

# Religion

## What do the children really think?

By JIM RYAN  
Eleventh Sunday  
in Ordinary Time  
March 4:28-34  
June 16, 1991

David Heller has written a book entitled, *The Children's God*. In it he describes and analyzes the views of forty children from the age of four to twelve years, on the nature of God. The children (20 girls, 20 boys) are from Catholic, Jewish, Baptist and Hindu backgrounds.

For Heller it was important to hear what the children really thought. What were their questions? How did they picture God? What was God's relation to them?

In order to encourage the children to trust him, to be open and to make original responses, and not just parrot the views of their parents, Heller developed an interview process that included drawing, story-telling, play and letters to God.

The questions that he asked the children fell under the following categories:

1. Description of the deity.
2. Belief in the deity.
3. Feelings about the deity.
4. Communication/relation with the deity.



Religion and Reality  
by Jim Ryan

5. The deity and famous people.  
The specific questions were semi-structured, leaving room to follow the interests of the child. Heller also worded his questions in such a way so as not to suggest priori answers.

Heller realized that much of what he would receive from the children would be the result of their particular family and religious upbringing (socialization) and their developmental level. But a major goal of his research was to discover if there were views of a deity that the children might hold in common, characteristics that would transcend family and religious upbringing.

Heller found seven common themes in the responses of the children.

1. God is powerful, and yet God's power is held in check. God doesn't have complete control otherwise he'd end wars or cure cancer.
2. God desires closeness with human beings.
3. God exists everywhere and at all times.
4. God seems scary. This fear or anxiety doesn't go away. God is complicated. Death is hard to explain.
5. God causes the changes and transformations that take place in the lives of the children. This is a source of joy and wonder.
6. God connects us all.
7. Light is the symbol of God, or the sign of God's presence.

Heller writes, "It is paradoxical that the themes that bring the children closest to themselves as individuals also bring them together through the God conception they have in common."

In an Epilogue, Heller notes that we're all children, but that we've forgotten it. He suggests that one way to rediscover the child within is to attempt the play tasks and the interview ques-

tions.

Here's a sampling:

Part 1: Naming the Deity.

Directions: When you think of what best represents your own beliefs about life, what word or words would you use to describe the most important thing in your beliefs?

Part 2: Drawing the Deity.

Directions: Now I want you to imagine what (child's name for deity) would look like if you pictured ... in your mind.

Part 3: Storytelling About the Deity.

Directions: Now, could you tell me a story about your picture? What is going on in the picture? What are the characters thinking and feeling? What led up to this? What will happen?

Part 4: Playing the Deity (family scenarios).

Directions: Next, I have here a small family of dolls and I want you to imagine a family situation - any family situation. But with this family, I want you to play ... I want you to show me what, if anything ... would you do or say with such a family. You can act how you like.

Part 5: The Deity and Famous Persons.

Directions: I'd like you to tell me whether ... is as real, more real, or less real for you than: Santa Claus, E.T., Brian Mulroney, your daddy, your granddaddy, your great-granddaddy.

Endnote: David Heller, *The Children's God*, (Chicago:1986).

## A book well worth reading

By REV. WALTER BEECHAM  
Home-Huttonville-Norval  
United Church

Peace, Love and Healing is a book written by Bernie Siegel, M.D.

"Come with me to London and hear Bernie Siegel," my wife continued to urge me. I doubted if I needed four hours of driving in the middle of a busy week. I got into his book and found it delightful. Some cancer patients go into long remission and some seem to get better. He asks them why and they seem to know.

2,300 people jammed into the alumni auditorium at Western University and many couldn't get in.

"You don't kill yourself doing what you love. Why do you need

an illness? We burn out doing what we don't want to do!" He has a lot of one-liners! "In medical school we learn alot about disease but not much about people."

He claimed that your attitude has a lot to do with how your handle disease especially cancer. People tend to postpone their death until after meaningful events. For example the graduation or marriage of children. This suggests that people do have a real capacity to handle disease if their attitude is right. "You need to become assertive with your doctor. Take responsibility for your progress."

He says it is a crime to graduate a doctor who has not spent a week in a hospital bed

worrying about some dangerous disease he/she is supposed to have. He seemed to think that would make a doctor more human and understanding. Really listening to a patient's trouble might do more curing than a pill.

How do you use your pain rather than avoid it? Keep sharing with someone - makes it bearable. His humour was delightful. Very much like Trivia in Fiddler on the Roof. After it was over I asked myself how I felt? I felt like I had been to church where the service had really gone well.

Listen to this for a closing comment. "If I told you you will be happy the rest of your life, what would you do? His book is well worth reading.

## Bible Digest

"And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Matthew 14:28.

Are you willing to get out of the boat of comfort and self-sufficiency and go to Jesus? He loves you and He will take care of you. Just look at how He took care of Peter.

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Jeremiah 33:3.

In this verse is a wonderful invitation, a wonderful promise and a wonderful surprise. Don't we serve a wonderful God?

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21.

The Lord just doesn't do the acceptable in life. He does the exceptional. Put your trust in Him.

"Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people." Psalm 77:14.

We serve a "great, big, wonderful God." He's bigger than any problem we face.

"The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body is full of darkness." Luke 11:34.

Our eyes are important instruments of instruction. What are we doing with them? Let the light of the Lord and His Word come into your life.

"Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of things." Deuteronomy 28:47.

Don't take for granted the blessings of the Lord and, most of all, don't forget the One who gave them to you.

## Camp for kids

"Camp Can-Do" Gives Local Church a New Look.

Giving your child a few days at summer camp just got a lot easier thanks to Bethel Christian Reformed Church and the Baptist Church, both in Acton. A free daily program is being offered for two weeks this summer.

The first part of the program runs at the Christian Reformed Church, Highway 7, at Churchill Road on July 8 to 12th.

The second part of the program will be offered several weeks later. Further details will follow.

"We will be turning the church into a campsite," reports Cindy Director of "Camp-Can-Do". There's even going to be a friendly bear walking the halls we understand.

The "bear" (a puppet) is part of the free daily program for students age 4 to 12. The program features Bible Study, crafts, learning activities, music, and lots of other fun times!

"Camp-Can-Do" begins Monday, July 8, 1991 and ends July 12th. Camp begins at 9:00 am and ends at noon. To register phone Cindy at 875-1813.

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