.

LANGUAGE OF THE DIVINE

The children's language of the divine points to the religious education curricula and to those religious educators who impart the religious knowledge. The children's language of the divine emerged from within their imaginative narrative accounts about God (i.e., participant's voice). In this way, the children's narratives of God revealed their own scriptural portrait of God.

The children's language of the divine was defined by the Biblical terms which dominated their Christian religious education. The religious knowledge imparted through religious education could be learned in a school setting from teachers (formal) or at home from parents (informal). Regardless, the children knew that God was their Father and that He was both the creator of the earth as well as creator of their individual lives. They viewed God as both active and

caring whether He resided in heaven or your heart. They mentioned Jesus as the Son of God.

As children matured, they began to recognize and wrestle with more abstract religious concepts such as the Trinity, eternity, salvation, and omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. This wrestling with religious concepts has been termed "thought experiments" because of children's shaping and re-shaping understandings about God (Yob, 1993, p. 232). The children's language of the divine was presented according to age because research has indicated that as they mature their understanding of religious concepts becomes more elaborate (e.g., Heller, 1986; Hyde, 1990).

Six categories in the language of the divine were used as a template. The categories characterize either God's 'very being' or 'His relationship with the world' (Hill, 1987). This twofold characterization is necessary because it moves away from the traditional doctrine that just acknowledges "what constitutes God absolutely" and equally focuses on "what constitutes God relatively" (Hill, 1987, p. 512).

This section is divided into the following **six** subsections: (a) a Triune God, (b) God is personal, (c) God the creator, (d) God is eternal, (e) God is all-ness [omni-ness], and (f) God offers salvation and redemption. Again, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Eliade, 1987), *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (Achtemeier, 1985), *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Elwell, 1996), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Metzger & Coogan, 1993), and *The Catholic Encyclopedia: Revised and Updated* (Broderick, 1987) guide this discussion.

A Triune God

Although Christianity is one of the three western monotheistic religions, its distinctive treatment of the Godhead is triune. For the Christian, God is not a solitary or isolated figure but one living in a communal relationship sharing one divine life. God is 'three in one' (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit/Ghost). This becomes the context for the divine choice to share that communal life with others. It provides the formal identification for the subject incarnated in the humanity of Jesus.

The notion of God in a Christian community is thought of in monotheist rather than polytheist terms. Consequently, there is one divine plan, agenda, or objective and these do not compete or conflict. Monotheism is the "belief that there is only one God" (Achtemeier, 1985, p. 652). "The close association of Jesus with God seems to lead toward the seeing of monotheism in a different way, wherein the deity has inner distinction as well as unity" (Achtemeier, 1985, p. 652). In this case, the inner distinction is noted as the Trinity being three equal partners. The idea of the Trinity is one God subsisting in three persons (Father, Son, and Spirit) and one substance. Together, God as Father, Son, and Spirit constitutes a Triune God.

<u>God as Father</u> originates in the Hebrew Scriptures, but is reintroduced with emphasis in the New Testament when Jesus proclaimed that "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30, NIV). Jesus' reference to God as His Father is acknowledged at Jesus' baptism when a voice was heard from the heavens

which said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, NIV).

God as Son "is reference to Jesus because He is God and partakes of the divine nature. ... Jesus' sonship involves a unique and exclusive sonship between the Father and the Son. His knowledge of the Father is in the same degree as the Father's knowledge of Him" (Bullock, 1996, p. 293). (Jesus as the Son of God was reflected in the children's responses to the Biblical story *Jesus Calms the Sea*.)

God as Spirit is "the manifestation of God's presence in the world" (Bullock, 1996, p. 294). The Holy Spirit was emphasized in the teachings of Jesus where the 'Spirit' of God is placed in the context of worship (Elwell, 1996). In this way, "the spiritual nature of God demands a spiritual response from human beings" (Bullock, p. 294). The response is prompted by the Holy Spirit, for example, sometimes you are prompted to pray for someone in particular. Also, Bullock (1996) stated that "[the Gospel of] John goes beyond this idea and lays out the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son" (p. 294), thus emphasizing the Holy Spirit's relationship to the Trinity.

The children's narrative responses indicated that they were thinking about the Triune nature of the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Across ages 6, 8, and 10, the children suggested three parts of the Trinity as being part of God's family.

[Does God have a family?]

Yeah, He has three. He has the Spirit and I forgot the last one. (Adam, age 6)

God has a family. Jesus and the Holy Ghost. Maybe? (Beth, age 8)

Well, Jesus is pretty much God. Isn't He? Cause there's three-in-one. Well, the Holy Spirit and God and Jesus they're all one person. (Donald, age 10)

In the film I was taught, that God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus are three-in-one. Yep, three-in-one that's what I was taught. (Peter, age 10)

Jesus is God's Son. And Jesus before He went to heaven, He told them that the Holy Spirit would always be with you or something. ... Maybe He was the one that sent the Holy Spirit. (Linda, age 10)

He has a family. The Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son. ... The Holy Sprit is everywhere, like right now in this room. And the Son came down, I don't know actually how long, maybe thirty years ago, three hundred? And the Father, just stays up in heaven. (Daniel, age 10)

Particularly at age ten, children described the Trinity in relation to God's personhood.

[Is God like a person?] *He can become many forms. He can become the Holy Spirit, God or the Father, the Son. Many Forms.* (Judith, age 10)

Well, He's three-in-one. He could be the Holy Spirit, a person, or, um, let me see, the Holy Ghost. He could be a person and He could be a spirit and He could be those other one. (Terry, age 10)

Well, what makes Him like a spirit is that He is in heaven and He can transform Himself into different things and what makes Him a person is because, well, I don't know exactly, but it's usually that He's actually a man or a person up in heaven but He can change himself. Like He can be a spirit inside of somebody. And then, in that second He can back up in heaven and change Himself into a man or something. (Andrew, age 10)

Across ages 12, 14, and 16, children commented on the characteristics and responsibilities unique to each member of the Trinity.

My grandpa told me that it's all in one all put together. Um, there's the Holy Spirit, God, Jesus all put together in one. Acting in all the ways you can think of. Like healing and miracles. (Nancy, age 12)

> *Father, Son, Holy Spirit. So I think there's just a bit of difference. Just kind of that they are two different, well, not different, two beings kind of different is the only difference. Jesus is God's Son. God is the ruler over everything. But I think that God gave Jesus everything so. And the Holy Spirit, uh, I am not sure. Maybe He is both of them.* (Arthur, age 12)

> *Cause you know they say there's the Trinity. There's God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. And they're all like one. Then, I guess that means that Jesus is a part of God, like the same as God.* (Mandy, age 14)

> *I think that Christ is more the compassionate part of the Trinity. I think it's like the children will open up but it's also adults' need for compassion and stuff. But it's children that you mainly deal with compassion. But also, I think that adults need somebody there to say that they understand what they're going through.* (Cassandra, age 16)

For Task Two (Jesus story) most of the children indicated that Jesus was the Son of God. However, only a few children mentioned the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) across age groupings for Task Two. Here are some examples: Ronnie (age 8) said, "They are always watching." Upon further probing, the child explained that 'they' represented "Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit." (In this case, Jesus was described as the "Son of God." God was described as the "creator." The Holy Spirit was described as "an angel.") Lucy (age 8) described the relationship between God and Jesus and said, "Jesus is like a bridge to God, so you have to believe in Jesus to know God." This notion is represented in John 14:6 (NIV) which reads: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" Scott (age 12) expressed his confusion over the Trinity in the following way:

> *Well, Jesus is the Father. Or is (pause). O.K. O.K. He's God the Father, ... God the Son, the Holy Spirit. [Pause] I can't remember. [Pause] If I remember correctly, my mom sometimes uses that term too. Like whenever I'm in trouble, she takes a passage from her head and she says, 'He's the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ....*

Samantha (age 12) described the relationship between God and Jesus in a more thorough way.

> *God is like the Father and He looks after you and Jesus is like your friend. Well God is too. ... Jesus gets His power and faith from God like when He didn't want to die on the cross . Then He was praying to God and saying, 'God why have you left me.' God didn't leave Him but He was showing Him that after that everything would be O.K. and we have to make sacrifices for God. Then after that I think when we are making those sacrifices I think that He shows us that everything is going to be O.K. And every time we make a sacrifice we kind of get a medal. ... That's kind of what Jesus got and we got the gift of life. So even though we are sinners I think that God gave us a very good gift and that we should make a sacrifice that God, not has done for us, but maybe He wants us to make. So we can move further in our relationship with Him.*

Lastly, Stephanie (age 16) explained the Trinity in the following way:

> *The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or Ghost and they've all three got different jobs. But, O.K., for Jesus, He's God's Son. He was sent to the earth I guess, probably to experience compassion amongst them, but that I don't understand because God knows everything and He knows us even better than we know ourselves so He would also know what we're going through and everything. ... I think it's the Holy Spirit that works with your emotions or something. It's like, you know when people go on they hear a whole bunch of stuff about Christianity and they just accept. O.K. God loves me and everything. And then, it sort of all of a sudden hits them. I think that's the Holy Spirit working in the person. And other people, no matter what people say they cannot do anything to convince that person. It's the person that has to open to it, kind of. And the Father is God. In the Bible, they refer to God kind of like the Father figure. Like Jesus tells a parable about the shepherd with his sheep. And then he'll count them and he'll know immediately which one is missing. And he'll go immediately to hunt for that one once the others are safe. So I think that God is caring, Well, they're all caring. This is difficult. ... Jesus' job is to show compassion and to be a part of the people. When He was on earth He seemed to be [pointed] mainly towards the children and the poorer people, but mainly towards children.*

Stephanie's account demonstrates a very sophisticated grasp of the three persons of the Trinity and their respective functions. God is the Father figure who is the source of creation and redemption; Jesus is the Son whom the Father sends to join humanity to be a figure of compassion; and the Spirit is described as a source of inspiration and religious understanding.

Across age levels, the Trinity was a concept that was not easily grasped. Many of the children were puzzled about the 'three-in-one' concept.

> *I wonder how He can be three-in-one. Like the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. But like my Sunday School Teacher, she told me that it's just like an egg. They have the shell, the yoke, and the middle stuff. It's three-in-one. Like it's still all one. So I kind of understand it but I still wonder about that.* (Cindy, age 10)

> *Well, in the Bible it says that God is Jesus and Jesus is God and that God is the Holy Spirit but they can be separate too but they're all the same when they're separated. So I don't understand that but that's what it says in the Bible so I believe it.* (Angela, age 14)

The children's and adolescents' responses indicated that children are thinking about the concept of a Triune God. This study suggested that knowledge about the Trinity emerged in the children's religious narratives as early as age ten. Perhaps the early introduction of Bible stories aided children in the early introduction of Triune language; for example, children at an early age were able to identify Jesus as the Son of God (as indicated in Task Two) even though they may not have understood why He was called so. At times, the children's thoughts about the Trinity lacked theological correctness. Nevertheless, they were trying to grasp the concept of the Trinity in their own way based on their own religious knowledge and experiences. The children's communal relationships (e.g., grandpa, Sunday school teacher) played an important role in describing their understandings of the Trinity as a communal form of the Godhead.

This study indicated that children are thinking about God as Triune. Research into children's God concepts has neglected to acknowledge the three-in-one God concept (e.g., Trinitarian monotheistic). Both Heller (1986) and Nye

and Carlson (1984) paid little attention to the uniqueness of the Christian God. Research should acknowledge the Trinitarian doctrine since it touches on every aspect of Christian faith and theology (LaCunga, 1987). LaCunga (1987) stated "The doctrine of the Trinity is the summary of Christian faith in God, who out of loves creates humanity for union with God, who through Jesus Christ redeems the world, and in the power of the Holy Spirit transforms and divinizes (2 Cor. 3:18)" (p. 53).

God is Personal

God is not simply an impersonal force. God relates to humankind in a personal way through divine knowledge and intention. Humanity is the apex of God's creation (Bullock, 1996). Genesis 1:26 (NIV) reads: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Bullock (1996) stated:

> The image of God implies all that is distinctive to human nature: the spiritual, psychological, sociological, and physical aspects which are reflections of God's nature. The spiritual implies that human beings are made to relate to their creator; the psychological, that they are reasoning emotional creatures; the sociological, that they are created to relate to one another; and the physical, that man's corporal form reflects the essential aspect of God's -- not in the sense that he has a body, but in the sense that his being is multifaceted and multifunctional. (p. 289)

The view that God is personal is grounded in the image of God as a self-conscious being who has will and purpose.

The children's responses indicated that they are thinking about the personal nature of God. At ages six and eight, simple anthropomorphic representations of God predominated. Children described God as a person with human characteristics (e.g., God is a man with a beard). Later, at age twelve, children described God's character according to His personal attributes (e.g., God is a caring and loving person).

Across ages 12, 14, and 16, adolescents described God as a 'perfect person' whose intent was to nurture and protect them in their daily living. They indicated that God was 'a loving God who resided in your heart and became part of your conscience.' Many adolescents considered God their best friend because God was someone you could talk to and count on.

The notion that God is personal resides in the anthropomorphic definition of acknowledging God as a physical and human form. Werblowsky (1987) stated:

> Western religious history also exhibits a very interesting special case, namely Christianity, ... since Christ is considered as more than just another divine, or manifestation, and hence the doctrine of the incarnation poses the problem of anthropology in its wildest sense -- that is, the doctrine of the nature of man and its relation to the divine -- and in a very special way. But even aside from incarnation, the 'personalist' element in theistic religion remains, as we have seen, an irreducible anthropomorphism. (p. 318)

Also, Marty (1987) drew attention to the personal nature of God because of His humanness; that is, because God is personal, He is "addressable" (p. 27).

Across all ages, children also indicated that God is personal because He is someone who listens to prayers and grants requests. Many children viewed

God as their comforter and confidant. The children suggested a special place for praying, how one should pray, and what should be prayed for. Most children acknowledged the activity of prayer as a way to communicate with God on a personal level. This was consistent with Schuller (1993) who stated that "it is both possible and desirable for humans to address the Divine and that the Divine both can and will respond" (p. 607).

At JCS, the activity of prayer was reinforced. Prayer was evident at all grade levels. Corporate prayer was encouraged at all assemblies and at the start of each day in the regular classroom. Prayer both opened and closed the weekly staff meetings and many students met for prayer on a weekly basis during lunch hour. The importance of prayer at JCS was mentioned in the JCS' Handbook (1994) which stated, "It is the obligation not only of parents but of the entire Christian community to establish and maintain Christian schools, to **pray** for them, work for them, and give generously to their support" (p. 3) [Bold for emphasis]. In this way, the community played a role in reflecting God's personal nature wherein as Christians we are all part of His family. There was an emphasis on a community of believers wherein there is not only a spiritual relationship with God but also a social relationship with others. This communal relationship points to the covenant that God has with His people. God promises us that He will take care of us through a personal relationship with Him. Regarding the covenant, Hillers (1987) stated: "The significant word *remember* is used by God; God will remember what He has promised" (p. 134) [Italics in

original]. For instance, Noah's rainbow was a reminder from God as to His promise.

Overall, the children's and adolescents' responses indicated that God was personal. At an early age, children believed that God was personal because of how He looks. At a later age, adolescents believed God was personal because of His attributes and His ability to communicate with them on an intimate level.

God the Creator

The first impression that the Bible gives us about God is that He is the Creator. Genesis 1:1 (NIV) reads: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." "The Bible makes no attempt to prove that God exists. Rather, the universe is the affidavit of his existence. Moreover, the fact that he is creator means that the world belongs to him (Bullock, 1996, p. 289) [Underline for emphasis]. Bridges (1996) suggests that the Biblical concept of *the world* falls into five categories. They are the physical, human, moral, temporal, and coming worlds (Bridges, 1996, pp. 836 - 837).

To assess children's understandings about *God as Creator*, Bridges' (1996) five worlds (physical, human, moral, temporal, and coming) were used as an overlay. In the physical world, God is sovereign over nature. In the human world, God relates to our humanness. In the moral world, God judges what is right or wrong. In the temporal world, God is involved in today's materialistic world. In the coming world, God's emphasis is on our reunion with Him.

Across ages 6 to 16, children and adolescents described God's sovereignty in terms of the physical world. They indicated that God is the creator of the universe and in charge of nature. For instance, a ten-year-old said, "God made the universe and everything. And He made the earth and He made people. Cause nobody else can make people except for Him."

Also, across all ages, children and adolescents described God in terms of the human world. They acknowledged their God as personal. They indicated that God communicated with them through prayer. Their stories told of a nurturing and loving God who took care of their everyday needs.

In particular, children's knowledge about the moral world emerged around age ten. Emphasis on the moral world was evident across ages 12, 14, and 16. In the moral world, adolescents viewed God as the ultimate authority who was in charge of what was 'right or wrong' in the world. They believed that God was there to prevail against evil and to aid His believers (which included them) toward a 'good and moral' life. For instance, Vicky (age 14) said:

> *He doesn't punish you because He wants to. He punishes you because you need to be punished because if you don't get punished you'll never know what's right and what's wrong. And that's why parents are here and grandparents and people to tell you what's right and wrong because God can't come down to tell you that's right and that's wrong so parents have to do it for you.*

The children's responses indicated that they were most curious about God in terms of the following three worlds: They asked questions about the physical world (e.g., "Why is the sky blue?" "What happened to the dinosaurs?"), the temporal world (e.g., "Why is there evil in this world?" "Why are people dishonest?"), and the coming world (e.g., "What does heaven really

look like?" "What will happen after we die?"). Overall, concepts representing the physical world were evident with younger children whereas concepts representing the moral and temporal worlds were most evident at the onset of adolescence.

God is Eternal

God is eternal, providing a stable basis for all reality. 'Forever' and 'eternity' are used to illustrate God as eternal. *Forever* is used to describe God's reign (Ps. 9:7), His protection, His plans (Ps. 33:11), the inheritance of His people, His throne, His rule, His remembrance of His covenant (1 Chron. 16:15), His righteousness, His statues and His name (Yarbrough, 1996). *Eternity* is viewed as "motionless, changeless state, remote and qualitatively distinct from time" (Yarbrough, 1996, p. 209). Manchester (1987) described eternity as "timelessness" (p. 167). "Since God is eternal, so are His love, His blessings, and all His other attributes and benefits. They endure without end; as long as God exists, so do they" (Yarbrough, 1996, p. 209). Psalm 93:2 (NIV) reads: "Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity."

The children's and adolescents' responses indicated that they are thinking about the eternal nature of the Christian God. *God as eternal* was reflected in the children's responses to the question 'How old is God?'

God's age as everlasting, forever, or infinite emerged around age eight and continued across ages 10, 12, 14, and 16. Rueben (age 12) explained God's age in the following imaginative way:

> *Well, God has been around since the beginning of time, I guess. Cause He was here before, like, I guess you could say, um, ... have you ever seen Star Trek? The Next Generation? Well, in the, you know the Hallodeck? Well, it's kind of like that except, you know those yellow squares? There's no yellow. It's just kind of like a black place -- He's above it. And then, He's been there, say He's like a spider on a spider's web and nobody's seen Him and He's been here and then these crewmen come and build things. So He's been there for a long time before anybody knew anything about Him. And, well, that's what happened I guess. ...*
> *Well, He's older than the earth. He's older than the sun. He's older than any of us. He's very, very old. But He probably looks young. Like I don't think He's, like, has a very long beard, like going past, like land on the floor. I think He kind of looks young. And I don't know, He's very handsome, He probably has a very powerful voice. And I don't know, probably very big too.*

Christopher (age 16) said, "He's been here forever. I'd think that He'd be billions and billions of years old. But He probably looks like twenty and in good shape."

Most children acknowledged a sense of mystery as to God's infinite existence. Paul (age 16) said, "How He does that [i.e., lives forever] boggles my mind." Furthermore, Sandra (age 12) expressed 'living forever' in the following way:

> *Well in heaven our life never ends. It is kind of weird cause like, if we live forever and life never ends, it's weird cause like, I mean most things like we're going swimming for a field trip today and that's going to end and this is going to end and school's going to end and everything. Everything ends except for that and it's weird, I don't understand.*

Overall, the children's responses revealed that they are thinking about the characteristics of God as 'eternal' and 'forever'. This concept emerged around the age of eight and continued through adolescence. As children matured, their understanding of the concept became more elaborate.

God is All-ness (Omni-ness)

God is in charge of the world. In this way, God is not just a distant observer. He is the creator and His relationship with the world demonstrates omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. This section examines children's responses to God's character as being All-ness (Omni-ness). It is divided into the following **three** parts: (i) God is all-powerful (omnipotent), (ii) God is all-present (omnipresent), and (iii) God is all-knowing (omniscient).

God is all-powerful (omnipotent). Broderick (1987) defined God's omnipotence as "a recognition of the ability of the Creator to do all things that are possible. Knowledge (wisdom), will, and power are one in God" (p. 434). Concerning God's omnipotence, Green (1987) defended the following position:

> Typically it is argued that while God can do anything He wills Himself to do and anything that is capable of being done, He cannot do what is logically impossible. This is not because His power is limited but only because what is logically impossible cannot really be thought or conceived. Thus, God cannot make a 'square circle,' and we cannot ask or desire Him to do so, because the very idea of a square circle is nonsense. (p. 432)

Regarding Green's (1987) comment, many children indicated that there was 'nothing that God could not do.' Yet, there was some understanding that God could not do the impossible, for instance, one child suggested that God could not give you a sundae as big as a house.

The children's responses indicated that they are thinking about God's character as all-powerful (omnipotent). In particular, children suggested that

miracles point to God's power. *Miracles*, according to Terrance (age 12) were "miraculous things that nobody's ever been able to do. Like a turkey being everlasting. So you could just have a whole bunch of people and keep cutting it and it would never run out."

Miracles, whether historical or modern day, were a focus for children across ages 6 to 16. Creation points to God's power. Erica (age 6) said, "He can do miracles. Creation. Everything in creation, like trees, flowers, plants, and fruits. Like Adam and Eve, they were in the garden." Nicholas (age 10) said, "He can raise people from the dead. He can stop an earthquake. He can make people vanish, like teleport them and put them somewhere else. His powers are endless. He can do anything." Terrance (age 12) said, "He can make planets. He can make vegetation. He can do miracles. He can do anything." Finally, Charity (age 16) stated:

> *God can do miracles and create and destroy. Miracles like healing and raising people from the dead. Like health miracles and stuff, where people have cancers and sores or something and then they are miraculously healed and all the cancer disappears or car accident victims are like they're never going to walk again and they're walking in two weeks.*

In particular, the term omnipotent emerged in adolescence. For instance, Mollie (age 14) said, "God is omnipotent. [Researcher: What does that mean?] He is all-powerful. Like, He can do anything He wants to but He does stuff good because He wants to. If He wanted to do something bad He could, but He doesn't want to because He loves us."

Overall, the children across age levels (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) recognized God as powerful. They indicated that miracles pointed to God's power. *Omnipotence*, as a term, emerged in adolescence.

God is all-present (omnipresent). God hears our every word and holds us accountable. God's presence provides comfort in times of trouble and anxiety. God's presence is a place where prayer is heard and blessings take hold. God is everywhere. "The Bible describes heaven as a place with God's presence. Angels stand in God's presence and act in authority as He directs them" (Beyer, 1996, p. 630).

The children's responses indicated that they are thinking about God's character as all-present (omnipresent) or everywhere. *God as omnipresent* was reflected in the children's responses to the question, 'Can God see you and hear you?' (Task Three).

Across all age levels, the children indicated that God can see and hear them. They believed that God was present everywhere. In describing 'everywhere,' they suggested that God lives both on heaven and earth. Pat (age 10) said, "He could be on heaven and on earth at the same time." Zachary (age 12) said, "He doesn't really live anywhere. Like, He isn't anywhere at one time, He's everywhere. He is in heaven and on earth." Furthermore, Monica (age 8) was discouraged by God's constant presence and stated, "Well maybe if you are somewhere private, that He won't be able to LOOK at you everywhere. Like when you are with your boyfriend or something."

At first, the children believed that God was an invisible presence. Then, as they matured, they believed that God was not only 'out there in an invisible state' but also 'in your heart.' Later, adolescents used the term omnipresent in describing God's ability to be all-present. Olivia (age 14) said, "He can do anything. He can do anything all at the same time. He is omnipresent. He can be here as well as with everything else. And He loves me so He'll take the time to do that."

The concept of omnipresence was difficult to grasp for most adolescents and even more difficult to explain. A fourteen-year-old said, "I am sort of wondering how He could be there for everybody. Cause we are sort of trapped by time. And He is there for everybody. What's it like to have no time and to just be there?"

Overall, children across all age levels recognized God as omnipresent by acknowledging that 'God is everywhere.' The children expressed God as 'all-present' in relation to their own understandings and experiences with Him. Some children thought that God was in heaven or in their heart. Many children recognized that God could be present anywhere at a given moment. The term of 'omnipresent' did not emerge until adolescence.

God is all-knowing (omniscient). Broderick (1987) defined God's omniscience as "God's attribute of knowing all things simply and absolutely. ... God, in ruling and directing all things to His own glory, must know all things, even the most secret, and He must know them now" (p. 435).

God knows the human heart. God knows His children's needs such as clothing and food. He even anticipates their petitions. God knows everything. John 10:14,27 (NIV) reads: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. ... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." God knows you because He made you. Psalm 119:75 (NIV) reads: "Your hands made me and formed me." Psalm 139:1 (NIV) reads: "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me."

Children's responses indicated that they are thinking about God's character as all-knowing (omniscient). *God as omniscient* was reflected in the children's responses to the question, 'Does God know who you are?' (Task Three).

Children, across all age levels, suggested that God knows everything about you. Derek (age 10) illustrated how God knows everything about him in the following way:

> *I think it's because He – even the song, 'He has the whole world in His hands', right. If He has, I'm not sure but maybe He has, um, something like every time He goes into a room He sees what you are doing, He knows where you hide, He knows what you say, things that you say before you do, and He knows where you're going to go before you go there, and He knows when you're going to go to bed, where you are going to eat. Stuff like that.*

Also, the children suggested that God knows what you are thinking. Yves (age 16) said, "He knows what you are thinking. You can trick people, you can be sad but you can act happy. But you can't trick God cause He knows your thoughts." Tammy (age 10) suggested that God knew her before she was born. She said, "He created you. He has to know everything about you."

Lastly, the children suggested that not only does God know about you 'now' but also that He had designs on your 'future'. They indicated that God had all the answers about their life.

Overall, the children's responses across all age levels recognized God as omniscient. However, they did not use the term. Instead, they expressed God as 'all-knowing.' All the children believed that God knew everything about them.

God Offers Salvation and Redemption

Both the children's and adolescents' responses indicated that they are thinking about the concepts of salvation and redemption. Yet, the terms of *salvation* and *redemption* did not emerge in the children's understandings about God in an explicit way. Instead, they used their own knowledge and experiences to represent their individual understandings of salvation and redemption. This subsection is divided into **two** parts: (i) God's salvation and (ii) God's redemption.

God's salvation. For Christians, the "ultimate salvation" is through Jesus Christ, who is the author and mediator of salvation, through the forgiveness of one's sins (Arnold, 1996). Acts 4:12 (NIV) reads: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Arnold (1996) stated that "salvation encompasses both the physical and spiritual dimensions of life, having relevance for the whole person" (p. 702). The subjective basis of salvation is personal repentance and faith, often associated closely with water baptism (Arnold, 1996). Duclow (1987) stated that "Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and illumination, and the eucharistic liturgy exemplifies both the christological mystery and the perfecting 'communion and union with the One' " (p. 357).

As a result, both personal repentance and baptism play a role in the salvation of Christians. Salvation denotes an important relationship between God and His people. Also, it denotes a sense of well-being and a connection with the Creator (Arnold, 1996).

Children described salvation in **three** ways. This included the children's beginning ideas of sin, forgiveness, and baptism.

First, around the age of eight, children indicated that through prayer God helped them not to sin. Pat (age 8) said, "He looks down on us and listens to our prayers and helps me not to sin and stuff. [Interviewer: What does it mean to sin?] It means if you do something bad like make fun of a person and stuff."

Second, around adolescence, they understood that sin could be forgiven through personal repentance. Susanna (age 14) said, "Forgiveness means once you've done something wrong and you ask God to forgive you, then He would forgive you and just leave it behind you."

Third, some children acknowledged that baptism was important for salvation. Thomas (age 12) defined 'a baptism' as: "Basically, they dunk you

under water and that sort of represents [pause] it's like when you become a Christian you are telling everybody that you are a Christian. It's like you're dying and then starting all over." Robert (age 8) described his baptismal experience in the following way:

> *I go to church, I go to church with my parents and then when I was baptized I had to read the Bible and then I went under water and then, and then, I heard something in my head 'you are good' or something. That's what I heard in my head. And that's all I heard. I think it was God talking in my head.*

Roberta (age 14) described the following intricate baptismal experience:

> *First on a Baptism Sunday, I think it was Easter--OH YEAH! It was Easter last year. They always have one then. And, um, well, first they have a worship service when everyone's standing and singing and stuff and instead of having a sermon, all the people who are getting baptized go and they get a robe to be baptized in and we pray before we get baptized and we line up and we get into the baptism sort of little pool and we'd stand there. ... Well, I was too nervous to say anything so this lady said stuff for me cause we each got to write out some stuff that we wanted to say so we could. ... But instead, me and Carmen, we asked this lady if she would talk about us, instead of us talking about us because we were really nervous and she talked about us and she said that I had a gift that um, I listened to little things that my conscience and God was telling me to do, cause one service she was sitting up there and whenever she was praying she like rocks back and forth, like that and the other teen-agers in my youth group were sort of looking at her. And she was like, she's always involved in the youth, like she used to be the youth leader, but she stopped because she needed sometime to like, I don't know, well she had a baby and she didn't want to, she didn't have enough time and it caused her a lot of stress and so she stopped being a youth leader. But she was sitting there and she was rocking back and forth and I didn't think that it was very nice of them to be laughing at her so I went up and I sat beside her. And she, when I was being baptized she told people this and then she said 'Well, that was probably God telling you. And that was really comforting to me when you did that and I think that you have a gift that you listen to God when you do that.' ... And then she talked about me a bit and then you put your hands across your chest like this and then you lay back and you go under and you come back up and then they sing a song like, the chorus of a song just as you're coming up and you're walking up and then when you get out of the tank all these people are hugging you and they give you this towel and they wrap it around you. ... [I felt] really sort of overwhelmed, like, whoa, this is a lot. And sort of relieved, that now I'm baptized now I've got it... now I'm done, it's over with and now everyone knows that I'm a Christian and I love God.*

Salvation through Jesus was summarized in the following responses:

> *Everybody that accepts Christ gets to live in a mansion in heaven. (Jason, age 10)*

> *God's proved that He's loving and kind and all those good things. You know, merciful, and just in one word good. But He also has rules and if you break those rules the, if you believe in His son, Jesus, you can always get forgiveness and it will be like it never happened even though you did it. But if you don't have Jesus – O.K. His one main rule is believe in Jesus or else, go to hell. (Mark, age 12)*

The notion that you are 'saved' in the Christian tradition emphasizes that when a person dies he or she will go heaven, not hell. On the one hand, children had much to say about heaven. On the other hand, children did not mention the entity that lives in hell -- the Devil or Satan. Satan was only mentioned in Rachel's (age 16) dramatic prayer experience (see *Children's Stories about God*). Rachel's experience with Satan was based on a family discussion about Satanism and the occult and not on any formal religious education. There were not any references to Satan in the educational curricula nor in the teachers' Bible study goals. However, the grade ten teacher listed a book on the occult for a reference. Overall, there was little reference to Satan or Hell in the educational environment (e.g., artwork or music).

Lastly, a poster in the Grade Two classroom indicated the steps to salvation. They were: (i) realize God's love, (ii) admit that you have done wrong, (iii) believe that Jesus died so that you can be forgiven, and (iv) ask Jesus into your life. Salvation was also mentioned as a focus for the Grade Four religious education curriculum.

God's redemption. Marcoulesco (1987) stated:

> The mystery of redemption is best illustrated in Christianity: Christ suffered on the cross in order to satisfy retributive justice. The meaning of redemption in the New Testament is chiefly that of the deliverance of man from sin, death, and God's anger, through the death and resurrection of Christ. (p. 229)

To elaborate, Rightmire (1996) provided the following description of redemption:

> Finding its context in the social, legal, and religious customs of the ancient world, the metaphor of redemption includes loosing from a bond, setting free from captivity or slavery, buying back something lost or sold, exchanging something in one's possession for something possessed by another, and ransoming. (p. 664) [Underline for emphasis]

Jesus paid the ransom for God's people and it is through His death that redemption is possible. Rightmire (1996) stated that "Jesus conceived His mission to be that of the Son of Man, who came to offer Himself in obedience to God's redemptive plan.... Christ's death is portrayed as the payment price for the deliverance of those held captive" (p. 665) [Underline for emphasis]. Hebrews 9:28 (NIV) reads: "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those that are waiting for Him." The redemptive plan includes: "God's identification with humanity in its plight, and the securing of liberation of humankind through obedience, suffering, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Son" (Rightmire, 1996, p. 665). Lastly, Rightmire (1996) stated that "the redemption of the believer can not be complete until the return of Christ" (p. 665).

Children described God's redemption in **two** ways. This included knowledge about the death and resurrection of Christ and questions about the actual event.

First, the children acknowledged the death and resurrection of Christ. This study was conducted during the Christian celebration known as *Easter*. Pertaining to Christ's death, children as young as six expressed that, "Jesus died on the cross." Around age ten, children indicated some understanding of why Jesus died. Emily (age 10) said, "Jesus is the Savior and God sent His only son, I think it's His only son, to come and die for our sins." Stella (age 12) said:

> *Like sometimes you say, 'Oh, Jesus died on the cross, but you don't really think about it because you are so used to hearing about it – it's just there and then you really try to think about it, you're like WOW! Somebody would actually die for us that way.*

Amber (age 14) said, "Without Jesus I wouldn't be alive, and if He didn't forgive me or if He hadn't sent Jesus down to die on the cross we wouldn't have been able to go to heaven." Bethany (age 16) said, "God sent His son for me and um, He just changed my life because I am glad I'm not a non-Christian where I have nothin' to turn to when I am down. I think that He's done a lot for me."

Second, many of the children had questions about Jesus' death and resurrection. Some children acknowledged that Jesus died for them; however, they wondered why He chose to die. Trevor (age 8) said, "Why did He die on the cross and why didn't He just get out of it or something. Tim (age 10) said, "How come He died on the cross without having His angels save Him?" Nate (age 10) was sympathetic to Jesus and said, "Did He get mad when the people

were putting nails through Him and seeing who could win His shirt" (a reference to Luke 23:34).

Also, some children wondered about Jesus' resurrection. Andrea (age 8) said, "I was wondering how He rose. He just rose again. Like when Mary Mandileen [sic] came to the tomb and He wasn't there. I think He came down from the clouds. How did He come down to earth again and how He got up?" Lastly, concerning the arrival of 'God on this earth' again, Jessica (age 10) said, "Maybe in the next thousand years He'll send down a girl."

PARENT'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

A parent called today. She received the consent form along with the Parent's Background Information Form. She said that she loves the study. We talked for about fifteen minutes. She shared that she is heavily involved in her children's lives. She finds it hard to pay for private school but that it is worth it to both her and her husband to support their children in the best education possible. She thinks that a Christian education is necessary in order that her children (ages 5 and 10) have a good foundation. She says that she is involved in 'Focus on the Family.' As a result, she and her husband spend money on the educational materials that she believes helps her family 'grow in God.' We talked for sometime about our own church involvement. I thanked her for calling. She said that she would be willing to help out in any way. [Researcher's Journal]

I was stopped in the hallway today by a parent. She commented that the form actually 'convicted' her and her husband to 'take stock' of their family's religious activities. [Researcher's Journal]

The *Parent's Background Information Form* provided some insight into children's thinking about God based on their religious experiences both inside and outside the family environment as defined by the parents. The parent's responses indicated that church, school and home all played a key part in developing and maintaining their children's thoughts about God. The children had learned about God from their parents, teachers, youth leaders, and friends within their religious community.

Also, the results suggested that a child's ideas about God were not developed in isolation but were bound up in the child's daily and weekly religious circumstances. Children were exposed to understandings about God as they exchanged ideas with others in their different religious experiences. This supports Bowley and Townroe (1958) who asserted:

> Church, school and home can and should all play an essential part in the spiritual development of the school child and it is essential that there should be an understanding and co-operation between them if they are to achieve the main purpose for which all in the end are striving, the child's fullness of life, physically, mentally and spiritually. (p. 35)

Consequently, this study suggests that there should be a mutual understanding and cooperation between home, school, and church in order that a child's understandings of God be consistent and meaningful for life.

To analyze the participant's responses (N=114) on the *Parent's Background Information Form*, each form was identified with the child's code (e.g., A06M001) and the response codes per question (as described in Appendix F). Then, the responses were analyzed on SPSS-X for Windows (Version 6).

The analysis provided frequency and percentile tables for (a) each age (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) [Appendix G] and (b) each question (1, 2, 3, and 4)[12] [Appendix H]. The frequency and percentile tables draw attention to **four** things in accordance with the questions on the form. They are: (a) denomination, (b) family life, (c) child's weekly religious involvement, and (d) weekly estimate.

Denomination

The JCS Handbook (1994) stated that JCS is "a denominationally diverse educational community" (p. 2). The Parent's Questionnaire confirmed that many denominations were represented within the school. The three most common denominations were Baptist (21/114 = 18.4%), Mennonite (16/114 = 14%), and Pentecostal (11/114 = 9.6%) as represented in Table 4.1. (See Table H.1 in Appendix H for a complete breakdown of denomination by age grouping.)

A significant number of families (42/114 or 36.8%) indicated the 'other' category. A further breakdown of the 'other' category indicated a varied denominational school wherein the following denominations, as noted by the parents, were recognized: (i) Brethren (5/42), (ii) Church of Christ (4/42), (iii) Holiness (2/42), (iv) Apostolic Faith (2/42), (v) non-denominational (9/42), (vi)

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[12] In addition, two post-hoc analyses were carried out for Questions Two and Three. The various response combinations for *Question 2* (codes 201-246) were identified wherein the most frequent response combination (e.g., two activities) of the family life could be distinguished (e.g., grace and Bible reading). Also, the various response combinations for *Question 3* (codes 301-332) were identified wherein the most frequent response combination (e.g., two activities) of the child's weekly religious involvement could be distinguished (e.g., Sunday school and bedtime stories).

Christian Reformed (8/42), (vii) independent (3/42), (viii) Charismatic (4/42), and (ix) Salvation Army (1/42).

Table 4.1: Denomination Frequency and Percentile Table for Total Group

Denomination	**Group** (N=114)	
	f	%
Alliance	5	4.4
Anglican	2	1.8
Baptist	21	18.4
Catholic	0	0
Evangelical	5	4.4
Lutheran	6	5.3
Mennonite	16	14.0
Pentecostal	11	9.6
Presbyterian	4	3.5
United	0	0
Other	42	36.8
Missing	2	1.8

JCS was a private religious school community where diverse denominations were acknowledged. However, since most of the children attending JCS were driven or bused to school, these students may have had three sets of friends (i.e., friends at school, friends in their neighborhood, and friends in their religious community), exposing them to a variety of denominations and religious practises. For instance, Jason (age 16) described his hockey friends differently from his Christian school friends (e.g., party-goers versus non-party-goers). Peter (age 10) described his friends that he played with at home differently from his Christian school friends (e.g., at home some of the boys liked to fight whereas at school you were not allowed to fight).

Therefore, not only did the children at JCS have exposure to a variety of Christian denominations within their own school but, it was possible that they were exposed to further diversity within their own neighborhoods. For instance, in the city where JCS is located, there were Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, Hindu temples, and Buddist Priories. As a result, the children at JCS may have encountered other children who believed in God (monotheistic or polytheistic God) and others who did not believe in God at all. Each of these encounters may effect children's thinking about God (to what extent it is not known). However, the children's religious narratives did not reveal encounters with other children from these specific religious communities.

Family Life

For the question on family religious life, parents were to check which of the following activities applied at their home: (i) grace, (ii) family prayer, (iii) personal prayer, (iv) Bible study, (v) church going, and (vi) other. These activities reflected the child's religious activities outside the school environment and within the family environment. Of these activities, 70.2% of the families engaged in 4 to 6 activities and 25.4% engaged in all the activities.

The religious activities of family and personal prayer were also reflected in the children's stories about God (Task One) wherein 15% of the children told a story about God answering prayer. The understanding of personal prayer was represented in category four in Questions About God (Task Three) wherein most

children believed that it was possible to have communication with God through personal prayer. Since prayer was a part of family life, this perspective about connecting with God through personal prayer probably originated in the family. Grace was also central to religious activity. One older student questioned its value. Nathan (age 16) commented, "Why do you have to say grace every time you eat. Can't you just say it once and you are covered for the whole day?"

Francis and Evans' (1996) research indicated that prayer and church attendance were highly correlated. In this study, the most common religious activity was church attendance. Some of the adolescents in this study were not enamored by church attendance. This was evident in one adolescent's (age 16) response to questions about God (Task Three). Sabrina stated, "Like, I don't like going to church, because church is boring. Like it is boring. Like people say, 'Oh yeah church is boring.' But my church is really boring."

The least common activity was Bible Study. Linda (age 16) described it in the following way:

> *I don't really have time to read the Bible. I could if I wanted to but I get so lazy. Like you finish your homework, practise piano and then, study for a test or whatever and then, you know, you sit at the TV and watch it for an hour. And then, you pick up the phone and you talk to your friends and then the day is gone.*

Nevertheless, Becky (age 14) appeared enthusiastic about learning about the Bible and stated, "I can't wait 'til Sunday cause I love learning about God. I just drink it all up and if I miss a Sunday, I beg to go Bible Study."

However, one encounter between Greg and myself illustrated his struggles with attending church, his family's Christian values, and his own religious identity. What follows was our conversation:

> *As I was getting ready to interview and setting up my equipment in the small office that had been assigned to me, a student appeared at my office door. He introduced himself and said he was willing to participate in the study except that he had to wait to get his parent's signature. He added that he had not been home all week and that he was in trouble. I asked him if he had attended school this week. He said, "Yes." He said that it was commendable despite his lifestyle this week.*
> *He said that his parents are "really strict." Although he said that he gets to decide whether he wants to go to church or not, Greg said that he does not like church because it is "boring" and he does not like the kids at youth group. Greg said he only goes to church because of his girlfriend.*
> *Later, Greg stated that he feels guilty for the way he lives. He said that he is having a conflict between 'right' and 'wrong.' He says he just does not want to worry about it and have fun. Then he asked if there were going to be any questions in the interview about sex, drugs, and alcohol. I said, "No, unless someone wanted to talk about it there were no such questions." Also, I reminded him that whatever was stated in the interview remained confidential. He said, "Don't worry. I want to talk about it" and added, "I'm realistic." Greg stated, "Even though this is a Christian school, there is lots of drinking and drugs and even stealing." He said that the teachers try to talk to the parents about some of the issues [which were never mentioned to me during my stay at JCS] but that the parents are unwilling to listen. ... (There was a part of me that wondered if Greg was testing me to see my reaction to his story.)*
> *I thanked him for his enthusiasm for the project. [Researcher's Journal]*

Despite a few adolescents' dissatisfaction about some religious protocols (such as church or prayer) most of the adolescents at JCS were loyal to their family's religious traditions. Overall, the adolescents' enthusiasm for their religion was contrary to the research that suggested that in adolescence there is a rebellion against religious conventions (Fowler, 1981; Francis, 1987; Francis & Evans, 1996; Vianello, 1991).

Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

For this question about children's weekly religious involvement, parents were asked to check which of the following activities applied: (i) Sunday school, (ii) choir and/or worship, (iii) youth group, (iv) boys and girls club, (v) bedtime stories, and (vi) other. These questions reflected the child's religious involvement within his or her community. The children (72.8%) engaged in 1 to 2 weekly religious activities, with the most common activity being Sunday school. Another common religious activity, especially for children ages 6, 8, and 10, was bedtime stories (this activity significantly decreased by age 12). The children (52.6%) at ages 12, 14, and 16 were involved in both Sunday school and youth group. For some, the onset of adolescence brought on additional community involvement (e.g., fund raising for camp or visiting the elderly) and responsibility in the church (e.g., teaching Sunday school or helping in the office).

Weekly Estimate

The parents were asked to estimate the total number of hours per week that their child was involved in religious activities. The weekly percentiles were as follows: (a) 2 hours = 8.8%, (b) 3 hours = 9.6%, (c) 4 hours = 22.8%, (d) 5 hours = 21.1%, and (e) 6 hours = 10.5%.

Specifically, the age grouping percentiles indicated that the number of hours each child spent in religious activities did not vary across age groupings (Table 4.2). (It was speculated that the younger children would spend fewer hours because of their age, however, this was not the case.)

Table 4.2: Weekly Estimate of Hours Spent on Religious Activities per Age Grouping

AGE	HOURS	%
06	4 to 5	57
08	4 to 5	60
10	3 to 5	61.5
12	3 to 4 10 to 14	30 30
14	4 to 6	68.5
16	2	20

The most variation in weekly hours spent on religious activities was at age 12 where estimates ranged from 3 to 14 hours. This finding suggested that the hours of religious involvement varies in adolescence. Perhaps the adolescent had additional religious activities (e.g., youth group) to choose from and he or she had more autonomy as to his or her choice of religious activities. The sixteen-year-olds' hours of weekly involvement ranged from 1 to 11 hours. This variation showed both a lack of enthusiasm for religious activities and a high involvement in religious activities. In general, other literature had suggested that there was a decline in religiousness as a child grows older (e.g., Francis, 1987; Hoge & Petrillo, 1978a; Janssen, De Hart, & Gerardts, 1994).

SUMMARY

This chapter presented JCS' religious context. The contextual findings were presented in **three** major ways.

First, JCS' religious education program was reviewed. The religious education curriculum was governed by the CSI (1995) resource guide with a heavy emphasis on Bible study. The role of the teacher was placed at the forefront in the importance of telling Bible stories. At JCS, Bible study was sometimes placed in a secondary position to other instructional courses because of a lack of time. Bible study was often integrated into other parts of the curriculum (e.g., journal writing). Adolescents described their thoughts about the Bible Study program. An Easter celebration was observed.

Second, children's language about God was discussed. Six classic categories concerning the 'Language of the Divine' in the Judeo-Christian tradition were introduced. They were: (i) God is Triune, (ii) God is personal, (iii) God is creator, (iv) God is eternal, (v) God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, and (vi) God offers salvation and redemption. The results indicated that children do not explicitly employ the religious terms discussed but rather use their own individual understandings to portray the 'language of the divine.'

Third, the results from the Parent's Background Information Form were presented. The results suggested that (a) 70.2% of the families engaged in 4 to 6 religious activities within and outside the home, (b) 72.8% of the children engaged in 1 to 2 weekly activities outside the home with Sunday School being a

common activity, and (c) 2 to 6 hours per week on average are spent on such religious activities.

The next chapter -- *Conceptual Representations of God* -- presents the conceptual findings. This includes a discussion of children's representations of God as evidenced by their narrative responses to Tasks One, Two, and Three.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF GOD

Are you excited about God? [Researcher]
Sometimes I am and sometimes I'm not.
When are you excited about God? [Researcher]
When I'm happy!

Joseph (age 8)

The conceptual results revealed the *meaning* in the children's narratives and paid attention to the way children communicated their representations of God through their responses to a story about God (Task One), a story about Jesus (Task Two), and questions to God (Task Three). The children's responses for Tasks One, Two, and Three allowed for their representations of God to emerge within the context of their religious world. This chapter pays particular attention to the *participant's voice*.

Chapter Five is divided into **four** main sections. They are: (1) Children's Stories about God, (2) Children's Understandings of a Bible Story, (3) Children's Answers About God, and (4) Summary.

CHILDREN'S STORIES ABOUT GOD

For **Task One**, children were asked to generate a story about God. The children's responses to Task One were analyzed by ordering them in post hoc categories. This procedure is acknowledged by Hutsebaut and Verhoeven

(1995) who used open-ended questions to assess participants' "personal view of God" rather than "to show their knowledge of God" (p. 54). The categories indicated in Table 5.1 were assigned by the researcher and based on the meanings expressed by the participants.

Table 5.1: Categories Across Ages 6 to 16

CATEGORY	***F***	***M***	***TOTAL***	***%***
God in the Bible	9/30	21/30	30/114	26.32%
God in Everyday Living *Theme: God Helps*	15/24	9/24	45/114 24/45	39.47%
Information about God	6/16	10/16	16/114	14.04%
God Answers Prayers	13/17	4/17	17/114	14.91%
Other			6/114	5.26%

Table 5.1 suggests gender differences. Females were more likely to tell stories about God's ability to help and answer prayers. Males were more likely to tell a Biblical story and provide information about God. These differences were with respect to children's understanding of the relational aspects of God. (This is discussed further in this chapter, in the subsection entitled *Gender Differences in Children's Representations of God.*)

This section is divided into **five** subsections. They are: (a) God in the Bible, (b) God in everyday living, (c) information about God, (d) God answers prayers, and (e) religious knowledge and personal relationships apparent in children's stories about God. (The first four subsections introduce the categories and the last section summarizes the categorical interpretation of children's stories about God.)

God in the Bible

Category One -- *God in the Bible* -- represents narratives with a Biblical theme. These themes reflected children's knowledge of the Bible. For instance, Natasha's (age 8) story was about Jesus.

> *When a little boy was going to Jesus, well, everybody was going to Jesus to learn more about Him preaching and then everybody was hungry cause it was time to eat and they all wanted to go home or else they would be very hungry. A little boy had I think 3 loaves of bread and 2 fishes, then he shared and God put it for 5,000 people. And they even had left-overs. I learned that -- how to share and trust in God.*
> Who told you that story? (Researcher) *It's in the Bible.*

Some of the children (7/30 = 23.33%) told stories about 'Jesus dying on the cross.' Sandy's (age 10) narrative indicated, "Jesus died on the cross for us. And that reminds me that He suffered for our sins and we should be thankful that He did." Sandy's narrative reflected the Easter Celebration at JCS during the research period.

God in Everyday Living

Category Two -- *God in Everyday Living* -- represents narratives that revealed God involved in children's everyday life situations at school, home, and/or church. A significant theme in this category was the representation of God as a *helper*. Of the 45/114 stories told in this category, 24/45 (53%) of the children's stories were about God's helping hand in particular circumstances. Ralph (age 10) described an event where God helped him when he was lost.

> *Well, once we went to the PNE [Pacific National Exhibition] and I got lost and I was, I heard them talking about going to the really big slide which you go on the mat and I went and looked over there and then I went and looked back where I was before and then I went and looked at the slide again and they still weren't there. So I went and looked back and I went a little farther then and I found my mom and my family. ... Well, it was like God telling me to keep looking like that, like to keep going back. And then it was kind of like God told me to go a little further back and then I found them.*

Dorothy (age 10) described how God helped her improve her roller-blading skills.

> *Well, a few days ago I was roller-blading and I couldn't go down these two hills --this big one and this little one that's really steep. I was roller-blading with this other kid who's been roller-blading for five days-- she just got rollerblades on Sunday. So Cheryl and my friend were helping her and she could go down this hill--if she can go down and I can't. Then I just went down and I didn't fall or anything. Cause the first time I went down it I didn't ... I went down it ... I was fine and I wanted to go down it again and I went down it and I didn't like it after that cause I had sprained my wrist and I couldn't roller blade after that until my wrist was better and the tension bandage was off. So then I did it and it's really easy and stuff and then about the day after that I could go down the big hill easily and the day before that I was turning around in circles freaking out. The day after that I could go down it fast--it was cinchy. ... God helped me get brave enough to go, actually go down the hills. ... it's like roller-blading forward except you roller-blade up, it's easy!*

Information About God

Category Three -- *Information about God* -- represents narratives that provided information about God. Thomas (age 6) said, "That God loves you ... that God give you a daddy and mummy. That God give you a house. That God give you food. That's four things." Thomas' representation of God indicated a loving God who is a *provider*.

As children matured, their information about God became more elaborate. Fred (age 8) said:

> *God was a faithful man, and He used to heal people and do stuff to them. And He used to be very nice to people and talk about them. And He used to go in people's hearts and show them... and tell them about the bad people so they can be Christians again. And God made people so they could, so He wouldn't be lonely again.*

Fred's representation of God suggested God as a *redeemer* and *creator*. God redeems His people and shows them how to live and God created people so that He would not be lonely.

In addition, Bonnie (age 16) provided an elaborate description of *God as creator.*

> *I go up to this island, Keats--not the camp just being on the island. The camp there--it's really good even with the camp, but just being on the island, it's peaceful and I always feel so close to God in a peaceful situation. Or when I'm in the woods or nature or something like that, I really feel close and it's just amazing how something can be so beautiful--it's amazing how God can make something so beautiful. And I mean, the earth is small but it holds so many wonders that we'll never stop wondering about things. And it's just amazing, how much He can create that we'll never ever know.*

God Answers Prayers

Category Four, *God Answers Prayers* -- represents narratives that illustrated that God answers the children's prayers. Becky (age 12) described how God answered her prayer request to stop her continuous nosebleeds.

> *Um, well, like, a year ago, I didn't really, um, in grade five I had just got, like, I had always been a Christian all my life but, like I knew that God died on the cross and stuff but I never really knew Him personally until last year. And last year I got, this sounds really stupid, but I used to get a lot of nosebleeds and I had a problem with my breathing and I was losing a lot of blood. And so, one night I had a nosebleed and I was just like crying and I prayed to God and asked Him to like, help me and I didn't really, I wasn't really sure if He was there or not but I was kind of, I wasn't really made to believe, but I kind of believed that He was always there but I wasn't really sure. So I asked Him to help me and like, I asked Him to please stop my nosebleed and then in like not even half*

a minute it just stopped like that and that's when I really started believing. Now when I get nosebleeds I just pray to Him and He just stops them like, and before they used to continue for an hour and now they just go for one minute.

Rachel (age 16) described the following dynamic prayer experience.

Um, well, it has more to do with God's realism in my life. And um, we used to work with foster kids, first time offenders, um, kids who had mental disabilities, mentally handicapped children. We also worked with kids who had a bad home life and they'd come into our home. So a lot of time we'd have kids who were not only first time offenders, like kids who were multiple but they just needed to get out of their home life. Ah, we were considered one of the best foster homes within BC in the lower mainland. And we got all the kids that were the hardest to deal with so we got the ones that were the most amount of trouble. Um, when I turned 13, it was really hard to know that my mom was really around for me. And I started turning more and more into what the world had to offer. Like for example, my boyfriends, my social life, my music, my books--I love reading. Me and my mom would have really bad arguments, but it was just, like it would build and build. At times when my relatives would come to stay, I'd stay in one of my foster sister's rooms. And on this particular time I did. And we just finished within our family, talking about Satanism. And studying it, and working with it and finding out what Satan was really like and why he had demons the way he did. And, um, it was mostly for our benefit because we had had some kids that had come in that had been involved in the occult. And we also had a social worker that was a witch. So we were dealing with that sort of thing. And one particular night, I spent the night in one of my sister's rooms. And in our house, our old house actually, we had prayed the blood of Jesus over every single doorway and anybody who had entered. And this particular room had not been prayed over and the blood was not covering the doorway. And as I was sleeping that night, I woke up about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning with a stabbing pain in my neck and I screamed. I couldn't move my neck, I couldn't move my body as if someone had plunged a knife into my neck. I couldn't move. And we prayed, my mom and dad both prayed over me and the pain lessened and I could move my body.

Religious Knowledge and Personal Relationships Apparent in Children's Stories about God

The children's responses for Task One indicated **two** general things. Religious knowledge and personal relationships were apparent in children's stories about God.

First, children indicated their own religious knowledge in the *God in the Bible* and *Information about God* categories. These categories illustrated how knowledge about God may be transmitted within the child's religious context (school, home, and/or church). As a child acquired knowledge about God and experienced God, his or her representations about God emerged through the content of his or her narratives about God. These narratives provided clues as to where the child had acquired knowledge about God. For instance, Seth (age 12) described what he learnt from his grade six teacher.

> *OK, Mr. _____ teaches, like every term he teaches something new, or like, he could teach two things in a term, but I think right now we are doing something about Ruth and he's teaching what Ruth's life is about and how she has faith in God and Mr. _____ is really focused on faith, like believing in God and having faith in Him. So that's what we're learning and that's what he's teaching.*

Second, children indicated their personal relationships in the *God in Everyday Living* and *God Answers Prayers* categories. These categories revealed how God was reflected in the child's relationships within their religious environment. For instance, James and Cynthia illustrated how relationships with others can shape their excitement for learning about God. On the one hand, James' (age 14) enthusiasm for his youth group allowed him to share God with others.

> *I go to church all the time and I go to youth group every Friday night. .. It's really nice. I love my youth group. I even sometimes play guitar in my youth group. My youth pastor is really good. And on the 20th we are going on a youth convention with a whole bunch of youth groups.*

On the other hand, Cynthia's (age 10) lack of enthusiasm for Sunday school was due to 'Carey not being there.' She stated:

> *Sunday school was quite boring this Sunday and last Sunday cause normally I have this guy named Carey and he's really fun. Like he tells about God in a fun way. But the other teachers are way too serious and they do it like kind of boring.*

Overall, the children's stories about God revealed their religious knowledge and their personal relationships in their religious community. Hence, this study was consistent with the research that suggested a child's 'image of God' is transmitted through relational exchanges in his or her environment (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Heinrichs, 1982; Heller, 1986; Hyde, 1990; Rizzuto, 1991).

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF A BIBLE STORY

For **Task Two**, the children were asked to respond to a series of questions from a Biblical story about Jesus called *Jesus Calms the Sea* (Mark 4:36-41, New International Version). The children's responses were based on their experience with the Biblical narrative and their understandings of who they believed Jesus to be.

Jesus Calms the Sea: **Mark 4:36-41**
Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

1. *Why did the disciples ask, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?"*
2. *Why did Jesus ask, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*
3. *What is the answer to the question, "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"*
4. *Do you think this story has a message?*

Their responses to the story were analyzed per question (1, 2, 3, and 4) across age groupings (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) and summarized in Table 5.2. (It should be noted that Table 5.2 does not propose a developmental sequence of children's responses to the Biblical event.)

Table 5.2: Summary of Children's Responses to the Biblical Story *Jesus Calms the Sea*

	Q1: Care	**Q2: Faith**	**Q3: Who is?**	**Q4: Message**
AGE 6	The disciples were scared and they thought that they were going to drown and that Jesus did not care.	Jesus was wondering how come they were afraid.	• Son of God • God	Don't be afraid because Jesus is with you and He is powerful. (Many say that they 'do not know' if there is a message to the story.)
AGE 8	The disciples were afraid that they were going to drown and they did not know who Jesus was.	The disciples did not believe in Jesus. They did not trust.	• Son of God • God • Messiah 'He is a bridge to God.'	God can do anything. That He is with you and that you should trust Him. Jesus is not an ordinary person.

AGE 10	The disciples were not sure who Jesus was. (If they did know they forgot because they were scared.) They wanted Him to perform a miracle because they did not want to die.	Jesus wondered why His disciples did not trust Him and questioned them to see if they still believed in Him. 'He sees into their hearts.'	• Son of God • God • Messiah • Savior Disciples thought that He was an ordinary man with powers	Believe and trust that God is with you and that God will protect you. Don't be afraid if Jesus is with you. 'Don't think that you can do it on your own.'
AGE 12	The disciples knew that Jesus could save Himself but would He save them? They wanted protection and they thought that He did not care because He was sleeping. They felt abandoned.	Jesus was testing them. They were not acknowledging that God is in control. They were scared and they did not trust. They were not sure if they were going to be saved.	At first they did not know who He was. Perhaps a 'teacher of God.' But then after the miracle they knew. • Son of God • God • Creator who has control over everything Maybe some of the disciples thought that He was a sorcerer or a magician.	Trust in God and do not rely on your own understanding. God is powerful and in control. He will help you even if it is at the last second. He is always there.
AGE 14	The disciples thought that He did not care because He was sleeping. He was not helping them fast enough and they were mad.	They should have known that Jesus would not have let anything happen to them. They were not calm and therefore, did not trust that Jesus would save them.	They saw the miracle and yet they found it hard to believe. He was the Son of God. Or was He a special prophet or magician.	'Things happen' but do not worry because God will protect you. God has power and authority over the world. Without faith one has nothing.
AGE 16	The disciples were impatient. They expected Him to do something before they got scared. Because He was sleeping and did not attend to their	The disciples have fears and this shows that they are only human. Yet, their reactions show a lack of faith. Therefore, Jesus believed	Before the miracle, they thought that He was a teacher, rabbi, or prophet. After the miracle, the disciples realized that He was indeed the	One must believe in God and have faith that He is there. It is the strength of your faith that is being tested.

	feelings promptly, they felt abandoned.	that He needed to rebuke them for being afraid and not trusting in Him. Jesus was disappointed in His disciples.	Son of God.	

This section is divided into **six** subsections. They are: (a) question one, (b) question two, (c) question three, (d) question four, (e) role of religious experience, and (f) role of cognitive maturity. (The first four subsections present the children's responses to the four questions and the last two subsections summarize the findings.)

Question One: *Why did the disciples ask, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?"*

In a general way, most of the children across ages 6 to 16 believed that Jesus is called 'teacher' because He teaches the disciples about God. Most of the children wondered if Jesus cared because the disciples were afraid that they were going to drown because Jesus was sleeping. Rebecca (age 10) said, "How could He sleep? We are His friends and He could let us drown."

At ages 12, 14, and 16, the adolescents were sympathetic to the disciples' feelings. They stated that the disciples felt abandoned, unprotected, and impatient and that Jesus did not attend to their feelings promptly enough. Linda (age 12) said, "They thought that He knew that there was a storm outside and maybe they thought that He did not really care. They thought that He could save Himself but would He care to save them?" Similarly, Jackie (age 14) said, "He's

supposed to be like powerful wanting to make good things happen and they are just wondering, like do you want us to die or something like that. Like if you care about us, then why is this happening to us?"

Question Two: *Why did Jesus ask, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*

At age six, there was little response to this question. The definition of *faith* appeared too obscure for these young children to understand. However around ages eight and ten, there was an emergence of the understanding of *faith*. At this age, *faith* was defined by what it is not; that is, it is 'not believing' or 'not trusting.' In this way, Jesus was asking why they 'did not believe' that He would take care of them. David (age 10) explained 'faith' in the following way:

> *It says in the Bible if you have as much faith as a mustard seed you can move mountains so that they must have thought that Jesus has lots of faith. So, if they have lots of faith they did not have to wake Him up and they could do the same thing.*

As the children matured, *faith* was associated with 'trusting' and 'believing.' Stuart (age 12) said, "Faith would be like you believe in God. If you have faith that He will do something for you, then it will happen. ... Even if you are praying and you just say it and you don't mean it. That's like having no faith cause you're not praying with meaning." Annie (age 14) said, "They were not trusting Him.... It is like that song 'In your time, in your time.' Well, you have to trust Jesus to do it when He wants to because when He does it He's kind of

testing them to see if they have faith in Him." Teresa (age 16) said, "Faith is believing that something IS without having facts to back it up."

In adolescence, they began to acknowledge that this story was about God's power and control. Stuart (age 12) said, "Whoa, this guy is SUPERHUMAN like, even the winds and the waves obey Him." Chelsea (age 12) said, "I think that God made Jesus take them on a trip to show them how much power He has." Adolescents suggested that with Jesus' power the disciples should have known that nothing would happen to them. Monica (age 16) stated:

> *He asked them that because they were His disciples. He has been teaching them for so long already and they still have no faith. I think that it is rebuking them and saying, 'You still don't have any faith with me, what's wrong with you?*

Teresa (age 16) said, "He [Jesus] was trying to say that they should know that He would not let anything happen to them, [therefore] there is no reason to be afraid."

Question Three: *What is the answer to the question, "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"*

At ages six and eight, the children believed that Jesus is the Son of God. Acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God points to the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Only a few children provided knowledge about the Trinity across age groupings. Sarah (age 8) explained, "He is God's Son because He

came down to save us. Like God cannot come down so He sent someone to be His helper and teach about Him and it is sort of Him."

Many children believed that Jesus is the Son of God because He is powerful and that 'He is the only one that can do what He can do.' Melinda (age 10) stated, "He's really powerful so He can do it. ... It's really weird that some person can calm the wind and everything because nobody else can do it. ... He can do anything."

Between the ages of twelve and sixteen, there emerged a sense of timing in the Biblical event (i.e., before and after the miracle). Many adolescents believed that prior to Jesus calming the sea the disciples felt Jesus had abandoned them. Then after experiencing the miracle, the adolescents believed that the disciples were forced to acknowledge that Jesus was the Son of God and God was in control. Christy (age 12) said, "Before, probably they didn't think that He could do miracles and that He wasn't Jesus. And after they probably had a little more faith [and believed] Jesus was God's Son." Pat (age 14) said, "Before they thought of Him as a teacher but after, they knew He was the Son of God." Mariah (age 16) summarized who Jesus is in the following way:

> *(Before) they think that He is a rabbi and a teacher. And possibly a prophet. But I do not think until the end that they really realized the true extent of who He is. They were common folk. People who weren't involved in a lot of the goings on in the city. They mostly just caught fish for a living so I mean, if you're not really involved in a lot of things then it's kind of hard to get used to some things. So to them, He was a person who was to be greatly honored, respected, but not, ... (until after the miracle) did they realize the true extent of how much they needed to honor and respect Him. He is Jesus the Son of God.*

Question Four: ***Do you think this story has a message?***

Most of the children at age six were unable to provide a message for the story. At this age, some of the children provided a simple message for the outcome of the story. They suggested that Jesus is with you; therefore, do not be afraid. Marion (age 6) suggested that the message of the story is, "Hakuna Matata" which means 'don't worry' (an influence from the movie called the *Lion King*).

At age eight, most children could provide a message for the story. Thomas (age 8) said, "[This story means] to keep your eyes on Jesus." The children's messages, at this age level, suggested that God is with you and that He will not let you down. They stressed that the message is to believe and trust in God.

Similarly, at age ten, the children continued to reinforce the message of the story as trusting and believing in God. Betty (age 10) said, "It means that we need to trust in the Lord that He will save us when we are in trouble. And we don't need to go running to Him, He will come to us if we believe in Him."

In addition, at ages eight and ten, children began to acknowledge that the story was a 'miracle.' Isaac (age 8) said, "The story is a miracle. And it's good for us because God is powerful and He's there, right here, watching over us." Veronica (age 10) described what the disciples experienced and said, "It was like the first time that they saw a really exciting miracle happen, like right in front of their eyes."

From ages twelve to sixteen, adolescents suggested that *faith* played a prominent role in defining the message to the story. Adolescents suggested that the story reveals that we should trust and not lose faith in God even when the problems are insurmountable. Cassandra (age 12) said, "We need to have faith in God and that He has everything in control. And we need to believe in Him even when times are tough." Jonathan (age 14) said that this story means, "To have faith in God because He will always bring you through the storm so to speak." Michelle (age 16) said, "We should believe in God and just trust in Him what He is going to do cause He is going to keep us safe." Richard (age 16) emphasized the strength of one's faith and stated:

> *It's like have faith in the Lord and He will come through. It is like sometimes you pray for years and years and nothing happens. It's like Abraham praying for years and years wanting to have a child and still nothing happened. Then finally God came through and He gave Him a child. He never lets you down. It just depends how strong your faith is.*

Role of Religious Experience

Of the children interviewed, 90.35% (103/114), were familiar with the Bible story – *Jesus Calms the Sea*. Those children who were not as familiar with the Biblical story were mostly at the kindergarten level. Table 5.3 illustrates where children across ages 6 to 16 had heard the story before. Children suggested that they had heard the Biblical story from their parents, video and audio-tapes, Sunday school, school, church, and the Bible. (The <u>underlined</u> responses represent the majority of children's responses per age grouping.)

Table 5.3: Where Children Say They Have Heard the Story

age 6	age 8	age 10	age 12	age 14	age 16
• mother • T.V. • Sunday school • school • church • Bible	• mom and dad • video • Sunday school • school • church • Bible	• mom and dad • video and tapes • Sunday school • school • church • Bible	• mom and dad • video and tapes • Sunday school • school • church • Bible	• mom and dad • video and tapes • Sunday school • school • church • Bible	• mom and dad • video and tapes • Sunday school • school • church • Bible

Table 5.3 draws attention to five things. First, the mother played a predominant role in introducing children to the story at age six. Second, both Sunday school and the Bible played a significant role in teaching children the story across ages 6 to 16. Third, school teachers played a minimal role in teaching children the story around age 8 and 10. Fourth, church played a greater role in adolescents' learning the story at age 12 and 16. Fifth, educational materials played a minimal role in presenting the Biblical story (e.g., videos and audio-tapes) across ages 6 to 16. These findings were contrary to Goldman (1964) who did not take into account the role of religious experience in children's understanding of Biblical texts.

Role of Cognitive Maturity

The results suggest that children's understandings of the Biblical story may be influenced by their cognitive maturity. As children matured, their understandings about the Biblical events in the story changed.

The children's responses to *question one* (Teacher don't you care if we drown?) shifted between ages 10 and 12. Prior to age ten, children acknowledged the disciples' actions and feelings. After age twelve, not only did adolescents acknowledge the disciples' actions and feelings but also they elaborated and reflected on the character's feelings in light of their own feelings and understandings of the events in the story.

The children's responses to *question two* (Do you still have no faith?) shifted around ages 8 and 10. Prior to age eight, children had little understanding of the concept of 'faith.' Around age twelve, the concept of faith emerged for adolescents and their understandings of faith were expressed within the context of the events in the story and their own experiences with God.

The children's responses to *question three* (Who is this?) shifted between ages 10 and 12. Prior to age ten, children were unable to provide an answer as to why they believed Jesus was the Son of God. After age twelve, adolescents perceived the timing of the events in the story (i.e., before and after the miracle) and used additional knowledge from the Bible to support their claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

The children's responses to *question four* (Do you think that this story has a message?) shifted between ages 10 and 12. Prior to age ten, children provided a literal message to the story that incorporated the events of the story. After age twelve, adolescents provided an elaborate non-literal message that included personal reflection upon the events of the story.

In general, the children's responses to the above questions shifted around ages ten and twelve from literal to non-literal. A child's response was considered *literal* if the basic facts of the story were presented. A child's response was considered *non-literal* if the events of the story were elaborated by incorporating metaphor and his or her own ideas. This general shift was acknowledged in Goldman's (1964) research. He suggested that pre-adolescent children tend to understand Biblical events in a literal way. Goldman (1965) indicated that around the age of thirteen, "Biblical literalism may still persist, yet there is a move towards a non-literal interpretation and a recognition of the metaphorical, poetic truth" (p. 163).

In addition, the shift in children's thinking about the Biblical story from literal to non-literal responses parallels the shift, in general, in children's thinking from concrete to abstract reasoning. (Review Piaget's Periods of Cognitive Development presented in Table 2.2.) Goldman (1964) acknowledged that children's understanding of Bible stories paralleled Piaget's stages of cognitive development (i.e., intuitive, concrete, and abstract religious thinking). However, Goldman (1965) advised against letting young children study the Bible. He believed that young children were unable to grasp Biblical concepts because of the level of their cognitive maturity. Also, Nye and Carlson (1984) suggested that formal religious instruction is not advantageous prior to age ten. Yet, the results from Task Two illustrated that early introduction and repetition of Biblical stories aided in children's understandings of Biblical themes. Evidently,

children's incomplete understanding at an earlier age facilitated their deeper understanding at a later age.

Overall, as children matured, their interpretations of the events in the Biblical story shifted from literal to non-literal responses. These responses indicated a general cognitive shift in children's understanding of the Biblical events from concrete to abstract religious thinking. The results indicated that early experiences with Biblical stories may facilitate children's understandings of Biblical themes in later years.

CHILDREN'S ANSWERS ABOUT GOD

For **Task Three** children were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions about God. The children's understandings of God as expressed in their answers (participant's voice) were the focus of this section. The themes that emerged within each of the categories were interpreted by the researcher (researcher's voice). For instance, *Category Three* described the children's responses to the question "What think are God's everyday activities?" The researcher summarized the children's responses to this question in two themes (nurturing and practical).

The children's responses, along with researcher's interpretation, are summarized categorically according to age in Table 5.4. (It should be noted that Table 5.4 does not propose a developmental sequence of children's responses to the questions.)

Table 5.4: Summary of Children's Responses to Task Three

	AGE 06	AGE 08	AGE 10	AGE 12	AGE 14	AGE 16
	n=28	n=23	n=23	n=17	n=13	n=10
CATEGORY ONE Description of God	God came from heaven. So many years old. Like a person. Define like a person or like a 'other' (i.e. cloud).	God came from heaven. So many years old. Like a person but can do more (i.e., has power). Define like a person.	God came from heaven and always existed. Infinite age. Like a person or spirit. Define like a person or a spirit.	God came from heaven and always existed. Infinite age. Like a person or spirit. Define like a person and/or spirit.	God came from heaven and always existed. Infinite age. Like a spirit or person. Define like a person and a spirit with other attributes.	God always existed. Infinite age. Like a 'perfect' person. Define like a powerful person with personality who is massive.
CATEGORY TWO Home of God	God lives in heaven. Heaven described in a Biblical way. God has a Biblical and Heavenly family.	God lives in heaven. Heaven described in a Biblical way. God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God lives in heaven. Heaven described in a Biblical way. God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God lives in heaven, heart, and every-where. Heaven described in a Biblical way. God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God lives in heaven, heart, and every-where. Heaven described in a Biblical way. God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God lives in heaven and every-where. Heaven described in a Biblical way as well as their own ideas of paradise. God has a Spiritual family.
CATEGORY THREE Activities of God	God can do everything. Biblical activities. Unable to suggest what God cannot do. Everyday activities are Biblical, nurturing, and practical. Unable to say how God is involved in their own lives.	God can do everything. Biblical and lifestyle activities. God cannot not 'do anything.' Everyday activities are mostly nurturing. God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing way.	God can do everything. Biblical, lifestyle, and answering prayer activities. God cannot not 'do anything.' Everyday activities are nurturing. God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing	God can do everything. Biblical and lifestyle activities. God cannot not 'do anything.' Everyday activities are nurturing and practical. God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing,	God can do everything. Biblical and lifestyle activities. God cannot 'sin.' Everyday activities are nurturing and practical. God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing, practical,	God can do everything. Biblical and lifestyle activities. God cannot 'sin.' Everyday activities are nurturing and practical. God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing, practical,

			way.	practical, and educational way. God is an active deity.	and educational way. God is an active deity.	and educational way. God is an active deity.
CATEGORY FOUR Communi-cation with God	God knows you, sees you and hears you. "He is invisible." Can talk to God through prayer.	God knows you, sees you and hears you. "He is powerful." Can talk to God through prayer.	God knows you, sees you and hears you. "He created us." Can talk to God through prayer.	God knows you, sees you and hears you "He created us." Can talk to God through prayer.	God knows you, sees you and hears you. "He is omni-present." Can talk to God through prayer.	God knows you, sees you and hears you. "He is omni-present" Can talk to God through prayer.
CATEGORY FIVE Questions about God	Nature? (Very few questions)	Nature? Grandeur? One-to-one?	Nature? Grandeur? One-to-one?	One-to-one? Nature of God?	Nature of God?	Nature of God?
CATEGORY SIX Changes about God	No changes.	No changes. Cleansing suggestion.	No changes. Cleansing suggestion.	No changes. Lifestyle and God's authority suggestion. God is perfect, fair, good, and right.	No changes. Lifestyle and God's authority suggestion. God is perfect, fair, good, and right.	No changes. No suggestion. – God is authority. God is perfect, fair, good, and right.
CATEGORY SEVEN Learning about God	From people (i.e., parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, and/or pastors) From places (i.e., home, community, Sunday school, school, and/or church) From the Bible (i.e., video and audio-tapes) From experiences (i.e., Mission Trip and/or club membership) From God (i.e., personal prayer)					
CATEGORY EIGHT Thinking about God versus friends and parents	(Unable to answer the question)	Were not sure if their thinking was the same or different.	Some same and some different. Recognize, in general, that people are unique in their thinking about God.	Different than their friends. Same as parents.	Different than their friends. Same as parents.	Different than their friends and parents. They are unique in how they think about God.

This section is divided into **ten** parts in accordance with the eight prescribed categories (adapted from Nye and Carlson [1984] and Heller [1986]) and a summary of the children's representations of God based on age and gender. They are: (a) description of God, (b) home of God, (c) activities of God, (d) communication with God, (e) questions about God, (f) changes about God, (g) learning about God, (h) thinking about God versus friends and parents, (i) cognitive and conceptual shifts in children's representations of God as they mature, and (j) gender differences in children's representations of God.

Category One: Description of God

Category One addressed the following questions: *Where does God come from? How old is God? Is God like a person? Could you describe in words, using one word or many, what God looks like?*

At age six, children agreed that God came from either the "sky" or "heaven." Yet, there was a range of ideas about God's age. Leanne said that God was "old, old, old" whilst other children were more definitive in their answers and said "50 years" or "100 years" or "10 thousand years old." Most of the children agreed that God 'is like a person.' This agreement was reflected in the children's descriptions which suggested that God "looks like a man" or has "a head and blond hair and a beard." Also, this view reflected the religious pictures that the children had been exposed to. For instance, Shelley said, "God got brown hairs and blue eyes and a nose and a mouth and a blue and white shirt

on" and concluded with "that's what I see in my Bible." Those children who did not view God 'like a person' described God "like a cloud" or "a bright light" or "something invisible." Generally, at age six, all the children's descriptions of God were simple and short displaying an anthropomorphic view of God wherein physical characteristics predominated.

At age eight, the majority of children believed that God came from "heaven" and only one suggested that God was "just there." Regarding God's age, there were less definitive answers and there was an emerging sense that God's age was unknown. Many children suggested that God's age was "everlasting" or "forever." At this age, there was less emphasis on God "like a person" because of God's "power." Anne said, "Well, not exactly [like a person] cause He's very powerful and He made us and everything" and Paul said, "He's not a real person [because] He's a man who has power." Even though some of the children described God as defined by "Jesus" pictures in their Bible, they began to describe God in a different way as defined by His divine power. Eve suggested that God was not like a person "because people cannot do miracles." William said, "Like He's not like an ordinary person because He could do some miraculous things." Coupled with this description, there was a sense that this understanding of God's physical form was changing. Tanya said, God is "just a spirit ... cause He doesn't have a body." Christina said, "God looks like the air because God is everything around us. But Jesus is too, because Jesus is in our hearts."

At age ten, children believed that God came from heaven and that He had always existed in that realm. Joy said, "God comes from His heavenly kingdom in heaven.... He was there when the earth began and nobody knows where He came from. He was just there." This view corresponded with God's age as 'unknown' or 'infinite' or 'everlasting.' At this age, God began to be defined in a dual way. Charlotte said, "I think God is a spirit but He looks like a person cause I'm used to seeing people" and Karyn said, "Maybe He is a person when He comes on earth but He may be around us like the Holy Spirit." This duality was consistent when describing what God looked like. In other words, if God was a person that 'came on earth' then many of the children described Jesus' attributes from a common painting by Solomon (i.e., brown hair, brown eyes, beard, and a white robe with a blue sash). However, if God was 'a spirit' then the children described Him as "a wind that has a voice" or "just white" or "like holy radiant sunshine with one voice coming down from the clouds." Only a few children, at this age, viewed God 'sitting on a throne in the clouds.'

At age twelve, some of the children believed that God came from heaven. Others were not so sure where God lives. Nevertheless, the majority of children believed that God had always existed; in other words, it was a mystery that one just accepted. Allan said, "No one's really sure. He could have come from another galaxy and came to make His own. No one really knows. He was here before time, before the earth, and before life." Consequently, God's age was viewed as 'unknown' or 'limitless.' Much like ten-year-olds, children at age twelve continued to view God as both a spirit and a person. For instance, when

asked if God was a person, Katie responded with, "Sometimes and sometimes not. Sometimes, He's like a spirit in heaven and sometimes He is like when Jesus came to the earth to be human." Carolyn said that God is like a spirit because "He doesn't have flesh and bones and stuff like that." Robbie explained it in the following way: "He's more like a spirit but you can talk to Him like a person. He's kind of like the person of a spirit. In a way, He can be a person." This mix of person and spirit may have lead to the twelve-year-olds' difficulty in describing God's appearance. For instance, John said, "There's many different pictures and stories about God having a beard, but I think that's more Jesus type of stuff, well same thing sort of. I think that God can show Himself in any type of way. You can't really say that this is mainly how He is because He can be any type of form." Similarly, Anna said, "I think He's a man and He's a bright shining light and I think He's all the colors of the rainbow."

At age fourteen, the majority of adolescents believed that God had 'always been' and that God's age was 'infinite.' Only a few adolescents suggested that God came from heaven. Most of the adolescents thought about God as both spirit and person. Mary elaborated on this and stated, "When He came to earth He was a person, when He went up to heaven He was a representative of all people before God. So, He's not really a person, He's a representative of the people." In addition, the fourteen-year-olds described God not only as a person and a spirit but also in terms of God's personhood (i.e., patient, kind, and caring) and size (i.e., massiveness). Brigette suggested that God was "big, like, massive. Maybe He's got the features of a human but He's

not really. Maybe like a giant. But He's like kind and caring." Alexis described God in the following personal way:

> *Like everything, like a father, and a friend, like your best friend. You can tell Him anything and He'll help you. He died for you. He's just there for you all the time. He'll never leave you and He never won't be there for you. So He is like the best friend in the world and then, He's like the Father because He can watch over you and protect you and stuff. And when you are really scared it almost feels like He's hugging you. Like you always feel secure when God's around. I think of Him as light because He's pure and He's bright and He gives me so much joy. It's light.*

At age sixteen, the adolescents believed that God had always existed and consequently, God's age was infinite. God was viewed as a person because "we were made in His image." God was thought of as a 'perfect person.' Andrea described God in the following way: "He is kind of like a person because He has some characteristics the same as people, such as emotions, feelings, morals and stuff, but He's nothing like people because He is perfect." At this age, there was less emphasis on the person/spirit duality. God was described as a person with human characteristics and yet, something large, bright, and powerful. In other words, God is something more than human. Stephen described God as, "Really large and powerful. ... I think that He's very kind but He can be angered." Sadie stated that "God is a person who is in charge of our lives. He can take our lives at the snap of a finger and tell us when we are going. He's not someone to play around with."

Children's descriptions of God started simply and then became more elaborate with age. The younger children believed that (a) God came from heaven, (b) God's age was older than their own age, and (c) God was a person with physical characteristics such as a beard. Furthermore, older children

became increasingly aware that God was not an ordinary person because of His 'divine power' to create and perform miracles. The older children understood that (a) God's origin was a mystery, (b) God's age was infinite, and (c) God was like a spirit and a person but yet, something more in personality and powerfulness.

Category Two: Home of God

This category addressed the following questions: *Could you tell me where you think God lives? What is God's home like? Does God have a family or does God live alone there?*

At age six, most of the children viewed 'where does God come from' and 'could you tell me where God lives' as the same question and frequently told the researcher that they had already answered the question. Consequently, most of the children said that God's home is in "the sky" or "heaven" or "in the clouds." Many of the children gave elaborate concrete descriptions of *heaven* such as: "Well, it has streets of gold and mansions in all colors. It has beautiful forests and flying horses" or "Heaven is like, where the angels stay and heaven looks like a pretty place. It has flowers and beautiful bunnies and kids that like God and angels." Danny was puzzled about heaven and said, "I don't know what heaven looks like ... well, I do have a little Bible, but it doesn't have a picture of heaven." If God's home was in *the sky* or *in the clouds,* then children's descriptions were simpler. Ricky said that God's home in the sky "looks like a

parking lot" and Nancy said that God's home in the sky "looks like a castle and it has a princess and a king."

Almost all of the children at age six believed that God had a family. At this age, the nature of God's family was viewed in two ways, namely a *Biblical* or a *heavenly* family. A *Biblical family* was comprised of those historical figures that were represented in the Bible such as "Mary and Joseph" or "Jesus." A *heavenly family* differed from a Biblical family in that it represented those that had gone to heaven after death. Mike said, "All the dead people, of course" are in God's family and added that both "Jesus" and "Elvis" are "up there." Richard talked of a heavenly family in the following way: "He has a big family of all the people ... like angels and people who died on the earth like in the wars."

At age eight, all of the children, except one, responded that God's home is indeed "in heaven." All were able to provide elaborate descriptions of heaven and some of the descriptions reflected their knowledge of the Bible. There are "streets of gold [and] pearly gates, filled with mansions" in heaven. Other descriptions of heaven included "a place that looks like there's jewels all over" or "like everything you wanted ... like trees, apples, and lots of things, like horses" or "lots of clouds and angels." At this age, there was an emerging idea that heaven was a place where there were no worries, no sin, and no violence. Kristy stated:

> What is God's home like?
> *Very beautiful. Very, very beautiful. Nothing bad, there's no sin. Nothing goes wrong. There's no weeds or anything. No bad stuff.*
> What does it mean to have 'no sin'?
> *There's nothing, like no people say bad words or swear. And they don't do things wrong like rob or steal.*

Michelle said, "Heaven is huge and wonderful and you don't have any worries anymore." In this way, heaven was perceived in a twofold manner in that it was not only a beautiful place but also a place where there were no troubles.

Most of the children, at this age, believed that God had a heavenly family. (This was similar to those children at age six.) However, there was an emerging theme of a *spiritual family* on earth. Patrick said, "All the people who are down here are His children. [We are His] spiritual family" and Jason said, "God has a family because we are all part of His family, we're all His children."

At age ten, children continued to believe that God lives in heaven, with the exception of one child who believed that God lives in both heaven and earth and another child who believed that God lives only inside of people. Many of the descriptions of heaven were reminiscent of the six- and eight-year-olds' ideas. Heaven was a place where the streets were paved with gold; there was no pollution; there were mansions; and nothing bad happened there. Regarding God's family, the heavenly family (i.e., all those who died) and spiritual family (i.e., all of us who are His children) predominated at age ten.

At both age twelve and age fourteen, adolescents continued to believe that God lives in heaven. Heaven continued to be described in the Biblical way and Kathy (age 12) said, "Well in the Bible it says that the streets are paved with gold and stuff like that and it has stuff that we couldn't even imagine. It's like something too wonderful to picture." Yet, at these ages, God not only lived in heaven but also He could live in your heart and everywhere. Heather (age 14) described this in the following way: "Well like, not that He's in my heart, but He's

with me wherever I go. And I sort of know that He's there and that He's helping me through my day and whatever." At this age, the adolescents believed that God's family was both heavenly and spiritual. Lesley (age 14) said, "Everyone [is in His family]. Everyone who accepts Him. Like all the apostles from the Bible. All the people who believed in Him and were with Him. And all the people who are with Him now. All the believers of Him, I guess we are His family."

At age sixteen, the adolescents believed that God was not only in heaven but also everywhere. (This was similar to adolescents at ages twelve and fourteen.) Heaven was described like that of the Bible but also like places that the adolescents had experienced themselves (i.e., Hawaii or Paris). In addition, the majority of sixteen-year-olds viewed God's family as a spiritual one wherein they believed that "we are all His family." However, Corey suggested God's family as a heavenly one and stated, "I think He lives with everyone that's gone to heaven, that's died. I think they 'just hang' together."

Thus, God's home was consistently thought of as in heaven. Yet, with age there was a sense that God was both in your heart and everywhere. God's family was initially thought of as a Biblical family (e.g., Jesus and Mary) or a heavenly family (e.g., those that have died and gone to heaven). However, with age children began to view God's family as a spiritual one wherein His family consisted of a community of believers in Him.

Category Three: Activities of God

This category addressed the following questions: *What are some things that God can do? What are some things that God cannot do? What are God's everyday activities? How is God involved in your life every day?*

Overall, most of the children between ages six and sixteen agreed that God could "do anything" and "do everything." Particularly, children between ages ten and sixteen agreed that there was 'nothing' that God cannot do.

At age six, most of the children's responses suggested that God's 'can do' activities were *Biblical* in nature wherein God healed, made blind people see, and helped people that were sick. (These activities point to the healing activities of Jesus Christ in the New Testament [e.g., Luke 4:48; Matthew 8:14-17; and Mark 1:29-38].) At this age, most of the children were unable to answer what it was that *God cannot do*. Two children provided practical responses such that "God cannot change houses into different colors" or "God cannot make cars. He can't just say, 'well, I'll give you a bicycle' and POOF, it's there."

Six-year-old children viewed God's everyday activities in three ways, namely: *Biblical, nurturing* and *practical* activities. *Biblical activities* were those which were related to Biblical times or stories, mostly historical. For instance, many of the children described God's everyday activities as 'healing' such that God "makes blind people well" or "helps people rise from the dead" and 'creating' such that God "makes the sun and the mountains and the animals" or "makes people." *Nurturing* activities were more personal and represented God's

'helping hand' or 'watchful eye' in a child's everyday life. For instance, many of the children viewed God's everyday activities as loving and caring for them and making them feel safe. This included providing food so that, "God makes me grow up." *Practical* activities were ones that enabled God to get the job done. These included God talking to angels because "angels are God's helpers" or "praying and reading the Bible" or "just working." (At this age, there were few distinctions in the children's answers to *what are God's everyday activities* versus *how God is involved in your life every day?*)

At age eight, children viewed God's 'can do' activities in a twofold manner, namely *Biblical* and *Lifestyle*. Most of the children described God's overall activities from a *Biblical* perspective in that God can heal, cast demons from people, turn water into wine, and create the earth. (These activities were found in Bible stories.) Also, many of the children described such Biblical activities as miracles. When prompted, Adam defined a miracle as "something that nobody else can do." Furthermore, God was responsible for changing your *lifestyle*. Many of the children suggested that God's activities were to "turn you around" or "make you a Christian" or "forgive you" or "help you through the tough times" or "give you a better heart." In this way, God was viewed as a *change agent*. Many of the children at this age believed that nothing was beyond God's capability.

Eight-year-old children suggested that God's everyday activities are mostly *nurturing*. Such activities included watching, listening to prayers, caring, teaching, loving, helping, protecting, and "saving people." Children, at this age,

were able to specify how God was involved in their life. Usually, these answers were congruent with the preceding question (what are God's everyday activities). For instance, if they believed that God's everyday nurturing activities were 'helping' then they believed that God helped them with "their math" or "to get up in the morning." If they believed that God's nurturing activities were 'protecting' then they believed that God makes "you feel safe when you walk around that people aren't going to jump out and hurt you."

At age ten, children believed that God could accomplish anything. His 'can do' activities were *Biblical*, *lifestyle*, and *answering prayers*. Again, *Biblical* referred to God's activities as described by the Bible and *lifestyle* referred to God's changing activities as "making people have faith in Him." At this age, God's major activity was described as comforting and *answering prayer*. However, Ellen acknowledged the practicality of prayers and stated, "God cannot get you whatever you want. Like you can pray and ask for an ice-cream sundae as big as your house and He cannot do that and if you asked Him to change the way you look He cannot do that." Ten-year-old children suggested that God's everyday activities were mostly *nurturing*. God watched, comforted, listened to prayer, blessed people, and took care of them. Most of the children viewed God as an active nurturer in their life who helped them, heard their prayers, protected them, and cared for them.

At age twelve, fourteen, and sixteen, adolescents suggested that God's 'can do' activities were *Biblical* and *lifestyle*. *Biblical* activities were healing and

raising people from the dead. Patricia (age 16) described such activities in the following manner:

> *Like in the Bible, He's like doing miraculous things, like splitting the sea and everything. Like Moses and Noah and the ark and the huge rain and everything. And like He did all those miracles with the lame man by helping him walk.*

Lifestyle activities included changing people's lives, giving them a 'spiritual lift,' and healing the world. Cindy (age 12) elaborated, "He can't make a person follow Him -- well, He can but He chooses not to."

Most of the children in this age group indicated that God cannot *sin*. Yet, when they were prompted to explain their answers, there was some difficulty. A fourteen-year-old said, "Well, He can't sin. I don't think?" Julie stated:

> *I think He cannot sin. I think that He could but I think He does not want to. ... I've always thought that He can do everything. Because that is what I've been taught. Like I've gone to this school all my life. So, I've taken Bible every year. I don't know, I've always thought He can do everything.*

Furthermore, in this age grouping, adolescents viewed God's everyday activities as *nurturing, practical*, and *educational*. *Nurturing* activities included: checking in on you, watching and protecting you, listening and answering prayer, healing, blessing, caring, and forgiving. Fiona (age 14) summarized these activities in the following way:

> *Maybe He's like a psychiatrist. Because He hears all the people's problems. Cause everybody prays and stuff and they talk to Him and He hears everybody. Maybe He like analyzes everything and like does what He thinks is right for them.*

Also, Leslie (age 14) said, "I guess just knowing that He is always with me makes me feel a whole lot better. I know that He's always there and if I need Him I can just talk to Him whenever I want." *Practical* activities were those that

God must do in order to accomplish His job. These tasks included: planning ahead, making decisions, getting involved at the perfect time, and talking to certain people. Carlos (age 16) described God's everyday tasks in the following way:

> *Well, I'm sure He looks over and checks up on everyone. Signs the papers that forgive them whenever they ask for forgiveness. And maybe He makes new worlds somewhere else just for the heck of it. Just to see if He can get the formula right there.*

Educational activities were those which enabled the adolescent to make decisions about certain issues such as: cheating, knowing God better, learning about God everyday, and problem solving. One enthusiastic fourteen-year-old said, "God helps me make great choices on things to do."

Overall, children suggested that God could accomplish many activities. Most children suggested that there was nothing that God could not do. The notion of God as 'being unable to sin' began to emerge in the adolescent years; yet, there was some uncertainty as to how this was possible. As the children matured, God's everyday activities were reflected in their daily lives. In adolescence, children viewed God as an active deity who was involved in their personal lives as well as in the lives of others.

Category Four: Communication With God

This category addressed the following questions: *Does God know who you are? Can God see you or hear you? Is it possible to have a conversation with God? How is it possible to let God know about something?*

All of the children across ages six to sixteen believed that God knows *who they are* and that God can both *see* and *hear* them. What differed were the explanations that the children gave for God's ability to do so. Aaron (age six) suggested how 'God can see everybody' and stated:

> *Well, probably if He wanted to see through the other side of the world, He would probably just see through the top side of the world. He could see through that and He could see what's going down on the other side ... an invisible globe ... His eyes would go sh-sh-sh-sh and see what's going on the other side. ... And say there are the clouds, He peeks down through the clouds. That's how I think. ...*

At ages eight and ten, children indicated that "He's everywhere" or "He's right beside us" or "He is in your heart" or "He's powerful." At age twelve, some children suggested that God "created them" and "He is inside you." One teen said that's why He can know you "just in some cool way." At ages fourteen and sixteen, there was an emerging sense that God was "omnipresent." A fourteen-year-old described God's omnipresence in the following manner: "He's got the whole world. He can see everyone. He can see everything that's happening. He knows what's happening because He's the ruler." Similarly, Mike (age 16) said, "He knows who we are and He knows exactly what we're going to do anyway. So maybe He doesn't even have to watch us. He knows what we're going to do already. He even knows who we are before we are born."

All of the children, aged six to sixteen, believed that it was possible to have a conversation with God through prayer. Prayer was a central activity in the lives of the children at JCS. Many of them had their own personal format for prayer. Carolina (age 16) said, "You can just talk to Him ... or you can just sit and pray and meditate and stuff. Different people have different techniques or ways of doing it." Jimmy (age 6) simply said, "I talk to God in my head with nobody hearing, not with my mouth, just in my head." Nicky (age 8) said, "I keep doing what I normally do and I just say [a prayer] in my brain. Dear Jesus ... say Amen and stop." Stacey (age 8) said, "I fold my hands, like this, and I kneel and I close my eyes and talk to God just like He was actually there and I could see Him. And I can sometimes hear Him talking to me." Amy (age 10) suggested that it was possible to have a conversation with God by "going to a very holy place or going to a church when you're by yourself or something and just praying beside the altar."

Children not only suggested a special place for praying but also suggested what they should pray for. Will (age 6) said that prayer was "telling God something that you were worried about ... like asking God to heal your cold." Travis (age 10) said, "First close your eyes and you pray for a good day. You pray for people that are injured and stuff and you talk to Him about your troubles and everything else." Most of all, the children indicated that a prayer could be a simple thank you. Todd (age 6) recited the following prayer of thankfulness:

Thank you for the world so sweet,
Thank you for the food we eat,
Thank you for the birds that sing,
Thank you God for everything. Amen.

Hence, most of the children suggested that God knows who you are and that God can both see and hear you. Also, they proposed that prayer was a purposeful way to have a conversation with God. As a result, prayer became the vehicle by which one could have a personal relationship with God.

Category Five: Questions For God

This category addressed the following questions: *Are there questions that you would like to ask God if you could? Are there some things that you are wondering about God?*

At age six, most of the children were unable to generate questions for God. A few children asked *nature questions* such as, "Why is it blue up in the sky" or "Is there such a thing called dinosaurs?" Some children asked *one-to-one questions* such as "Do you love me?" or "Could you make my brother feel better?" or "Could you help me and care for me and watch over me when I fall down?" or "Could you help me to learn some stuff?" (These questions represented personal requests.)

In addition, children at this age were unable to distinguish between *questions for God* versus things that they were *wondering about God.* Nevertheless, Nathan said, "I wonder about heaven. Are we ever going to die in

heaven again? .... And I wonder if there is another heaven that we are going to?" Damien said, "I wonder what day Jesus will take us up to heaven?"

At age eight, children inquired about God in the form of *nature, one-to-one,* and *God's grandeur* questions. The *nature* questions included science inquiries like, "How many hairs do I have on my head?" or "When did the dinosaurs live?" The *one-to-one* questions included personal requests such as, "When am I going to grandma's house?" or "When am I getting my rollerblades?" The *God's grandeur* questions illustrated God's magnificence such that: "Can you really do all that stuff?" or "How did you stop the storm?" or "How did you create the earth?" or "What did it look like when there was no sin?" Regarding God's greatness, Georgina said, "How can God do everything at once? He has everybody, well, almost everybody, and He can listen to everybody but like at one time. ... Does He have a hundred ears or something?" At this age, some of the children wondered about God's description (perhaps this was prompted by the first set of questions in this task which asked for a description of God). For instance, Heidi inquired about God's description in the following way:

> *I really do want to see Him because I'm not really sure and I'm really confused about it because some people say He has black hair and some people say that He has brown hair and some people say that He has brown skin or black skin or something like that.*

At age ten, most of the children asked *nature, one-to-one,* and *God's grandeur* questions. (This was similar to the eight-year-olds.) Many children wondered whether or not animals go to heaven. Wanda stated, "I have a pet Buddy. He's a rabbit and when he dies I want him to go to heaven." At this age, there were emerging questions about the *nature of God*; that is, questions about

God that were theological inquiries. Amanda presented her questions to God in the following way:

> *Maybe when I get to heaven I'll ask Him questions. ... Like, what kind of year you came on earth cause I don't know when He came to earth, how did He come to earth? And um, how He always protects us from enemies and all this stuff. Why can't we just see Him now? And I want to ask Him why did He leave? And um, when will you come down to earth?*

Also, Amanda wondered, "How does He come into our hearts and cleanse our sins?"

At age twelve, most of the children asked *one-to-one* questions. For instance, "Why did God take my aunt to heaven?" "What will happen when I am older?" and "How come sometimes when you pray you get no answer?" Some of the twelve-year-olds continued to question the *nature of God* such that they wondered, "Why did God allow Adam and Eve to eat the apple?" "Why can't God stop the bad people?" "Why can't God do something to make people change?" and "Is God really there all the time?" Many of the twelve-year-olds wondered about God's personality (e.g., "Does God cry?") or about God's thoughts (e.g., "How does He think of His angels?")

At age fourteen, the adolescents continued to ask questions about the *nature of God*. They asked a mixture of questions which included: "How did God make everything?" "Why God doesn't destroy Satan?" "Why do certain things happen?" "Why did God put the tree in the Garden of Eden?" and "How does God see everything?" Yvonne stated:

> *I would ask how God sees everything. Like I would want the knowledge of how He sees everything. I would ask Him what happened with evolution and stuff like that. And how He created Adam and stuff like that. Because I just think He*

> *picked it up and said 'POOF' and that's how I think it happened. But this evolution and stuff, I think it's crazy.*

At age fourteen, adolescents still wondered about what God looks like. Franny said, "I want to see what He really looks like. I mean, it's always a curiosity to see what God looks like. If He's that wonderful when you don't see Him, what's He like when you do see Him? And I'm a very visual person." Danielle said, "Well, there are lots of things I wonder because I'm not really sure of the answers. But, I don't have to find out. One day I hope I can find out when I meet Him."

At age sixteen, the adolescents continued to question the *nature of God.* Yet, these questions concerned the specificity of their relationship with God. Some of the adolescents asked, "Why are temptations so hard?" "Why did God give us choices?" "Why are we so special to God?" and "How can I be a better Christian?" This depth of inquiry was mirrored in the adolescents' responses to things that they were wondering about God. For instance, some of the adolescents struggled with whether or not there is a heaven and an earth or how God can be a jealous and a loving God or if evolution is true.

Hence, the children had varied questions for God. The younger children expressed questions about God's description, God's magnificence (i.e., grandeur), and God's ability to both create and control nature. In adolescence, the teens asked personal one-to-one questions and questions regarding the nature and character of God. In general, as children matured, there were more things that they were wondering about God.

Category Six: Changes For God

This category addressed the following questions: *Are there things you would like to change about God? If you could give God a suggestion, what would it be?*

At age six, all of the children except one said that there were not any changes about God that they would make. (At this age, they could not provide a rationale for their answer.) Only one child said that God should "mark the bombs coming into the country" and not allow "the sun to burn up." Also, most of the children were unable to provide a suggestion for God. Only one boy had a *personal* suggestion and asked that God stop his brother from hitting him.

At age eight, most of the children could not suggest any changes for God. One child said that there should be no changes "because if He did [change], then He wouldn't be good for everybody. Because God is God." (This way of thinking was consistent with children across ages 10, 12, 14, and 16 who were reluctant to suggest changes for God because God is perfect, fair, good, and right.) Nevertheless, children at this age had some *cleansing* suggestions for God. Many children suggested that God 'clean up' the world. For instance, one child said, "God should take sin out of the world." In this case, *sin* was described as "stuff that people do wrong and that does not honor God." Other *cleansing* suggestions included: "Letting peace on earth" or "Giving more people chances to become Christians" or "Turning bad people into good." Adrian had a

personal request. He suggested that God change his older brother so that he would stop lying.

At age ten, suggestions for God were few. However, the children's suggestions included both *cleansing* and *personal* suggestions. *Cleansing* suggestions included: stopping evil, bringing world peace, and getting rid of dishonest people. A child's desire for cleansing could be represented in a personal request, for instance, Owen stated:

> *God should give us power like He does, and then if somebody was blind or something, then we could heal him instead of God always having to come down and work on him. ... Cause then He wouldn't always have to attend to all these prayers.*

At age twelve, children made suggestions regarding their own and others' *lifestyle*. Many children wondered, "Why is it necessary to make a commitment to God and not do the things one wants to do?" At this age, there were other suggestions pertaining to *God's authority*. For instance, some adolescents said, "Why doesn't God take it easier on people?" "Why does God allow Satan to break up families?" and "Why doesn't God give people more chances?" Most adolescents were reluctant to provide a suggestion for God because of His authority. Eileen said, "He doesn't need advice from us. He doesn't need us. We need Him! So, I wouldn't tell Him anything. No advice from me. He's far more better than me and far wiser." As a result, a few adolescents provided encouragement for God. One teen said, "I don't think that I have any advice to give Him except to kind of encourage Him to keep up the good job."

At age fourteen, many of the adolescents continued to provide encouragement for God. They said, "God knows what is right and wrong" and

"God should keep on doing what He's doing." At this age, there were suggestions for God regarding their own or others' *lifestyle*. Janet wanted God to "make us more understanding so we can understand why things might happen to us. Like if someone dies and they're really young, we don't really understand why, we can figure things out, sort of." Regarding *God's authority*, Ramona said that she would tell God "to listen to people when they need help and to just love everyone that He can, everyone who accepts Him, and just try to understand everyone."

At age sixteen, few adolescents provided suggestions for God. Much like the twelve and fourteen-year-olds, there was a desire not to interfere with God's authority. Many adolescents asserted that, "God knows what is best" and "God is all wise." Lisa said, "I don't know if I could tell God anything actually. I mean ... it comes back to the explanation. If you listen to what He wants, what He's aiming for, maybe it will all become understandable."

Overall, children were reluctant to make suggestions to change God because of His authority and power. Yet, the older children were able to provide suggestions regarding their own or other's religious lifestyle. Most children and adolescents agreed that God was 'doing a good job' and that He was worthy of encouragement. Particularly, at age sixteen, there were no suggestions for God because of His authority.

Category Seven: Learning About God

This category addressed the following questions: *Where did you learn about God from? From anyone in particular? From any ways that do not involve other people?*

Children at age six suggested that they learned about God from their parents, grandparents, siblings, and teachers. Some specifically said that they learned information about God from Sunday school, church, school, and the Bible. Bonnie summed up her response to the question 'learning about God' in the following way:

> *I learned about God from the Bible. And we went to church and then some Christian peoples and some pastor or counselor, like my dad is a counselor and he tells me about God. ... Yep, I learned about God when I was [pause] my dad told me that a missionary that my dad know and ... the missionaries told me about God.*

Just like the six-year-olds, the children at age eight described many ways in which they had learned about God. They mentioned specific people (e.g., parents, grandparents, pastors, and teachers) that they had learned from and places (e.g., Sunday school, church, and school) where this learning had taken place.

Generally, the ways in which children had learned about God were consistent across ages six to sixteen. As the children had different experiences, their sources of learning about God changed. For instance, Erica (age 12) described how she had learned about God through Bible camp and Robert (age 16) described how he had learned about God through a mission trip to Mexico.

Generally, most of the children mentioned the Bible as a source of information about God. A sixteen-year-old said, "You learn about God just through reading the Bible, also some devotions, but most of all it is through people."

Overall, it appeared that information about God came from the Bible generated through (a) parents reading to their child, (b) a pastor's sermon, (c) a teacher's religious instruction, and/or (d) a child's own individual Bible study. Particularly, Pauline (age 14) described her Biblical instruction and stated:

> *Well, our teacher will talk to us about the Bible. Sometimes we watch a movie, a cartoon movie about it. And sometimes we do work from a little booklet. But usually we read from the Bible and our teacher just explains stuff that we want to know. That we don't understand that our teacher might know, stuff like that.*

Although many children had expressed that they learned about God from the Bible, some of them commented on how difficult it was to continue on an individual Bible study program. Ingrid (age 16) described the difficulty:

> *It's kind of hard sticking to it, you know. Because there's not always time to sit down and read and pray. So that it becomes easier and easier to say, 'Oh, I'll do it tomorrow and make up the time.' But you never have time. And it ends up being weeks or even months before you read again.*

In addition to the Bible, some children said that they had learned about God from God. Greg (age 12) stated:

> *God helps people like He did when Moses had to make the Ten Commandments and Peter and John had to write the Bible and there are others. I guess it was from God that they wrote, but God still used them. ... He still talks to people and people to other people.*

Dennis (age 10) said that he had learned about God by looking "at the beautiful creatures that He created."

Hence, for children, the Bible continued to be a prominent source of learning about God. Also, learning about God was coupled with the children's relational experiences with their parents, with others, and ultimately with God. These experiences in the home, church, school, and community provided opportunities for children to learn about God. Overall, as children matured they took more responsibility for their own learning such as Bible reading and study.

Category Eight: Thinking About God Versus Friends and Parents

This category addressed the following questions: *How do you think the way you think about God might be the same as or different than your friends' ideas? How do you think the way you think about God might be the same as or different than your parents' ideas?* Overall, the children's responses to these questions were as varied as the children themselves.

At age six, children were unable to distinguish the differences in their thinking about God versus their friends' and parents' thinking about God. At this age, children's thoughts were focused mostly on themselves and as a result, they were unable to define the subtleties in their thinking versus someone else's thinking. Also, most of the children could not provide justifications for their chosen answer. However, two boys were an exception to this majority. Kevin said, "You can think about Him in your heart. ... They [friends] think about Him in their brain." Daniel said, that he thinks about God in a different way than his friends "because I like God more than my friends."

At age eight, the majority of the children were unsure whether or not their thinking about God was the same as or different from their friends and parents. Those children who believed that their thoughts of God were different than their friends' said so because "They think differently," "My God ideas are better," "We love God in different ways," or "We draw different God pictures." Likewise, those children who believed that their thoughts were different than their parents' said so because "my parents know more" or "my parents are older." One exception to this was Ellie who said, "I think that it is the same because we both love God and we know that He is real."

After age ten, children were less definite in their answers. They believed that they think about God both the same as and different than their friends and parents. Leza said, "We think some the same and some different. Same is we all trust in Him and believe in Him. And different is they might think some other stuff than me." Those children who believed their thoughts are the same as their friends and parents mention that, "We both know the Lord," "We go to the same church," "We know the same stuff," "We read the Bible together," and "We think that He looks the same." Those children who believed their thoughts were different than their (a) friends mentioned that, "Not everyone is the same," "Everyone thinks differently," and "Some of my friends are not Christians" and (b) parents mentioned that, "They are older and know more," "My mother doesn't take it seriously," and "They are not Christians."

At age twelve, most children suggested that they think about God in a different way from their friends. They indicated that even though they had the

'same faith,' they thought differently than their friends because they had different commitments, opinions, experiences or trials, ideas, and churches. To illustrate, Ian stated:

> *I think that we have different views of what God's like. Some people are really really into Christianity, like are really like 'Oh you sinned you will go to hell.' And like they're just being really obnoxious not really getting it. And some people are just kind of loose with it. They just take it as it comes sort of.*
> *Which variety are you? (Researcher)*
> *Well, what I do is I just sort of take it as it comes and I just when we are learning about the Bible or at church or something, I go along with it. I actually enjoy it.*

In addition, some twelve-year-olds suggested that they think about God in the same way as their parents because their parents raised them and gave them information about God. Other twelve-year-olds suggested that they think about God in a different way from their parents because their parents had a stronger commitment, were more knowledgeable, and had more time to read the Bible.

At age fourteen, some adolescents indicated that their thoughts of God were different than their friends. The majority of adolescents viewed their thinking about God as the same as their parents. Gloria described her thinking about God in the same way as her parents in the following manner:

> *I think that I think basically like my parents because I learned a lot from them, I'm more at their level than at my friends' level because God's done so many things through my life, all of a sudden in the last two years, I'm just exploding with God and that's kind of the way my parents have always been. So, I can relate more to them than my friends. So, I like talking to adults and I love going to my parents' Bible study. The only problem is that my parents don't like me there because they think that children should not be in Bible study. So, I want to start my own Bible study with the youth but nobody else wants it. And I can't wait 'til Sunday cause I love learning about God. I just drink it all up and if I miss a Sunday then I beg to go to the Bible study. ... It's like how it was explained how you hunger and thirst for Him. And if you don't (pant pant) you know, you're completely out of it.*

At age sixteen, all of the adolescents believed that they think about God in a different way from both their friends and parents. Darren described how he thinks about God in a different way from his parents and stated:

> *Whoa! I know I think a lot different than my parents. ... Well, they're always telling me to have devotions, but I don't think God needs that everyday. And another thing is prayer before meals, every single meal. I don't think so! Maybe a prayer for the day or something like that. ... It's like you come, you sit down and the prayer's always the same. It's kind of stupid I think. What's the point of that?*

At this age, adolescents are struggling for their identity (Erikson, 1959) and in particular, to find a personalized meaning for God. The adolescents indicated that there was some reluctance to the rules and regulations imposed by their religious traditions.

Overall, children suggested that they think about God in a different way from their friends. They tended to view their relationship with God as distinct and somewhat unique from their friends' views. On the one hand, children fluctuated in their responses to whether or not their thinking about God is the same as or different from their parents. At an early age, the differences in thinking about God between parents and their children were attributed to the parents' age and knowledge. Later, the differences in thinking about God between parents and their children were based on individual differences such as levels of religious commitment. On the other hand, children suggested that their parents think about God in the same way because of the experiences that unite parent and child to the same faith. In all, as children matured, they were able to recognize how their faith can be both the same and different from both their friends' and parents'.

Cognitive and Conceptual Shifts in Children's Representations of God as they Mature

The children's responses to questions about God suggested that as children matured there were differences in their representations of God. The differences in children's representations of God were not conceptually different as they matured but were presented with more depth and subtle understanding.

Table 5.5 illustrates the change in children's thinking about God across categories (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8). The varying degrees of grey indicate the presumed shifts or levels in children's thinking about God. For instance, there were three levels in children's thinking about one of the questions in Category One: "Where does God come from?" At the first level, children suggested that God came from heaven. At the second level, children suggested that God not only came from heaven but also always existed. At the third level, adolescents suggested that God always existed and therefore did not come from anywhere in particular. (It should be noted that these cognitive shifts were based on the researcher's interpretation and were not statistically measured.)

Table 5.5: Changes in Children's Responses to Task Three

	AGE 06	**AGE 08**	**AGE 10**	**AGE 12**	**AGE 14**	**AGE 16**
	n=28	n=23	n=23	n=17	n=13	n=10
CATEGORY ONE Description of God Where does God come from? Is God like a person?	God came from heaven.	God came from heaven.	God came from heaven and always existed.	God came from heaven and always existed.	God came from heaven and always existed.	God always existed.
	Like a person or like 'other' (e.g., cloud).	Like a person.	Like a person and/or spirit.	Like a person and/or spirit.	Like a person and/or spirit.	Like a 'perfect' person with personality.

CATEGORY TWO Home of God Where does God live? What is it like? Does God have a family?	God lives in heaven.	God lives in heaven.	God lives in heaven.	God lives in heaven, heart, and every-where.	God lives in heaven, heart, and every-where.	God lives in heaven and every-where.
	Heaven described in a Biblical way.	Heaven described in a Biblical way.	Heaven described in a Biblical way.	Heaven described in a Biblical way.	Heaven described in a Biblical way.	Heaven described in a Biblical way as well as their own ideas of paradise.
	God has a Biblical and Heavenly family.	God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God has a Heavenly and Spiritual family.	God has a Spiritual family.

CATEGORY THREE Activities of God What are some things that God can do? What are some things that God cannot do? What are God's everyday activities? How is God involved in your life every day?	God can do everything.	God can do everything.	God can do everything.	God can do everything.	God can do everything.	God can do everything.
	Biblical activities.	Biblical and lifestyle activities.	Biblical, lifestyle, and <u>answering prayer</u> activities.	Biblical and lifestyle activities.	Biblical and lifestyle activities.	Biblical and lifestyle activities.
	Unable to suggest what God cannot do.	God cannot not do anything.'	God cannot not 'do anything.'	God cannot not 'do anything.'	God cannot 'sin.'	God cannot 'sin.'
	Every day activities are Biblical, nurturing, and practical.	Every day activities are mostly nurturing.	Everyday activities are nurturing.	Everyday activities are nurturing and practical.	Everyday activities are nurturing and practical.	Everyday activities are nurturing and practical.
	Unable to say how God is involved in their own lives.	God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing way.	God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing way.	God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing, practical, and educational way. God is an active deity.	God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing, practical, and educational way. God is an active deity.	God is involved in their own lives in a nurturing, practical, and educational way. God is an active deity.

CATEGORY FOUR Communi-cation with God Does God know who you are? Can God see and hear you? How is it possible to let God know about something?	God knows you, sees you and hears you.	God knows you, sees you and hears you.	God knows you, sees you and hears you.	God knows you, sees you and hears you	God knows you, sees you and hears you.	God knows you, sees you and hears you.
	He is invisible.	He is powerful.	He created us.	He created us.	He is omni-present.	He is omni-present.
	Can talk to God through prayer.	Can talk to God through prayer.	Can talk to God through prayer.	Can talk to God through prayer.	Can talk to God through prayer.	Can talk to God through prayer.

CATEGORY FIVE Questions about God Are there questions you would like to ask God?	Nature?	Nature?	Nature?			
		Grandeur?	Grandeur?			
		One-to-one?	One-to-one?	One-to-one?		
			Nature of God?	Nature of God?	Nature of God?	Nature of God?

CATEGORY SIX Changes about God Any changes? Any suggestions?	No changes.	No changes.	No changes.	No changes.	No changes.	No changes.
		Cleansing suggestion.	Cleansing suggestion.	Lifestyle and God's authority suggestion.	Lifestyle and God's authority suggestion.	No suggestion. God is authority.
				God is perfect, fair, good, and right.	God is perfect, fair, good, and right.	God is perfect, fair, good, and right.

CATEGORY EIGHT Thinking about God versus friends and parents Same or Different?	(Unable to answer the question.)	Were not sure if their thinking was the same or different.	Some same and some different. Recog-nized, in general, that people are unique in their thinking about God.	Different than their friends AND same as parents.	Different than their friends AND same as parents.	Different than their friends and parents. They are unique in how they think about God.

In addition, Table 5.5 indicated that there were different concepts that had different levels of understanding. For instance, 'God as a spirit' was more difficult to grasp than 'God as a person.' This was consistent with Vianello, Tamminen, and Ratcliff's (1992) research which proposed a threefold sequence of anthropomorphism where God was regarded as a human, a human but different, and God as a spirit. This anthropomorphic sequence suggested that God was "a category superordinate to a 'person' " (Barrett, 1997, p. 149). As a result, the age at which children moved to the next level of understanding about God was different with different religious concepts.

Largely, the children's ability to grasp different religious concepts was due to their cognitive ability. Table 5.5 indicated, in a general way, that there was a presumed shift in children's thinking about God from concrete to abstract reasoning. (Again, this cognitive shift was not statistically measured.) For instance, the changes in children's thinking about God, from concrete to abstract reasoning, is demonstrated in Table 5.6 across a few categories (1, 4, and 5).

Table 5.6: Shifts From Concrete to Abstract Religious Reasoning Across Categories for Task Three

	CONCRETE RELIGIOUS REASONING	**ABSTRACT RELIGIOUS REASONING**
Category One: Description of God	God is like a person. Anthropomorphic view of God. Physical traits.	God is like a spirit. Duality of person/spirit with divine characteristics.
Category Four: Communication with God	God communicates through the clouds. God is invisible.	God communicates with us because He is everywhere. God is omnipresent.
Category Five: Questions for God	"How can God listen to everybody at once does He have a hundred ears?"	"He's so wonderful when you cannot see Him, I wonder what He is like when you do see Him?"

This study was consistent with research that acknowledged that children's religious thinking, in general, shifts from concrete to abstract (e.g., Elkind, 1961, 1962, 1963; Fleck, Ballard, & Reilly, 1975; Fowler, 1981; Goldman, 1964, 1965; Harms, 1944; McGrady, 1996; Nye & Carlson, 1984; Shelly, 1982; Tamminen, 1991). Most of this research took into account that children develop from stage to stage, assimilating new religious ideas.

This study confirmed that children's representations of God followed a stage sequence with a transition between childhood and adolescence. For instance, this study reflected Fowler's (1981) second and third stages of Faith Development which paralleled Piaget's concrete and abstract stages of cognitive development. In the Mythic-Literal stage (second stage), the children's concepts of God were concrete and literal whereas in the Synthetic-Conventional stage (stage three), the adolescents' concepts of God were as they related to themselves.

In particular, the adolescents' responses to whether or not they thought the same or different about God from their parents revealed varying ideas about God that were unique from their parents' ideas of God. At this age, there was a weakening of the parental bond as the adolescents looked for a personalized religion distinct from their own parents' ideas.

This study demonstrated that children do not suddenly move to the next level (or stage) but move one step at a time in their conceptual understanding about God. This movement was largely due to the subtle changes in children's cognitive ability wherein as they matured they added additional thoughts to

existing thoughts about God. This premise was consistent with (a) Heller's (1986) study which categorized children's thinking about God into three groups (i.e., minimal knowledge of God, increasing interest in God, and definitive or uncertain ideas about God) and (b) Wright and Koppe's (1964) study which had a sixfold sequence of children's descriptions of God (i.e., simple idea of God, interest in God, understanding God's attributes, personal relationship with God, expressions of faith in God, and a search for meaning with God). Hence, this study confirmed that children's representations of God changed as a child matured and acquired more knowledge about God.

Gender Differences in Children's Representations of God

Several researchers suggested that there were differences in the way boys and girls think about God (e.g., Heller, 1986; Hyde, 1990; Jaspard, 1972; Savin-Williams, 1977; Tamminen, Vianello, Jaspard, & Ratcliff, 1988) (Review Table 2.1). Much of this research indicated that gender socialization was responsible for the differences in the way boys and girls think about God (Nelsen, 1981).

In contrast to Heller's (1986) research which suggested that boys viewed *God as powerful* whereas girls viewed *God as compassionate*, this study did not find any gender differences with respect to God's power (male) versus God's compassion (female). Instead, children (male and female) viewed God's

characteristics as both powerful and compassionate. Consequently, children indicated that God was an extra-ordinary deity with human characteristics.

Also, this study did not support Heller's (1986) findings that suggested that girls viewed *God as passive* whereas boys viewed *God as active*. This study did not reveal any gender differences with respect to God being active (male) versus God being passive (female). Children (male and female) across age levels revealed God as an active deity involved in their everyday lives.

Lastly, Heller's (1986) conclusion that boys viewed God in a *rational* way whereas girls viewed God in an *aesthetic* way was not supported by this study. A review of the children's responses across categories and age levels did not provide evidence of gender differences in this area. On the contrary, children (male and female) viewed God in both a rational and an aesthetic way. Most children recognized God as a Creator who, along with His wisdom and divine power (a thinking God), carefully orchestrated the creation of the earth with all its splendor (a God that initiates beauty).

In addition, this study did not support Hyde's (1990) research which indicated that boys view *God as a Spirit* whereas girls view *God as a Father*. Instead, the transition in children's thinking from 'God as a person' to 'God as a Spirit' was considered a cognitive shift, from concrete to abstract religious reasoning, rather than one related to gender. In this study, the nature of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) was somewhat confused across all age levels and not necessarily related to gender.

The children's responses to questions about God were investigated to assess whether or not boys were less interested than girls in a relationship with God and whether or not girls were more interested than boys in the relational aspects of God as suggested by Heller (1986) and Tamminen et al. (1988). This study found that both males and females recognized *God as relational* and that the nature of the relationship was expressed by males and females in subtly different ways around the ages of ten and twelve. For instance, God was viewed as a comforter for both males and females yet each described that comfort differently. Males described that comfort as *protection/watching* whereas females described that comfort as *caring/listening*. This finding was congruent with Gilligan's (1993) research which indicated that males and females interpret and experience relationships differently; in this study, males and females interpreted and experienced their relationship with God differently.

This study did not support Jaspard's (1972, 1980) research which suggested that a girl's relationship with God strengthens as she matured whereas a boy's relationship with God lessens as he matured. On the whole, this study revealed that as children (male and female) matured, especially around adolescence, there was a desire to learn more about God, to know God in an intimate way, and to understand His characteristics in light of their own understandings of God.

Savin-Williams (1977) indicated that females were more likely to be involved in traditional religion whereas males were less likely to be involved and more likely to question the traditions of their religion. This study did not find

evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, as children matured they initiated questions about the traditions of their religion and the nature of God. In this study, both male and female adolescents incorporated their own knowledge and experiences about God in efforts to acquire a representation of God that made sense to them.

Overall, the categorical analysis of children's responses for Task Three revealed gender differences between boys' and girls' thinking about God with respect to describing God's comfort. As research suggested, this study expected to find further gender differences in children's understandings of God.

SUMMARY

This chapter presented the conceptual findings of children's representations of God. They were presented in **three** main sections.

First, the conceptual results of the children's narratives for Task One (Tell a Story about God) were divided into four categories. They were: (i) God in the Bible, (ii) God in everyday living, (iii) information about God, and (iv) God answers prayers. The findings indicated two general things about children's representations about God. One was the influence of religious knowledge and the other was the influence of personal relationships in shaping children's stories about God.

Second, the conceptual results of the children's narratives for Task Two (*Jesus Calms the Sea*) indicated that there were cognitive shifts in the children's responses to the questions outlined in the story. The shifts were from literal to non-literal understanding and from concrete to abstract religious thinking. The findings confirmed that the children's stories were influenced by their cognitive maturity and the number of times they had heard the story within their religious environment.

Third, the conceptual results of the children's narratives for Task Three (Questions About God) were presented categorically according to age. The seven categories were: (i) description of God, (ii) home of God, (ii) activities of God, (iii) communication with God, (iv) questions about God, (v) changes about God, (vi) learning about God, and (vii) thinking about God versus friends and parents. The results revealed that children's changing representations of God were based on maturity. There were gender differences in male and female representations of God.

The next chapter – *Narrative Development* -- presents the structural findings. The narrative structure of children's religious texts (Tasks One and Two) and the relationship narrative structure has to working memory (Task Four) is examined. The descriptive statistics and results of the statistical analysis are presented.

CHAPTER SIX

NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

> So as we close the interview was there anything that you want to add? [Researcher]
> *Yeah. What was the point of that number game?*
> Oh. The point of the number game was to check where your memory is at. [Researcher]
> *O.K. That was hard.*
>
> *Stephen (age 16)*

Chapter Six presents the results of the structural analyses. Case's (1992a) developmental model served to focus the results of this chapter. This chapter indicates the narrative structure of children's religious texts (Tasks One and Two) and the relationship such narrative structure has to working memory (Task Four). It is divided into the following **five** main sections: (1) Task One Analysis, (2) Task Two Analysis, (3) Task Four Analysis, (4) MANOVA, and (5) Summary.

TASK ONE ANALYSIS

The children's developmental level scores for Task One (*Tell me a story about God*) were analyzed for age effects. The alpha level used for the statistical tests was .05.

This section addresses the analysis in **five** ways. They are: (a) developmental levels and scores, (b) descriptive statistics, (c) ANOVA, (d) test for linearity, and (e) Scheffé test.

Developmental Levels and Scores

Again, the purpose for Task One -- *Tell a Story about God* -- was to examine the developmental changes in children's (ages 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) narratives about God. The following simple instructions allowed the children to tell any kind of story:

> *I am interested in learning more about what children think about God. Could you tell me a story about God?*

This section addresses the changes in a child's narratives about God by examining the hypothesized narrative structure (i.e., central narrative structure) of his or her story about God (Task One). Each child's interview for Task One was assigned a developmental level response (score 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) in accordance with the narrative structure descriptors in Table 6.1. These descriptors were adapted from McKeough's (1992a, 1993), McKeough & Martens' (1994), and Salter's (1993) research on narrative structure.

Table 6.1: Developmental Level, Score, and Narrative Structure for Task One

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL	SCORE	NARRATIVE STRUCTURE
PRE-DIMENSIONAL	SCORE 1	EVENT or OUTCOME (A)
DIMENSIONAL STAGE CHARACTERIZED BY INTENTIONAL NARRATIVES Contains connections between event(s) and outcome of the story with a set of intentional states associated with the action of the story		
UNI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 2	EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) ONE INTENTION
BI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 3	EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) TWO INTENTIONS
ELABORATED BI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 4	MINOR/MAJOR EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and MINOR/MAJOR OUTCOME (B) THREE INTENTIONS
VECTORIAL STAGE CHARACTERIZED BY INTERPRETIVE NARRATIVES Contains a connection between events and outcome of the story with interpretation(s) that may include both self-reflection and a message to the story and an interpretation of others' intentions in the story		
UNI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 5	EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B)
BI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 6	EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B)
ELABORATED BI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 7	MINOR/MAJOR EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENTS (A) and INTERPRETIVE MINOR/MAJOR OUTCOME (B)
POST-VECTORIAL STAGE	SCORE 8	

To be more explicit, the next **two** subsections provide examples of children's narrative structure of religious texts as they relate to Case's (i) Dimensional stage and (ii) Vectorial Stage. (The children's names are fictitious.)

Dimensional stage. Overall, the *Dimensional* stage was characterized by three substages. They were: (a) the uni-dimensional substage [age 5 to 7 years], (b) the bi-dimensional substage [age 7 to 9 years], and (c) the elaborated bi-dimensional substage [age 9 to 11 years].

Intentional narratives were the focus at this stage, wherein there were connections between events and outcome of the story with sets of intentional states associated with the action of the story (i.e., protagonist's role in the story). *Intentional state(s)* were (a) feeling states [i.e., an emotion such as happy or sad], (b) personal judgments [i.e., having a personal opinion on a particular matter], (c) others' judgments [i.e., someone else's opinion on a particular matter], and (d) social judgments [i.e., an opinion that is common to a group of people or society] (Griffin, 1992).

The *pre-dimensional level* (score 1) was characterized as the transition from the *Interrelational Stage* (stage two) to the *Dimensional Stage* (stage three). At this level, a child's intentional narrative structure contained a script with either an event or an outcome (McKeough, 1992b). For instance, Jason (age 6) said, "God loves you" and Sally (age 6) said, "He made Adam and Eve, He made animals, He made trees, He made people." Both Jason's and Sally's scripts focused on an event without an outcome and are very simple. Intentional states were not evident at this pre-dimensional stage.

The *uni-dimensional level* (score 2) was the first substage of the Dimensional stage. At this level, a child's intentional narrative structure

contained a simple plot with a connection between an event and outcome (McKeough, 1992a). For instance, Elaine (age 6) said:

> *Uh, when the Holy Spirit touched the disciples' head they began to speak in many languages and the people that were hearing them thought that they must have drink that kind of wine that make them speak all the kinds of languages. And from that day onward, 3,000 people obeyed God.*

In this example, Elaine coordinated an event (*when the Holy Spirit touched the disciples' head they began to speak in many languages*) with an outcome (*from that day onward, 3,000 people obeyed God*). At this level, the child began to generate thoughts and feelings about events; this was the beginning of intentional reasoning; for example, "I do 'x' and 'y' because I know, think, or feel, 'a' and 'b' " (McKeough, 1993, p. 5). At this level, one intentional state was evident. In this example, Elaine's narrative described one social judgment (*people obeyed God*).

The *bi-dimensional level* (score 3) was the second substage of the Dimensional stage. At this level, children were able to elaborate on the simple plots demonstrated at the uni-dimensional level by including an event that intervenes between the initiating event and the outcome (McKeough, 1992a). For instance, Michael (age 6) coordinated an event (*Once upon a time, there was a earth, and people were really bad in that place and God decided to send down a flood*) with an outcome (*dry land ... they went back to the home*) that is somewhat complicated by an intervening event (*heard a big bang ... and Noah sent out a raven*):

> *This story is about Noah's ark. Once upon a time, there was a earth, and people were really bad in that place and God decided to send down a flood. So He told Noah.*

> *So Noah said, 'let's build an ark.' So seven weeks later they got a ship going. Ten weeks later, and they got, and it was finished.*
> *And the rain came down and they were in the boat. And all the animals were tossing this way and that and the elephants were in the basement splashing in the water.*
> *And then, they heard a big bang and they were on a big island on a rock. So they got out and Noah sent out a raven and the raven went there and he came back with a leaf. I mean, he came back. Cancel that one! He came back with nothin'.*
> *So several weeks later he came back with nothin'. But ten weeks later he got a leaf, so they knew dry land was here. So what they did was they went back to the homes and that's the T-H-E [i.e., The End].*

At this intentional narrative level, a child's story contained two intentional states. Michael described a social judgment (*people were really bad*) and an other's judgment (*God decided to send a flood*) in connection with the event and outcome.

The *elaborated bi-dimensional level* (score 4) was the third substage of the Dimensional stage. At this level, the major and minor plots were resolved in one outcome (McKeough, 1992a). Esther (age 10) described the following episode:

> *When I was, like, five years old, my family had a lot of troubles. And then, when everyone kept on praying -- my dad didn't believe in God. And he got really mad at my mom's brother, so me and my mom kept praying day and night. So finally, he started to go with us to church. So he, now my dad feels more comfortable about God. He doesn't just go, like jumping around feeling too proud about himself.*

The components of Esther's narrative structure were as follows: (a) the major plot was *my family had a lot of troubles*, (b) the minor plot was that *my dad didn't believe in God*, (c) the complicating intervening event was that *he got really mad at my mom's brother*, and (d) the outcome (of the minor plot) was that *now my dad feels more comfortable about God*. In addition, a child's intentional

narrative at this level could contain three intentional states. Esther's intentional narrative revealed three personal judgments with regards to her father: (i) *didn't believe in God*, (ii) *really mad at my mom's brother*, and (iii) *feels more comfortable about God.*

Vectorial stage. The *Vectorial* stage was characterized by three substages. They were: (a) the uni-vectorial substage [age 11 to 13 years], (b) the bi-vectorial substage [age 13 to 15 years], and (c) the elaborated bi-vectorial substage [age 15 to 19 years]. At the *vectorial stage*, the complexity of the narrative events and outcomes were evidenced by *interpretive* stories (McKeough, 1993, Salter, 1993).

Interpretive narratives were the focus at this stage, wherein the adolescents' interpretation of the events and the outcomes had more psychological understanding. Their interpretations of the story may have included both self-reflection and a message to the story and possibly an interpretation of others' intentions of the story. The interpretive stage (vectorial) was higher-order to the intentional stage (dimensional) wherein the knowledge of others' intentions was considered higher-order to the expression of one's intentions. Reflection was key to the interpretation of the story. Also, literary devices such as foreshadowing or surprise endings were used to enhance the story.

The *uni-vectorial level* (score 5) was the first substage of the Vectorial stage. Jonathon's (age 12) narrative structure contained an interpretive script

with a connection between an event (*Before I got diabetes, I had an acting career*) and a reflective outcome (*But I kind of realized that the acting industry ... is kind of dirty*).

> *Before I got diabetes, I had an acting career, and ... Well I had my own agent, I had a ten-year acting contract. I tried out for a movie, I tried out for 'Free Willie II', I tried out for a whole bunch of commercials--I never made any of them. But it was fun for me. But I kind of realized that the acting industry, some of it is kind of dirty, right. And it might mess my walk up with God and I might get into drugs and stuff. Maybe if I'm older I might go back so I'm more prepared but I'm not sure I want to really do that, because it would just like maybe mess me up.*

The *bi-vectorial level* (score 6) was the second substage of the Vectorial stage (Case, 1992a). Naomi's (age 14) narrative structure contained an interpretive script with a connection between an event (*a special camp fire*) and a reflective outcome (*I was like so emotional*) complicated by an intervening event (*as I watched people doing it, I got this really weird feeling*).

> *Oh, a couple years ago. We have this, like on the last day, we have a camp fire--a special camp fire, where you get to throw a stick in the fire to throw away your sins. And as I watched people doing it, I got this really weird feeling. And all of a sudden I was up holding a stick and throwing it into the fire. And after, I was, like so emotional.*

The *elaborated bi-vectorial level* (score 7) was the third substage of the Vectorial stage. Robert's (age 16) narrative structure contained an interpretive script with a major and minor event(s), intervening event(s), and outcome(s).

> *OK, ah, OH, I got a good one! This summer, our youth group, and a bunch of kids about 12 kids and a couple of youth leaders, we went with _____, one of the teachers here? She came with us and we drove to Mexico in two days. But one of the days, the first day, the van broke down in Oregon. So, it looked like we were stuck and we might even head back to Vancouver and cancel the trip, the missions trip that we were going to do to Mexico. So it was pretty discouraging. And ... so we were calling, all the repair shops were all closed cause it was 6:30 or so. And a van pulls up. It's on the side of a highway in the middle of nowhere. And they ask what's wrong and we tell them. So they invite us to their house and they're Christians and so they invite up to their house. And the dad has a friend that's a repair man. So they couldn't fix the van so*

> *they just took it to a shop and they were going to fix it there. And they gave us their Suburban van to take to Mexico. And we'd only known them a couple of hours. So they give us the Suburban to drive to Mexico. ... Yeah and the other one didn't. We had two vans, one had air conditioning and the other one didn't, the one that broke down didn't. ... So they gave it to us and the other van got repaired in Oregon while we were in Mexico for a week. Pretty amazing!*
> *... I never really witnessed a miracle like that. It was just, from then on everyone was thinking this trip, we're going to accomplish something, we're going to learn something, cause we're supposed to go, cause we know that now.*

The components of Robert's interpretive narrative were as follows: (i) the major plot was that *we drove to Mexico in two days ... the van broke down in Oregon*, (ii) the minor plot was that *a van pulls up ... so they invite us to their house*, (iii) the complicating intervening event was that *all the repair shops were all closed,* (iv) the outcome of the minor plot was that *all the repair shops were closed*, and (v) the outcome of the major plot was that *they gave us their Suburban van to take to Mexico*. Robert reflected on his Mexico experience and added, "I never really witnessed a miracle like that. I was just, from then on everyone was thinking that this trip, we're going to accomplish something, we're going to learn something, cause we're supposed to go, cause we know that now."

The *post-vectorial level* (score 8) was beyond the Vectorial stage. There were not any protocols from the sample scored at this level.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics include the mean scores and standard deviations for Task One across age level and gender as represented in Table

6.2. To illustrate the descriptive findings, the mean level scores for Task One were graphed by age groups and gender (Figure 6.1).

Table 6.2: Task One Mean Scores and Standard Deviations by Age Group

	Female			Male			Group		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Age 06	1.71	.76	7	1.50	.82	21	1.55	.80	28
Age 08	2.13	.58	9	2.21	.89	14	2.18	.78	23
Age 10	3.50	1.11	12	3.14	1.27	11	3.33	1.17	23
Age 12	4.94	1.42	9	5.38	.79	8	5.15	1.16	17
Age 14	5.42	1.27	10	5.33	.58	3	5.42	1.27	13
Age 16	6.45	.79	6	6.50	.58	4	6.45	.79	10

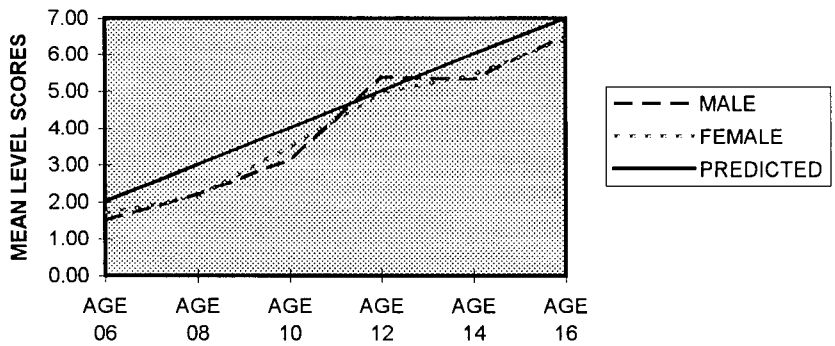

Figure 6.1: Task One Mean Level Scores -- Line Graph

ANOVA

A Two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted for Task One. An ANOVA factorial design was suitable when two independent variables were introduced such as: (1) age levels (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) and (2) the children's gender (male or female). The dependent variables were the developmental level scores achieved on the research tasks. This was a 2 X 6 ANOVA (Collyer & Enns, 1987; Lomax, 1992; McMillan & Schumacher, 1989)

factorial design. The ANOVA analysis determined "whether mean scores on one or more factors differ significantly from each other, and whether the various factors interact significantly with each other" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 356). What the ANOVA for Task One accomplished was a test for the effect of age[13] on task performance, averaged across all children of each age group regardless of gender, and a test for effect of gender on task performance, averaged across ages. The analysis was conducted on SPSS for Windows (Version 6).

The ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant age effect for Task One, F (5,112) = 50.44, p = .000. These results confirmed that age was a significant factor in children's changing narratives about God. Gender did not have a significant effect on children's performances for Task One, F (1,112) = .005, p = .946. There were not any significant interactive effects[14] between age and gender F (5,112) = .34, p = .89.

Test for Linearity

The *test for linearity* addressed the linear progression of the mean level scores for Task One. The results indicated a linear trend in the mean level scores across age groups, for Task One, F (5, 112) = 62.14, p= .000. Also, the

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13 The *main effect* identified whether or not there were any statistical differences in the mean level scores (dependent variables) due to age or gender (independent variables).

14 The *interaction* was the effect of age and gender (independent variables) on the mean level scores (dependent variables). The interaction effect is the 'joint effect' on the independent variables on the dependent variable. An interaction exists if there is a joint effect between age and gender on the mean level scores and if there is a unique effect that could not be predicted from knowledge of the main effects on age or gender.

results did not indicate a significant deviation from the linear trend for Task One, F (4,112) = 2.33, p = .06. This finding was consistent with Case's (1992a) theory which indicated that as a child matured there was a linear progression of cognitive development.

Scheffé Test

The Scheffé Test is a multiple comparison procedure (MCP) designed to test each possible pair of mean level scores by age groups for significant differences between groups. The Scheffé method tested each possible pair of mean level scores by age groups for significant differences (e.g., group 1 = age 06; group 2 = age 08; group 3 = age 10; group 4 = age 12; group 5 = age 14; and group 6 = age 16). This test was used "to test the statistical significance of differences between particular group means or combinations of groups means" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 356).

The Scheffé test "is the only MCP that is necessarily consistent with the results of the *F* ratio in the analysis of variance" (Lomax, 1992, p. 143). The statistic for the test was the standard *t*-test. This procedure was performed on SPSS for Windows (Version 6) and was used to examine the multiple comparisons for age groupings (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) among Task One.

The results indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between ages 8 (bi-dimensional level) and 10 (elaborated bi-dimensional level). Also, there was a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages

of 10 and 12. This change indicated a significant transition from Case's (1992a) Dimensional stage to the Vectorial stage. This transition paralleled the shift in Piaget's concrete and formal operational periods wherein a child's thinking about systems, in general, shifts from concrete to abstract.

There was not a significant change in the mean level scores between ages 6 (uni-dimensional level) and 8 (bi-dimensional level). This result may be related to the directions given for Task One. In this study, the participants were asked to answer a broad question which was *Tell me a story about God.* In McKeough's (1992a) study children were asked a well-defined question.

In addition, there was not a significant change in the mean levels scores between the ages 12, 14, and 16. This indicated a plateau effect at the Vectorial Stage. Reasons for this 'effect' may be for two reasons. First, the results may be related to the scoring criteria for narrative structure at the interpretive narrative level for Task One. Second, the results may be because the number of participants in the sample at ages 14 (n=13) and 14 (n=10) was not sufficient power to drive the statistical procedure.

TASK TWO ANALYSIS

The children's interview transcripts for Task Two (*Who is this Jesus?*) were analyzed for age effects. The alpha level used for the statistical tests was .05.

This section addresses the analysis in **five** ways. They are: (a) developmental levels and scores, (b) descriptive statistics, (c) ANOVA, (d) test for linearity, and (e) Scheffé test.

Developmental Levels and Scores

Again, the purpose of Task Two -- *Who is this Jesus* -- was to examine the developmental changes in children's (ages 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) responses to a Biblical story *Jesus Calms the Sea.* The children were asked to listen to the story (below) and to respond to the following **four** questions:

Jesus Calms the Sea: Mark 4:36-41 (NIV)
Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

1. *Why did the disciples ask "Teacher don't you care if we drown?"*
2. *Why did Jesus ask "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*
3. *What is the answer to the question "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him?"*
4. *Do you think this story has a message?*

The story of *Jesus Calms the Sea* had four components. They were: (i) an event -- Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them, (ii) a major outcome -- Jesus rebuked the winds and sea and everything became calm once more, (iii) an intervening event -- the disciples were terrified that Jesus was sleeping through the storm so they woke Him up, and (iv) a minor outcome -- because of His miraculous intervention they wondered who Jesus was.

The children's narrative responses were related to the components of the Biblical story told. For instance, a *simple answer* was a one-line answer in direct response to the question proposed with some connection to the event and outcome of the story; an *extended answer* was an extension of the simple answer with better-developed responses that provided additional information in connection with the event, intervening event and outcome of the story; and a *complex answer* was a well-developed response, usually the whole story was considered in framing the responses, and was well-connected to the major and minor events, and outcomes of the story.

There were a set of intentions associated with the action of the Biblical story. Again, *intentional state(s)* were (a) feeling states, (b) personal judgments, (c) other's judgments, and (d) social judgments. Some of these intentions were displayed by the characters in the Biblical story, for instance, the disciples were terrified (feeling state) and they wondered if Jesus cared about them (personal judgment or opinion).

The hypothesized narrative structure of a child's response to a Biblical story about Jesus (Task Two) was assigned a developmental level response (score 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) in accordance with the descriptors in Table 6.3. The descriptors were adapted from McKeough's (1992a, 1993), McKeough and Martens' (1994), and Salter's (1993) research on narrative structure.

Table 6.3: Developmental Level, Score, and Narrative Structure for Task Two

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL	SCORE	NARRATIVE STRUCTURE
PRE-DIMENSIONAL	SCORE 1	'I DO NOT KNOW' ANSWERS AND NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THE EVENT (A) or OUTCOME (B)
DIMENSIONAL STAGE CHARACTERIZED BY INTENTIONAL NARRATIVES Contains connections between event(s) and outcome of the story with a set of intentional states associated with the action of the story		
UNI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 2	SIMPLE ANSWERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B)
BI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 3	EXTENDED ANSWERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B)
ELABORATED BI-DIMENSIONAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 4	COMPLEX ANSWERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE MINOR/MAJOR EVENTS (A) and OUTCOME (B) and INTERVENING EVENTS (A) and MINOR/MAJOR OUTCOME (B) OF THE STORY
VECTORIAL STAGE CHARACTERIZED BY INTERPRETIVE NARRATIVES Contains a connection between events and outcome of the story with interpretation(s) that may include both self-reflection and a message to the story and an interpretation of others' intentions in the story		
UNI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 5	SIMPLE INTERPRETIVE ANSWERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE EVENT (A) and OUTCOME (B) OF THE STORY
BI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 6	EXTENDED INTERPRETIVE ANSWERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENT (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B)

ELABORATED BI-VECTORIAL SUBSTAGE	SCORE 7	COMPLEX INTERPRETIVE ANSWERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE MAJOR/MINOR EVENTS (A) and INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME (B) INTERVENING EVENTS (A) and INTERPRETIVE MINOR/MAJOR OUTCOME (B)

With this in mind, the next **two** subsections provide examples of children's narrative structure as they relate to Case's (1992a) developmental framework for Task Two. They are: (i) the Dimensional stage and (ii) the Vectorial Stage.

Dimensional stage. At this stage, the children's responses to the Biblical story were concrete and literal. Also, the children's responses to the Biblical script contained (a) connections between the sequential events and outcome of the story and (b) intentional states which included their own thoughts and feelings about the events and outcome of the story.

The *pre-dimensional level* (score 1) was characterized as the transition from the *Interrelational Stage* (stage two) to the *Dimensional Stage* (stage three). At this level, the response to the questions was usually "I don't know." Earl's (age 6) responses to the questions were typical at this substage.

> Researcher (R): Why did the disciples ask "Teacher don't you care if we drown?"
> Student (S): I don't know.
> R: Why did Jesus ask "Why are you so afraid?" Why do you think they were afraid?
> *S: I don't know.*
> R: What is the answer to the question "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Who is the person?
> S: Um, I don't know.
> R: What do you think this story means?

S: I don't know.

The children's responses, at this level, did not demonstrate the relationship between the event (Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them) and the outcome (Jesus rebuked the sea and the winds).

The *uni-dimensional level* (score 2) was the first substage of the Dimensional stage. At this level, the children's responses were simple in connection to the event (Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them) and outcome of the story (Jesus rebuked the sea and the winds). Jacob's (age 6) following responses to the individual questions were simple and concrete. For instance, the disciples were upset because the boat was in danger; they called Him teacher because He was a teacher; Jesus asked them about their faith because the disciples woke Him up; and Jesus was who He was because the story was about Him.

R: So there was the storm and disciples woke Jesus up and said, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?" Why did the disciples ask that question?
S: Because the boat was in danger.
R: And why did they call Jesus a teacher?
S: Because He teaches them....
R: Then Jesus gets up and He calms the sea and the storm and then He says to the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Why did Jesus ask that question?
S: Because He woke up and He calmed the water and He said why don't you have any faith?
R: Why did Jesus ask that question?
S: Because um, they just woke Him up.
R: What is the answer to the question "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"
S: Jesus.

Jacob's responses to the questions were related to the sequence of events and outcome of the Biblical story. Also, Jacob's response to the first question included his own opinion about the boat being in danger.

The *bi-dimensional level* (score 3) was the second substage of the Dimensional stage. At this level, the children's responses were extended in connection with the event (Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them), intervening event (Jesus was asleep), and outcome of the story (Jesus rebuked the sea and the winds). For instance, Martha's (age 8) response to the question "Who is this person?" indicated a timeframe before (*in the first place*) and after the intervening event (*then, ... they didn't really know*). Martha's responses to the questions were extended beyond a simple concrete explanation (as in the previous level).

> R: ... The disciples go to wake up Jesus and say, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?" Why did the disciples ask that question?
> *S: Well, Jesus He cares for His people and even though the waves were like, really big and rocky, He didn't really care about it. That's why they're wondering.*
> R: Why did they call Jesus teacher?
> *S: Because He teaches them about God. ...*
> R: What is the answer to the question "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Who is the person?
> *S: Well, in the first place, I think that they didn't really believe that He was actually the Son of God. But then, I don't know if that's right, and they say, "What?" Cause they didn't really know--that's what I think.*

Also, Martha extended her answer to include her own thoughts and feelings about whether or not (a) Jesus really cared for His disciples and (b) His disciples believed that 'He was the Son of God.' She emphasized, "That's what I think."

The *elaborated bi-dimensional level* (score 4) was the third substage of the Dimensional stage. At this level, the children's responses were complex in connection with the event (Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them), intervening event (Jesus was asleep), minor outcome (because of His miraculous intervention they wonder who Jesus was), and major

outcome (Jesus rebuked the winds and sea and everything became calm once more). Jackson (age 10) formulated well-developed responses for each question proposed. For instance, when asked "Why did they call Jesus teacher?" Jackson responded with *Because He teaches about, oh man! He teaches stuff like to believe in people and stuff. And that He can perform miracles and people can believe in Him.* Also, his responses integrated the major and minor plots, intervening event, and outcome of the Biblical story, for example, *Because He would like teach them to have faith in Him and since they weren't actually having faith, like they didn't believe, they thought they were going to drown and they didn't believe that He could save them.* Furthermore, Jackson shared his own thoughts about the disciples' lack of faith and adds "faith means trusting."

S: *Oh, I did a skit about this!*
R: You did a skit? Neat!
R: OK, tell me about your skit.
S: *Well, we had to like, well we kind of did, we drew clouds and lightning and we went whaaaaaaa. And there was a person lying down and sleeping and uh, oh, yeah, and there was everybody else yelling at him and then he got up and he said, 'Peace, be still' or whatever and then the water calmed down and it was the end of the skit.*
R: How many people were in it?
S: *I think there was um, 7.*
(Audio Tape of Biblical Story)
R: Let me ask you a few questions about this story. You know when the storm was rocking the boat and the waves were crashing and Jesus was sleeping. Then the disciples woke Jesus and asked him, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?" Why did the disciples ask that question?
S: *Because they thought that the waves were going to sink the boat and they were going to drown.*
R: Why did they call Jesus teacher?
S: *Because He teaches about, oh man! He teaches stuff like to believe in people and stuff. And that He can perform miracles and people can believe in him.*

R: Then after Jesus calmed the wind and calmed the waves He turned to the disciples and said, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Why did Jesus ask that question?
S: Because He would like teach them to have faith in Him and since they weren't actually having faith, like they didn't believe, they thought they were going to drown and they didn't believe that He could save them.
R: So is 'faith' meaning 'believing'?
S: Faith means trusting.
R: So when He said, 'Do you still have no faith.' 'No faith' means 'no trust'?
S: Yeah.
R: So He's asking whether 'you trust me' to His disciples? Is He saying to His disciples, 'Do you trust me?'
S: No, 'Do you... mmmm like, don't you believe that I could calm the wind or something?'
R: So after all this happened the disciples were terrified and they looked at one another and said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Who do you think they thought He was?
S: Uh, an ordinary man that had special powers.
R: Who is Jesus?
S: Hum, (pause) uh, kind of like spirit person that can perform miracles and it's not like some sort of trick or something like that.
R: So it's possible.
S: Yeah.
R: Do you think this story has a message for us?
S: I think it does but I can't figure out what it is.

Overall, Jackson's responses to the questions were complex and beyond an extended explanation (as in the previous level).

Vectorial stage. Again, the interpretive stage (vectorial) was considered higher-order to the intentional stage (dimensional). At this stage, the responses to the Biblical story were represented by interpretive narratives. The adolescents' interpretation of the events and outcome of the Biblical event had more psychological understanding. The adolescents' responses to the story included self-reflection; this was evident in the final question which asked if the story had a message. Also, the characters' intentions of the story were considered wherein the adolescent was empathetic toward the characters'

feelings. During this stage, the adolescent began to develop a non-literal interpretation toward the events and outcome of the Biblical story.

The *uni-vectorial level* (score 5) was the first substage of the Vectorial stage. At this level, the adolescents' interpretive responses were simple in connection to the event (Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them) and outcome of the story (Jesus rebuked the sea and the winds). Christa's (age 12) responses to the Biblical story were interpreted in light of the events leading to the outcome, for example, *Cause maybe before, maybe He was kind of testing them to see if they were going to do that and He asked that question because they were getting all worried about them dying because and Jesus was there and I don't think Jesus would do that.*

R: ... The disciples were getting anxious. They woke Jesus and asked Him, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?" Why did the disciples ask that question?
S: *Um, because they were scared that they were going to drown and like, get killed or something. ... Because He was sleeping and He didn't really do anything when the storm was going on until they woke Him up.*
R: So how do you think they were feeling?
S: *Feeling kind of, well, like He didn't really care.*
R: Why did they call Jesus teacher?
S: *Because before that He was their teacher. [He taught them about] healing and to save your sins and stuff like that.*
R: Then after Jesus calmed the wind and calmed the waves He turned to the disciples and said, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Why did Jesus ask that question?
S: *Cause maybe before, maybe He was kind of testing them to see if they were going to do that and He asked that question because they were getting all worried about them dying because and Jesus was there and I don't think Jesus would do that.*
R: So why did Jesus say, "Why do you have no faith?" What does 'no faith' mean?
S: *That you don't have faith, they didn't have faith in God, like, that He would help them. ... to Trust. Trust in something. ...*
R: So after all this happened the disciples were terrified and they looked at one another and said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Who do you think they thought He was?

S: *I don't know.*
R: Who is Jesus?
S: *He's God's Son.*
R: Do you think this story has a message?
S: *Yeah. To have faith in God and to trust Him that He'll help you.*

Christa interpreted Jesus' actions and suggested that Jesus was *testing* His disciples' faith. She reflected upon the story and said that the message was *to have faith in God.*

The *bi-vectorial level* (score 6) was the second substage of the Vectorial level. At this level, the adolescents' interpretive responses were extended in connection with the event (Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them), intervening event (Jesus was asleep), and outcome of the story (Jesus rebuked the sea and the winds). Sharon's (age 14) responses to the questions were extended beyond a simple concrete interpretive explanation (as in the previous level), for example, Why did Jesus ask that question? *Because they weren't trusting Him to do it when He wants to. It's like that song, 'In your time, in your time.' Well, you have to trust Jesus to do it when He wants to cause when He does it He's kind of testing them to see if they have faith in Him.* The following response illustrated Sharon's integration of the event sequences in the story in an interpretive way.

R: ... Jesus was sleeping and the disciples were getting anxious and they woke Him up and asked Jesus, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?" Why did the disciples ask that question?
S: *Because they don't want to drown and He's the one who could save them. So they're kind of asking Him, 'Save us please!' in a harsh way so He might respond better. ... Cause they were scared [and] sick to their stomachs cause the boat was rocking all over the place and then they had to go tie down the rigging and that sailor stuff.*
R: Why did they call Jesus teacher?
S: *Cause He's a teacher -- He teaches us about God. But He is God so He knows about God.*

R: Then after Jesus calmed the wind and calmed the waves He turned to the disciples and said, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Why did Jesus ask that question?

S: *Because they weren't trusting Him to do it when He wants to. It's like that song, 'In your time, in your time.' Well, you have to trust Jesus to do it when He wants to cause when He does it He's kind of testing them to see if they have faith in Him.*

R: What does 'no faith' mean?

S: *Not believing something. Like saying, well you do believe something, if you have no faith then you're telling yourself that you can't believe anything. Because it might wreck your life but it won't.*

R: So after all this happened the disciples were terrified and they looked at one another and said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Who do you think they thought He was?

S: *A man. God. But when He was on earth He was God posing as a man so He would be able to see what people felt. ...*

R: Do you think this story has a message?

S: *Every story in the Bible has a message. ... That you have to trust God all the time even when things aren't going exactly as you planned. Like they probably didn't think there would be a storm because God was with them, but God has other plans.*

In addition, Sharon's interpretation extended to include the disciples' feelings and their 'sailor' duties, for example, *Cause they were scared [and] sick to their stomachs cause the boat was rocking all over the place and then they had to go tie down the rigging and that sailor stuff.* Also, Sharon's interpretation included a non-literal reflection about the events and outcome of the story, for example, *That you have to trust God all the time even when things aren't going exactly as you planned.*

The *elaborated bi-vectorial* level (score 7) was the third substage of the vectorial level. At this level, the adolescents' interpretive responses were complex in connection with the event (Jesus and His disciples were on the sea when a storm came upon them), intervening event (Jesus was asleep), minor outcome (because of His miraculous intervention they wondered who Jesus was), and major outcome (Jesus rebuked the winds and sea and everything

became calm once more). Richard (age 16) formulated well-developed interpretive responses for each question posed. Also, his interpretive responses integrated the major and minor plots, intervening event, and outcome of the Biblical story, for example, *OK, first I guess first they know He's Jesus and they know He's the Lord, but then they were still afraid, like, they go, cause He's just sleeping there, like, "Don't you ever care about us?" They probably assumed that He can control this and it's like why are you letting the storm and the waves thrash our boat. But then, it was more like a test of faith for them, if they would have faith in Him, and just relax.* Overall, Richard's (age 16) interpretive responses to the questions were complex and beyond an extended explanation (as in the previous level).

R: Let me ask you a few questions about this story. So there was a storm and the disciples were getting anxious, right? They went to Jesus and they asked Him, "Teacher don't you care if we drown?" Why did the disciples ask that question?

S: *Uh, because, like, OK, first I guess first they know He's Jesus and they know He's the Lord, but then they were still afraid, like, they go, cause He's just sleeping there, like, "Don't you ever care about us?" They probably assumed that He can control this and it's like why are you letting the storm and the waves thrash our boat. But then, it was more like a test of faith for them, if they would have faith in Him, and just relax.*

R: Instead of getting all worried.

S: *Yeah.*

R: Why did they call Jesus teacher?

S: *Oh, because He was a good teacher to them, like, in effect, He was, He, like took them like students. Like He appointed the 12 disciples, like Matthew or whatever, it's like, come with me and it's like in a way He had a time limit and He was going to give all His knowledge to His disciples so they can spread the word of God. Cause it's not possible that He can live forever so He was like, a teacher to them and they were like His pupils.*

R: Then after Jesus calmed the wind and calmed the waves He turned to the disciples and said, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Why does He say that to them?

S: *I guess when humans are put into situations where fears, well we have fears, well we just really resort to, "Oh, I got to get out of this..." you know. It's like, in a way you have no faith. Like if they just trusted in God, hum, if*

they just trusted in God, like if they just relax, it's like, "Oh, God will do this, He will calm this, we'll be alright." and then they would be fine. But they just woke Him up, like, HEY!

R: Almost like they were freaking out.

S: Yeah.

R: So what does it mean to have no faith?

S: No trust. Uh, you don't really believe, you say you have faith but you don't really believe that it's going to happen.

R: What about in the end when the disciples were terrified and they looked at one another and said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Who did they think He was?

S: Maybe they would have thought He was just a educated man. But then I guess when they saw that He can control the waves and the wind, too, maybe they thought He was more than just a man. Maybe they thought He was the Lord. Maybe even though they knew He was the Lord, but they still second guessed Him and wasn't sure because He was just like a guy here coming along and saying, "Hey, I'm God." Maybe they were like, more astounded, like maybe this is the real Savior.

R: Do you think this story has a message?

S: Yeah. It's like have faith in the Lord and He will, like, what do you call it, He'll like, He'll come through. It's like sometimes you pray for years and years nothing happens. It's like Abraham, praying for years and years wanting to have a child and still nothing happened. Then finally God came through and He gave him a child. He never let's you down. It just depends how strong your faith is.

Richard's interpretation included a deep psychological response to the message of the story on two counts. He stated:

> *I guess when humans are put into situations where fears, well we have fears, well we just really resort to, "Oh, I got to get out of this..." you know. It's like, in a way you have no faith. Like if they just trusted in God, hum, if they just trusted in God, like if they just relax ...*
>
> *It's like sometimes you pray for years and years nothing happens. It's like Abraham, praying for years and years wanting to have a child and still nothing happened. Then finally God came through and He gave him a child. He never let's you down. It just depends how strong your faith is.*

Both of these interpretive responses included a non-literal interpretive reflection to the Biblical story.

Again, the *post-vectorial level* (score 8) was beyond the Vectorial stage. There were not any protocols from the sample scored at this level.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics include the mean scores and standard deviations for each task across age level and gender as represented in Table 6.4. To illustrate the descriptive findings, the mean level scores for each task were graphed by age groups and gender (Figures 6.2)

Table 6.4: Task Two Mean Scores and Standard Deviations by Age Group

	Female			Male			Group		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Age 06	1.86	.69	7	1.90	.68	21	1.89	.67	28
Age 08	3.13	1.36	9	3.14	.69	14	3.14	.95	23
Age 10	4.38	.68	12	4.32	.75	11	4.35	.70	23
Age 12	5.67	1.03	9	5.38	.79	8	5.53	.89	17
Age 14	5.60	.74	10	4.67	1.53	3	5.38	.98	13
Age 16	6.50	.55	6	5.75	.96	4	6.20	1.12	10

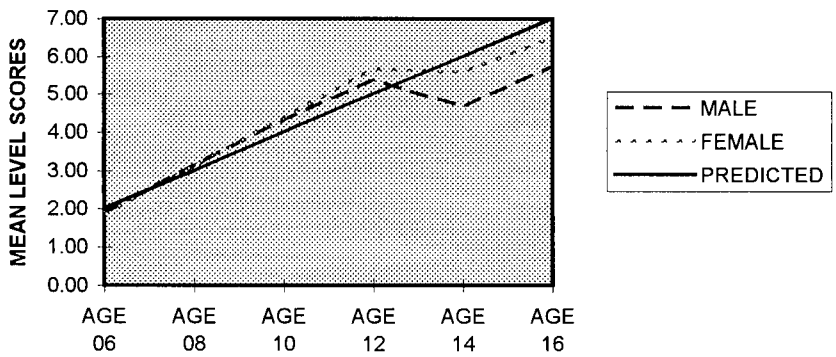

Figure 6.2: Task Two Mean Level Scores -- Line Graph

ANOVA

A Two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted for Task Two. What the ANOVA for Task Two accomplished was a test for the effect of age on

task performance, averaged across all children of each age group regardless of gender, and a test for effect of gender on task performance, averaged across ages. The analysis was conducted on SPSS for Windows (Version 6). Again, the *main effect* identified whether or not there were any statistical differences in the mean level scores due to age or gender. The *interaction* was the effect of age and gender on the mean level scores.

The results of the ANOVA indicated that there was a significant age effect for Task Two, F (5,112) = 61.26, p = .000. These results confirmed that age is a significant factor in children's changing narratives about God.

Gender did not have a significant effect on children's performances for Task Two F, (1,112) = 3.48, p = .65. There were not any significant interactive effects between age and gender, F (5,112) = .80, p = .556.

Test for Linearity

The *test for linearity* addressed the linear progression of the mean level scores for Task Two. The results indicated a linear trend in the mean level scores across age groups for Task Two, F (5, 112) = 76.33, p = .000. This finding was consistent with Case's (1992a) theory. Also, the results indicated a significant deviation from the linear trend for Task Two, F (4, 112) = 6.296, p =.000.

Scheffé Test

The Scheffé Test was performed on SPSS for Windows (Version 6) and was used to examine the multiple comparisons for age groupings (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) on Task Two. The test results indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages of 10 and 12. This change indicated a transition from Case's (1992a) Dimensional stage to the Vectorial stage. This transition paralleled the shift in Piaget's concrete and formal operational periods wherein a child's thinking about systems, in general, shifts from concrete to abstract.

Also, the results indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between ages 6, 8, and 10. These transitions parallel the substages of the Dimensional Stage (i.e., uni-dimensional, bi-dimensional, and elaborated bi-dimensional). Perhaps, the children's knowledge of the Biblical story influenced their performance on this Task.

In addition, there was not a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages 12, 14, and 16; this indicated a plateau effect at the Vectorial Stage. Again, reasons for this 'effect' may be for two reasons. First, the results may be related to the scoring criteria for narrative structure at the interpretive narrative level for Task Two. Second, the results may be because the number of participants in the sample at ages 14 (n=13) and 14 (n=10) was not sufficient power to drive the statistical procedure.

TASK FOUR ANALYSIS

The children's working memory capacity was determined by analyzing the developmental level responses assigned for each child on Task Four (Counting/Ratio Span Test). The alpha level used for the statistical tests was .05.

This section addresses the analysis in **five** ways. They are: (a) developmental levels and scores, (b) descriptive statistics, (c) ANOVA, (d) test for linearity, and (e) Scheffé test.

Developmental Levels and Scores

The developmental levels and scores for the Counting Span Test and Ratio Span Test are indicated in Tables 6.5 and 6.6. Again, the *Counting Span Test* was administered to the 6, 8, and 10-year-old participants. The *Ratio Span Test* was administered to the 12, 14, and 16-year-old participants.

Each substage was awarded a total of 1 point; that is, one-third point for each mathematical operation performed at each level (a, b, and c). For instance, at the uni-dimensional *level a* the mathematical responses were scored one-third point for the total response (e.g., 2 and 6) AND for the bi-dimensional *level a* the mathematical responses were scored one-third point for the total response (e.g., 3, 6, and 8). Furthermore, *out-of-order responses* for each level (a, b, and c) were not awarded one-third points. *Partial responses* of 2 out of 3

at each level (a, b, and c) were award one-half point. For instance, a partial response at the uni-dimensional level would be a correct response to *level a* (2 and 6 = 1/3 point) and *level b* (4 and 7 = 1/3 point) but an incorrect response for *level c* (8 and 5); that is, 2 X 1/3 points, were awarded half-a-point of the total one point given per substage.

Table 6.5: Task Four: Counting Span Test Developmental Levels and Scores

Developmental Level	Score	Descriptors
Pre-dimensional	1	(a) 4 (b) 9 (c) 5
Uni-dimensional	2	(a) 2 6 (b) 4 7 (c) 8 5
Bi-dimensional	3	(a) 3 6 8 (b) 2 5 7 (c) 3 6 4
Elaborated Bi-dimensional	4	(a) 5 3 7 4 (b) 9 6 2 8 (c) 3 8 4 7
Uni-vectorial	5	(a) 2 5 9 4 6 (b) 7 2 8 3 5 (c) 6 9 4 7 5

Table 6.6: Task Four: Ratio Span Test Developmental Levels and Scores

Developmental Level	Score	Descriptors
Elaborated Bi-dimensional	4	(a) 1:2 (2) (b) 3:18 (6) (c) 3:12 (4)
Uni-vectorial	5	(a) 4:12 (3) 2:14 (7) (b) 3:15 (5) 3:6 (2) (c) 3:21 (7) 4:20 (5)
Bi-vectorial	6	(a) 2:12 (6) 5:15 (3) 2:8 (4) (b) 2:8 (4) 3:21 (7) 3:9 (3) (c) 2:10 (5) 2:4 (2) 3:18 (6)
Elaborated Bi-vectorial	7	(a) 2:14 (7) 5:10 (2) 4:16 (4) 2:12 (6) (b) 2:6 (3) 2:10 (5) 5:10 (2) 3:21 (7) (c) 3:15 (5) 5:15 (3) 2:12 (6) 2:8 (4)
Post-Vectorial	8	(a) 3:18 (6) 4:20 (5) 4:8 (2) 2:14 (7) 3:9 (3) (b) 3:12 (4) 3:18 (6) 4:12 (3) 3:21 (7) 3:15 (5) (c) 3:6 (2) 4:16 (4) 2:6 (3) 4:20 (5) 2:14 (7)

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics included the mean scores and standard deviations for Task Four across age level as represented in Table 6.7. To illustrate the descriptive findings, the mean level scores for each task were graphed by age groups (Figure 6.3). The mean level scores indicated that there were increases in children's working memory capacity as they matured.

Table 6.7: Task Four Mean Scores and Standard Deviations by Age Group

		Group		Predicted	
	n	M	SD	M	SD
Age 06	28	1.75	.55	2.00	---
Age 08	23	2.78	.52	3.00	---
Age 10	23	3.28	.56	4.00	---
Age 12	17	5.12	.80	5.00	---
Age 14	13	5.38	1.12	6.00	---
Age 16	10	6.55	1.09	7.00	---

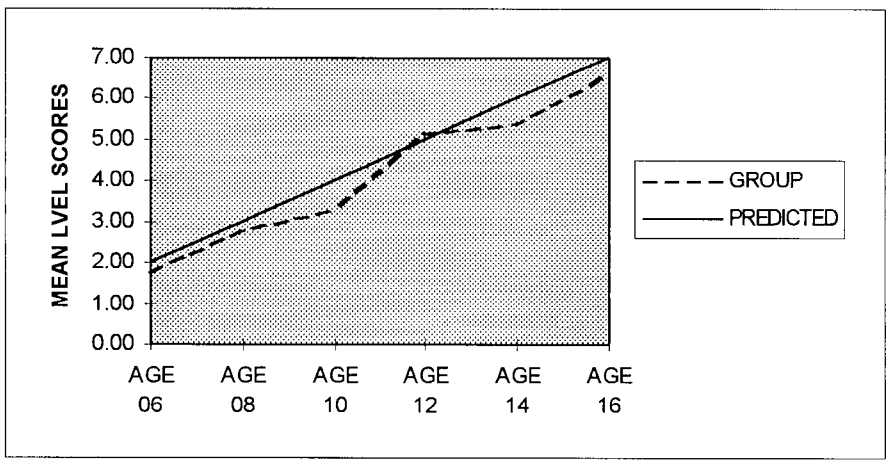

Figure 6.3: Task Four Mean Level Scores -- Line Graph

ANOVA

To conduct the ANOVA, the mean level scores (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) generated for each child at each age level code (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16) for Task Four were statistically analyzed to assess whether or not there were any significant differences. A One-way ANOVA, conducted on SPSS for Windows (Version 6), was done to determine age differences in working memory capacity. What the ANOVA for Task Four accomplished was a test for the effect of age on task performance. The results indicated that age was a significant factor for Task Four, F (5,111) = 87.695, p = .000.

Test for Linearity

The test for linearity indicated a linear trend, F (5,111) = 102.81, p = .000. There was a significant deviation from the linear trend, F (4,111) = 3.81, p = .006.

Scheffé Test

For Task Four, the results indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages of 10 and 12. Again, this change was representative of the transition from Case's (1992a) Dimensional stage to the

Vectorial stage. Also, a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages of 14 and 16 was indicated. This change indicated a major transition from the bi-vectorial substage to the elaborated bi-vectorial substage.

In addition, the results indicated that there were not any significant differences in the mean level scores between (a) ages 8 and 10 which represented the bi-dimensional and elaborated bi-dimensional substages and (b) ages 12 and 14 which represented the bi-vectorial and elaborated bi-vectorial substages. Reasons for this finding may be related to the scoring criteria on the second substage of the Counting Span and Ratio Span Tests.

MANOVA

To illustrate the descriptive findings for Tasks One, Two, and Four (Table 6.8), the mean level scores for each task were graphed by age groups (Figure 6.4).

Table 6.8: Tasks One, Two, and Four Mean Scores and Standard Deviations by Age Group

		Task One		Task Two		Task Four		Predicted	
	n	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age 06	28	1.55	.80	1.89	.67	1.75	.55	2.00	---
Age 08	23	2.18	.78	3.14	.95	2.78	.52	3.00	---
Age 10	23	3.33	1.17	4.35	.70	3.28	.56	4.00	---
Age 12	17	5.15	1.16	5.53	.89	5.12	.80	5.00	---
Age 14	13	5.42	1.27	5.38	.98	5.38	1.12	6.00	---
Age 16	10	6.45	.79	6.20	1.12	6.55	1.09	7.00	---

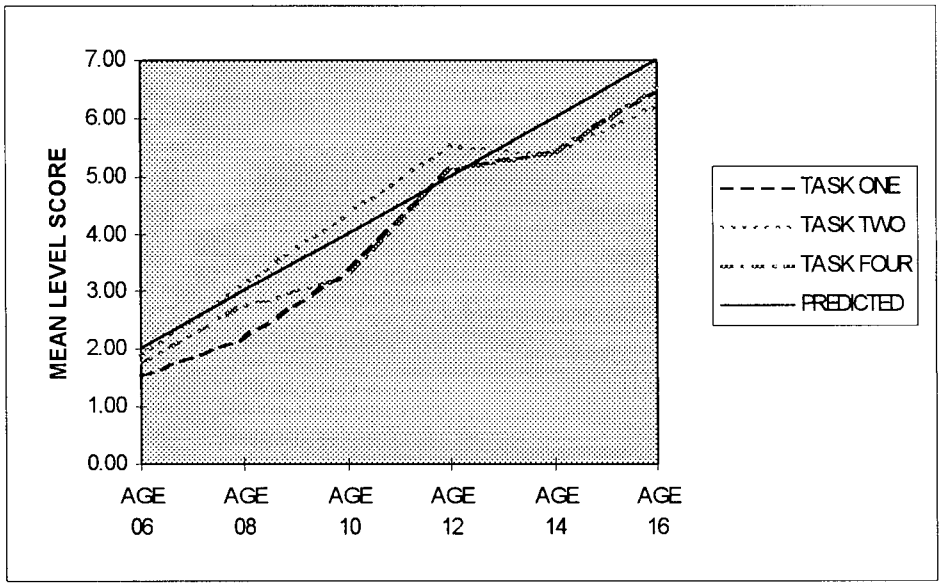

Figure 6.4: Tasks One, Two, and Four Mean Level Scores -- Line Graph

In the preceding sections, the above results were analyzed as 'separate units' in three distinct ANOVAs, for example, a Two-way ANOVA for Tasks One and Two and a One-way ANOVA for Task Four. The ANOVA procedure was consistent with other studies that have used Case's (1992a) developmental theory to assess children's thinking (i.e., Eikelhof, 1995; Goldberg-Reitman, 1991; McKeough, 1991a). However, a MANOVA was necessary to analyze Tasks One, Two, and Four as a 'system' rather than as 'three separate units.' Grimm and Yarnold (1995) outline the reasons for this statistical analysis:

> MANOVA is appropriate when one's design involves one or more categorical independent variables ... and two or more continuous dependent variables. As in analysis of variance (ANOVA), one can examine the effects of each independent variable separately as well as the effects of combinations, or interactions among independent variables, providing the design is factorial. (p. 15)

MANOVA was appropriate in this study because there were two independent variables (age and gender) and several continuous variables (developmental level scores 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) for Tasks One, Two, and Four. There also were conceptual reasons for analyzing the variables as a system given their theoretical relationship.

A MANOVA was conducted on SPSS for Windows (Version 6). Wilk's Lambda was the criterion. An alpha level of .05 was used. Regarding the influence of age for Tasks One, Two, and Four, the value for Wilk's Lambda was F (15,268) = 26.04, p = .000. This result confirmed that age was a significant influence on children's capability to assemble a narrative structure and on their working memory capacity. Figure 6.4 demonstrates the relationship between the growth patterns of these variables.

Regarding the influence of gender for Tasks One and Two, the value for Wilk's Lambda was F (2,100) = 1.92, p = .152. Regarding the interactive effects between age and gender for Tasks One and Two, the value for Wilk's Lambda was F (10, 200) = .69, p = .735.

Follow-up univariate F-tests did indicate significant group effects for Task One, F (5,99) = 49.01, p = .000, for Task Two, F (5,99) = 61.27, p = .000, and for Task Four, F (5,99) = 86.64, p = .000. The univariate F-tests indicated a significant effect of age on all tasks. An alpha level of .02 was used as the criterion for the univariate tests. This criterion represents .05÷3, a Bonferroni correction for inflation of the probability of Type I error.

SUMMARY

This chapter presented the results from the structural analyses. The mean level scores for Tasks One, Two, and Four were subjected to a series of statistical analyses.

For Task One, the ANOVA results demonstrated that age was a significant factor. The test for linearity identified a significant linear trend. The Scheffé Test indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between ages 10 and 12. Also, this test revealed that there were not any significant changes in the mean level scores between ages 6 and 8 and between ages 12, 14, and 16.

For Task Two, the ANOVA results demonstrated that age was a significant factor. The test for linearity identified a significant linear trend. The Scheffé Test indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between ages 6, 8, and 10 and between ages 10 and 12. Also, this test revealed that there was not any significant change in the mean level scores between ages 12, 14, and 16.

For Task Four, the ANOVA results indicated that age was a significant factor. The test for linearity identified a significant linear trend. The Scheffé test indicated a significant transitional change in the mean level scores between ages 10 and 12. Also, this test revealed that there were not any significant differences in the mean level scores between ages 8 and 10 and between ages 12 and 14.

The MANOVA illustrated that age was a significant factor Tasks One, Two, and Four. These results confirm the ANOVA findings. The next chapter – *Discussion of Hypotheses, Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications* -- discusses the findings and implications with relevance to the hypotheses outlined in Chapter Two along with the conclusion and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION OF HYPOTHESES, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Is there anything else you would like to say? [Researcher]
I kind of learned more about God too! Sandra (age 10)
[I thought to myself ... 'so did I.'] [Researcher]

Chapter Seven concludes this interdisciplinary study. The hypotheses are reviewed, the conclusion and limitations are presented, and the practical and research implications are discussed.[15]

This chapter is divided into **eight** main sections. They are: (1) Hypothesis One: Religious Education Context, (2) Hypothesis Two: God Representations, (3) Hypothesis Three: Narrative Development of Religious Texts, (4) Conclusion, (5) Limitations, (6) Practical Implications, (7) Research Implications, and (8) Final Comment.

HYPOTHESIS ONE: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONTEXT

Hypothesis One was related to the children's religious education context and was evidenced by the contextual lens. **Three** hypotheses applied to Hypothesis One. They were: (a) religious school environment, (b) religious education program, and (c) religious social experiences.

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[15] The preliminary findings were presented to JCS' 1996 Annual General Meeting (Smoliak, 1996). This report is found in Appendix I.

Religious School Environment

Hypothesis 1(a): There will be elements in the children's religious school environment that influence their understandings about God.

This hypothesis was accepted. There were four elements, as defined by JCS, which indicated that they had the potential to influence children's understandings about God because they were within a religious school environment.

It was within the religious school environment of JCS that children's understandings about God could emerge and be developed and sustained. JCS' religious school environment was one of the religious templates (the others being home and church) from which children's religious understandings about God could emerge. JCS was an interdenominational religious school community which encouraged children's learning about God through religious education.

Four elements, as defined by JCS (i.e., the *school's voice*), represented their religious school environment. This subsection is divided into **four** parts. They are: (i) religious community, (ii) 'denominationally diverse' community, (iii) learning environment, and (iv) religious education.

Religious community. JCS considered itself a religious community because the school was connected to a larger religious community called the *Society of Christian Schools (SCS)*. Affiliation with this association defined JCS' religious community wherein they considered themselves "a community in which schools strengthen each other in living the gospel of Jesus Christ in teaching and learning" (SCSBS, n.d.).

At a local level, parents, teachers and students were encouraged to maintain JCS' religious community. Whether it was through active participation, monthly fees, or quiet contemplative prayer, the members of the religious community were encouraged to support the religious school.

Overall, JCS was a religious community where children could see reminders of God in their everyday school life. This was evidenced by: (a) JCS' school logo which symbolized "God's all-embracing love for his children," (b) JCS' yearbooks which emphasized a community whose focus is on God, and (c) JCS' entrance which had a stained glass portrait of Jesus with children.

Denominationally diverse school. JCS considered itself a religious school because it enlisted participation from varied Christian traditions. This was introduced in JCS' mission statement which stated that "JCS [is] a denominationally diverse educational community...." (p. 2). Also, the Parent's Background Information Form affirmed JCS' position. The results indicated that there was a denominational mixture wherein Baptist, Mennonite, and Pentecostal accounted for a denominational majority (42%), and a multi-denominational mixture accounted for the rest (58%). Although there were many denominations represented at JCS, the Easter concert highlighted their common Christian commitment.

Learning environment. As defined by JCS, a learning environment was offered in which exploration about God could begin, be nurtured, and

maintained. This premise was confirmed in JCS' mission statement which stated that "JCS ... seeks to serve Christian families by providing a secure learning environment...." (p. 2). To support JCS' assertion, the children's response to the question 'Where did you learn about God from? (Task Three) was that they learned about God from school.

Overall, the Christian faith appeared central to JCS' learning environment where religious information was transmitted. This was evidenced by (a) the religious posters in the classrooms and hallways which encouraged learning about God, (b) the school yearbooks illustrated children learning about God whilst in the midst of school activities, and (c) the primary educational role of the Bible at JCS.

Religious education. Religious education was a focal point within JCS' religious learning community. JCS' principles for religious education indicated that: (a) the school had a responsibility to educate the children about God, (b) the teachers had a responsibility to teach the children about God, (c) the parents had a responsibility to reinforce the children's learning about God, and (d) the students had a responsibility to learn about God.

Religious Education Program

Hypothesis 1(b): There will be elements in the religious education program that shape children's understandings about God.

This hypothesis was accepted. There were three elements, as defined by JCS, in their religious education program that had the potential to shape children's understandings about God.

Through JCS' religious education program, children were introduced to knowledge about God. Three elements, as defined by JCS (i.e., the *school's voice*), represented their religious education program.

This subsection is divided into **three** parts. They are: (i) philosophy for religious education, (ii) religious education curricula, and (iii) Bible study.

Philosophy for religious education. JCS defined their own philosophy for religious education. JCS' philosophy pointed to the role of the Bible in understanding that (a) creation is understood in relation to the Trinity, (b) sin illustrates humankind's fallenness, (c) Jesus Christ is the redeemer, and (d) through education of Christ there is renewal. In addition, JCS' philosophy was further supported by their affiliation with Christian Schools International (CSI). CSI's guide read:

> The glory of the Christian school is its freedom to explore the works of the Lord in nature, history, human culture, and the world about us. The importance lies in the fact that exploration and the nurture that goes with it have a goal -- to prepare students for living a full-orbed Christian life. This life must be, first of all, a life of faith. Not a life that includes faith as *one* element but a life that as a *whole* expresses faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (CSI, 1981, p. 4) [Italics in original]

Religious education curricula. JCS defined its own religious education curriculum. The resource guides provided by the associations to which the school belonged offered the curriculum focus (e.g., Christian Schools

International and the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia). The teacher's religious education goals reflected the scope and sequences represented in these guides. The Bible was viewed as a primary resource for religious curriculum. JCS used educational materials such as videos and audio-tapes in presenting Biblical stories. For instance, the children referred to this type of media presentation when they were responding to the story *Jesus Calms the Sea* (Task Two).

Bible study. Bible Study was part of the religious education program at JCS. The Teacher's Bible Study objectives emphasized Bible stories. Some of children told these Bible stories for Task One (Tell a story about God). Bible Study was incorporated into other parts of the curricula (e.g., history or science) as evidenced by the adolescents' comments about Bible study and by the Teachers' Bible Study Goals. Overall, JCS acknowledged that "God, by His Holy Word, reveals Himself ... and therefore guides His people also in the education of their children" (p. 2).

Religious Social Experiences

Hypothesis 1(c): There will be religious social experiences, both inside and outside the family, that influence children's understandings about God.

This hypothesis was accepted. There were religious social experiences, both inside and outside the family, that could have the potential to influence children's understandings about God as evidenced by the Parent's Background Information Form.

Two religious social experiences, as evidenced by the Parent's Background Information Form, may have provided opportunities for children at JCS to learn about God. This subsection is divided into **two** parts. They are: (i) parental and family involvement and (ii) community involvement.

Parental and family involvement. Concerning parental and family involvement, approximately 70% of the participants engaged in 4 out of 6 family religious activities which included grace, family prayer, personal prayer, Bible study, church, and/or other. Church attendance was the most common religious family activity, for the participants at JCS. Reading a bedtime story was the most prominent religious activity at ages 6, 8, and 10. This religious activity was confirmed in the findings for Task Two where the children identified their mother as the one who most often had introduced them to the story of *Jesus Calms the Sea*.

Community involvement. Concerning community involvement, for Task Two (Respond to a Bible Story), children suggested that they heard the Biblical story from Sunday school, school, and/or church. The results from Task Two indicated for adolescents that church played a significant role in their learning more about the Jesus story. This result was consistent with the findings from the Parent's Background Information Form which indicated that church was the most common religious activity across all ages. For adolescents, approximately 52% of 12, 14, and 16 year-olds were involved in religious group

activities such as Youth Group and/or Sunday School where peer groups predominate.

HYPOTHESIS TWO: GOD REPRESENTATIONS

Hypothesis Two was related to children's God representations and was evidenced by the conceptual lens. Children's representations of God, as evidenced by their responses to a story about God (Task One), a story about Jesus (Task Two), and answers about God (Task Three), are related to the conceptual lens (i.e., the *participant's voice*).

There were **three** hypotheses related to Hypothesis Two. They were: (a) general representations of God, (b) representations of God based on age, and (c) representations of God based on gender.

General Representations of God

Hypothesis 2(a): There will be narrative texts of God that reveal children's general representations of God.

This hypothesis was accepted. The children's narrative texts of God revealed three general representations of God as evidenced by their responses to Tasks One, Two, and Three.

The children involved in this study, across ages 6 to 16, were able to define God in a general way that was common among children. They viewed God as a powerful helper and friend who is actively involved in their everyday lives.

This subsection is divided into **three** parts. They are: (i) God is powerful, (ii) God is a helper, and (iii) God is a friend.

God is powerful. This study found that children (across ages 6 to 16) indicated that God is powerful. For Task One, children described a powerful, historical God who created the world, healed the lame, and performed miracles. For Task Two, children described a powerful God who has control over the winds and sea. They acknowledged God as the ultimate authority who has control over nature, the world, and their individual lives. For Task Three, the children indicated that God is powerful because He is everywhere (omnipresent). They suggested that because God has power, He is a God that you do not question. The children viewed God as more than a person because He has power. These findings were consistent with Oser and Gmunder's (1991) first stage of religious judgment which acknowledged a powerful God who is directly involved with people's day-to-day lives.

God is a helper. The results suggested that children described God as a helper who was actively involved in their everyday activities. For Task One, many children told stories about God as a helper in both historical days (i.e., helping a blind man to see) and modern days (i.e., helping them to do their homework). For Task Two, children said that Jesus helped His disciples by calming the storm. For Task Three, children viewed God's helping activities as nurturing and practical. This finding was consistent with Shelly (1982) who

suggested that children (in the concrete-operational stage of spiritual development) view God according to His everyday actions such as loving, helping, and watching.

God is a friend. In this study, children described God as an intimate and caring friend who cared, listened, and comforted them. For Task Two, several children viewed Jesus as a friend who never left their side. For Task Three, Sarah (age 14) said, "He's ... like your best friend. You can tell Him anything." These findings were consistent with Shelly (1982) who suggested that for adolescents (in the formal-operational stage of spiritual development), God was viewed as a personal friend and confidant.

In addition, the results of this study indicated that prayer formed the communication line to God that strengthened children's image of God as a faithful friend. For Task One, children told stories about God answering prayers. For Task Three, children suggested that it was possible to communicate with God through prayer. These findings were consistent with other research that acknowledged the importance of prayer in a child's life (Long, Elkind, & Spilka, 1967; Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Scarlett & Periello, 1991).

Representations of God Based on Age

Hypothesis 2(b): There will be narrative texts of God that reveal children's representations of God based on their age.

This hypothesis was accepted. There were narrative texts of God that revealed children's representations of God based on age as evidenced by their responses to Tasks One, Two, and Three.

This study investigated possible age differences in children's representations of God by examining their responses to Tasks One, Two, and Three. The results suggested that changes in children's representations of God were based on age.

In this study, as children matured, there were presumed cognitive shifts in their representations of God as evidenced in their narrative texts about God. In general, these shifts indicated a transition from concrete to abstract religious thinking (See Table 5.6). Children's responses to *Jesus Calms the Sea* (Task Two) indicated a change from literal to non-literal interpretations of the Biblical event. Also, the narrative structure of the children's religious texts (Tasks One and Two) indicated a change from intentional to interpretive narratives.

Furthermore, the findings suggested that children do not suddenly move to the next stage of religious thinking (from concrete to abstract religious thinking), but rather move one step at a time in their conceptual understandings of God by adding additional thoughts to existing thoughts about God. This movement is largely due to the subtle changes in children's cognitive ability.

Particularly, children's understandings of different concepts of God matured at different rates; for example, *God as Creator* was more easily grasped

than *God as Triune*. Therefore, with different concepts, the age at which children moved to the next level or stage of religious understanding was presumed to be different. Overall, these step-by-step cognitive and conceptual changes were evidenced in the children's religious narratives about God.

Representations of God Based on Gender

Hypothesis 2(c): There will be narrative texts of God that reveal children's representations of God based on their gender.

This hypothesis was accepted. There were narrative texts of God that revealed children's representations of God based on their gender as evidenced by their responses to Tasks One, Two, and Three.

This study investigated gender differences in children's representations of God as evidenced by the conceptual lens.[16] The results indicated a significant difference in the content of female and male narrative texts of God. For Task One, males were most likely to tell stories about 'God in the Bible' and 'Information About God' whereas females were most likely to tell stories about 'God's Ability to Help' and 'God Answers Prayer' (Review Table 5.1). (For Task Two, there were no conceptual differences in the male and female responses to *Jesus Calms the Sea*.) For Task Three, males were most likely to view 'God's comfort' in terms of protection and watching, whereas females were most likely to view 'God's comfort' in terms of caring and/or listening.

[16] The quantitative results (ANOVA) revealed that gender did not have a significant effect on children's performances (mean level scores) for Tasks One and Two. This was expected because the structural dimensions of a child's thoughts, in general, are not gender-related.

HYPOTHESIS THREE: NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS

Hypothesis Three was related to the developmental progression of children's narratives about God and was evidenced by the structural lens. A structural analysis of the developmental progression of children's religious texts (Task One: Tell a Story About God and Task Two: Who is this Jesus?) was conducted. Also, a working memory measure (Task Four: Counting/Ratio Span) was administered to assess the 'upper limits' of a child's memory which was hypothesized to be related to his or her level of cognitive functioning.

The findings indicated that as a child matured there were hierarchical changes in the structure of his or her narrative texts about God (Tasks One and Two). These changes paralleled the narrative structure posited by McKeough (1992a, 1993) and the stages and substages of development posited by Case (1992a).

These findings were consistent with McKeough and Martens (1994) who stated that "this transition is accounted for by proposing that the hierarchical integration of knowledge structures [i.e., central narrative structure] is made possible by both maturationally-based increases in processing capacity [i.e., the relationship between cognitive ability and working memory] and culturally-specific learning opportunities [i.e., religious environment]" (p. 2). In other words, the structure of children's narrative texts about God were influenced by the upper bounds of their cognitive functioning and the religious learning which had taken place within their religious community.

This subsection is divided into **two** parts. They are: (a) changes in children's narratives about God are consistent with Case's stages and substages and (b) working memory capacity parallels the developmental progression of children's narrative texts about God.

Changes in Children's Narratives About God are Consistent with Case's Stages and Substages

Hypothesis 3(a): There will be changes in children's narrative texts about God (as evidenced by central narrative structures) that are consistent with the stages and substages hypothesized by Case's (1992a) developmental model.

This hypothesis was accepted. There were changes in children's narrative texts about God (as evidenced by central narrative structures) that are consistent with the stages and substages hypothesized by Case's (1992a) developmental model.

An analysis of the developmental progression of children's religious texts was conducted. The narrative structure for Task One (Tell a Story About God) and Task Two (Who is this Jesus?) was assessed to determine whether or not the developmental progression of the religious texts was consistent with the stages and substages hypothesized by Case (1992a).

For Task One, the descriptive statistics indicated a significant increase in the children's mean level scores across ages 6 to 16. Specifically, the results (a) indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages of 10 and 12, suggesting a significant transition from Case's dimensional stage to the vectorial stage, (b) did not indicate a significant change in the mean levels scores between the ages, 12, 14, and 16, suggesting a plateau effect at Case's vectorial

stage, and (c) did not indicate a significant change in the mean level scores between ages 6 (uni-dimensional substage) and 8 (bi-dimensional substage).

For Task Two, the descriptive statistics indicated a significant increase in the children's mean level scores across ages 6 to 16. Specifically, the results (a) indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages of 10 and 12, suggesting a significant transition from Case's (1992a) Dimensional stage to the Vectorial stage, (b) indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between ages 6, 8, and 10, suggesting transitions which parallel the substages of the Dimensional Stage (i.e., uni-dimensional, bi-dimensional, and elaborated bi-dimensional), and (c) did not indicate any significant change in the mean levels scores between the ages 12, 14, and 16, suggesting a plateau effect at the Vectorial Stage.

The findings indicated that there were changes in children's narrative texts about God (as evidenced by central narrative structures) that were consistent with the stages and substages hypothesized by Case's (1992a) developmental model. These results confirmed that age was a significant factor in children's changing narratives about God.

These findings were consistent with McKeough's (1992a) research on central narrative structure. The findings indicated that there was a general pattern of development of children's narratives of God. Children at the Dimensional stage described intentional narratives whereas adolescents at the Vectorial stage described interpretive narratives.

Working Memory Capacity Parallels the Developmental Progression of Children's Narrative Texts About God

Hypothesis 3(b): There will be increases in children's working memory capacity as they mature cognitively. These increases will parallel the developmental progression of their narrative texts about God.

This hypothesis was accepted. There were increases in children's working memory capacity as they matured cognitively. These increases paralleled the developmental progression of their narrative texts about God.

The complexity of a child's narrative structure of religious texts was hypothesized to be related to the child's working memory capacity. Therefore, Task Four (Counting/Ratio Span Test) was administered to assess the 'bounds' of each child's memory.

For Task Four, the descriptive statistics indicated a significant increase in the children's mean level scores across ages 6 to 16. Specifically, the results (a) indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages of 10 and 12, representative of the transition from Case's dimensional stage to the vectorial stage, (b) indicated a significant change in the mean level scores between the ages of 14 and 16, suggesting a major transition from the bi-vectorial substage to the elaborated bi-vectorial substage, and (c) indicated that there were not any significant differences in the mean level scores between (i) ages 8 and 10 which represent the bi-dimensional and elaborated bi-dimensional substages and (ii) ages 12 and 14 which represent the bi-vectorial and elaborated bi-vectorial substages.

The findings indicated that there were increases in children's working memory capacity as they cognitively matured. These increases paralleled the

stages and substages hypothesized by Case's developmental progression and as a result, paralleled the narrative structure of children's religious texts about God. This finding was consistent with Case's (1992b) research which indicated that there is a relationship between children's progression through a developmental sequence and the development of their working memory capacity.

CONCLUSION

This study provided an encompassing interdisciplinary perspective toward understanding changes in children's and adolescents' (aged 6 to 16) thinking about God. The results demonstrated the contextual (religious environment), conceptual (religious understandings), and structural (developmental components) dimensions of children's and adolescents' thinking about God. Overall, the findings were **threefold**.

First, the religious environment at JCS had the potential to influence children's thoughts about God. It was in the children's religious school environment that their ideas about God were developed and nurtured. Future research should examine the role of parents and community in shaping children's ideas about God (i.e., religious socialization).

Second, there were conceptual differences in male and female thoughts about God. These differences concerned children's thoughts about the

relational aspects of God. Future research should investigate the conceptual differences in female and male descriptions of God.

Third, each child's thinking about God was influenced by his or her cognitive maturity. As the children matured, the acquisition of religious knowledge within their religious context influenced their changing thoughts about God (as evidenced by their religious narratives). Future research in cognitive development should consider the acquisition of religious knowledge as part of the social cognitive domain.

This study was unique. By combining the research contributions of anthropology, religious studies, and developmental psychology, a multi-dimensional investigation of children's and adolescents' thinking about God was conducted.

LIMITATIONS

There were **three** limitations to this study. *First*, the results of children's and adolescents' thinking about God can only be generalized to a similar Christian school population. The results cannot be generalized to other religions nor to the general school public. *Second*, this study focused on one general definition of religious thinking (Francis, 1979) -- the developmental progression of children's religious ideas. Other definitions of religious thinking as they relate to religious beliefs, attitudes, and practises and religious discourse were not taken into consideration. *Third*, the smaller sample of adolescents aged 14

(n=13) and 16 (n=10) was problematic with regards to the statistical analysis and did not allow for significant power to run the statistical procedures.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

At JCS, the religious education curricula played a major role alongside the regular curricula. The academic components of JCS' religious education curricula emphasized the school's religious education philosophy which focused on principles unique to their Christian tradition. JCS acknowledged the Bible as a primary guide in religious education, Jesus Christ in the religious educational enterprise, and the role of parents, teachers, and community in the religious education environment.

The religious education program, as defined by JCS, has practical implications on **two** counts. They are: (a) early introduction of the Bible and (b) children's language of the divine.

Early Introduction of the Bible

Concerning religious education, this study suggested that the Bible should be introduced at an early age and used consistently across all age levels. This conclusion was contrary to that reached by Goldman (1965) and Nye and Carlson (1984) who suggested that the Bible should not be introduced until a child is ten- or eleven-years-old.

Regarding Bible instruction, this study suggested that the religious education curricula needed to take into account the child's level of cognitive development. Appropriate teaching methodology should be used to teach the Bible in a way that is understood by the child. If a child is at a level of concrete religious thinking, then the religious instruction should be geared toward that level, for example, reviewing Bible stories for factual or literal meaning pertaining to the events of the story and then relating that meaning to a child's everyday life. Some of this information may only become meaningful to the child after repeated encounters with the knowledge and as a result of maturation.

Children's Language of the Divine

An investigation of children's 'language of the divine' was unique to their Christian tradition and included an investigation of six classic categories. They were: (i) a Triune God, (ii) God is personal, (iii) God is the creator, (iv) God is eternal, (v) God is all-ness (omniscience), and (vi) God offers salvation and redemption.

The results suggested that the children's 'language of the divine' was not expressed explicitly in the religious education curricula. Despite this, children seemed to respond to this 'language' in an unique way according to their own individual understandings about God wherein they assigned their own theological terms. Understanding the way in which children express particular theological concepts, such as *God the Creator*, could have implications for the

way these concepts are taught. For instance, if a theological concept was identified (e.g., omni-presence) a discussion across all age levels could be about the character of *God as all-present*. The children's metaphors and expressions that would evolve from this discussion would become the future basis for understanding the theological implications of children's 'language of the divine.'

Therefore, the religious education program should provide opportunities for children to discuss the 'language of the divine.' Children should be given the freedom to explore the 'language of the divine' at their own level of understanding. The focus should not be on the theological correctness of the religious concept being discussed although this is important too, but rather on the children's efforts to understand God. The key is to make children aware of the theological concepts within their Christian tradition by using the children's own language, terms, and concepts.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This section examines the implications of this investigation of children's and adolescents' thinking about God. It is divided into the following **three** subsections: (a) research in children's religious development, (b) research in cognitive developmental psychology, and (c) future research in gender differences.

Research in Children's Religious Development

The study suggested that children's thoughts of God follow a developmental sequence. This was evidenced in the following general ways: (a) ideas about God changed across age from childhood to adolescence, (b) children's representations of God shifted, in general, from concrete to abstract religious thinking, (c) children's representations of God shifted from simple to elaborate conceptual notions, (d) children's interpretations of a Biblical event shifted from literal to non-literal understanding, and (e) children's stories about God shifted from intentional to interpretive narrative structure (Smoliak, 1996, 1997).

Yet, there are **two** areas in the development of children's religious thought that research should consider further. They are: (i) religious socialization and (ii) a personal relationship with God.

Religious socialization. The results from the contextual lens suggested that a child's religious ideas are substantially formed by (a) the knowledge and experiences acquired within his or her religious environment and (b) the personal relationships within his or her religious community. Children are actively learning about God whilst engaging in the relationships formed in their religious community. In this way, the socialization process is on-going as children and members of the religious community interact.

Fowler (1981) proposed that the socialization process is governed by the child's and parent's or community member's commitment to a shared center of value and powers (i.e., convenantal pattern of relationship). Perhaps, research should address the interplay of this commitment as it relates to the child's shared center of values and powers within the home, school, and community.

The reasons 'why' are twofold. This study purports that as a child matures (i) his or her desire to learn more about God may be patterned by a covenantal pattern of relationship between the child and parent in relation to the family's shared center of values and powers (i.e., shared religious experiences) and (ii) he or she may have numerous relationships that are defined by a shared center of values and powers within their religious context. In other words, as the child matures the covenantal relationship may no longer be between the child and his or her immediate family but may be expanded to include his or her teacher or youth leader. For instance, the results from Task Three indicated that as children matured, they learned about God not only from their parents but also from their teachers, pastors, friends, and/or youth leaders.

Especially in adolescence, it is presumed that the shared center of values and power shift from the parental bond to a peer bond. This presumption is compatible with Ozorak (1989) and Sloane and Potvin's (1983) research which acknowledged the role of peers and community in shaping adolescents' religious commitment. Consequently, believing in God is easier if a child is in a community of 'believers.' This supports Shelly's (1982) statement that "children

have a natural interest in God, an inborn sense of the divine, the numinous, which must be nurtured by the family and community" (p.34).

Research should be asking what shared centers of values and power does a community of believers holds. A global community's 'shared center of values and powers' (church or school) should be contrasted with the individual members 'shared center of values and powers' (parent or child). Having some idea of the transference of 'values and powers' from a global perspective to an individual level, may lead to some understanding of the religious socialization processes and factors which may potentially influence children's and adolescents' thinking about God.

Personal relationship with God. The findings from the conceptual lens indicated that children within JCS' religious community believed that (a) God was ever-present in their day-to-day lives, (b) God was an approachable deity who listened to their prayers, and (c) God was helpful and friendly in a personal way. The children's general representations of God revealed a child's willingness to enter into a personal relationship with God on a day-to-day basis.

To date, research in children's religious development has tended to neglect the perspective that the child's intimate struggle to understand God is connected to his or her personal relationship with God. Figure 7.1 serves to focus this illustration.

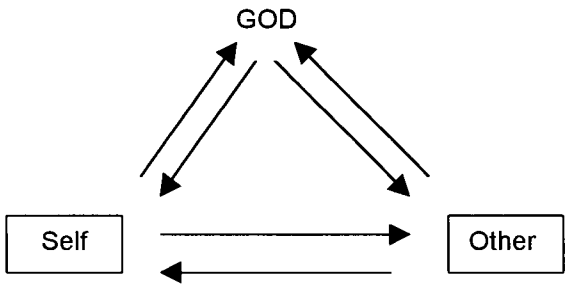

Figure 7.1: Triadic Mode of Communication Between Self, Other, and God[17]

Figure 7.1 shows that a child (self) and members of the community (others) are connected to one another by the mutual religious experiences within their religious community. Yet, each (self and other) are also connected to God. This connection illustrates the God-child relationship (e.g., personal encounter with God through prayer) and the God-other relationship (e.g., members of the church community). Together, the child and members of the community are responsive to God and to each other.

This study suggested that it is in the context of this triadic mode of communication that relationships about God are formed and nurtured. Therefore, not only do the family and community fashion a child's understandings about God but also a child's personal relationship with God is key.

Research in the development of children's religious ideas needs to consider a child's developing relationship with God. The notion that God is an

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[17] Figure 7.1 is a simplified version of Fowler's (1981) convenantal pattern of relationship (See Figure 2.1).

active participant in the child's spiritual journey cannot be ignored. For instance, a personal relationship between God and a child are developed and nurtured through prayer. In this way, God is seen not only as a concept being defined along the cognitive continuum but also as a part of the socialization process. God becomes a primary teacher, along with other members in the religious environment who have the potential to shape children's religious ideas.

Perhaps research should be asking children to describe the nature of their relationship with God and, in doing so, come to a greater understanding of how the nature of the relationship has the ability to shape children's growing understanding of God. This research should be deemed complementary to the focus on the socialization process of parents and community in defining children's ideas about God. Hence, there should be a return to research which suggests that there is a complex relationship between the relationships with self, others, and God and one's varying ideas of God (Spilka, Addison, & Rosensohn, 1975).

Research in Cognitive Developmental Psychology

To date, much of the research in cognitive psychology has acknowledged the relationship between children's religious development and their general pattern of cognitive development. Hyde (1990) stated that "the development of logical thinking ... affects the ability to reason in any area, and must of necessity affect the cognitive aspects of religious thinking, just as it does in many other

areas of learning" (p. 374). For instance, Goldman (1964) used the term 'abstract religious thinking' to parallel Piaget's formal operational period.

This study utilized Case's (1992a) neo-Piagetian developmental framework to assess children's narratives about God. The results indicated that the narrative structure of children's religious texts was consistent with the narrative structure of children's texts, in general, hypothesized by McKeough (1992a) and the stages and substages of development hypothesized by Case (1992a).

McKeough's (1993) research in children's 'narrative knowing' is considered part of the social cognitive domain because narrative is thought to be a way for children to express their knowledge about the social events within their social environment. This study was modeled after McKeough's (1992a) research on narrative structure and used McKeough's (1992a) developmental scoring criteria to assess the changes in children's religious narratives.

Even so, research tends to neglect that just as 'narrative knowing' takes place on a social landscape, so does 'religious knowing' take place in a religious social landscape. Therefore, this study purports that 'religious thinking' is part of the social cognitive domain because the results indicated that there were specific social factors (e.g., religious instruction and religious socialization) which had influenced the children's narrative texts about God (Smoliak, 1998).

The changes in the children's narratives about God as they matured were largely dependent on the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and experiences that were domain, task, and context specific. To reiterate, the children's acquisition

of skills, knowledge, and experiences were as a result of their: (a) religious thinking (about God) in the social cognitive domain, (b) performance of the religious narratives about God (Tasks One, Two, and Three), and (c) religious context (home, school, and church). In this social cognitive domain, children acquire religious knowledge through their religious social experiences.

As a result, research in cognitive development should acknowledge that children's religious ideas are not only a part of cognitive growth (i.e., religious development) but also a part of the social cognitive domain (i.e., religious social cognitive domain). Children's religious development is bound up in all religious life and all the people with whom they live and have daily contact with.

Future Research in Gender Differences

This study did not find as many gender differences as expected. The reasons 'why' are speculative. Perhaps, JCS' high female teacher ratio contributed to the gender socialization process or it may be that the tasks designed for the study were not gender-specific. For instance, Heller (1986) specifically asked children to respond to the sex of the deity.

As a result, further investigation into gender differences and children's understandings about God is needed. Here are **two** suggestions for future analysis.

First, a content analysis of children's (female and male) narrative transcripts could be conducted to examine the adjectives (e.g., loving, kind,

eternal, and holy) that children use to describe the character of God. In turn, these adjectives could be ordered into categories (e.g., companionable versus eternality of God) (adapted from Gorsuch, 1968).

Second, a content analysis or content mapping of the responses indicated in the categories for Task Three (e.g., home of God, activities of God) could be conducted (adapted from Janssen, De Hart, & Gerardts, 1994). This is illustrated in Figure 7.2. For example, a map of female and male responses of the category 'where God lives' may reveal inherent gender differences in the words they use to describe God's home. For instance, females may describe heaven differently than boys.

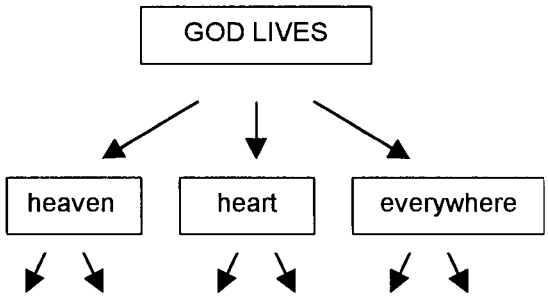

Figure 7.2: Task Three: Content Mapping of Category – Where God Lives.

An analysis of the attributes or responsibilities of God could be conducted in the same way.

Future research into gender differences in children's thinking about God could give researchers the potential to clarify the conceptual differences in boys and girls ideas about God and examine the 'gender socialization process' in the transmission of boys' and girls' ideas about God.

FINAL COMMENT

It was within JCS' religious environment that children's imaginative ideas of God emerged and the changes in their thinking about God were captured. The children's own voices (as portrayed in their narratives) conveyed their understandings about God. For instance, Mike (age 6) said, "God can make a plant grow, make a rain fall, and make the sun shine and make a earth" and Sharon (age 16) said, "God made us. He's tuned into us. He knows what we're thinking and feeling. He's everywhere, I'm sure!"

These voices have allowed me to explore my own understandings about God. I was, in essence, vicariously transformed to a young time when I was both curious and excited about God.

Perhaps in our adult time, and in our desire to fulfill our search for a personal encounter with the divine, we need to remember our childhood voice.

> *'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.' ...*
>
> *And Jesus took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them.* ✞
>
> [Mark 10:14-16 NIV]

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APPENDIX A:

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX B:

PARENT'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

CODE ☐☐☐☐

ATT: PARENTS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING **FOUR** QUESTIONS IN THE SPACE PROVIDED. THIS IS ONLY REQUESTED IF YOU HAVE **CONSENTED** FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT.

(IF MORE THAN ONE CHILD IS PARTICIPATING PLEASE COMPLETE A FORM FOR EACH CHILD)

1. **DENOMINATION** (CHECK ONE RESPONSE THAT IS MOST REPRESENTATIVE)

   ☐ ALLIANCE
   ☐ ANGLICAN
   ☐ BAPTIST
   ☐ CATHOLIC
   ☐ EVANGELICAL FREE
   ☐ LUTHERAN
   ☐ MENNONITE
   ☐ PENTECOSTAL
   ☐ PRESBYTERIAN
   ☐ UNITED
   ☐ OTHER _____

THANK-YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING ☺☺☺

2. **FAMILY LIFE** (CHECK AS MANY ACTIVITIES THAT APPLY AT HOME IN YOUR FAMILY)

   ☐ GRACE
   ☐ FAMILY PRAYER
   ☐ PERSONAL PRAYER
   ☐ BIBLE STUDY
   ☐ BIBLE READING
   ☐ CHURCH GOING
   ☐ OTHER _____

3. **CHILD'S WEEKLY RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT** (CHECK AS MANY ACTIVITIES THAT APPLY)

   NAME _____

   ☐ SUNDAY SCHOOL
   ☐ CHOIR AND/OR WORSHIP GROUP
   ☐ YOUTH GROUP
   ☐ BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS
   ☐ BEDTIME STORIES
   ☐ OTHER _____

4. **ESTIMATE** (THE TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK INVOLVED IN THE ABOVE ACTIVITIES)

   ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
   ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10
   ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15

APPENDIX C:

COUNTER BALANCED ORDER CHECK LIST

ORDER OF TASKS

	K	A06	2	A08	4	A10	6	A12	8	A14	10	A16
1	1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.	
2	2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.	
3	3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.	
4	4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3	
5	1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.	
6	2.3.4.1		2.3.4.1		2.3.4.1		2.3.4.1		2.3.4.1		2.3.4.1	
7	3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.	
8	4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3	
9	1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.	
10	2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.	
11	3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.	
12	4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3	
13	1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.	
14	2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.	
15	3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.	
16	4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3	
17	1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.	
18	2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.	
19	3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.	
20	4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3	
21	1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.	
22	2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.	
23	3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.	
24	4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3	
25	1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.		1.2.3.4.	
26	2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.		2.3.4.1.	
27	3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.		3.4.1.2.	
28	4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3		4.1.2.3	

APPENDIX D:

PARTICIPATION CERTIFICATES

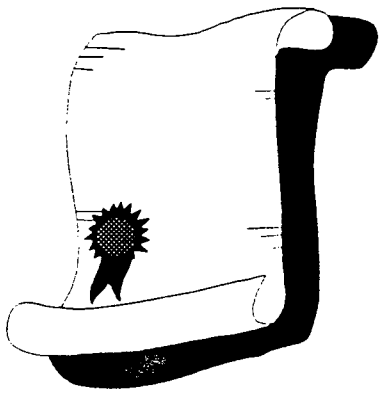
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Dear Student,

In honor and recognition of your participation in this project, I present you with this certificate of award.

Wendy Smoliak
(Researcher)



Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

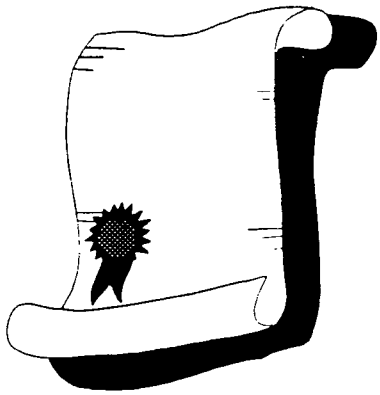
May 1995

Dear Student,

I appreciate your time and effort toward this study. Importantly, your understandings about God will benefit teachers when planning religious instruction.

In honor and recognition of your participation, I present you with this certificate of award.

Wendy Smoliak
(Researcher)



APPENDIX E:

TEACHERS' BIBLE STUDY GOALS

TEACHERS' BIBLE STUDY GOALS

The *Bible Study Goals* were submitted by the teachers at JCS. (They have been adapted for the purposes of this appendix.) This appendix presents the curriculum outlines for the following grades: (1) Kindergarten, (2) Grade Two, (3) Grade Four, (4) Grade Six, and (5) Grade Ten. (The teacher for grade eight did not submit a Bible Study curriculum outline.)

KINDERGARTEN

Bible Study Goals: For KINDERGARTEN, the Bible Study Goals are:

- *to recognize that God is the Creator and Heavenly Father.*
- *to develop faith and trust in God as well as nurture their faith.*
- *to know that God loves them.*
- *to show love and thankfulness to God.*
- *to appreciate prayer and learn to talk to God in prayer.*
- *to learn stories from the Old Testament and the New Testament.*

The Christian Schools International (CSI) curriculum "God's Wonders" will be used in teaching Bible. The class will focus on stories in the Old Testament during the first half of the school year and will learn stories from the New Testament in the last half of the school year.

Social Development Goals: Students will be able:

- *to develop a positive Christian way of living.*
- *to develop worthwhile relationships with family, peers, and adults in the community.*
- *to develop an awareness, respect, and appreciation of the richness of cultural variation within the society.*
- *to develop an acceptance of individual differences and an awareness of the needs of others.*
- *to relate the world at large to God.*

Emotional Development Goals: Students will be able:

- *to develop initiative.*
- *to recognize, accept and express their feelings.*
- *to demonstrate appropriate emotional behavior in appropriate ways.*
- *to give and receive affection.*
- *to develop awareness and respect for the feelings of others.*

GRADE TWO

Resources: Grade 2 Textbook: "God's Promises"

General Objectives: The students will be able to:

- *recognize God as their Creator and Heavenly Father.*
- *develop trust in God.*
- *recognize that God loves them.*
- *show love and thankfulness to God.*
- *learn to talk to God in prayer.*
- *learn stories from the Old Testament and the New Testament.*

Program Focus:

1. School Wide Devotions
2. Classroom Devotions
   (including weekly memory verse and singing)
3. Daily Prayer
4. Bible Curriculum
   Unit 1 - Creation Through Kings
   Unit 2 - The Prophets Speak to Israel and Judah
   Unit 3 - God Preserves His People in Exile
   Unit 4 - A Savior is Born
   Unit 5 - Jesus' Early Ministry
   Unit 6 - Who Is Jesus?
   Unit 7 - Parables
   Unit 8 - Jesus' Death and Resurrection
   Unit 9 - The Early Church
   Unit 10 - The Christian Life
   Unit 11 - The Lord's Prayer
   Unit 12 - Revelation

GRADE FOUR

The principal resource for the GRADE FOUR Bible Study program is "Witnesses to the Gospel (CSI)." The objectives are **fourfold**:

1. The students will discover and explore some of the poetic and prophetic works of the Bible (mainly Psalms and Isaiah) and how they tie in with the story of God's people as well as God's plan for salvation.

2. The students will gain an appreciation for God's Word.

3. The students will consider how the areas covered relate to their own personal lives.

4. The students will memorize passages from Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah.

GRADE SIX

For GRADE SIX, the Bible Study Goals include the following **six** objectives:

1. Students will recognize God's plan to save man through Christ. This promise can be seen at work throughout the whole Old Testament until its fulfillment in the New Testament.

2. Students will study the emphasis of *faith* placed on the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3. Students will understand that the Bible is God's Book of inspired writing to teach about Himself.

4. Students will study the causes and effects of *sin* on mankind.

5. Students will study and see the significance of *Godly characters* of the Bible (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, and Ruth).

6. Books to be studied:

   (a) Genesis (September - October)
   (b) Exodus (November - December)
   (c) Ruth (January)
   (d) 1 Samuel/2 Samuel (February - March/April)
   (e) Reading from Luke/John/Hebrews/Romans (May/June)
   (f) Story of Jonah

GRADE TEN

Course Philosophy:

The grade 10 Bible curriculum for this year will be partly based on student choice. As this is their final year at [JCS], the students should have the opportunity to explore, research and discuss Biblical topics which both interest and challenge them. This student-directed approach provides both variety and versatility to the Bible program and it makes it possible for the teacher to focus on individual student's needs.

'The study of God's Word, for the purpose of discovering God's will, is the secret discipline which has formed the greatest characters.'
J. W. Alexander

Program Focus:

The students will choose Biblical areas which they would like to research and will present their projects to the rest of the class. Part of the course will include classroom visits from a number of guest speakers who will address some of the Biblical issues or topics that the students have chosen to study. In the latter part of the course, we will study Christian apologetics and cults. One of our final units in the Bible 10 course will deal with "Family Life" topics from a Christian perspective.
One of the goals for the Bible 10 program is for the students to be more motivated with the opportunity to choose and research their own curriculum and teach each other.
A list of possible topics to be covered this year in Bible 10 will be submitted later in September when the students have made their choices.

Resources:

1. The Bible (written by men, inspired by God)
2. *Group's Active Bible Curriculum*; Group Books (1993)
   - *Knowing God's Will* (C. Hansen)
   - *Christians in a Non-Christian World* (R. Chromey)
3. *Ideas for Social Action: A Handbook on Missions and Service for Christian Young People* (T. Campolo, 1983)
4. *The Christian in the World: Biblical Perspectives* (C.S.I., 1975)
5. *Exploring Faith and Discipleship* (C.S.I., 1992)
6. *Cults in North America* (E. Schipper, C.S.I., 1982)
7. A variety of other sources, books, magazines, and videos etc.

APPENDIX F:

PARENT'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM RESPONSE CODES

PARENT'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM RESPONSE CODES

Table F.1: Summary of Parent's Background Information Form Response Codes

	QUESTION CODE	*RESPONSE CODES*
QUESTION 1 Denomination	100	101-111 (e.g., Alliance 101)
QUESTION 2 Family Life	200	One Activity 201 Two Activities 202 Three Activities 203 Four Activities 204 Five Activities 205 Six Activities (ALL) 206
QUESTION 3 Child's Weekly Religious Involvement	300	One Activity 301 Two Activities 302 Three Activities 303 Four Activities 304 Five Activities (ALL) 305
QUESTION 4 Estimate Hours	400	401-415 (e.g., one hour a week 401)

APPENDIX G:

PARENT'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM
FREQUENCY TABLES PER AGE GROUPING

AGE 06 FREQUENCY TABLES

Table G.1: Age 06

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
age six	06	28	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	28	100.0	100.0	

Table G.2: Gender

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
male	1	21	75.0	75.0	75.0
female	2	7	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	28	100.0	100.0	

Table G.3: Denomination

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ALLIANCE	101	2	7.1	7.7	7.7
BAPTIST	103	7	25.0	26.9	34.6
LUTHERAN	106	3	10.7	11.5	46.2
MENNONITE	107	4	14.3	15.4	61.5
PENTECOSTAL	108	1	3.6	3.8	65.4
OTHER	111	9	32.1	34.6	100.0
	.	2	7.1	Missing	
	Total	28	100.0	100.0	

Table G.4: Q2: Family Life

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	2	7.1	7.4	7.4
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	5	17.9	18.5	25.9
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	3	10.7	11.1	37.0
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	3	10.7	11.1	48.1
FIVE ACTIVITIES	5	5	17.9	18.5	66.7
SIX ACTIVITIES (ALL)	6	9	32.1	33.3	100.0
	.	1	3.6	Missing	
	Total	28	100.0	100.0	

Table G.5: Q2: Family Life (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
PERSONAL PRAYER (P)	203	1	3.6	3.7	3.7
CHURCH GOING (C)	206	1	3.6	3.7	7.4
G/F/P/S/R/C	208	9	32.1	33.3	40.7
G/C	215	3	10.7	11.1	51.9
G/P/C	222	1	3.6	3.7	55.6
G/R/C	225	1	3.6	3.7	59.3
F/R/C	228	1	3.6	3.7	63.0
F/C	229	1	3.6	3.7	66.7
G/F/P/R/C	236	5	17.9	18.5	85.2
P/R	237	1	3.6	3.7	88.9
G/P/R/C	238	2	7.1	7.4	96.3
G/F/P/C	239	1	3.6	3.7	100.0
	.	1	3.6	Missing	
		---	---	---	
	Total	28	100.0	100.0	

Table G.6: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	6	21.4	22.2	22.2
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	14	50.0	51.9	74.1
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	4	14.3	14.8	88.9
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	2	7.1	7.4	96.3
FIVE ACTIVITES (ALL)	5	1	3.6	3.7	100.0
	.	1	3.6	Missing	
		---	---	---	
	Total	28	100.0	100.0	

Table G.7: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
SUNDAY SCHOOL (S)	301	19	16.7	17.1	17.1
CHOIR AND WORSHIP (W	302	1	.9	.9	18.0
YOUTH GROUP (Y)	303	2	1.8	1.8	19.8
BEDTIME STORIES (B)	305	4	3.5	3.6	23.4
OTHER (O)	306	1	.9	.9	24.3
S/W/Y/C/B	307	1	.9	.9	25.2
S/Y/C/B	308	1	.9	.9	26.1
S/C/B	309	6	5.3	5.4	31.5
S/B	310	31	27.2	27.9	59.5
S/W	311	3	2.6	2.7	62.2
S/C	312	7	6.1	6.3	68.5
S/Y	313	7	6.1	6.3	74.8
S/W/Y	314	6	5.3	5.4	80.2
S/W/C	315	3	2.6	2.7	82.9
S/W/B	316	4	3.5	3.6	86.5
W/Y	321	2	1.8	1.8	88.3
W/B	323	2	1.8	1.8	90.1
S/W/C/B	328	3	2.6	2.7	92.8
S/O	329	5	4.4	4.5	97.3
S/W/Y/C	330	1	.9	.9	98.2
S/Y/B	331	1	.9	.9	99.1
S/Y/C	332	1	.9	.9	100.0
	.	3	2.6	Missing	
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

Table G.8: Estimate Number of Hours

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE HOUR	401	2	7.1	7.4	7.4
TWO HOURS	402	3	10.7	11.1	18.5
THREE HOURS	403	2	7.1	7.4	25.9
FOUR HOURS	404	11	39.3	40.7	66.7
FIVE HOURS	405	5	17.9	18.5	85.2
SIX HOURS	406	2	7.1	7.4	92.6
SEVEN HOURS	407	2	7.1	7.4	100.0
	.	1	3.6	Missing	
	Total	28	100.0	100.0	

AGE 08 FREQUENCY TABLES

Table G.9: Age 08

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
age eight	08	23	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.10: Gender

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
male	1	14	60.9	60.9	60.9
female	2	9	39.1	39.1	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.11: Denomination

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ALLIANCE	101	1	4.3	4.3	4.3
BAPTIST	103	6	26.1	26.1	30.4
EVANGELICAL FREE	105	1	4.3	4.3	34.8
LUTHERAN	106	1	4.3	4.3	39.1
MENNONITE	107	3	13.0	13.0	52.2
PENTECOSTAL	108	2	8.7	8.7	60.9
OTHER	111	9	39.1	39.1	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.12: Q2: Family Life

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	6	26.1	26.1	26.1
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	5	21.7	21.7	47.8
FIVE ACTIVITIES	5	6	26.1	26.1	73.9
SIX ACTIVITIES (ALL)	6	6	26.1	26.1	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.13: Q2: Family Life (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
G/F/P/S/R/C	208	6	26.1	26.1	26.1
G/P/S/R/C	209	1	4.3	4.3	30.4
G/P/C	222	3	13.0	13.0	43.5
G/R/C	225	1	4.3	4.3	47.8
F/P/S/R/C	226	2	8.7	8.7	56.5
P/R/C	231	2	8.7	8.7	65.2
G/F/P/R/C	236	3	13.0	13.0	78.3
G/P/R/C	238	1	4.3	4.3	82.6
G/F/P/S/C	240	1	4.3	4.3	87.0
G/F/R/C	241	1	4.3	4.3	91.3
G/P/S/C	242	1	4.3	4.3	95.7
F/P/R/C	245	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.14: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	3	13.0	13.0	13.0
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	15	65.2	65.2	78.3
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	4	17.4	17.4	95.7
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.15: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
SUNDAY SCHOOL (S)	301	2	8.7	8.7	8.7
BEDTIME STORIES (B)	305	1	4.3	4.3	13.0
S/C/B	309	1	4.3	4.3	17.4
S/B	310	8	34.8	34.8	52.2
S/C	312	3	13.0	13.0	65.2
S/Y	313	1	4.3	4.3	69.6
S/W/C	315	1	4.3	4.3	73.9
S/W/B	316	1	4.3	4.3	78.3
S/W/C/B	328	1	4.3	4.3	82.6
S/O	329	3	13.0	13.0	95.7
S/Y/C	332	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.16: Estimate Number of Hours

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
TWO HOURS	402	1	4.3	4.5	4.5
FOUR HOURS	404	6	26.1	27.3	31.8
FIVE HOURS	405	8	34.8	36.4	68.2
SIX HOURS	406	2	8.7	9.1	77.3
SEVEN HOURS	407	1	4.3	4.5	81.8
EIGHT HOURS	408	2	8.7	9.1	90.9
NINE HOURS	409	1	4.3	4.5	95.5
TEN HOURS	410	1	4.3	4.5	100.0
	.	1	4.3	Missing	
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

AGE 10 FREQUENCY TABLES

Table G.17: Age 10

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
age ten	10	23	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.18: Gender

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
male	1	11	47.8	47.8	47.8
female	2	12	52.2	52.2	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.19: Denomination

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ANGLICAN	102	1	4.3	4.3	4.3
BAPTIST	103	2	8.7	8.7	13.0
EVANGELICAL FREE	105	1	4.3	4.3	17.4
LUTHERAN	106	1	4.3	4.3	21.7
MENNONITE	107	6	26.1	26.1	47.8
PRESPYTERIAN	109	1	4.3	4.3	52.2
OTHER	111	11	47.8	47.8	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.20: Q2: Family Life

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	3	13.0	13.0	13.0
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	5	21.7	21.7	34.8
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	6	26.1	26.1	60.9
FIVE ACTIVITIES	5	4	17.4	17.4	78.3
SIX ACTIVITIES (ALL)	6	5	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.21: Q2: Family Life (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
G/F/P/S/R/C	208	5	21.7	21.7	21.7
G/C	215	2	8.7	8.7	30.4
G/F/S	217	1	4.3	4.3	34.8
G/P/C	222	1	4.3	4.3	39.1
F/C	229	1	4.3	4.3	43.5
P/R/C	231	1	4.3	4.3	47.8
G/F/P/R/C	236	4	17.4	17.4	65.2
G/P/R/C	238	2	8.7	8.7	73.9
G/F/P/C	239	2	8.7	8.7	82.6
G/F/P/S/C	240	1	4.3	4.3	87.0
G/F/R/C	241	1	4.3	4.3	91.3
F/P/C	246	2	8.7	8.7	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.22: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	4	17.4	17.4	17.4
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	14	60.9	60.9	78.3
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	4	17.4	17.4	95.7
FIVE ACTIVITES (ALL)	5	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.23: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
SUNDAY SCHOOL (S)	301	3	13.0	13.0	13.0
CHOIR AND WORSHIP (W	302	1	4.3	4.3	17.4
S/W/Y/C/B	307	1	4.3	4.3	21.7
S/C/B	309	1	4.3	4.3	26.1
S/B	310	11	47.8	47.8	73.9
S/W	311	1	4.3	4.3	78.3
S/W/C	315	2	8.7	8.7	87.0
S/W/B	316	1	4.3	4.3	91.3
W/B	323	1	4.3	4.3	95.7
S/O	329	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table G.24: Estimate Number of Hours

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
TWO HOURS	402	3	13.0	13.6	13.6
THREE HOURS	403	5	21.7	22.7	36.4
FOUR HOURS	404	4	17.4	18.2	54.5
FIVE HOURS	405	5	21.7	22.7	77.3
SIX HOURS	406	2	8.7	9.1	86.4
EIGHT HOURS	408	1	4.3	4.5	90.9
NINE HOURS	409	2	8.7	9.1	100.0
	.	1	4.3	Missing	
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

AGE 12 FREQUENCY TABLES

Table G.25: Age 12

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
age twelve	12	17	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table G.26: Gender

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
male	1	8	47.1	47.1	47.1
female	2	9	52.9	52.9	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table G.27: Denomination

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
BAPTIST	103	1	5.9	5.9	5.9
EVANGELICAL FREE	105	2	11.8	11.8	17.6
MENNONITE	107	2	11.8	11.8	29.4
PENTECOSTAL	108	4	23.5	23.5	52.9
PRESPYTERIAN	109	1	5.9	5.9	58.8
OTHER	111	7	41.2	41.2	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table G.28: Q2: Family Life

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	1	5.9	5.9	5.9
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	2	11.8	11.8	17.6
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	6	35.3	35.3	52.9
FIVE ACTIVITIES	5	3	17.6	17.6	70.6
SIX ACTIVITIES (ALL)	6	5	29.4	29.4	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table G.29: Q2: Family Life (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
G/F/P/S/R/C	208	5	29.4	29.4	29.4
G/P/S/R/C	209	1	5.9	5.9	35.3
G/C	215	1	5.9	5.9	41.2
G/F/C	219	1	5.9	5.9	47.1
G/P/C	222	1	5.9	5.9	52.9
F/P/S/R/C	226	1	5.9	5.9	58.8
F/S/R/C	227	1	5.9	5.9	64.7
G/F/P/R/C	236	1	5.9	5.9	70.6
G/F/P/C	239	1	5.9	5.9	76.5
G/F/R/C	241	2	11.8	11.8	88.2
F/P/S/C	243	1	5.9	5.9	94.1
G/F/P/R	244	1	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table G.30: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	6	35.3	37.5	37.5
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	6	35.3	37.5	75.0
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	4	23.5	25.0	100.0
	.	1	5.9	Missing	
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table G.31: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
SUNDAY SCHOOL (S)	301	4	23.5	25.0	25.0
BEDTIME STORIES (B)	305	1	5.9	6.3	31.3
OTHER (O)	306	1	5.9	6.3	37.5
S/C/B	309	2	11.8	12.5	50.0
S/C	312	3	17.6	18.8	68.8
S/Y	313	1	5.9	6.3	75.0
S/W/Y	314	2	11.8	12.5	87.5
W/B	323	1	5.9	6.3	93.8
S/O	329	1	5.9	6.3	100.0
	.	1	5.9	Missing	
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table G.32: Estimate Number of Hours

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE HOUR	401	1	5.9	5.9	5.9
THREE HOURS	403	3	17.6	17.6	23.5
FOUR HOURS	404	2	11.8	11.8	35.3
FIVE HOURS	405	1	5.9	5.9	41.2
SIX HOURS	406	3	17.6	17.6	58.8
EIGHT HOURS	408	1	5.9	5.9	64.7
NINE HOURS	409	1	5.9	5.9	70.6
TEN HOURS	410	3	17.6	17.6	88.2
FOURTEEN HOURS	414	2	11.8	11.8	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

AGE 14 FREQUENCY TABLES

Table G.33: Age 14

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
age fourteen	14	13	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table G.34: Gender

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
male	1	3	23.1	23.1	23.1
female	2	10	76.9	76.9	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table G.35: Denomination

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ALLIANCE	101	1	7.7	7.7	7.7
BAPTIST	103	2	15.4	15.4	23.1
LUTHERAN	106	1	7.7	7.7	30.8
MENNONITE	107	1	7.7	7.7	38.5
PENTECOSTAL	108	4	30.8	30.8	69.2
OTHER	111	4	30.8	30.8	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table G.36: Q2: Family Life

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	3	23.1	23.1	23.1
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	4	30.8	30.8	53.8
FIVE ACTIVITIES	5	4	30.8	30.8	84.6
SIX ACTIVITIES (ALL)	6	2	15.4	15.4	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table G.37: Q2: Family Life (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
G/F/P/S/R/C	208	2	15.4	15.4	15.4
G/P/C	222	2	15.4	15.4	30.8
S/R/C	233	1	7.7	7.7	38.5
G/F/P/R/C	236	4	30.8	30.8	69.2
G/P/R/C	238	2	15.4	15.4	84.6
G/F/R/C	241	1	7.7	7.7	92.3
F/P/R/C	245	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table G.38: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	3	23.1	23.1	23.1
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	6	46.2	46.2	69.2
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	3	23.1	23.1	92.3
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table G.39: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
SUNDAY SCHOOL (S)	301	2	15.4	15.4	15.4
YOUTH GROUP (Y)	303	1	7.7	7.7	23.1
S/Y/C/B	308	1	7.7	7.7	30.8
S/W	311	1	7.7	7.7	38.5
S/Y	313	4	30.8	30.8	69.2
S/W/Y	314	3	23.1	23.1	92.3
W/Y	321	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table G40: Estimate Number of Hours

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
TWO HOURS	402	1	7.7	7.7	7.7
FOUR HOURS	404	2	15.4	15.4	23.1
FIVE HOURS	405	5	38.5	38.5	61.5
SIX HOURS	406	2	15.4	15.4	76.9
EIGHT HOURS	408	1	7.7	7.7	84.6
TEN HOURS	410	1	7.7	7.7	92.3
THIRTEEN HOURS	413	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

AGE 16 FREQUENCY TABLES

Table G.41: Age 16

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
age sixteen	16	10	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table G.42: Gender

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
male	1	4	40.0	40.0	40.0
female	2	6	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table G.43: Denomination

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ALLIANCE	101	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
ANGLICAN	102	1	10.0	10.0	20.0
BAPTIST	103	3	30.0	30.0	50.0
EVANGELICAL FREE	105	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
PRESPYTERIAN	109	2	20.0	20.0	80.0
OTHER	111	2	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table G.44: Q2: Family Life

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	2	20.0	20.0	20.0
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	1	10.0	10.0	30.0
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	3	30.0	30.0	60.0
FIVE ACTIVITIES	5	2	20.0	20.0	80.0
SIX ACTIVITIES (ALL)	6	2	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table G.45: Q2: Family Life (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
G/F/P/S/R/C	208	2	20.0	20.0	20.0
G/P/S/R/C	209	1	10.0	10.0	30.0
G/C	215	1	10.0	10.0	40.0
G/P/C	222	1	10.0	10.0	50.0
P/C	232	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
G/F/P/R/C	236	1	10.0	10.0	70.0
G/F/P/C	239	2	20.0	20.0	90.0
G/F/P/S/C	240	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table G.46: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	4	40.0	44.4	44.4
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	2	20.0	22.2	66.7
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	2	20.0	22.2	88.9
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	1	10.0	11.1	100.0
	.	1	10.0	Missing	
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table G.47: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement (Breakdown of Activities)

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
SUNDAY SCHOOL (S)	301	3	30.0	33.3	33.3
YOUTH GROUP (Y)	303	1	10.0	11.1	44.4
S/Y	313	1	10.0	11.1	55.6
S/W/Y	314	1	10.0	11.1	66.7
W/Y	321	1	10.0	11.1	77.8
S/W/Y/C	330	1	10.0	11.1	88.9
S/Y/B	331	1	10.0	11.1	100.0
	.	1	10.0	Missing	
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table G48: Estimate Number of Hours

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE HOUR	401	1	10.0	11.1	11.1
TWO HOURS	402	2	20.0	22.2	33.3
THREE HOURS	403	1	10.0	11.1	44.4
FOUR HOURS	404	1	10.0	11.1	55.6
SIX HOURS	406	1	10.0	11.1	66.7
EIGHT HOURS	408	1	10.0	11.1	77.8
TEN HOURS	410	1	10.0	11.1	88.9
ELEVEN HOURS	411	1	10.0	11.1	100.0
	.	1	10.0	Missing	
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

OVERALL FREQUENCY TABLES

Table G.49: Age

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
age six	06	28	24.6	24.6	24.6
age eight	08	23	20.2	20.2	44.7
age ten	10	23	20.2	20.2	64.9
age twelve	12	17	14.9	14.9	79.8
age fourteen	14	13	11.4	11.4	91.2
age sixteen	16	10	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

Table G.50: Gender

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
male	1	61	53.5	53.5	53.5
female	2	53	46.5	46.5	100.0
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

Table G.51: Q1: Denomination

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ALLIANCE	101	5	4.4	4.5	4.5
ANGLICAN	102	2	1.8	1.8	6.3
BAPTIST	103	21	18.4	18.8	25.0
EVANGELICAL FREE	105	5	4.4	4.5	29.5
LUTHERAN	106	6	5.3	5.4	34.8
MENNONITE	107	16	14.0	14.3	49.1
PENTECOSTAL	108	11	9.6	9.8	58.9
PRESPYTERIAN	109	4	3.5	3.6	62.5
OTHER	111	42	36.8	37.5	100.0
	.	2	1.8	Missing	
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

Table G.52: Q2: Family Life

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	2	1.8	1.8	1.8
TWO ACTIVITES	2	11	9.6	9.7	11.5
THREE ACTIVITES	3	20	17.5	17.7	29.2
FOUR ACTIVITES	4	27	23.7	23.9	53.1
FIVE ACTIVITES	5	24	21.1	21.2	74.3
SIX ACTIVITES (ALL)	6	29	25.4	25.7	100.0
	.	1	.9	Missing	
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

Table G.53: Q3: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE ACTIVITY	1	26	22.8	23.4	23.4
TWO ACTIVITIES	2	57	50.0	51.4	74.8
THREE ACTIVITIES	3	21	18.4	18.9	93.7
FOUR ACTIVITIES	4	5	4.4	4.5	98.2
FIVE ACTIVITES (ALL)	5	2	1.8	1.8	100.0
	.	3	2.6	Missing	
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

Table G.54: Q4: Estimate Number of Hours

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ONE HOUR	401	4	3.5	3.6	3.6
TWO HOURS	402	10	8.8	9.1	12.7
THREE HOURS	403	11	9.6	10.0	22.7
FOUR HOURS	404	26	22.8	23.6	46.4
FIVE HOURS	405	24	21.1	21.8	68.2
SIX HOURS	406	12	10.5	10.9	79.1
SEVEN HOURS	407	3	2.6	2.7	81.8
EIGHT HOURS	408	6	5.3	5.5	87.3
NINE HOURS	409	4	3.5	3.6	90.9
TEN HOURS	410	6	5.3	5.5	96.4
ELEVEN HOURS	411	1	.9	.9	97.3
THIRTEEN HOURS	413	1	.9	.9	98.2
FOURTEEN HOURS	414	2	1.8	1.8	100.0
	.	4	3.5	Missing	
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

APPENDIX H:

PARENT'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTILE TABLES PER QUESTION

FREQUENCY AND PERCENTILE TABLES PER QUESTION

Table H.1: Denomination Frequency and Percentile Table

	AGE 06 n=28		AGE 08 n=23		AGE 10 n=23		AGE 12 n=17		AGE 14 n=13		AGE 16 n=10		GROUP N=114	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Alliance	2	7.1	1	4.3	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	1	10	5	4.4
Anglican	0	0	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	0	0	1	10	2	1.8
Baptist	7	25.0	6	26.1	2	8.7	1	5.9	2	15.4	3	30	21	18.4
Catholic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Evangelical	0	0	1	0	1	4.3	2	11.8	0	0	1	10	5	4.4
Lutheran	3	10.7	1	4.3	1	4.3	0	0	1	7.7	0	0	6	5.3
Mennonite	4	14.3	3	4.3	6	26.1	2	11.8	1	7.7	0	0	16	14.0
Pentecostal	1	3.6	2	13.0	0	0	4	23.5	4	30.8	0	0	11	9.6
Presbyterian	0	0	0	0	1	4.3	1	5.9	0	0	2	20	4	3.5
United	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	9	32.1	9	39.1	11	47.8	7	41.2	4	30.8	2	20	42	36.8
Missing	2	7.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.8

Table H.2: Family Life Frequency and Percentile Table

	AGE 06 n=28		AGE 08 n=23		AGE 10 n=23		AGE 12 n=17		AGE 14 n=13		AGE 16 n=10		GROUP N=114	
# activities	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
ONE	2	7.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.8
TWO	5	17.9	0	0	3	13.0	1	5.9	0	0	2	20	11	9.6
THREE	3	10.7	6	26.1	5	21.7	2	11.8	3	23.1	1	10	20	17.5
FOUR	3	10.7	5	21.7	6	26.1	6	35.3	4	30.8	3	30	27	23.7
FIVE	5	17.9	6	26.1	4	17.4	3	17.6	4	30.8	2	20	24	21.1
SIX (ALL)	9	32.1	6	26.1	5	21.7	5	29.4	2	15.4	2	20	29	25.4
Missing	1	3.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.9

Table H.3: Child's Weekly Religious Involvement Frequency and Percentile Table

	AGE 06 n=28		AGE 08 n=23		AGE 10 n=23		AGE 12 n=17		AGE 14 n=13		AGE 16 n=10		GROUP N=114	
# activities	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
ONE	6	21.4	3	13.0	4	17.4	6	35.3	3	23.1	4	40.0	26	22.8
TWO	14	50.0	15	65.2	14	60.9	6	35.3	6	46.2	2	20.0	57	50.0
THREE	4	14.3	4	17.4	4	17.4	4	23.5	3	23.1	2	20.0	21	18.4
FOUR	2	7.1	1	4.3	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	1	10.0	5	4.4
FIVE (ALL)	1	3.6	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.8
Missing	1	3.6	-	-	-	-	1	5.9	-	-	1	10.0	3	2.6

Table H.4: Total Number of Hours Involved in Religious Activities Frequency and Percentile Table

	AGE 06 n=28		AGE 08 n=23		AGE 10 n=23		AGE 12 n=17		AGE 14 n=13		AGE 16 n=10		GROUP N=114	
# hours/wk	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
ONE	2	7.1	0	0	0	0	1	5.9	0	0	0	0	4	3.5
TWO	3	10.7	1	4.3	3	13.0	0	0	1	7.7	1	10.0	10	8.8
THREE	2	7.1	0	0	5	21.7	3	17.6	0	0	2	20.0	11	9.6
FOUR	11	39.3	6	26.1	4	17.4	2	11.8	2	15.4	1	10.0	26	22.8
FIVE	5	17.9	8	34.8	5	21.7	1	5.9	5	38.5	1	10.0	24	21.1
SIX	2	7.1	2	8.7	2	8.7	3	17.6	2	15.4	0	0	12	10.5
SEVEN	2	7.1	1	4.3	1	4.3	0	0	0	0	1	10.0	3	2.6
EIGHT	0	0	2	8.7	2	8.7	1	5.9	1	7.7	0	0	6	5.3
NINE	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	1	5.9	0	0	1	10.0	4	3.5
TEN	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	3	17.6	1	7.7	0	0	6	5.3
ELEVEN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10.0	1	.9
TWELVE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10.0	0	0
THIRTEEN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	0	0	1	.9
FOURTEEN	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	11.8	0	0	0	0	2	1.8
FIFTEEN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missing	1	3.6	1	4.3	1	4.3	-	-	-	-	1	10.0	4	3.5

APPENDIX I:

REPORT FOR JCS
1996 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT GOD

Report for [JCS] Annual General Meeting on May 25, 1996

Submitted by Wendy G. Smoliak (Ph.D. Candidate)

Introduction

A study was conducted at [JCS] during the months of April and May 1995. The **purpose** of the study was to provide an opportunity for children (ages six to sixteen) to talk about their own understandings about God.

Overall, 114 children participated (with consent of their parents) in the study [See TABLE 1]. In a one-to-one interview, the children were asked to (i) tell a story about God [Task 1], (ii) respond to a story about Jesus [Task 2], (iii) answer questions about God [Task 3], and (iv) reply to a short memory task [Task 4].

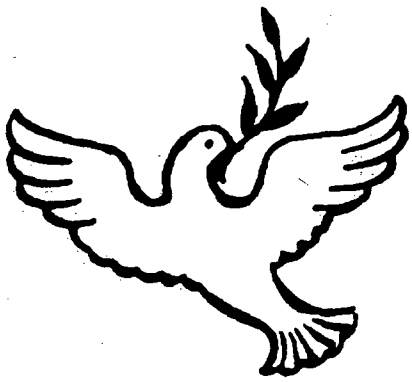
This report **HIGHLIGHTS** *some* of the children's responses to *some* of the above tasks. Such highlights demonstrate a child's personal journey toward a developing relationship with God.

TABLE 1: BREAKDOWN OF STUDENTS (Average Age)

AGE	#	M	F
6	28	21	7
8	23	14	9
10	23	11	12
12	17	8	9
14	13	3	10
16	10	4	6
Total	114	61	53

Note: Only those students in kindergarten, grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 participated.

Task One Highlights



For **Task One**, children were asked to generate a story about God. Overall, the children's stories revealed **two general** things.

One is the influence of religious knowledge and the other, is the influence of personal relationships in shaping children's understandings about God.

The **influence of religious knowledge** in shaping children's understandings of God emerged from three general themes. They were: (i) *God in the Bible* (stories that reflect a child's knowledge of the bible), (ii) *Information about God* (stories that demonstrate a child's general knowledge about God), and (iii) *Christian Passage* (stories that reveal a child's knowledge about a particular Christian event such as baptism).

The above *God Themes* indicate how knowledge about God is transmitted within the child's religious environment. Such knowledge is acquired at school, home, and/or church.

Inside This REPORT

1 Task One Highlights
2 Task Three Highlights
3 Developmental Trends
4 Parent's Questionnaire
5 Conclusion

For instance, one boy (age 12) describes what he is learning from his grade six teacher.

> *OK. Mr. _____ teaches, like every term he teaches something new, or like, he could teach two things in a term, but I think right now we are doing something about Ruth and he's teaching what Ruth's life is about and how she has faith in God and Mr. _____ is really focused on faith, like believing in God and having faith in him. So that's what we're learning and that's what he's teaching.*

Therefore, as a child acquires knowledge about God and experiences God within his or her religious environment, his or her understandings about God emerge, develop, and change.

The **influence of personal relationships** in shaping children's understandings of God emerge from three general themes. They were: (i) *God in Everyday Living* (stories that reveal God's involvement in a child's every day life), (ii) *God Helps* (stories that reveal God's assistance in a child's life), and (iii) *God Answers Prayers* (stories that illustrate God's answered prayer in a child's life).

The above *God Themes* reveal how God is reflected in the child's relationships. For instance, one boy (age 14) shares his fondness for his youth group and youth pastor.

> *I go to church all the time and I go to youth group every Friday night. .. It's really nice. I love my youth group. I even sometimes play guitar in my youth group. My youth pastor is really good. And on the 20th we are going on a youth convention with a whole bunch of youth groups.*

HENCE, it is through the child's religious environment that the child acquires knowledge about God. It is in this environment that relationships are formed and knowledge about God is shared and experienced; all which further a child's understandings of God.

Task Three Highlights

For **Task Three**, children were asked to respond to a series of questions about God. The answers to these questions were as vast and unique as the children themselves.

Overall, children's understandings about God start simply and then, become more elaborate with age. The following answers illustrate some of the intimate and imaginative details of children's thoughts and feelings about God. ENJOY!

DESCRIPTION OF GOD: *Where does God come from? How old is God? Is God like a person? Could you describe in words, using one word or many, what God looks like?*

"Eighty-free" OR "A million years old" OR "Older than we think" (age 6)

"God got brown hairs and blue eyes and a nose and a mouth and a blue and white shirt on ... that's what I see in my Bible." (age 6)

"Well, God looks like the same as angels. He has wings, feet, and two eyes." (age 6)

"He might be bald like my dad." (age 8)

"God looks like air because God is everything around us." (age 8)

"If he was a thing, maybe a rock. If he was a creature maybe a porcupine. If he was a human, maybe a grown man or boy" (age 10)

"God comes from His heavenly kingdom in heaven.... He was there when the earth began and nobody knows where he came from, He was just there." (age 10)

"No one's really sure. He could have come from another galaxy and came to make His own. No one really knows. He was here before time, before the earth, and before life." (age 12)

"There's many different pictures and stories about God having a beard, but I think that's more Jesus type of stuff, well same thing sort of. I think that God can show himself in any type of way. You can't really say that this is mainly how He is because He can be any type of form." (age 12)

"He's like everything, like a father, and a friend, like your best friend. You can tell Him anything and He'll help you. He died for you. He's just there for you all the time. He'll never leave you and He never won't be there for you. So He is like the best friend in the world and then, He's like the Father because He can watch over you and protect you and stuff. And when you are really scared it almost feels like He's hugging you. Like you

always feel secure when God's around. I think of Him as light because He's pure and He's bright and He gives me so much joy. It's light." (age 14)

HOME OF GOD: *Could you tell me where you think God lives? What is God's home like? Does God have a family or does God live alone there?*

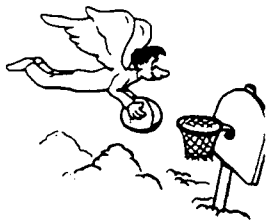
"Heaven is like, where the angels stay and heaven looks like a pretty place. It has flowers and beautiful bunnies and kids that like God and angels." (age 6)

"All the dead people, of course" are in God's family and adds that both "Jesus" and "Elvis" are "up there." (age 6)

"God has a family because we are all part of his family, we're all His children." (age 8)

"Well like, not that He's in my heart, but he's with me what ever I do. And I sort of know that He's there and that He's helping me through my day and whatever." (age 14)

ACTIVITIES OF GOD: *What are some things that God can do? What are some things that God can not do? What are God's everyday activities? How is God involved in your life every day?*



"If he sees people hurt, He heals them. Well, when there's nothing to do, He just sits and He might just go and see his angels." (age 6)

"God cannot change houses into different colors" OR "God cannot make cars. He can't just say, 'well, I'll give you a bicycle' and POOF, it's there." (age 6)

"Loving, caring, being joyful, taking care of us, and being with us ... " (age 8)

"God cannot get you whatever you want. Like you can pray and ask for an ice-cream sundae as big as your house and He cannot do that and if you asked Him to change the way you look He cannot do that." (age 10)

Some children suggested that God activities are to "turn you around" or "make you a Christian" or "forgive you" or "help you through the tough times" or "give you a better heart."

"God is like a psychiatrist. Because He hears all the people's problem. Cause everybody prays and stuff and they talk to Him and He hears everybody. Maybe He like analyzes everything and like does what He thinks is right for them." (age 14)

"Well, I'm sure He looks over and checks up on everyone. Signs the papers that forgive them whenever they ask for forgiveness. And maybe He makes new worlds somewhere else just for the heck of it. Just to see if He can get the formula right there." (age 16)

"Like in the Bible, He's like doing miraculous things, like splitting the sea and everything. Like Moses and Noah and the ark and the huge rain and everything. And like He did all those miracles with the lame man by helping him walk." (age 16)

COMMUNICATION WITH GOD: *Does God know who you are? Can God see and hear you? Is it possible to have a conversation with God? How is it possible to let God know about something?*

All of the children, across ages six to sixteen, believe that God knows *who they are* and that God can both *see* and *hear* them.

"Well, probably if he wanted to see through the other side of the world, he would probably just see through the top side of the world. He could see through that and he could see what's going down on the other side ... an invisible globe ... his eyes would go sh-sh-sh-sh and see what's going on the other side. ... And say there are the clouds, he peeks down through the clouds. That's how I think. ... " (age 6)

In addition, they believe that it is possible to have a conversation with God through prayer. **Prayer** appears to be central activity in the lives of children. Importantly, prayer is an essential link in a child's developing relationship with God.

"You can just talk to Him ... or you can just sit and pray and meditate and stuff. Different people have different techniques or ways of doing it." (age 16)

"I talk to God in my head with nobody hearing, not with my mouth, just in my head." (age 6)

"I keep doing what I normally do and I just say [a prayer] in my brain. Dear Jesus ... say amen and stop." (age 8)

"I fold my hands, like this, and I kneel and I close my eyes and talk to God just like he was actually there and I could see him. And I can sometimes hear him talking to me." (age 8)

"Everyday I pray and I know He's always listening." (age 10)

Thank you for the world so sweet,
Thank you for the food we eat,
Thank you for the birds that sing,
Thank you God for everything. Amen (age 6)

QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD: *Are there questions that you would like to ask God if you could? Are there some things that you are wondering about God?*

"Why is the 'blue' up in the sky?" (age 6)

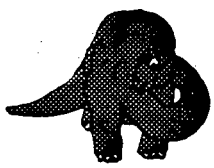
"I am wondering how God can do everything." (age 6)

"I really do want to see him because I'm not really sure and I'm really confused about it because some people say he has black hair and some people say that he has brown hair and some people say that he has brown skin or black skin or something like that."(age 8)

"What do angels look like? Do they have wings?" (age 8)

"Maybe when I get to heaven I'll ask Him questions. .... Like, what kind of year you came on earth cause I don't know when He came to earth, how did He come to earth? And um, how He always protects us from enemies and all this stuff. Why can't we just see Him now? And I want to ask Him why did He leave? And um, when will you come down to earth?" (age 10)

"Dinosaurs -- did they really live? Like when did they live cause humans were always on this earth?" (age 10)



"I have a pet Buddy. He's a rabbit and when he dies I want him to go to heaven." (age 10)

"I would ask how God sees everything. Like I would want the knowledge of how he sees everything. I would ask Him what happened with evolution and stuff like that. And how He created Adam and stuff like that. Because I just think He picked it up and said 'POOF' and that's how I think it happened. But this evolution and stuff, I think it's crazy." (age 14)

Some of the adolescents asked, "Why are temptations so hard," "Why did God give us choices," "Why are we so special to God," and "How can I be a better Christian?"

"Well, I did doubt Him. And I guess sometimes I still do. Like, I don't like going to church, because my church is boring. Like it is boring. Like people say, 'Oh, yeah church is boring.' But my church is REALLY boring." (age 16)

CHANGES ABOUT GOD: *Are there things you would like to change about God? If you could give God a suggestion, what would it be?*

There should be no changes "because if He did [change], then He wouldn't be good for everybody. Because God is God." (age 8)

"God should give us power like He does, and then if somebody was blind or something, then we could heal him instead of God always having to come down and work on him. ... Cause them He wouldn't always have to attend to all these prayers." (age 10)

"He doesn't need advise from us. He doesn't need us. We need Him! So, I wouldn't tell Him anything. No advice from me. He's far more better that me and far wiser." (age 12)

"I don't think that I have any advice to give Him except to kind of encourage Him to keep up the good job." (age 12)

God should "listen to people when they need help and to just love everyone that He can, everyone who accepts him, and just try to understand everyone." (age 14)

God should "make us more understanding so we can understand why things might happen to us. Like if someone dies and they're really young, we don't really understand why, we can figure things out, sort of." (age 14)

"I don't know if I could tell God anything actually. I mean ... it comes back to the explanation. If you listen to what He wants, what He's aiming for, maybe it will all become understandable." (age 16)

God should "make the Bible clearer ... cause at school it's really hard when you're doing discussions and everybody else has a different opinion about he Bible and you have your own. They get into these big fights and sometimes in our class we end up insulting people about their faith. Not me but other people. So it's kind of difficult." (age 16)

LEARNING ABOUT GOD: *Where did you learn about God from? From anyone in particular? From any ways that do not involve other people?*

"I learned about God from the Bible. And we went to church and then some Christian peoples and some pastor or counselor, like my dad is a counselor and he tells me about God. ... Yep, I learned about God when I was [pause] my dad told me that a missionary that my dad know and ... the missionaries told me about God." (age 6)

"Well, our teacher will talk to us about the Bible. Sometimes we watch a movie, a cartoon movie about it. And sometimes we do work from a little booklet. But usually we read from the Bible and He just explains stuff that we want to know. That we don't understand that he might know, stuff like that." (age 14)

"You learn about God just through reading the Bible, also some devotions, but most of all it is through people." (age 16)

"I don't really have time to read the Bible. I could if I wanted to but I get so lazy. Like you finish your homework and like, practice piano and then study for a test or whatever and then, you know, you sit at the TV and then you watch it for an hour. And then, you pick up the phone and you talk to you friends and then the day is gone. And then, there's school." (age 16)

The BIBLE continues to be a prominent source for children to learn about God. Such learning about God is coupled with the children's relational experiences with their parents, with others, and ultimately with God. These experiences in the home, church, school, and/or community provide opportunities for children to learn about God.

THINKING ABOUT GOD VERSUS FRIENDS AND PARENTS: *How do you think the way you think about God might be the same as or different than your friends' ideas? How do you think the way you think about God might be the same as or different from your parents' ideas?*

"You can think about Him in your heart" and "they [friends] think about Him in their brain." (age 6)

"I like God more than my friends." (age 6)

Those children that believed that their thoughts of God were different than their friends' said so because "they think differently," "my God ideas are better," "we love God in different ways," or "we draw different God pictures." (age 8)

"I think that it is the same because we both love God and we know that He is real." (age 8)

"I think that we have different views of what God's like. Some people are really really into Christianity, like are really like 'Oh you sinned you will go to hell.' And like they're just being really obnoxious not really getting it. And some people are just kind of loose with it. They just take it as it comes sort of."
Which variety are you? (Researcher)
"Well, what I do is I just sort of take it as it comes and I just when we are learning about the Bible or at church or something, I go along with it. I actually enjoy it." (age 12)

"I think that I think basically like my parents because I learned allot from them, I'm more at their level than at my friend's level because God's done so many things through my life, all of a sudden in the last two years, I'm just exploding with God and that's kind of the way my parents have always been. So, I can relate more to them than my friends. ... And I can't wait 'til Sunday cause I love learning about God. I just drink it all up and if I miss a Sunday then I beg to go to the Bible study. ... It's like how it was explained how you hunger and thirst for Him. And if you don't (pant pant) you know, you're completely out of it." (age 14)

"Whoa! I know I think a lot different than my parents. ... Well, they're always telling me to have devotions, But I don't think God needs that everyday. And another thing is prayer before meals, every single meal. I don't think so! Maybe a prayer for the day or something like that. ... It's like you come, you sit down and the prayer's always the same. It's kind of stupid I think. What's the point of that?" (age 16)

Developmental Trends

This section is especially for those "statistical enthusiasts."

The children's responses for Task One (Tell a story about God) and Task Two (Respond to a Story about Jesus) were given numerical scores. The scoring procedures were in accordance with the theoretical premise of a developmental model (Case, 1992). [See **predicted line** in FIGURES 1 and 2]

Case's (1992) model allows for the identification of a developmental progression in children's understandings of God. In other words, as the child matures and is exposed to new experiences or knowledge about God, it is hypothesized that changes occur in his or her understandings about God.

The results of TABLE 2 indicate that as children mature their average or mean score for Tasks One and Two increases. Likewise, FIGURES 1 and 2 demonstrate the developmental progression of children's (female and male) understandings of God.

Particularly, FIGURE 1 illustrates that for males there is an increase in mean scores around ten years old with little difference in mean scores between ages twelve and fourteen. This 'leveling off' is evident for both males and females in FIGURE 2.

OVERALL, this developmental trend suggests that children's understandings of God change as children mature.

TABLE 2: Tasks One and Two Mean Scores by Age Group

	TASK ONE			TASK ONE		
	Female	Male	Group	Female	Male	Group
AGE	M	M	M	M	M	M
Age 06	1.71	1.50	1.55	1.86	1.90	1.89
Age 08	2.13	2.21	2.18	3.13	3.14	3.14
Age 10	3.50	3.14	3.33	4.38	4.32	4.35
Age 12	4.94	5.38	5.15	5.67	5.38	5.53
Age 14	5.42	5.33	5.42	5.60	4.67	5.38
Age 16	6.45	6.50	6.45	6.50	5.75	6.20

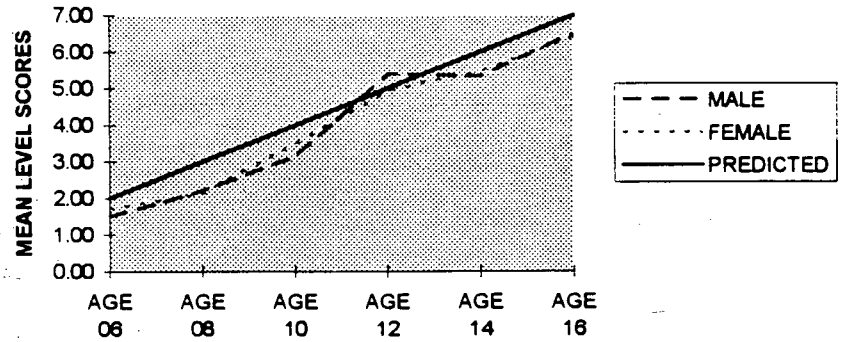


FIGURE 1: Task One Mean Level Scores -- Line Graph

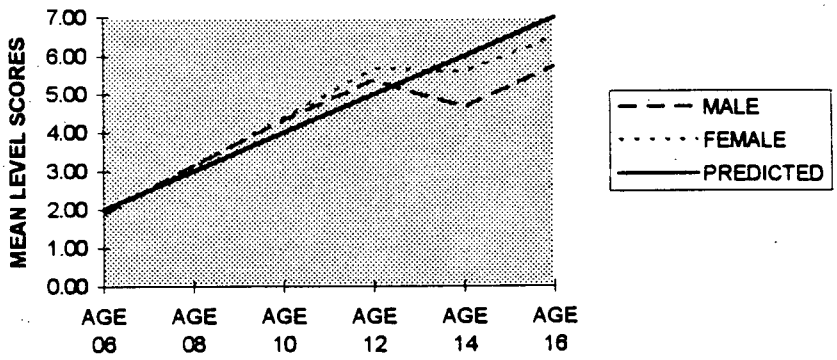


FIGURE 2: Task Two Mean Level Scores -- Line Graph

Case, R. (Ed.) (1992). *The mind's staircase: Exploring the conceptual and underpinnings of children's thought and knowledge.* Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

"God can make a plant grow, make a rain fall, make the sun shine, and make a earth" (age 6)

Parent's Questionnaire

Parents were asked to provide specific information regarding the child's religious experiences. Such experiences were based on the (a) family's religious activity, and (b) child's religious activity.

The following **two** questions were taken from the "Parent's Background Information Form." [114 parents responded to this form]

FAMILY LIFE (CHECK AS MANY ACTIVITIES THAT APPLY AT HOME)

- ❒ GRACE
- ❒ FAMILY PRAYER
- ❒ PERSONAL PRAYER
- ❒ BIBLE STUDY
- ❒ BIBLE READING
- ❒ CHURCH GOING
- ❒ OTHER

RESULTS:

- ✞ 70.2% of families engage in 4 to 6 activities
- ✞ 25.4% of families regularly engage in ALL activities
- ✞ The least common activity in family life is BIBLE STUDY
- ✞ The most common activities in family life are GRACE and CHURCH

CHILD'S WEEKLY RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT (CHECK AS MANY ACTIVITIES THAT APPLY)

- ❒ SUNDAY SCHOOL
- ❒ CHOIR AND/OR WORSHIP GROUP
- ❒ YOUTH GROUP
- ❒ BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS
- ❒ BEDTIME STORIES
- ❒ OTHER

RESULTS

- ✞ 72.8% of the children engage in 1 to 2 weekly activities
- ✞ SUNDAY SCHOOL and BEDTIME STORIES are the most common activities
- ✞ 52.6% of 12, 14, and 16 year olds are involved in both SUNDAY SCHOOL and YOUTH GROUP

Overall, the results of this questionnaire represent **some** of the factors which influence a child's understandings about God.

Listen my son, to your father's instructions and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

[Proverbs 1:8-9]

Conclusion

A child's understandings of God are dependent on a child's burgeoning relationship with a personal God. Accordingly, a child's relationships within his or her religious environment are central in defining his or her ideas about God.

In other words, a child's developing ideas about God are not developed in isolation. Such ideas and understandings are bound up in all daily circumstances and with all the people that the child comes into contact with.

As a result, a child learns about God from his or her parents, teachers, church leaders, and friends within his or her religious environment. In this way, the religious environment is an **interactive one**. This interaction calls for a constant exchange of ideas between adults and children. Through these relational exchanges, a child is exposed to knowledge about God and in turn, he or she develops understandings about God.

Therefore, church, school, and home should play an essential part in the child's developing interests in God. Importantly, there should be mutual understanding and cooperation between them in order that the child's fullness of a God filled life can be achieved.

AFTER ALL, the child's understandings about God developed and formed during childhood become the inner convictions that color the entire religious life of the child.

A Final Comment

I have tried to convey the children's understandings of God in the ways that they were expressed to me.

SIMPLY
HONESTLY
ENTHUSIASTICALLY
COURAGEOUSLY
IMAGINATIVELY
ENERGETICALLY
QUESTIONINGLY
FAITHFULLY

****

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

And Jesus took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

[Mark 10:14-16]

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THANK YOU to everyone at [JCS]! It was a privilege to be a part of your school community.

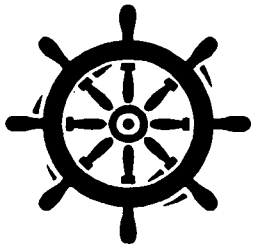
THANK YOU to all the parents that consented for their child's participation in the study.

THANK YOU to the teachers who were directly involved in the study.

THANK-YOU to the [JCS] Board and [PRINCIPAL].

Most of all, THANK YOU for each participant who shared his or her understandings about God.

MOSE'S ARK



OK, I'll tell a story from the Bible.

Moses was building the ark, and people were laughing at him and saying, 'That thing will never float are you going to test drive it or something?'

And they keeped on laughing and had a party and stuff. And Moses ignored them and stuff and he did what God told him to. Cause he knew a storm would come and stuff. They would want to come in when the storm came. They would be sorry but God wouldn't let them.

And he's taking like, all the animals, two of every kind.

And like, the earth opened up and water came spraying out and stuff. Then, like, another earthquake was under the water. It was pushing and pushing against a big huge mountain and it broke from the mountain and came sporting down. And it destroyed the whole world.

...

People actually saw it on Mount Seymour. It got struck in two. It went on one side and then the other side. It was big. There where the water came crashing out on Mt. Seymour. That where the big hole was. (age 8)

Further Investigation

This report is a **preliminary one.** Therefore, it did not address ALL features of this study in progress.

As a result, much more investigation is required in order to further assess

(a) the changes in children's understandings about God as they mature across ages six to sixteen

AND

(b) the role of the religious environment [that is, particularly the role of religious education] in shaping children's understandings about God.

HENCE, this investigative process is an on-going one.

Accordingly, as the investigation continues and as the results unfold, you are welcome to contact me at the following address:

Wendy Smoliak

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[Effective September 1996]