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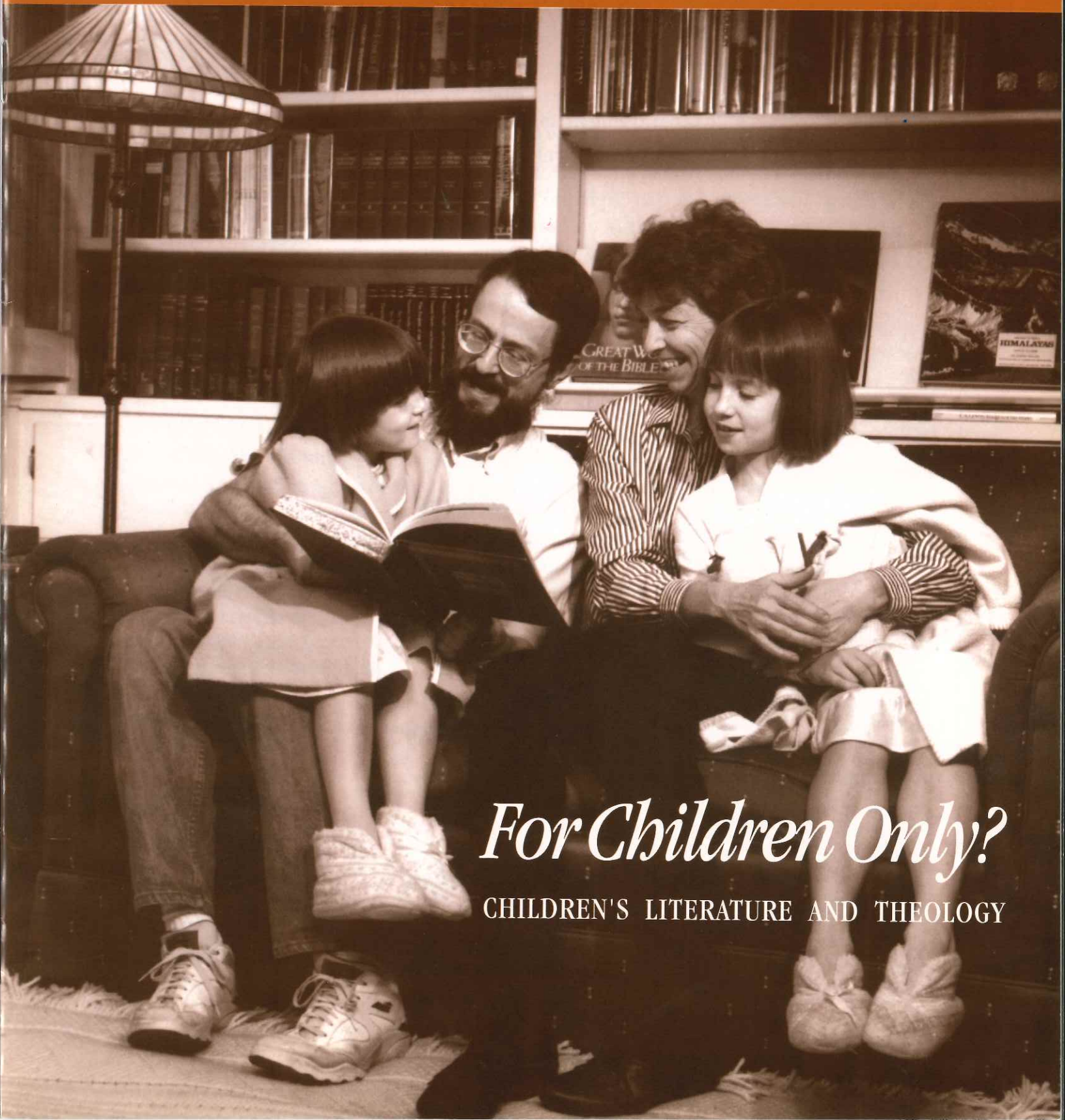
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# THEOLOGY, NEWS AND NOTES

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DECEMBER 1997



*For Children Only?*

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THEOLOGY



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## Contents

3

### *For Children Only?*

ABOUT THIS ISSUE  
JEANNETTE F. SCHOLER

4

### *Having a Book Happen*

ANITA L. SORENSON

6

### *To Difficult for Children?*

A CONVERSATION WITH  
MADELEINE L'ENGLE

7

### *A Child's Guide to God*

BARBARA EURICH-RASCOE

10

### *The Truth in Fairy Tales*

C. S. LEWIS' CHILDREN'S BOOKS  
MEDI SORTERUP

12

### *Building Bridges of Hope*

THE STORIES OF  
KATHERINE PATERSON  
JEANNETTE F. SCHOLER

14

### *Blinky Bill Rides Again*

AN AUSTRALIAN FOLK TALE'S IMPACT  
ROBERT GALLAGHER

16

### *The Basic Theology of Agape*

A DUTCH AUTHOR'S LEGACY  
HENDRIKA VANDE KEMP

18

### *Telling Old Testament Stories*

PAMELA J. SCALISE

20

### *Teaching the Bible to Children*

JOHN L. THOMPSON AND  
MARIANNE MEYE THOMPSON

22

### *Family Favorites and Resources*

## For Children Only?

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

BY JEANNETTE F. SCHOLER

Many people in the Fuller community have discovered in the books categorized for children a literature of value for adults as well, a literature that helps them explore the human experience and, therefore, has profound theological implications. That is the genesis of this issue of *Theology, News and Notes*.

To introduce the subject, Anita Sorenson discusses the genre of children's literature and how "a reader is born" when a good book "happens" to a child. Featured is a sampling of authors whose books have gained recognition in the realm of children's literature and who are also known for their Christian faith: an interview with best-selling author Madeleine L'Engle and articles about C. S. Lewis' and Katherine Paterson's stories, discussed by Medi Sorterup and me, respectively.

Warm memories of childhood books continue into adulthood with lasting influence. Hendrika Vande Kemp presents a beloved Dutch author from her childhood in the Netherlands. Robert Gallagher reflects on the theological significance of cultural identity as he introduces an influential author from his Australian heritage.

Our most important literary concern, for children as well as ourselves, is to know and love reading the Bible. Pamela Scalise explores the subject of telling Old Testament stories to children. John and Marianne Meye Thompson describe how they teach the Bible to their daughters in the context of children's literature, Christian tradition and history, and life itself. Finally, resource books for adults and family favorites are suggested by the Sorenson and Thompson families.

We hope that this issue of *Theology, News and Notes* will encourage you to discover an even broader basis on which to relate to the children in your life and ministry and, through shared experiences, to come to understand more fully Jesus' call to enter the Kingdom of God as a child. ■



JEANNETTE F. SCHOLER, M.A., director of academic programs in Fuller Seminary's School of Theology, is the integrator of this issue of *Theology, News and Notes*. Jeannette previously taught at the high school, college, and seminary levels in the areas of communication and education. Sharing books with her husband, David, and their two daughters has been an integral part of the Scholer family's life.



# Having a Book Happen

BY ANITA L. SORENSON

Why do we read as adults? To learn. To stay informed. To discover who we are. To understand where we came from. To escape. To have experiences of "otherness." To find meaning. To be entertained. To have solitude. Because literature is wonderful!

Why do children read? Largely because some grown-up has introduced them to the world of children's literature. The books that children are given are the ones that adults think suitable for them, that present the kind of world adults want children to believe they live in.

We can all equip our children with a strong appetite for reading. But we must try to avoid any suggestion that books are good for them or that reading is a duty. Children read because it feels good. It is deeply satisfying to be able to decipher the code of words, to grasp the meaning, to get the point of the story. And children must be inundated with books—with good-natured fervor—if we expect them to be more than just language decoders.

"Children's literature" exists because people are convinced that children are different than adults—different enough to need their own special books. Children's literature encompasses books designed for children and books about childhood—embracing everything from religious tracts to multimedia comics, from the classic to the unashamedly popular. Children's books have the child's eye at the center. The children's poet Walter de la Mare states in *Bells and Grass*, "Only the

rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young."

Prior to the 1800s, books specifically for children did not exist. Along with the adults, children listened to stories of the highborn in medieval castles and of common people in cottages. The first books for the young were often instructional, containing religious themes and didactic morals. The publication of the first folk and fairy tales were

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*"Only the rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young."*

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intended for adults, though were soon appropriated by children.

In the latter part of this century, a vast array of genres have been published for children and young adults. Alphabet and counting books, nursery rhymes, picture books, easy readers, middle-grade adventure stories, young-adult fiction, and historical novels add to the repertoire of nonfiction works available (such as biography, history, science, nature, and photojournalism).

Typical storytelling consists mostly of narrating what is seen and heard. A true picture book tells the story mainly or entirely with pictures. When words are used, they have an auxiliary role. A great picture book says in words only what pictures cannot show. By telling a story visually, a picture book provides a vivid, dramatic experience for the child who cannot yet read. The main function of the illustrations is to illuminate the text. Pictures help make the subject matter concrete,

closer to the way children perceive the world.

Books are written for children but adults buy them. The best way for adults to know these books is to read them. There is no substitute for reading, if we are going to recommend works of literature for children. We should base our recommendations on the pleasure of the words themselves, their ability to express ideas, and the importance of what they teach about human values. Under the influence of beautiful words, a child strengthens his or her vocabulary and gains a sense of language structure.

But reading is far more than just a skill to be mastered—it is a free ticket to other lives and worlds. Children are taught to want what others think they should want. When it comes to reading, however, we must try to unearth children's true desires. Encouraging beginning child-readers to read is often a much better direction than saying "Read this."

Yet as they mature, it is important to strike a balance between prescriptive control of children's choices and granting them an absolutely free rein. So many competing activities and interests fill children's time today that only the most inveterate readers read more than a half-dozen books a year beyond those required by their schools. Children exposed only to mass market books, commercial tie-ins to movies or television shows, and pedestrian series will not necessarily proceed to good literature—unless some adult suggests better books and discusses them with enthusiasm and understanding. Everyone knows about A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, but the millions who have relied only on the Disney movies have missed the charm, wit, and common sense of the originals.

One misconception adults have is the tendency to think that children's books are unrelated to literature as a whole. Yet artistic standards prevail in both children's and adult's literature.

The body of children's literature, however, stands squarely on its own merit. C. S. Lewis says that "no book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty."

We should read children's books for their artistry. We should read aloud with children to escape commercial television's stupefaction. We should read because the childlike values of curiosity, faith, and imagination often make the impossible possible. We should read children's literature for its "nonsense value." We should read to learn about books and authors entirely new to us or to revisit books we loved as children. Children's books can enable us to recapture and reenter our earliest worlds. A phrase or illustration can cast light on a darkened past. Our literary experiences influence our developing sense of values. Our favorite books are often subconsciously the models for our later beliefs.

What reader doesn't understand the meaning of friendship after reading James Marshall's *George and Martha*, and finding George pour his unpleasant pea soup in his shoe rather than to hurt Martha's feelings with the truth about her cooking? And many young women have suggested that their independent spirits were encouraged by their love for the free-spirited *Pippi Longstocking*.

For those who also have "theological careers"—pastoral ministry, teaching, psychological care, missionary service—reading children's literature can be useful in helping to connect with children and their families. A quick perusal of current young adult books soberly reveals the contemporary issues that young people are grappling with today—friendships, romantic relationships, identity, internal turmoil, abuse, family violence, sexuality, ecological and global concerns, the uncertain future, and more. Familiarity with youths' literature

can provide a bridge of contact that may become the first step to a deeper relationship.

Sermon illustrations for children's church or the whole family can be found in many fine children's books that, while not necessarily written by Christians or explicitly theological, touch on universal themes. One local church built their Advent services around storytelling, culminating in the Lukan account of Jesus'

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*Our favorite books are often subconsciously the models for our later beliefs.*

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birth. They read aloud in their Christmas programs *The Dreamer*, a lyrical interpretation of creation, and *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*, a poignant story about a reclusive wood-carver whose heart was transformed through contact with a young woman and her son who had commissioned him to carve a crèche. Both books touch upon deeply spiritual themes and provide opportunities to experience the gospel anew.

Children's literature is also distinctively cross-cultural, presenting folk tales and myths that acquaint readers with customs from around the world. Children not only learn about other global children, but wrestle with ideas about embracing differences, exploring prejudices, and encouraging inclusion—all theological themes. Last year, several Sunday school classes used *Children Just Like Me*, a compila-

tion of photographs and interviews with children from other countries, to help them understand those who would soon benefit from their Christmas gifts.

Parents and grandparents, teachers and librarians, pastors and therapists, who lead excursions into literature help to connect children to a precious resource, a space to play and grow for the rest of their lives. Reading can become a source of strength and sustenance, a dependable spiritual bedrock for children who have had positive experiences with books.

None of us can predict or determine the choices of the children in our care. All we can do is teach them, by example, through our own wonder with words. We can help older children to see that reading is a hip thing to do—that there is no pleasure like the moment when book and reader meet and are just right for each other.

When we read to a child, or put a book into a child's hands, we are awakening him or her to the infinitely varied nature of life. The literature of imagination has the effect of helping children discover not only different people and places, but their own lives as well. Reading teaches children how to sit still for long periods and confront time head on. It brings stillness and attentiveness. Children learn to relax around books. In *Better Than Life*, Daniel Pennac calls the evening ritual of

—Please turn to page 23.

ANITA L. SORENSON, Ph.D., a Fuller alumna, is a practicing psychotherapist in Pasadena, California. She is also the executive editor of the *Children's Book Review Magazine*. The entire Sorenson family are book lovers, including her husband, Randy, and their two daughters.





# Too Difficult for Children?

A CONVERSATION WITH CHILDREN'S AUTHOR  
MADELEINE L'ENGLÉ AND FULLER WOMEN JEANNETTE  
SCHOLER, BARBARA EURICH-RASCOE, AND MARGERY CORBEN

**SCHOLER:** When introducing you as the guest lecturer at this year's Fuller Women's Conference "Looking Back, Looking Forward," President Mouw quoted you as having said that if you have something really *difficult* to say, then you choose the form of a children's book.

**L'ENGLÉ:** That came from a time in my life when I was asking all the cosmic questions about God and Jesus and the incarnation and finding no answers in the logical places such as church. And we were very faithful churchgoers. For some reason I picked up a book of Einstein's and I read that anyone who is not lost in rapturous awe at the power and glory of the mind behind the universe is as good as a burned-out candle. And I thought, "I've found my theologian." That's when I began to read Einstein and Planck and the quantum theory and that whole incredible world of particle physics and quantum mechanics—which I'm not intelligent enough to understand but intelligent enough to know that it doesn't matter.

So, in *A Wrinkle in Time*, I was subconsciously rebutting German theologians who were answering questions that I didn't believe *had* answers—who wanted to put faith, that can only be answered with the heart, in the terms of provable fact. I had to write about a universe in which I could believe, one that had been created by a loving God, a God who cared. You can't prove the incarnation. It is outside the realm of proof. It doesn't make

any sense at all. It was a totally crazy thing for God to do—yet it was wonderful! But if I have to understand it in a rational way, I lose it.

**SCHOLER:** Of course *A Wrinkle in Time* is in the realm of fantasy. But you've also written realistic fiction for children. Is it the basic concept of "story" that carries fundamental, essential truth?

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**L'ENGLÉ:** My husband and I lived in the country when we were raising our kids—in a dairy-farm village. There was no kindergarten, and half of the children going to first grade had never seen a book. I wasn't finding any theological stimulation in what the kids were being taught or in what was going on in church. Though we went to church, we didn't want to think about God. But occasionally, we were forced into thinking about God and death by tragedy—watching the father of one family of three young children slowly die of cancer. For me, it made the most sense through writing.

Nobody had ever told me that when you write for children,

you write differently than when you write for the grown-up market. So I didn't. My first several books were regular trade novels [for adults]. Then I wrote *Meet the Austins*, the book before *Wrinkle*, as a Valentine present for my husband. It almost never got published, because it begins with the family's reaction to a death that affected them all, and death was a taboo then [in publishing for children]. At that time, I was also struggling with what I could believe about God.

In Dorothy Sayers' *Mind of the Maker* there's a funny story about a Japanese gentleman who is studying the Trinity. He finds it a difficult concept and says, "Honorable Father very good; Honorable Son very good; Honorable Bird, I do not understand at all." Well, that was never my problem—it was "Honorable Son" I was having trouble with.

I was trying to understand the incarnation in terms of fact. But it doesn't work in terms of fact. So, in writing *Wrinkle*, I was trying to listen to what the incarnation is really about. It was a wonderful book to write. And I thought it was the best thing I had ever written, so I was not prepared for two-and-a-half years of rejections. You can't name a major publisher who didn't reject it. One reason was that it didn't "categorize." When I occasionally got a human response instead of a printed rejection form, it would be, "Who is this book for? Is this book for children? Is this for grown ups?" I said, "It's for people."

I think we underestimate kids. Small children's ability to understand difficult theological concepts is enormous. Once they start school, it goes down. But I've had my best conversations with my children and with the high school Sunday school class I taught, because they were willing to ask the difficult questions. And they didn't want me to throw

back simplified answers. We struggled with them together. I think I did more thinking during that period than at any other time.

**SCHOLER:** *Meet the Austins* was among the first of what is sometimes called the "new realism" in children's books. C. S. Lewis chose to write fantasies because he observed that realistic stories as he knew them had a greater potential for deception, as being unlike the world he experienced as a child. You've written in both genres, fantasy and realism.

**L'ENGLÉ:** Well, I enjoy both. One of the things that C. S. Lewis and I have in common is George MacDonald. I was lucky enough to grow up on him. Lewis didn't discover MacDonald until he was grown, but I read him as a child. He lived in that mythic world which was real. And it's only in that kind of reality that I could understand the God that I wanted to love and that I wanted to have love me.

I'm grateful that no one told me you write differently for children, or that you use easier words. (But of course "tesseract" is not on *any* vocabulary list!) My idea is that when you write a book, you write the best book you can possibly write. I don't believe I know what a "children's book" is. If it's not good enough for me, it's not good enough for a child. You can always tell when a book has been written for children. There's something condescending and unreal about it. I think the scene in *The Wind in the Willows*, where Mole and Rat go to the Holy Island, goes right along with Dostoevski's *Grand Inquisitor* as being the two greatest pieces of

religious writing that I know. The books I read as a child that I loved the most are books I still enjoy. They're literate, they don't avoid using a word that is necessary, and they don't avoid the difficult questions.

**SCHOLER:** But obviously there are books that are for children, books that children can identify with.

**L'ENGLÉ:** Well, let's draw a line between picture books and books children read to themselves that

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*In writing, we have  
to be true—  
and true means  
factual. We have  
these silly ideas  
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with the truth than  
their parents and  
grandparents!*

---

don't have pictures. Beyond that, books have to make sense to children. But there's not much that, as long as a writer is honest, doesn't make sense. I wrote one young adult novel about forgiveness, and I get a lot of flak about one page which deals with sex—and the flak always comes from Christians. I keep writing back that this is not a book about sex, it's about forgiveness. Teenagers say, "This book is helping me forgive." Children will often go to

the core of what a book is about, whereas adults will suddenly find a word they don't like, then they'll not finish reading the book.

When *A Wrinkle in Time* was first published, it was hailed by the evangelical world as a Christian book. Yet now it is one of the ten most censored books in the United States. And not one word of that book has been changed. What happened?

**EURICH-RASCOE:** I think people have gotten more *literal*—almost afraid of imagination.

**L'ENGLÉ:** If they were really consistent, they would have to throw out the Bible. What are they going to do with Ezekiel's wheels? It's very hard to put that in terms of literalism.

**SCHOLER:** I think we're seeing the overreaction of adults who censor by looking just at words, rather than understanding ideas.

**L'ENGLÉ:** My parents didn't censor what I read, and I didn't censor what my kids read, particularly as they got into junior high and high school. When I knew they were reading books I thought were dreadful, I just read them too. Then we discussed them, and I would say, "This is really very poorly written. The problem is not with the eroticism in the plot, it's just that the author doesn't write very well." It made much more sense to read what they were reading and discuss why it didn't work as literature.

**CORBEN:** I think one of the things that I appreciate about your books is that you don't answer all the questions. I think that for children—as well as for grown-ups who haven't forgotten what it's



like to be children—this is a crucial element. One of the things that made me want to read *more* as a child was that I had to think.

**EURICH-RASCOE:** Going back to our earlier conversation, I don't think I ever made a distinction between *A Wrinkle in Time* and *Meet the Austins* as two separate genres. They're both real.

**L'ENGLE:** They're different aspects of one reality.

**EURICH-RASCOE:** Yes! I didn't approach them any differently, except that I know that in reading *The Moon by Night* [another book about the Austins], I knew that I wanted to go to the Grand Canyon, which I'd never done before. But after reading *A Wrinkle in Time*, I knew I had to "tesseract."

**L'ENGLE:** There are all kinds of ways that ignorance has been very helpful in my life. When I started writing, I didn't know that there was such a thing as a Christian publisher. It never occurred to me to send my books anywhere except to mainline publishers. I didn't know you weren't supposed to mention Jesus in a mainline publisher's book. I didn't know that there were science fiction publishers. I didn't know you don't use a female protagonist in a book. I was female, so why on earth wouldn't I? Naivete has been helpful.

**SCHOLER:** I've heard you say that as a story is formulating, it leads you in a direction—and you have to follow it. Then you're not specifically thinking of the audience, but of telling the story?

**L'ENGLE:** If I'm thinking of the audience, I'm *not* thinking of my story. When I'm writing a story,

that's all I am thinking about. In writing *The Arm of the Starfish*, I was fascinated with the fact that way, way back, human beings and starfish came from the same chordate. So what we learn about regeneration in starfish should

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*Children will often go to the core of what a book is about, whereas adults will suddenly find a word they don't like, then they'll not finish reading the book.*

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have some bearing on what we learn about healing in our own bodies.

I had worked with a marine biologist on experiments with starfish. It was also at that time in my life when I was having trouble with "Honorable Son." I was trying much too hard to be literal about the incarnation. So I started writing.

My protagonist, Adam, is going to an island off the south coast of Portugal to do some work with an American marine biologist. He gets caught in a web of international intrigue. A child in his care is kidnapped; he goes three nights without sleep; then he finally sleeps himself out in a Lisbon hotel. When he wakes up, there's a young man named Joshua in his room, sitting in a chair and looking at him. Adam is very surprised to see Joshua.

(Madeleine was very surprised to see Joshua! There was no Joshua in my plot.) Now, as a college graduate, I knew perfectly well that Joshua and Jesus are the same name—and that all this meant something, that maybe something was going to happen to Joshua—which, in fact, it does.

I was reading the final version of the story to my mother and my ten-year-old son, and when I got to the scene where Joshua was killed, my son said, "Change it." I said, "I can't change it, that's what happened." He said, "But you're the writer! You can change it!" I said, "I can't—that's what happened." Writing is as real as that. If it isn't that real, it doesn't work.

My books ultimately know a great deal more than I know. Some of it I learn after the book has been published. I think, "Oh, that's what this meant!" But having Joshua arrive in the story to teach me, just at the point where I needed him most in my own life, that was just one of God's little quirky senses of humor.

**SCHOLER:** There are a lot of adults who have cut themselves off from wonderful literature by thinking it's just for children. . . .

**L'ENGLE:** That's a topic dear to my heart. When Simon and Shuster asked me to write a life of Christ to go with those wonderful Giotto paintings, I was thrilled. But when they took me out to lunch to discuss the project, they said, "Now, dear, we see this as a children's book." I replied, "Wait a minute! You don't think kids can cope with a life of Christ? You want to make it pretty? You want a book about a wimp? Then I'm

not interested!" Then I played my trump card and said, "Remember, Simon and Shuster is one of the publishers who turned down *A Wrinkle in Time* because it was 'too difficult for children.' Would you let me write the book?" So they did. And I wouldn't have written it differently if it had been marketed for 80-year-olds. I wrote the book that I thought went with the pictures and that was consistent with my own theology! And they did a magnificent job in producing *The Glorious Impossible*.

In writing, we have to be true—and true means factual. We have these silly ideas that children can't cope. By and large, kids are much more able to cope with the truth than their parents and grandparents! ■

**MADELEINE L'ENGLE** is the renowned author of more than 40 books, including *A Wrinkle in Time*, winner of the 1963 Newbery Award and *A Ring of Endless Light*, a Newbery-honored book in 1981. Her nonfiction works, such as *A Circle of Quiet* and *The Summer of the Great-grandmother*, reflect her faith and her thinking on life.



## A Child's Guide to God

BY BARBARA EURICH-RASCOE

A young girl with pixie-cut hair waited for the bus to paradise. The 20-minute ride went from a shabby neighborhood to worlds of wonder—the public library—that storehoused countless books to tease the girl's imagination and stir her curiosity.

The child marched past row upon row of books until she arrived at "Young Adult Fiction," stories about girls and boys like her. She passed old friends Heidi and *High Sierra* to meet a new friend—*A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. Sitting on the floor in her faded blue denims, this young reader was soon adventuring to planets unknown with Meg Murry.

She read how Meg and her little brother Charles were whisked away by witchy-looking creatures to a star-moon where they heard

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*Because of that book,  
she grew into  
a certain kind of woman,  
a woman of God.*

---

"music that came not only from their throats but from the movement of their great wings as well," from creatures of "perfection of dignity and virtue." The creatures sang: "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise for the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein."

The young girl read Meg's adventures over and over. With Meg, she encountered hideous and glorious things. Because of that book, she grew into a certain kind of woman, a woman of God. In L'Engle's stories she discovered words from Psalms, words of God.

When the child became a mother and spoke new life into her old friend for her own daughters, she realized whom the Holy Spirit had given to her for her spiritual care. Madeleine L'Engle had been her lifelong teacher, guide, and friend. In L'Engle's stories she had received life-giving glimpses of the story of the ages, of God's grace, of Jesus' love.

A book is *more* than a book when the author becomes a child's guide to God. ■

**BARBARA EURICH-RASCOE**, Ph.D., a Fuller alumna, is the director of the Office of Women's Concerns at Fuller Seminary, an ordained minister with the Presbyterian Church (USA), and a devoted wife and mother.





# The Truth in Fairy Tales

C. S. LEWIS' CHILDREN'S BOOKS

BY MEDI SORTERUP

There was a boy named Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." This is the first line of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*—a book I have read at least 20 times.

Noting that fiction written by Christian authors is receiving an increasing amount of attention lately and that Christian authors are enjoying a broad readership, *Christianity Today* announced in its September 1997 issue a new annual section devoted to Christian fiction. Beneath the section's introduction were the first lines of various novels by Christian authors, challenging CT readers to name the books. Among the lines quoted, I was delighted to find the familiar quote above, from the fifth book in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis.

Unlike many of Lewis' adult fans, I first encountered him in the sixth grade, through the *Narnia* series. Our school library had the whole set, and I devoured them. As I entered the world Lewis created, I found a magical place. *Chronicles* tell of Narnia, a place where almost anything is possible. The human-child visitors fight in Narnia's battles and reign on Narnian thrones.

But there is more here than good story. Lewis believed that a good children's story is a good adult story also. In college when I reread them, after having read *Mere Christianity*, *The Four Loves*, and *The Great Divorce*, I was more attentive to their allusions and allegory. Then I saw clearly what I had not seen as a child: how the Lion's death for one traitorous Son of Adam paralleled the

crucifixion; how Eustace's "un-dragoning" symbolized the transformation of a person that only God can accomplish; how Aslan's country reminded one of Lewis' heaven in *The Great Divorce*. It seems that much of Lewis' theology is worked out in Narnia.

Lewis' stories continue to charm adults and children alike. His writing for children came out of his own learning as well as his imagination. Lewis was a scholar of medieval and renaissance literature. Narnia is a world he

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*"A children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story."* —C. S. LEWIS

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created with benevolent, righteous kings, courageous knights, and villains. The conflict between good and evil is crystal clear in Narnia, but one can be sure that good will triumph. The combination of adventure and certain victory for those who act rightly makes these stories very attractive to children.

Lewis did not approach children as a different species with alien tastes and needs. He felt that stories ought not to protect children unnecessarily from what may be found in the world. "Since it is so likely that they will meet cruel enemies," he writes, "let them at least have heard of brave knights and noble courage." Narnia's cruel villains and noble heroes fight bloody battles.

Creatures die fighting, and enemies are killed in the end. But there is nothing particularly gory about the battles—they are simply battles.

Lewis wrote for children in a uncondescending manner, although his medium is unabashedly fantastic. The books fall into the category of fairy tales. He did not set out to write books for children as much as to write stories he had in mind. In the process, the form that suited his ideas best was the fairy tale. He discussed his choice in an essay titled, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said."

## THE FOUNDING OF NARNIA

A journey to Narnia happens magically, by a special magic that gets one out of our world. And central to that journey is the Great Lion Aslan, the son of the Emperor-across-the-sea, who visits Narnia from time to time, and who children encounter there.

The first Narnian adventure involves Digory and Polly, who witness the creation of Narnia. At the sound of a voice singing in the darkness, all the stars come out and light floods over the horizon. Narnia's first dawn reveals the Great Lion Aslan, whose voice calls that world and everything in it into being.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory's mother lays dying, and he is hopeful that Aslan can help. That help eventually involves a journey for which Digory is ill-prepared. But before the Lion sends him off, he breathes on Digory, who receives new strength and courage for his errand. Ever since, children who come to Narnia find that Aslan's breath strengthens them for journeys and battles.

## WHAT LUCY FOUND

Perhaps the most famous of the Narnian stories is told in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which tells of Peter's, Susan's, Edmund's,

and Lucy's adventures. Lucy's encounters with Aslan reveal much about his character. She seems to belong to Aslan and to yearn for his country in a special way (as we might for God's Kingdom). In moments of peace and joy (when she reaches Aslan's country), she is "too happy to speak."

In *Prince Caspian*, the children's second adventure, Lucy sees Aslan, first on the road and then later by moonlight. The others see nothing. After her second sighting, Lucy refuses to remain with the others if they will not follow where Aslan leads. Grudgingly, all join her. One by one, as they follow, the others see him—but only by following him. In Narnia, faith and courage are powerful, and trust is not easy to misplace.

## THE DRAGONISH EUSTACE

Eustace becomes a dragon in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. What is important here is not the enchantment, or even the details of how he became one. Rather, it is that Eustace was a dragonish person long before the dragon's magic made him into one. And only after he became a dragon did he understand the sort of annoyance he had been all along. Losing that dragon skin was very painful. But once he was free of it, Eustace was overjoyed to find himself a boy again. After Aslan restored his humanity, he began to be less dragonish and had delightful adventures.

## THE LAST BATTLE

The final book tells how Narnia came to an end. An ape dresses a donkey in a lion costume, and this false Aslan leads many Narnians astray. The donkey is

eventually unmasked, and a battle ensues. After the battle, Aslan opens a door between his country and Narnia, and stands before it. The doorway to Aslan's country is on his right and his great shadow is on the left. As Narnian creatures approach single file, some walk to the right into Aslan's country, and others into his shadow. The stars fall as suddenly as they appeared, and Narnia's last night falls.

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*"We must write for children out of those elements in our own imagination which we share with children."* —C. S. LEWIS

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The end of Narnia, however, is not the end of the story. In fact, the whole series points toward Aslan's country as the final destination for all those who have visited Narnia. The stories are a reminder to all that there are other worlds—not only Narnia, but Aslan's country as well. The children's experiences in having met Aslan and having journeyed to Narnia changes them.

## ON THIS SIDE OF THE DOOR

What makes *The Chronicles of Narnia* so attractive for grown-ups are the subtle things, such as the way that "following comes before seeing" for Lucy's companions in *Prince Caspian*, or the magical transformation of dragonish Eustace.

The plots in Lewis' children's stories are full of adventure and surprise. But as the reader grows and has more to put into the stories, he or she finds that there is always more in the third and

fourth reading. My growth and learning—even my seminary studies—helped me to see deeper into Lewis' world.

Truth is what makes these books so compelling. In "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" in *Of Other Worlds* (Harvest/HBJ, 1966), Lewis argues that fantasies or fairy tales are less deceptive than realistic stories that do not correlate with a child's experience of the real world, and that sometimes the best way to tell truth is to tell a truthful (but not necessarily realistic) story.

There is something nourishing about the presence of Aslan in Lewis' stories. Aslan breathes courage and nobility into children and prepares them for long, arduous journeys and fierce battles. Each time I read about him doing that, I remember that there is strength and courage for my journey also, however deep the valleys, however high the mountains, however fierce the battles. ■

MEDI SORTERUP, M.A., who graduated from Fuller this year, currently teaches middle school in Alhambra, California. She enjoys introducing her students to C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and plans to pursue doctoral studies at Fuller with her husband, Donald.





# Building Bridges of Hope

THE STORIES OF KATHERINE PATERSON

BY JEANNETTE F. SCHOLER

The Newbery Award, one of the most prestigious awards that an author of children's books can receive, is given annually under the administration of the American Library Association to the author of the children's book that has been chosen from those published that year as "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children." Although it is considered an honor to win once, Katherine Paterson won the Newbery Award twice within four years: in 1978 for *Bridge to Terabithia* and in 1981 for *Jacob Have I Loved*. She also won the National Book Awards twice: in 1977 for *The Master Puppeteer* and in 1979 for *The Great Gilly Hopkins*.

Reading her Newbery acceptance speech for *Bridge to Terabithia*, I sensed a resonance of spirit with Katherine Paterson. She revealed that much of her life had consisted of building bridges for her children and for others across the "chasms of time and culture and disparate human nature."<sup>1</sup>

"I discovered gradually and not without a little pain," she said, "that you don't put together a bridge for a child. You become one—you lay yourself across the chasm."<sup>2</sup> When she told the story of writing *Bridge to Terabithia*, describing an incident that took place "by some chance or design, depending on your theology,"<sup>3</sup> I knew this was a woman with whom I shared faith. In the years since, my appreciation has grown for her gifts as a storyteller and for the transparency with which she witnesses to her faith.

Born in China in 1932 to Presbyterian missionaries, Katherine's family was forced to

evacuate in 1938 during the Japanese invasion. They returned in 1939, only to be forced to flee permanently in 1940. Katherine told many times how being a "mish kid"<sup>4</sup> impacted her view of herself and the world. The evacuations from China and the difficulties of adjusting to life in the

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*"You don't put together a bridge for a child. You become one."*

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United States, while always longing to return to China, provide material for many of her stories.

A graduate of King College in Tennessee, and of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Virginia, with a master's degree in English Bible, she prepared for missionary service. She struggled with a call to serve in Japan, because of memories of the harsh Japanese invaders of her childhood. But she accepted the assignment and grew to love Japanese culture and language in the four years she served in Japan, preaching and assisting churches in Christian education. Katherine's first three novels, *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum* (1973), *Of Nightingales That Weep* (1974), and *The Master Puppeteer* (1976), were all set in Japan.

Katherine returned to the United States on furlow in 1961, planning to return to Japan. But while studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York for another degree, she met and married John Paterson, a Presbyterian minister. Katherine's next

years were focused on family. She and John became parents of four children while John pastored churches in New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. The Patersons' two sons are their biological children, and their two daughters are adopted. One is from Hong Kong, and the other is a Native American.

When the children were little, Katherine began taking writing classes. She was asked to write a book for fifth- and sixth-grade Sunday school curriculum for the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education. So her first published book in 1966, titled *Who Am I?*, was for use in a church context. The tradition in John's churches for Katherine to write a story each year for the annual Christmas Eve service led to two published collections of Christmas stories, *Angels and Other Strangers* (1979) and *A Midnight Clear* (1995).

Katherine Paterson's first novel, *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum*, was written out of her daughter Lin's struggles with having been adopted. The American Library Association named *Of Nightingales That Weep*, her second novel, one of the notable children's books of 1974. After her third novel, *The Master Puppeteer*, she became a major figure in the field of children's literature. Her first Newbery Award winner, *Bridge to Terabithia*, tells of the friendship of a farm boy, Jesse, with Leslie, a city girl who moved to the country, while both struggled with the problems of being outsiders in the fourth grade. This superbly told story demonstrates Paterson's ability to engage readers with description and dialogue that evoke laughter and tears. (The plot mirrors the friendship her son David had in the second grade with a girl named Lisa, who was killed by lightning the following summer.) Katherine also acknowledges that,

in writing this story, she had also faced her own fear of death, having just undergone cancer surgery.

The tragedy of Leslie's death in *Bridge to Terabithia* is redemptive. Jesse moves through his grief for Leslie to give to his sometimes-despised little sister May Belle the special gift of entrance to the imaginary kingdom "Terabithia" that Leslie had created for their friendship.

In her acceptance speech for the Newbery Award, Katherine responded to some young readers who could not understand how Jesse could do this seemingly unfair thing, saying, "I hear my young critics. . . . But perhaps some day they will understand Jesse's bridge as an act of grace which he built, not because of who May Belle was, but because of who he himself had become. . . . I allowed him to build the bridge because I dare to believe with the prophet Hosea that the very valley where evil and despair defeat us can become a gate of hope—if there is a bridge."<sup>5</sup>

It is this hope—hope from a Christian perspective—that permeates all of Katherine Paterson's books. Not all of her books have been understood or appreciated by both secular and Christian critics. Not everyone has appreciated her commitment to realism. That includes having female characters in traditional roles. Not everyone understands that children struggle with monumental concerns and cannot live protected lives. Therefore, the issues faced by her protagonists—inexplicable and heartbreaking death, abandonment by parents, and deep sibling jealousy, to name a few—do not fit into the idyllic picture that some would frame for childhood.

Katherine Paterson says she writes "for children and young people who do not live in the paradise of childhood but in the same disturbed universe that I find myself in—children who do not want to be left alone to deal with the terrors they live with every

day."<sup>6</sup> And, in writing realistic stories, she necessarily must create characters that are not role models for behavior we seek to instill in our children.

The character Galadriel Hopkins in *The Great Gilly Hopkins* has been criticized for her language and behavior. But she is an abandoned child who has been moved from one foster home to another. She cannot be developed as an authentic person without such a reality. Gilly's story is ultimately one of hope for, in the person of Trotter, a larger-than-life foster mother, Gilly finds unconditional love that is a reflection of God's love.

In her National Book Award acceptance speech for *Gilly*, Katherine Paterson said that she wrote the story as a "confession of sin" because, while briefly caring for two foster children in her home, she discovered that she was

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*"The very valley where evil and despair defeat us can become a gate of hope—if there is a bridge."*

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not willing to engage with the children's problems because of her short-term commitment to them. She finally realized that "I had been regarding two human beings as Kleenex, disposable."<sup>7</sup> The world treats so many children—and adults—as disposable. Yet Katherine Paterson's books present a vision of hope.

In a speech titled "Hope and Happy Endings," given when she received the Roman Catholic Regina Medal, Katherine freely explored how her faith influences her idea of hope. Discussing the name God gave Moses at the burning bush, she said, "The One whose true name is a verb is the

One in whom we live and move and have our being. It is he who has hold of us. The story [of the deliverance of the people of Israel] also assures us that the One who is and will be hears the cries of those in distress and acts to deliver them."<sup>8</sup>

As she reflected on the number of her stories in which the main figure is searching for a lost parent, she concluded that it is not a reflection on her "two perfectly good parents," but that it "reveals a longing—not so much for my own parents—but a yearning for the One whose name is unpronounceable, but whom Jesus taught us to call Father."<sup>9</sup>

In her stories and essays, Katherine Paterson has given readers laughter and tears—insights for memory and heart—through which both children and adults can grow in the understanding of humanity and true hope. ■

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Katherine Paterson, "Newbery Award Acceptance," *The Horn Book Magazine* LIV (August 1978), 362.
- 2 Ibid., 363.
- 3 Ibid., 364.
- 4 Katherine Paterson, *The Spying Heart: More Thoughts on Reading and Writing Books for Children* (Lodestar/E. P. Dutton, 1989), 45.
- 5 Katherine Paterson, "Newbery Award Acceptance," *The Horn Book Magazine* LIV (August 1978), 367.
- 6 Katherine Paterson, *The Spying Heart: More Thoughts on Reading and Writing Books for Children* (Lodestar/E. P. Dutton, 1989), 107.
- 7 Katherine Paterson, *Gates of Excellence* (Elsevier/Nelson Books, 1981), 110.
- 8 Katherine Paterson, *The Spying Heart: More Thoughts on Reading and Writing Books for Children* (Lodestar/E. P. Dutton, 1989), 185.
- 9 Ibid., 186.



# Blinky Bill Rides Again

AN AUSTRALIAN FOLK TALE'S IMPACT

BY ROBERT GALLAGHER

My fourth-grade teacher was tough, but good. Forty years later, I still have instant recall of the multiplication tables because of his rigorous math drills. The good part came in the afternoons just before we caught the bus home. In the last 30 minutes of class, when Mr. Tate would read a story, I escaped from that Australian country classroom into a world of adventure and fun. Stories of magic puddings, evil banksia men, and playful koalas influenced my thinking and helped define what it meant to be Australian. As the Russian novelist Dostoevski said, "The strongest and most influential memories are almost always those of childhood."

*Blinky Bill*, the mischievous little koala, is one of the best-known and best-loved characters in Australian children's fiction. The mishaps and exploits which Blinky enjoys with such vigor, and the bush animals he meets along the way, made strong, lasting impressions.

These stories by Dorothy Wall created a love and respect for the Australian bush and its flora and fauna. Koalas perched in the forks of gum-trees, kookaburras chuckling among flannel flowers, kangaroos and wallabies hopping through the scrub, willie wagtails and magpies caring for their young in tea trees adorning the narrative landscape—all have lasting appeal.

Amid the tales of Blinky are the natural habits of the Australian bush animals. Mrs. Koala carries Baby Blinky in her pouch until he learns to travel on her back. His nurse, Angelina Wallaby, also tucks Blinky in her pouch for hoppings around the

bushland. The bush folk spring from the pages of the book. Kookaburras swallow fat worms in the middle of conversations; koalas grasp branches to pull down tender leaves to eat; and lyre birds dance in the moonlight.

Not all is serene and peaceful in Wall's Australian landscape. True to real life, there are dangers and death. When natural hazards such as bush fires cause devastation to the animal com-

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*"The strongest and most influential memories are almost always those of childhood."*

—F. M. DOSTOEVSKI

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munity, Mrs. Possum organizes a bush bazaar to raise money for the rabbits whose homes were destroyed and who have no grass to eat. This demonstrates the practical way that Australian bush communities love their "mates" (neighbors).

The author does not hold back on the crueller side of nature either. In his travels, Blinky meets the butcher-birds who prey on other birds. Seeing "little heads hung down with dull eyes that had glistened only a short time before" causes tears to come to Blinky's eyes. The bush he knew

that was so kind, "rustling with life and twittering with gladness," was now still and songless.

Good and evil are in tension throughout the stories. While Angelina Wallaby is minding Blinky, Mrs. Snake slyly schemes to have baby koala for her next meal. The worst evil of all is of human origin. Wall tells how the Koala family were living happily, never thinking of harm, when into their helpless and trusting lives comes the human being. "They had no idea such things as guns were in the world or that a human being had a heart so cruel" until suddenly, Blinky's father's body, riddled with bullets, hangs helplessly from the treetop. "They grunted and cried, and even felt him with their soft paws, but he still did not move. All that day and night they sat patiently waiting for him to wake." But Mr. Koala was dead.

I still dislike guns. I don't understand why humans want to hurt harmless animals. Nor does the author of *Blinky Bill*. Wall weaves into her tales of adventure the senseless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of koalas in eastern Australia. She allows readers to feel cruelty from the animals' perspective. And those feelings still remain with me today.

Also, the rules for proper behavior still remain. With all the larrikin (mischievous) scrapes of Blinky at Miss Pimm's store gorging himself on the lollies (candy), singing with Spotty Frog's boarding school in Frog Hollow, and the Rabbit's Ball and ensuing punch-up, there is an undertow of coming judgment. For what you sow, that you will eventually reap.

There is the often-repeated threat of a spanking for bears who are cheeky to their elders, disobedient to parents, who lie, and who run away from home. Angelina's advice to Blinky holds firm. "Oh, tell the truth! If she (Blinky's mother) spansks you, well, you know you really deserve it." The wages of sin brings "a

little of the stick around the hind parts."

Peppered throughout the narrative is the wise council of the elder animals. I hear my mother's voice in the directions to Blinky to have his face clean and his paws washed. "No stealing, no biting, do not be rude to one another, or you will be swallowed whole, as Big Frog did to Master Trapdoor Spider."

Instruction in table etiquette is everywhere in Wall's stories. At meal times, there should be no grabbing, no poking your fingers in the cakes, no paws on the table, and no speaking with your mouth full. "And while I think of it, don't lick your whiskers."

The Reverend Fluffy Ears represents the church in Blinky's bushland community. As the officiator at formal ceremonies, he christens Baby Blinky, looking very important with a white collar made from paper-tree bark. He also holds in his paws a book of gum leaves, from which he reads. Not only does the Reverend officiate at baptisms, his official duties also extend to opening bush bazaars. "He waved his paw and flicked his ears, then spoke in a clear dignified tone." The Reverend hops in and out of Wall's stories.

Dostoevski was right. The memories of children's stories such as *Blinky Bill* are some of the strongest influences in my life. My attitude toward the treatment of animals, respect for elders, the importance of proper manners, the consequences of disobedience, and that life is fun even in the midst of pain and suffering, may all be traced back to the tales of the mischievous little koala. Beyond that, my sense of who I am as an Australian was also shaped by this book and other childhood stories that were authentically Australian.

It was not always so. It was a long, slow struggle for children's literature in Australia to gain a

cultural identity. In the first century after Australia became a penal colony for the overcrowded prisons of the British Isles, most books for children came from Britain, with adaptations for Australian children. The storylines usually involved an adventurous Englishman experiencing the dangers of the Australian bush as he confronted bushfires, floods, bushrangers, aboriginals, and strange flora and fauna.

A turning point came in 1894 when Ethel Turner's *Seven*

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*God's salvation is always cultural. Ethnicity is an important factor in everyone's relationship with God.*

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*Little Australians* was published. This was the first genuinely Australian children's book and one of the most successful. In continuous print for over one hundred years in at least ten languages, it has also been produced for stage, film, and television. *Seven Little Australians* changed the Australian literary scene. Here was a children's book written for Australian children by an Australian. The subjects were ordinary people struggling with real-life situations. For the first time, Australians saw themselves depicted in a children's story in their own distinctive way.

As I reflect on the importance of having had authentic Australian children's books in my cultural experience from the standpoint of my theological and missiological interest, I have come to see the significance of using

shared stories from my childhood in any ministry context.

God's salvation is always cultural. Ethnicity is an important factor in everyone's relationship with God. The expression of human diversity in story, music, and art becomes the framework for divine intervention. Spirituality in the Bible springs from the social. The incarnation took place through the Jewish people, where Jesus lived and worked in the village of Nazareth in the land of Judea.

My fourth-grade teacher appreciated the spirituality of culture. Just as he imparted his passion through authentic Australian children's stories, making space for children to understand and to absorb their own cultural color and flavor, there was provision in my life for the influence of the Lord of all social history. ■

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# The Basic Theology of Agape

A DUTCH AUTHOR'S LEGACY

BY HENDRIKA VANDE KEMP

When visiting the Netherlands, it is soon evident that the most wonderful Dutch treasures are not listed in the Michelin Tourist Guide. One such unlisted historic gem is the W. G. van de Hulst School and its headmaster's house on the Jutfaseweg in Utrecht. From 1913 until 1942, it was the home of Willem Gerrit van de Hulst, the most widely read children's author in the Netherlands.

The original school was established in 1858 as a charity outreach by the Hervormde church to serve the children of the laborers who worked in the brickyards and stonecutting factories on the banks of the Rhine. These people, known as *ovensgasten* (oven guests), were uneducated, rough folk who lived in one-room cottages that surrounded the mansions of the factory owners. Young van de Hulst became a pupil at the school after the death of his stonecutter father. At age 14 he began training to be a teacher, attending normal school classes at night and serving as a student teacher during the day. He left the school only for his term of military duty and a two-year stint of teaching elsewhere, taking the first available opportunity to return to the Jutfaseweg in 1901. The simple people from this neighborhood inhabit many of his stories.

Van de Hulst authored more than 100 books. More than six million copies have been sold in the Netherlands. Several of his stories have been produced for radio and television. Callenbach

has reprinted at least 50 titles. At least 40 of his books have been translated into English. Others have been translated into Danish, Esperanto, Friesian, German, Japanese, Norwegian, South African, and Swedish.

Until he gained confidence as a writer, van de Hulst employed pseudonyms. But once established as an author, van de

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*Van de Hulst distinguished between fantasy and distortions of reality.*

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Hulst used only his initials "W. G." Van de Hulst's writing was primarily for children, but it encompassed a variety of genres that included historical fiction, biographical sketches, Bible and Sunday school stories, a children's Bible, reading primers, grammar and composition texts, novellas, and short stories. He also wrote treatises on storytelling and child education.

He taught that books for children should be written in the present tense, must feature pauses, and have as their content ordinary, everyday events. Both writer and teacher must model honesty and integrity and must never lie to children.

Van de Hulst distinguished between fantasy and distortions of reality. A writer could write fairy tales, however. My favorite childhood story is about a caterpillar who shrinks a little girl so

she can ride on his back. Months later, he returns as a butterfly to take her flying. This story is clearly labeled "a fairy tale." Another story about a teddy bear that grew to the size of a giant is clearly presented as a bad dream. Stories from the Bible were also clearly labeled.

Van de Hulst felt it was wrong to present as fact that which is impossible or untrue. When he read a novel in which a character was said to "sing while he accompanied himself on the flute," he was unable to read beyond that "lie." He defined a good children's book as "a mirror in which the child sees the truths of heaven and earth together, and sees them better, truer, sharper than in life itself." The "story must echo the child's own heart," he said. Van de Hulst carefully applied these principles in his stories (whether historical or fictional) and in his reading primers.

The suffering and loss in the van de Hulst family was often reflected in W. G.'s writings. Both he and his father lost their fathers when they were eight years old. W. G.'s two older sisters died before his birth. W. G. himself was widowed at the age of 33. His second wife bore him four more children, but one son was a prisoner of war in Poland during World War II. The compassion that grew out of these experiences is a discernible thread in all of W. G.'s writing.

In his books van de Hulst taught compassion and empathy by putting children in the shoes of others. In *The Snowman* noisy children building a snowman are asked to play elsewhere for the sake of a seriously ill girl. "If Annie can sleep, she will forget the pain." In other stories about sickness and pain, W. G. often depicts parents and children praying for God's comfort.

Monthly short stories for children appeared from 1946 to 1961 in *Moeder* (Mother), a Christian periodical on parenting.

Many of these stories are included in *The Big Read-to-Me Story Book*. *The Story Book* offers an excellent sample of van de Hulst: A wooden shoe with a red tip, blown off the deck of a houseboat by the wind, floats quietly down the canal. An infant, abandoned in her pram by her sister, has her kicking toes gently licked by a curious cow. A frisky goat, her stake only loosely driven into the ground by her mistress, escapes to go exploring in the woods. A little boy stows his pocket watch, a gift from his grandfather, under a shock of grain while playing hide-and-seek, then can't tell one shock from another. The doll Kathie left outside in the rain is rescued by a friendly policeman who puts it back under the bucket where it had been resting.

There's Donnie, who uses empty boxes to build himself a hidey hole under the stairwell at his aunt's store. There's little Laurie, walking home from the grocery store with a bag of beans, who squeezes the bag so tightly that it bursts, leaving a trail of brown and white beans in the snow; Laurie is rescued by a kind boy who helps her collect the beans and walks her home, to receive a reward of cookies and milk. One tale is the life history of a fabulous blue-green-and-yellow marble, told by the itinerant marble itself.

There are also wonderful animal stories, many straight from the mouths of the animals. Van de Hulst takes readers into the world of the farm and the banks of the Rhine. Blackcap and Tiptail, two sparrows who discover a banquet of golden corn on a barge, are caught when a trap-

door is closed; then they explore the barge-man's lunch pail and the lid drops on them! Two little lambs, who are afraid of the meadow's pig and horse and cows, are dismayed when a strange bald creature with their mother's voice returns from the shearing barn. The old dog Nibs, whose young master and mistress wear him out, takes refuge with the old man who lives upstairs.

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*Van de Hulst taught compassion and empathy by putting children in the shoes of others.*

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Hector, the pup, impulsively follows his perplexed mistress to school, but the kindly teacher excuses her to take him home. Three spiders—Reta, Meta and Sofeta—who go exploring and discover that humans don't like spiders (except babies), gratefully return to their home under the bushes.

Kindness is a theme that consistently runs through these stories: the kindness of one child to another, of an old man to a dog, of a parent or grandparent to a child, or of God to all of us. Occasionally, the stories are clearly allegorical, such as the story of Cobie, who is as kind to old beggars (the king and queen in disguise) as she would be to the king and queen; Cobie receives her just reward. There is Peeper, the frog prince, who sets out to find a birthday gift for his mother, who gets so exhausted helping others in distress that he has no time to finish his quest. When his

animal friends enumerate his good deeds, the queen says that his kindness is the best gift she received!

From reading W. G. van de Hulst's stories as a child, I learned the importance of simple courtesy, the goodness of lovingly prepared gifts, and the basic theology of agape. ■

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The following van de Hulst English translations are available from Inheritance Publications, Box 366, Pella, Iowa 50219.

- *The Mystery of Old Abe*
- *Jolly Baker Series 1: The Jolly Baker and the King from the North*
- *Jolly Baker Series 2: The Jolly Baker and The Evil Doctor*
- *The Old Man and His Dog*
- *Pierre and His Friends*
- *The Window in the Roof*
- *William of Orange: The Silent Prince*



# Telling Old Testament Stories

BY PAMELA J. SCALISE

Why do parents and teachers read Bible stories to children? We want our children to know and love the Bible, not just as an end in itself, but because we want them to know that God loves them. We want them to come to personal faith in Christ, and we want them to make right decisions about how to live their lives. Children need the Bible for the same reasons that adults do. Yet the Bible is an adult book containing complex theology along with vivid descriptions of violence and sexuality. Even many adults find it confusing and difficult. Children's Bibles and Bible storybooks exist to render the Bible accessible and attractive to children, so that parents' and teachers' desires for them may be met.

Adults communicate their own understanding of the Bible to children by means of these books. In their versions of the biblical text, Bible storybooks can avoid "unsuitable" material as well as answer questions, explain reasons, and fill in gaps about which every generation of Bible readers has wondered. These interpretations have been shaped by the same sort of societal forces and are derived from some of the same sources as biblical interpretation for adults.

The genre of Bible storybooks for children does not call for documentation of ideas or information. Other parts of the Bible, ancient extra-biblical books, systematic theology, folktales, prototypes, child development theories, and one's personal faith and imagination may influence how a story is told and explained. Bible stories told

to children are shaped by their cultural context.

Teachers and parents should choose Bible storybooks for their children with an awareness of how they interpret and apply the biblical text. Prevailing views regarding content unsuitable for children affect the selection of stories and the details within them. For example, Ruth Bottigheimer's survey of more

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## Bible stories told to children are shaped by their cultural context.

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than five centuries of children's Bibles in Europe and America identifies a trend beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to leave out or work around references to sex.<sup>1</sup> So the stories of Dinah who was raped by Shechem (Genesis 34) and the Levite's concubine who was raped and killed by the men of Gibeon (Judges 19) were usually omitted.

This trend was compatible with a tendency to burnish the reputation of patriarchal figures.<sup>2</sup> For example, Noah's drunkenness (Genesis 9:20-27) and Lot's offer to the men of Sodom and his incest (Genesis 19) were usually dropped; and David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband was written out of his story.<sup>3</sup> The same instances of omission and rewriting are found in my childhood Bible storybook, *The Child's Story Bible* by Catherine F. Vos, first published in 1935. The editor's forward commends her "chaste" language.<sup>4</sup> Fifty years

later, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* by Mary Batchelor omits the same stories but includes David's adultery.<sup>5</sup>

As early as the sixteenth century in Europe, Bible storybooks had to compete with popular secular stories about giants and tricksters.<sup>6</sup>

Bible stories must be exciting and relevant to a child's life. As a result, the Old Testament occupies a large place in contemporary Bible storybooks. Stories of exciting heroes and of children in families outnumber what is found in the New Testament.

Take a close look at a storybook about a boy hero who saved his people, *David and Goliath*. Beatrice Schenk de Regniers' beautiful book<sup>7</sup> tells the David and Goliath story in its Old Testament canonical context by including lines from the Psalms. De Regniers takes the direct quotes in David's conversations with Saul and with Goliath, with some omissions, from First Samuel 17. The author identifies these sources in a postscript. De Regniers acknowledges that she "made up a few things in retelling the story, but nothing very important." She says that the story in this book is about "how the boy, though he was the youngest and smallest of all his brothers, was able to overcome the terrible giant."

There is an Old Testament motif of a younger brother chosen over the older (e.g., Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau). De Regniers reveals that she has "followed a prototype of the folktale in which the youngest son, through his fearlessness and his innocence, conquers evil—and wins the hand of the princess, too." The influence of this folklore prototype on telling the story of David and Goliath is evident in other things the author omitted (found in 1 Samuel 17). Two motives for David's actions don't

appear in her story, nor David's reason for killing the giant. The folklore prototype has shaped the end of the story, too. David proceeds without conflict to the throne as Saul's successor.

Authors and publishers of Bible stories for children rarely document their sources or acknowledge other influences on their storytelling. Yet every retelling of a biblical story is shaped by tradition as well as imagination, and thus participates in the history of its interpretation.

The Bible also retells its own stories. (Compare Deuteronomy 1 to 5 with Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, or First and Second Chronicles with the books of Samuel and Kings.) Acts 7 and Hebrews 11 recount several stories from the Old Testament. Their versions have been incorporated in stories told for children.

For example, Acts 7:22 adds Moses' education in the wisdom of Egypt to the story in Exodus 2; and Hebrews 11:25-26 introduces wealth and the pleasures of sin at the pharaoh's court. Catherine Vos tells of Moses' "gold and silver toys."<sup>8</sup> And Mary Batchelor includes the fine clothes, food, slaves, and education that Moses enjoyed in the palace.<sup>9</sup> Later, as Moses prepared to offer up his son Isaac to God (Genesis 22), Mary Batchelor's Abraham "believed that in some way God would still keep his promise about Isaac."<sup>10</sup> Catherine Vos makes a clearer reference to Hebrews 11:9 when she says of her Abraham: "He knew that Isaac would be given back to him in some way. Perhaps God would raise him from the dead."<sup>11</sup>

The terse biblical account of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 raises other questions. Why did God test Abraham? Why didn't Isaac struggle to get away? Other versions of the story, from ancient to modern times, have added interpretive explanations.

Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews* explains this test of Abraham's fear of God as a test of his "religious disposition . . . if he preferred what was pleasing to God before the preservation of his own son."<sup>12</sup> Vos interprets the test of God's desire to know "if Abraham really loved him enough to do it."<sup>13</sup> In Philip Turner's retelling, the test was about whom Abraham loved the most, God or Isaac.<sup>14</sup> Batchelor's interpretation of Genesis 22:12 is, "I know now that you trust me and love me."<sup>15</sup>

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## Children intuitively construct a theology through the Bible stories they hear and read.

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Illustrations of this story in children's Bibles typically show Isaac bound on the altar and Abraham with knife in hand, poised above him.<sup>16</sup> Nineteenth- and twentieth-century versions of this story for children account for Isaac's compliance by having Abraham explain God's command to him. Isaac then chooses to obey.<sup>17</sup> The idea is an ancient one. Josephus had already provided this explanation in the first century AD (*Antiquities*, I, XIII, 3-4).<sup>18</sup>

Children intuitively construct a theology through the Bible stories they hear and read. Parents and teachers, therefore, must evaluate the stories that they and their children choose, sensitive to what each storyteller and artist communicates about the meaning of the Bible.

In Mary Batchelor's *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, she retells the biblical stories with a minimum of explanation, leaving space for the adults to discuss their meaning with children.

Further, she includes law, psalmody, proverbs, prophecy, and epistles, along with narrative, in order to show how the many pieces of the Bible "fit together . . . to make one whole picture."<sup>19</sup> Mary Batchelor expresses hope that her readers will want to read the whole story for themselves in the Bible.

As parents and teachers, we should choose Bible storybooks wisely as tools for sharing our faith with our children and for pointing them to their own direct engagement with God's Word. ■

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### ENDNOTES

- 1 Bottigheimer, Ruth B., *The Bible for Children, From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* (Yale University Press, 1996), 41, 117-41.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 139.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 129-32.
- 4 Vos, Catherine F., *The Child's Story Bible* (Eerdmans, 1952), 5.
- 5 Batchelor, Mary, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* (Lion Publishing, 1985), 160.
- 6 Bottigheimer, *op. cit.*, 60.
- 7 De Regniers, Beatrice Schenk, *David and Goliath* (Orchard Books, 1996).
- 8 Vos, *op. cit.*, 135.
- 9 Batchelor, *op. cit.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 11 Vos, *op. cit.*, 74.
- 12 Josephus, Flavius, "Antiquities of the Jews," Book I, XIII, 1. *The Works of Josephus* (Hendrickson, 1980) 36.
- 13 Vos, *op. cit.*, 74.
- 14 Turner, Philip, *The Bible Story* (Oxford University Press, 1968), 17.
- 15 Batchelor, *op. cit.*, 33.
- 16 Bottigheimer, *op. cit.*, 76-78.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 75. Vos, *op. cit.*, 75.
- 18 Josephus, *op. cit.*, 37, 75.
- 19 Batchelor, *op. cit.*, Introduction.



# Teaching the Bible to Children

BY JOHN L. THOMPSON AND MARIANNE MEYE THOMPSON

The real goal of teaching the Bible to one's children is not to fulfill some special Christian parental obligation or to provide yet one more building block in the edifice of their cultural literacy. . . . It is to encourage our children to know the Bible as a primary means of learning to know God; to love God's Word because it is God's Word; to learn in their own hearts and minds and lives what it means for them to belong to God. But how can a mother or father make a child love anything, whether a book or a Creator?

Thomas Aquinas might remind us here that one cannot love what one does not know. So while our attempts to cultivate a divinely oriented faith, hope, and love in our children will be indirect at best, nothing will flourish if the climate in the home is not friendly to theological and biblical discussion. Life in the home must be lived not just implicitly but also explicitly, with an eye to the presence of God. If children are to grapple with their lives before God, to wrestle in the battles of faith and temptation—and they will do both, whether well or badly—they need to know some things. They need to be equipped. They need to be vividly aware of God's promises and God's character. They need to know something of who they are as God's own children and, simultaneously, who they are as sinners like their parents. . . .

Often, the "great stories" of the Bible are offered as starting points for parents desiring to introduce their children to the Word of God. At the very least, these great stories—whether Moses and the Red Sea, Jonah and

the whale, or Daniel in the lion's den—make stimulating bedtime stories. It's undeniable that these are great places to start for the youngest children, precisely because they are great stories. We have read Moses and Daniel and John the Baptist and, of course, Jesus to our children from any

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*It is especially grievous when "Christian" literature for children reduces the great stories to good morals, or the good news to little more than an admonition to "be nice."*

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number of Bible storybooks and picture books, over and over again. . . . It remains the case that the great stories are indispensably part of the currency of the Kingdom. As Martin Luther said, marveling at Abraham's lonely and unprecedented journey, "It is difficult to believe God without an example." But because Scripture provides us with examples of faith such as Abraham's, neither we nor our children need be as lonely as he was.

Of course, Luther was also especially sensitive to the ways in which the greatest examples of

faith in Scripture were almost always also great examples of suffering, weakness, and human failing in general. When these failings are ignored, or (worse!) trivialized, the result is often but a mess of moralistic pottage. Indeed, the case could be made that here is where children are most at risk of becoming inoculated against the Bible, if Scripture serves as no more than a Christian variation on Aesop or Grimm or Disney. It is especially grievous when "Christian" literature for children reduces the great stories to good morals, or the good news to little more than an admonition to "be nice." Moreover, the Bible abounds with stories that fall short of virtually every moralist's canon. . . . Yet most Christian literature for children effectively censors and silences such tales, as if the "Christian" Bible must be sanitized, purged of violence and ambiguity—as if children couldn't hear similar tales on the news or read them on the front page of the paper! . . .

Properly understood, the great stories of the Bible do not teach an easy faith or a cheap grace, even though the retellings of these stories (like so many children's sermons) can easily evolve into clichés.

Is it possible to teach the Bible to children without dumbing it down or reducing it to an insipid moralism? We think so. In our own family, we have, in fact, begun mostly with the "great stories" of the Bible, but we have tried to en flesh these stories not only by retelling them with an eye to faith as well as behavior, but also by tying our use of the Bible to the rest of life.

#### READ THE BIBLE AS AN EVERYDAY BOOK.

It strikes us as somehow intuitive that if the only time children are read to is when they are being force-fed Scripture, they will assuredly wonder what makes this

book different (and, perhaps, oddly annoying) as compared with other books. As a corollary, one might ask whether it is even possible for someone to come to love God's Word (as a book and as a story) who does not love words and books and stories in general. In our house, that has meant that the Bible is not always the one constant book from which we read to our children. Rather, we have tried to read the Bible in the context of all other reading—lots and lots of it. In practice, this has meant reading good stories wherever we can find them, including such standards as Grimm and Aesop, the *Little House* series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Beverly Cleary's *Ramona* stories, Tolkien, and many more. But all this reading has always been eminently interruptible in order to prove such matters as the characters' hopes and fears, the implications and consequences of deeds, the development and care of conscience, and how providence and redemption are addressed (or neglected) by the author. . . . The point is simply that we have tried to underscore the continuity between the Bible and life by keeping always in mind the theological dimension of all stories.

#### READ THE BIBLE IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFE.

Bringing the Bible to bear on a child's life-situations will challenge any parent to honesty. Indeed, one must be forewarned of the thorny questions the Bible will raise! Our eldest, suffering from chicken pox some years ago, raised the issue before us with maximum acuteness and not a few tears: "Why won't Jesus heal me of my chicken pox?" Again, to be schooled in the theology of the cross is better than a thousand pat answers. If your storybooks have painted a Jesus who walked through Palestine in a blaze of glory, what will you say? Now there are things in life far, far harder than chicken pox. We do

not know what life will bring our children, but—statistically, at least—we know that some children will die, sometimes without warning, just as they did in Jesus' day. What sort of compassion is it, to avoid preparing one's children to face the reality of death? Fortunately, there is no more hopeful resource than Scripture for dealing with death,

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*The great stories of the Bible do not teach an easy faith or a cheap grace, even though the retellings of these stories . . . can easily evolve into clichés.*

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an issue which also loomed large for all the men and women of the Bible.

#### READ THE BIBLE IN THE CONTEXT OF TRADITION AND HISTORY.

Sometimes we have had to explain about the disagreements among Christians over Scripture and interpretation—as in the case of the dismal story of slavery in America and its racist concomitants, or in trying to explain to a daughter why the United States has never (yet) had a woman president. Church history, and in particular the history of the Bible's interpretation, is a necessary correlate of "merely" explaining the Bible to one's children. Indeed, the context of tradition and history is especially important for explaining why even those supposedly redeemed by Christ and enlightened by the Holy Spirit may need to be chastened by Scripture and even to repent of the way they use Scripture. Tradition and history also offer children a salutary link

with the communion of saints and that cloud of witnesses that surrounds us. . . .

There are surely lots of other hints and tips that other parents might offer were we to pool all our wisdom and strategies in our attempt to raise Christian children—tips about how to pray with one's children and how to encourage some sort of devotional life or ethical insight or simply Christian character. But the most exciting possibility awaiting those who undertake to teach the Bible to their children is, in our experience at least, the possibility of sharing a spiritual journey with one's own offspring and enjoying their fellowship, their prayers, and their own heartfelt counsel. Were we merely preparing them for some bizarre memorization quiz, we couldn't do it. Only to the extent that we have found the Bible to open windows into the heart of God and the mysteries of the life of faith can we muster any enthusiasm to communicate the richness of Scripture to our children.\* ■

\*The above article is excerpted from an essay by John and Marianne Meye Thompson titled "Teaching the Bible to Your Children: The Risks and the Rewards," published in *Word & World* magazine (Volume XVII, No. 3, Summer 1997).

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# Family Favorites and Resources

## THOMPSON FAMILY FAVORITES

- *Little House on the Prairie* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder, also prequels and sequels
- *The American Girls* series (six sets of six books each about Felicity, Kirsten, Addy, Josephina, Samantha, and Molly in six periods of American history)
- *Ramona and Her Father; Ramona the Brave; Ramona and Her Mother; Romana Forever; Beezus and Ramona; Ramona the Pest*; and others by Beverly Cleary
- *Anastasia Krupnik; Anastasia on Her Own; Anastasia Again!; Anastasia at your Service*; and others by Lois Lowry
- *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret; Superfudge, Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great*; and *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing, Starring Sally J. Freeman as Herself* by Judy Blume
- *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis
- *Katie John; Honestly Katie John*; and *Depend on Katie John* by Mary Calhoun
- *The Secret Garden* by Francis Hodgson Burnett
- *Miss Happiness and Miss Flower; Tottie: A Doll's Story; Little Plum*; and others by Rumer Godden
- *The Hobbit; The Lord of the Rings*; and others by J. R. R. Tolkien

## SORENSEN FAMILY FAVORITES

- *Abel's Island* by William Steig
- *The Animal Family and The Bat Poet* by Randall Jarrell
- *At the Back of the North Wind* by George MacDonald
- *The Borrowers and Bedknob and Broomstick* by Mary Norton
- *Charlotte's Web; Stuart Little*; and *The Trumpet of the Swan* by E. B. White
- *The Church Mouse* picture books by Graham Oakley
- *Five Children and It and The Enchanted Castle* by E. Nesbit
- *The Fledgling* by Jane Langton
- *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsburg
- *The Green Knowe* series by L. M. Boston
- *Half Magic* and others by Edward Eager
- *Rootabaga Stories* by Carl Sandburg
- *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble and The Amazing Bone* by William Steig
- *Tuck Everlasting and The Search for Delicious* by Natalie Babbitt
- *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame
- *Winnie the Pooh* by A. A. Milne
- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle

## RESOURCE BOOKS FOR ADULTS

- *Children's Books and Their Creators* edited by Anita Silvey (Houghton Mifflin, 1995)
- *Books That Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values Through Stories* by William Kilpatrick, Gregory and Suzanne M. Wolfe (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1994)
- *Better Than Life* by Daniel Pennac (Coach House Press, 1994)
- *Great Books for Girls* by Kathleen Odean (Ballantine, 1997)
- *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* by Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard (Oxford University Press, 1984)
- *Best of the Best for Children* by the American Library Association, by Denise Perry Donavin, editor (Random House, 1992)
- *Parent's Guide to the Best Books for Children*, New York Times, by Eden Ross Lipson (Time Books/Random House, 1992)
- *Hey! Listen to This: Stories to Read Aloud* by Jim Trelease (Penguin, 1992)
- *Talking With Artists, Volumes 1 and 2* compiled and edited by Pat Cummings (Simon & Schuster, 1992, 1995)
- *The Very Best of Children's Book Illustrations* by the Society of Illustrators (North Light Books, 1993)

## Having a Book Happen

—From page 4

reading together "a sudden state of grace after the uproar of the day."

To be sure, giving children contact with books does not guarantee that the instincts of a true reader will emerge. But there is a fullness of play that can be enjoyed when kids are taught to strike it rich in literature. Reading books can be an activity in which children learn what is important and what is not—a time to absorb silence, to experience tranquility, to have sanctuary.

Great books and the worlds within them permit access to a wildness that children need to explore—the "internal geography" of the self, the soul, the imagination. Little ones who start this kind of play on the lap of a grownup reader gradually read their way through chosen favorites that then are read repeatedly. Discovering literature and ideas, finding things interesting, may not happen for a few more years. But then they hit pay dirt—and the sky's the limit! With maturation comes appreciation. With experience comes a desire for more experience. And a reader is born!

Francis Bacon said, "It is a great thing to start life with a small number of really good books which are your very own." Giving children rich experiences with books, including the ones that most take hold of their imagination, is an invitation for them to start their own play with stories and language. A great many people will live out their days without ever discovering a love for

rummaging around in the wealth of books. They will not learn to play with ideas, to feel the vastness of the world and one's inherent smallness in relation to it.

I learned to read when I was five. I used to sit in the furnace room of our two-story house at the bottom of the stairs, curled up in a corner of the warm storage room with a river of *National Geographics* cascading beside me onto the floor. In those glossy pages, I met up with pygmies and Maori tribesmen, tropical rainforest creatures and penguins, glittering Asian cities and desert wildlife. I

*Great books and the worlds within them permit access to a wildness that children need to explore.*

began to sense a world of huge possibilities in that humid sanctuary at the bottom of the stairs.

Along with that memory are memories of a wonderful fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Easter, who made our classroom come alive with whatever book she read aloud. Our desks were moved into a crude circle as we read of *The Knights of the Round Table* and earned our knighthood or ladyship under her direction. I desperately longed to visit and get lost in the Metropolitan Museum of Art after hearing of Claudia and Jamie Kincaid's adventure in *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. I can just picture all of us in her room after recess, with

sweaty heads on our desks, and Mrs. Easter sitting up-front in her stuffed chair, quietly reading chapter after chapter, feeding us, nourishing us with those books that held a certain sort of wildness. I have been a passionate reader ever since.

Think back to your first experiences with books that caught your fancy. No doubt there are specific recollections of those significant books that had a formative impact on you. Charles Dickens enthusiastically related that "Little Red Riding Hood was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding Hood, I should have known perfect bliss." In their book *The Braid of Literature*, Shelby Anne Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath claim that "the experience of reading lives on far beyond the act of reading." Lynne Sharon Schwartz, in *Ruined by Reading*, says what many of us have felt about our early reading experiences: "What I liked best was sitting on my bed and having a book happen to me." ■



# Upcoming Events

(AT FULLER'S PASADENA CAMPUS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

## JANUARY

- 10** **"BRINGING THE CHURCH HOME,"** Church Leader's Workshop, with Rob and Julia Banks, Jonathan Campbell, Seattle, Washington
- 16-17** **COLORADO EXTENSION 50TH CELEBRATION,** Colorado Springs and Denver
- 21-23** **"BECOMING ADULT, BECOMING CHRISTIAN,"** School of Psychology Integration Symposium, with James Fowler

## FEBRUARY

- 4** **FOUNDER'S DAY CHAPEL,** featuring Gary Demarest
- 5** **MEDIA REFORMATION CONFERENCE** with Michael Slaughter
- 11-12** **AMADEUS SERMONS,** featuring Gardiner Taylor
- 12-13** **SMALL-GROUP MINISTRIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY,** with Gareth Icenogle, David Stark, and Derick Rust, First Nazarene Church, Pasadena
- 17** **PROFESSORIAL INAUGURAL LECTURE,** featuring Miroslav Volf, School of Theology
- 21** **ORANGE COUNTY EXTENSION 50TH CELEBRATION,** Southern California
- 26** **RENEWING YOUR CALL AND REVITALIZING YOUR MINISTRY,** with Edmund Gibbs, Christ Church, Oak Brook, Illinois

## MARCH

- 4** **INSTALLATION OF GLEN H. STASSEN** in the new Lewis B. Smedes Chair of Christian Ethics, School of Theology
- 6-7** **REGIONAL RENOVARÉ CONFERENCE,** with Richard Foster, Jim Smith and Glandion Carney, Mariner's Church, Irvine, California

