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Children's book. Nurture for children's theology

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**Anton A. Bucher, Gerhard Büttner,
Elisabeth E. Schwarz (Ed.)**

**CHILDREN'S BOOK
NURTURE FOR CHILDREN'S THEOLOGY**

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press

Beiträge zur Kinder- und Jugendtheologie

Band 39

Herausgegeben von Prof. Dr. Petra Freudenberger-Lötz
Institut für Evangelische Theologie an der Universität Kassel

Anton A. Bucher, Gerhard Büttner,
Elisabeth E. Schwarz (Ed.)

Children's book

Nurture for children's theology

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Anton A. Bucher

Introduction

In the last three decades, child theology advanced to a central topic in the pedagogy of religion. The original intension was to appreciate the child as a being capable of theologically relevant reflections. For centuries, the child was seen as an empty vessel. And the primary task of religious education was to fill this vessel by correct beliefs. But that is not so easily possible. Beliefs cannot be shared like postal packages. Children understand theological concepts in their own way, often very originally. A seven years old girl in Vienna heard in a religion lesson: "God is the creator". And she has associated: "God is a ladle", in German: "Schöpfer = creator".

The movement for child theology documented by numerous studies, especially qualitative ones, that children developed their own images of God, that they understand biblical texts in their own manner, that they are capable for theological relevant questions. Without doubt child theology upgraded the child.

But in recent years it has become increasingly evident that children cannot theologize in a vacuum and without content requirements. Not just theology from the children, but also theological contents for the children. No child is capable to interpret a biblical parable if he/she never heard this text. Children need theological food, as it were, nurture and requirements.

An excellent medium are children's book. This literary genre first appeared in the 18th century. But now, there are thousands upon thousands of such books on the market. And many of them portray religiously significant topics, e.g. biblical stories, childhood in other religious traditions, the death of grandparents etc. etc. First impressions deeply shape the child's imagination. And educators have a great responsibility in the selection of such books.

But which children's book are really suitable to nurture the child's mind? And how should children's books be used effectively? To clarify questions like these, the network of child theology organized in the Winter 2017/18 a symposium at the Theological Faculty of University of Salzburg, entitled: "Children's Books: Nurture for Children's Theology". Around 30 experts from different countries discussed for three days the interesting and multifaceted topic.

This volume presents the lectures, the most of them written in English. Miriam Zimmermann asked: "What is 'religious' in today's storybooks?" Systematically, she discusses, that "religion" in children's books can be analyzed with

regard to the functional aspects of religious elements (e.g. coping with fear), but also with regard to theological substantiality. Further she described transformed religion und religion-like elements in children's book, and she advocates books with explicit religious themes in order to stimulate the theological competence of children.

Martina Steinkühler opened her speech with an impressive story: David, the shepherd, guards his flock from the wolves and he asks: "Who cares for me?" This story is intended to provide access to the psalm verse "The LORD" is my shepherd". After a second story – Abraham and his wife Sara leave their old homeland –, she discusses rules for an adequate narration about God.

Elzbieta Osewska described the history of children's books in her homeland Poland. Such books intended to discipline children, but also to strengthen their patriotic feelings, and – last but not least – to teach about religious affairs. Newer children's books in Poland are more child centered and less moralistic.

Gehrmann Anna conducted an original qualitative study on the conversations which parents and children engage about religious children's books. At first she described the study of Wieler – how discuss parents with their children about picture books? –, thereupon she introduced the concept "theological talks". In her own study, she analyzed the theological talks between mothers and children about the Christmas story and the story of Noah. The excerpts from the interviews are really revealing. Gehrmann concluded that (religious) educators should provide suitable explanations. Without such, children can less theologize.

Henk Kuindersma and Lisbeth Winters from the Netherlands brought together theologizing with children and literature education. They singled out the famous children book "Robin and God". Two pupils read this book and told the central themes in a reading circle. The children were instructed to reflect Robin's opinions about God. The authors concluded that such books are very useful in optimizing children's theological competencies.

Anika Loose focused on two well-known biblical storybooks, the first one written by Rainer Oberthür, and the second one by Martinakühler. She compared precisely how these authors retell the Parabel of the lost son. Oberthürs narration is close to the biblical text and illustrated by famous pictures. Theological commentaries should facilitate children's understanding. In contrast, Steinkühler created new narration, bound to the sense of the original text. Explicitely, she speaks specifically to children and their parents.

Christine Hubka started her speech by autobiographical memories of their hidden anxieties in her childhood. Against this background, she argues that

even children should deal with the dark side of life in order to learn comforting words in troubled situation. Children's book can be helpful in learning a such vocabulary. She exemplified this by a nice picturebook written by herself and titled "Wo die Toten zu Hause sind".

Noemi Bravena focused on a main term of soteriology: soul. Can even pre-schoolers generate mental imaginations of the soul? Really. And this especially if they are stimulated by picturebooks such as "The Soul Bird". The author presents impressive passages from the interviews with young children. They locate the soul also in the chest, the abdomen and in the eyes.

Sabine Pemsel-Maier opened her speech by a plea: Children need also theological calories, example given picture books telling the Christmas Story. In a thorough way, the author theologically analyzed and compared three different children books about the birth story of Jesus. She pleads for theological correctness also in children books.

In her speech written in German, Martina Steinkühler presents illustrative examples of theologizing with children stimulated by stories. The book Grandpa's angel raises also for children the question: Will we be accompanied by God in our lives? Religiously recommendable children books shows traces of transcendence midst in the everyday life and strengthen at the same time the resilience of children.

Damaris Knapp pleads for a methodologically good preparation of theological talks with children. The author exemplified her approach by a lesson about the truth. The most important: A challenging question: "Does God love a child who does not speak the truth in the same way as a child who speaks the truth". Several children answered: Yes.

Ludmila Muchová provided helpful advice to write a good philosophical story.

Helene Miklas discussed in a workshop an important and sensitive topic: How can we talk with children about dying and death? And which children's books are particularly suitable for this? She pleads for a realistic literal and pictorial presentation of the limits of life.

Gerhard Büttner asked at first: "What is a religious children's or youth book? A book that addresses the question of God. Further, the author analyzed four books about families and religiosity, and he can convincingly show how differently and individually the religious topic is designed in contemporary families.

All in all: This reader presents the state of the art in theologizing with children stimulated by children's book.

Mirjam Zimmermann

What is “religious” in today’s storybooks or “all important books are about God”¹ ?

It is easy to state literarily that “all important books are about God”² as Thomas’ father does in Guus Kuijer’s *Das Buch von allen Dingen* (*The Book of Everything*) when answering Thomas, the protagonist’s, question about what books are about. But what role does religion actually play in current literature for children and young adults? What evidence can we search for to identify religion in these books?

During the winter semester 2016/17, a lecture series took place at Siegen University on the subject of “religion in children’s and young adult literature” (F1) during which well-known, German language authors of literature for children and young adults spoke about the existence and relevance of religion in their works and also read excerpts from their books. Theologians and literary studies scholars offered a second assessment, as a kind of two-fold interpretation. Both groups, the authors and the scholars, were unsure as to what was meant by “religion in the/their literature” and how they should search for it. Monika Feth, an author whose religious references are very obvious in *Du auf der anderen Seite* and in her detective stories, said during her reading: (F2) “When they asked me to give a lecture about the role of religion in my book, I asked myself whether I have anything at all to do with religion. Then I looked at my books more carefully and I noticed that it permeates all of them.”³

We heard similar statements from other authors participating in the lecture series⁴. How is it that the authors themselves do not seem to consciously

¹ Kuijer (2011), 9, see Tomberg (2016) 7

² Compare note 1

³ All of the lectures are available on my website with the original soundtrack, see https://www.uni-siegen.de/phil/evantheo/mitarbeiter/zimmermann_mirjam/rv_ridkjl.html?lang=de (last usage: 8.12.2016)

⁴ Compare Charlotte Kerner, Hermann Schulz, Markus Lefrancois as illustrator, Anna Kuschnarowa and others, compare the list of lectures at note 3.

broach the issue of religion and are uncertain when identifying, referencing and interpreting religion in their own books? Which questions and which elements can act as a map in our search for evidence? In this paper, we will grapple with:

- 1) which definitions can we find about what is religious literature for children?
- 2) to what extent are content, function and forms of the transformation of religion helpful in the search for evidence; and
- 3) how religion in children's and young adult literature should occur so that discussing theology through the medium of books for children and young adults is meaningful.

1. On the non-definability of children's and young adult literature and religion

It is very difficult to gain an overview of the attempts at defining children's and young adult literature itself because differentiations are made among intended, actual and non-intended children's and young adult literature as well as between descriptive⁵ and normative⁶ approaches. Normative definitions look, for example, at the function of the literature (e.g. communication of knowledge and values) while descriptive approaches primarily describe the communication specific to the recipient. The well-known German studies scholar Hans-Heino Ewers stated "that there cannot be a definition of this cultural phenomenon that is all-encompassing and valid in every respect and at every time and it does not make any sense to search for it."⁷

⁵ Children's and young adult literature as a communication system in which the children and young adults appears as the addressees, Ewers, 2000 1 and in which he describes the asymmetry of communication on all levels.

⁶ Children's and young adult literature as educational literature for the communication of knowledge and values that are adapted in their nature and messages to the competencies of the recipients.

⁷ Ewers (2000), 2-16

Trying to pinpoint religion with even greater exactness in children's and young adult literature becomes more difficult although there have been various attempts to identify that which is religious in this genre of literature. For example, Monika Born refers to Magda Motte⁸ and differentiates between religious children's and young adult literature in the classical sense – books with a “Judaean-Christian message” or with “transcendental-religious dimensions” – and religious books in a broader sense – “books with ethical-existential characteristics”⁹. This trichotomy is also supported by George Langenhorst¹⁰, who also speaks with functional differentiation about “non-intentional religious literature”, “religious literature” and “Christian children's and young adult literature”. The third type of literature is found today primarily in Christian publishing houses.

Whereas it is standard for studies dealing with religion in pop-culture to admit to not being able to define religion¹¹, this admission is lacking in the fundamental works on religious children's and young adult literature. The term “non-intentional religious literature” would seem to be helpful here but it does not solve the problem of identifying religious elements (see above).

The problem of the non-definability of religion is revealed when we speak of “religiousness that is distanced from religion” (Ziebertz), when we read about “invisible religion” (title of a book by Luckmann 1991) and when people who have left the church say that they are religious. Almost all of the invited authors emphasized early on that they actually did not write religious literature. However, we had invited them to participate in the lecture series because, in our opinion, at least one of their books had a direct bearing as religious or even Christian literature for children and young adults. This shows that “the tension indicated between the description by others and the description of oneself and between scholarly interpretation and everyday understanding is

⁸ Motte (1996), 28-32

⁹ Born (2002), 399

¹⁰ Langenhorst (2011), 39

¹¹ References in Pirner (2001), 64

inevitably accompanied by the problem of imminent appropriation.”¹² Neither this article nor the lecture series intend to demonstrate that the seemingly secular authors do indeed refer comprehensively to religion in order to prove the uninterrupted importance of (Christian) religion.

So how can we make a more detailed and specific search for religion in children’s and young adult literature and not only differentiate among ethical, religious and Christian literature or elements thereof?

2.1 Differentiation with reference to the substantive concept of religion: content

Religious studies differentiate between a substantive and a functional concept of religion. The first tries to describe religion as a phenomenon, the theme of which is all that is holy, transcendent, numinous or all-encompassing. The point of reference is dictated by the content, by the substance – religion is present in children’s and young adult literature when the topics are religious, for example dealing with God, the Bible, church history, creation, angels, cults, interreligious encounters, or important ethical questions such as dying or death that are also highlighted by religions.¹³ The mere portrayal of religious topics, however, does not determine their relevance in the literary context. Thus, the simple existence of a theme does not determine whether and why the reference is relevant or whether the book is suitable for theological discussion or even for use in religion class.

This reflection on substantive content can be supported by a second step in which we examine the functional definition of religion.

¹² Pirner (2001), 61

¹³ For example, compare the table of contents in Zimmermann (2012/2015); compare the list of examples in Langenhorst (2011), 172-174

2.2 Differentiation with regard to the functional concept of religion

Functional definitions of religion are attempts to focus on the function of religion for the individual and for society. As a consequence, we can examine where these functions are narratively adopted in children's and young adult literature on the level of the text or the recipient. Franz Xaver Kaufmann, scholar of the sociology of religion, has identified the following as the most important functions of religion:

- 1) psychological function: affective ties, coping with fear, discovering identity
- 2) ethical function: guiding actions even in exceptional situations
- 3) worldview function: dealing with contingencies, interpreting the world so as to guarantee meaning and order (cosmicisation)
- 4) social function: legitimizing a community
- 5) emancipatory function: creating distance from existing social relationships that are experienced as unjust or immoral

The functions will now be illustrated using current works of literature for children and young adults. I would like to begin with another function – the so-called prop function – that I believe is necessary in the analysis of this genre of literature and should therefore be introduced here.

2.3.1 Religion in its prop function

In some works of children's and young adult literature, religion makes an appearance only in the form of the use of religious elements in the daily life of the protagonists. For example, the well-known fantasy novel *Tintenherz* (Ink-heart) has been identified as a "space without phenomenological practices of

faith” and “without religious institutions or practices”¹⁴ even though the villain, Capricorn, lives in a church whose walls are guarded by life-sized stone devils and greets visitors by saying “Welcome to the house of the devil.”¹⁵ It is unlikely that this figurative usage also plays an important religious role in interpretation on the levels of reference or meaning, except that Capricorn’s usage of the church demonstrates that “in his megalomania [he claims] divine status”.¹⁶

Scholars also disagree on whether religious elements in the Harry Potter books in excess of the magic have more than a prop function¹⁷. With regard to what I call the “prop function”, Christiane Heidler speaks of references that exist solely on the figurative level.¹⁸ For example, in the Harry Potter novels, there are religious elements such as the Christian holidays (e.g. Christmas) that have no relevant meaning in their religious character but simply give the plot an external structure or refer to the (lack of) a secure atmosphere. The fact that the boundaries are blurred can be demonstrated with *Krebsmeisterschaft für Anfänger*¹⁹, the most recent book by Edward van de Vendel, who has been awarded the German prize for children’s and young adult literature. Most notably, the topic of prayer is broached in several places. The protagonist, Roy, has been diagnosed with cancer and after the diagnosis has become known, one of Roy’s father’s employees asks whether he can pray for Roy. After a dream vision²⁰, Roy contemplates whether prayer might be helpful but decides against it. However, after a chemotherapy treatment leaves him with an anxiety disorder, he decides to try it after all.²¹ The impact of prayer on the (self) interpretation of his fate, however, is not subsequently discussed. Instead, by the end, the reader seems to have gained the certainty that whereas God and religion may be important to some people during a life-

¹⁴ Schwab (2008), 481

¹⁵ Funke (2003), 172

¹⁶ Compare Heidler (2016), 101

¹⁷ For example, compare Bachl (2002), 111

¹⁸ Compare Heidler (2016), 97f.

¹⁹ Van de Vendel (2016), with Roy Looman, whose narrated biography is the foundation of the volume.

²⁰ Van der Vendel (2016), 51-52.

²¹ Van der Vendel (2016), 166-167

threatening illness, they do not help. In character with an enlightened way of life, both God and religion remain purely on the level of (useless) props like the comforting texts in the small Bible lent to him by his grandmother: “But that doesn’t work either.”²²

2.3.2 Functions on the level of the text and reader

Although the degree of importance for the text and the recipients on the level of reference is surely subject to an interpretive framework, there are works of children’s and young adult literature that clearly include functions of religion and will be discussed here to illustrate the individual functions.

Psychological function of religion in literature

In this domain, religion assists in coping with fear and in promoting self-acceptance and spiritual health. Surviving crises through religion also belongs to this function because religion gives comfort and hope. An example of this is the picture book *Annas Himmel*²³ (Anna’s Heaven), for which the Norwegian author Stian Hole received the Katholischer Kinder- und Jugendbuchpreis in 2015. Hole interweaves childlike hopes and ideas about heaven and the afterlife, which also comfort the father, into the hours before the final parting from the dead mother. The story begins shortly before Anna’s mother is to be buried and it is raining nails. The father, wearing a suit and carrying a bouquet of flowers, a familiar image from the thirties, tells Anna to hurry. However, Anna is sitting on the swing and does not want to get into the boat in order to cross the fjord to the chapel, where the bells have already begun to ring. Instead, she takes her father on a dream voyage – they both dive into the heaven that is reflected in the water and look for the person who “has made nails rain down from up in heaven today.” Anna’s father says “it shouldn’t be like this.” And his daughter whispers that tomorrow “perhaps strawberries with honey” will come from there, even though she also gives voice to her fear that “God is suddenly becoming just as forgetful as Grandma”

²² Van de Vendel (2016), 177

²³ Hole (2014)

although he could actually invent something “that would make something good out of something bad.” In this way father and daughter experience heaven, hear the heavenly choir and see the invisible ones. This makes their fear disappear and brings hope that there will be something after this much too early death. “I am happy that you took me along”, says the father at the end of their voyage and happiness almost shines through their shared grief. At this point, both are ready for the difficult step of saying good-bye because their fear has been tamed to the extent that they can cope with the crisis of the funeral.

The acknowledgement of guilt through religion, as in Marlene Röder’s novel *Zebraland*, also belongs to the psychological function of religion. In this book, a girl dies after a group of teenagers cause a car accident and then fail to help the girl. The author subtly weaves motifs from the Old Testament into the plot such as the tattooing of a mark of Cain and a photo with the license plate as a fig leaf with the naked teenagers, which refer to the psychological dimensions of symbolic references.

The ethical function of religion, which is often used in literature, refers to standards and norms for the judgement of behavior and examines goals and behavioral patterns. As an example, we can look at a book by the German author Anna Kuschmarowa that describes the development of a “normal” young man into a suicide bomber who supports his actions through religious legitimation. The ritual, social and community-building functions of religion all play a narrative role here. On the one hand, Julian’s behavior is a consequence of his social background, but on the other hand, he is radicalized by the Salafist ethics of Islam. On the level of the reader’s perception (reception), the form lived out by the protagonist Julian is received as an avenue for creating distance from religion. The difference between the textual and the recipient levels becomes clear in this way – taking Islam seriously, Julian distances himself on the textual level from the world; on the recipient level, this causes distancing from religion.

We find similar themes in *Das blaue Mädchen* by Monika Feth. All of the functions of religion – ritual, ethics, world understanding and even emancipation – play a role in this fictional novel about a cult. To a certain extent, they are even instrumentalized by “La Lune”, the leader of the cult. However, according to the author, her intention on the recipient level is to bring about emancipation from false religion²⁴ and to reveal the proximity between practicing religions and so-called cults. The literary message is that the reader must pay close attention to which religion serves a good life and life-enriching ethics.²⁵

In the worldview function, religion enables the interpretation of life experiences, one’s own history, nature, suffering and death and thus takes up the questions of “Where are we?” and “Where are we going?”. Hole’s picture book (see above), for example, offers the childlike eschatological hope of a reunion in the afterlife.

Other books take up this function by offering the reader answers to which they have to relate as in Sally Nicholl’s novel *Wie man unsterblich wird* (Ways to Live Forever). The eleven-year-old protagonist Sam is suffering from leukemia and is contemplating the questions of why and what might come after death. His teacher, Mrs. Willis, encourages Sam and his friend Felix, who is also seriously ill, to find their own answers to these questions that no one can really answer. While Felix argues that there is no God, Sam says, “God is like a big doctor. He makes people ill so’s to make them better, the same way doctors give people chemotherapy to make them better. It doesn’t matter to God if you die, because you just go to heaven, which is where he lives anyway.”²⁶

And the argument that people are improved by being ill does not satisfy the boys. Maybe there is no comprehensible reason why God lets children get cancer or “there is a reason but we are too stupid to understand it.” While Sam struggles to find a satisfactory answer that is positive vis à vis God, Felix’

²⁴ Compare note 1

²⁵ Compare the implementation in school lessons Zimmermann (2015a)

²⁶ Nicholl (2011), 48

attitude is negative and critical. In this way, various explanatory “solutions” gathered by the two boys become helpfully available to the readers as optional interpretations. Books that explicitly offer religious and non-religious interpretations, such as the picture book by Oscar Brenifier/Jacques Després, *Was, wenn Gott einer, keiner oder viele ist?*²⁷ (Who or What is God?), aim to support the worldview orientation by offering options for fundamental religious questions about God from a religious and non-religious perspective or from differing theological perspectives. The book begins with the sentence: “One can have very different ideas about God...” and ends with “And you?”. In between, each set of facing pages contain different viewpoints on the question of God, God’s existence, the possibilities of knowledge, the location of God’s impact, predestination, prayer as communication with God and the motivation for action:

“Some people think that the fear of God motivates us to act with goodness and that we would behave immorally without our faith. Others believe that morals are a natural sensation and that thinking generally leads to good.”²⁸

The social function of religion was particularly important in the educational concept primarily of the clichéd Christian-catechistic literature of the 1960s to 1980s. This literature was supposed to present religious practices such as holidays, traditions, and church services in order to create community and values. There are still many (picture) books on the market today that deal with the transfer of knowledge in the context of religion and in the best cases, as in the example of *Zum Taufen nimmt man Wasser ohne Seife*, by Ursel Scheffler/Jutta Timm (Stuttgart/Wien 2005), are based on experiences from the lives of children. In a Christian context, there are picture books about Christian holidays, creation, “important prayers” and the saints.²⁹

For the domain of Judaism, Eva Lezzi has made an attempt with her trilogy *Beni, Oma und das Geheimnis* (2010), *Chaos zu Pessach* (2012), *Beni und*

²⁷ Brenifier/Després (2013): The picture book was awarded the Jugendliteraturpreis in 2012.

²⁸ 21–22 according to my own counting

²⁹ See Zimmermann/Butt (2016)

die Bat Mitzwa and her most recent book *Die Jagd nach dem Kidduschbecher* (2016) to introduce the readers into the daily chaos of a Jewish family in the big city and thus to narratively make religion practiced in life vivid without being overly didactic. In this book, Judaism plays a part in socially defining daily life and the revitalization of a genre of children's literature that had died out after 1945 is celebrated.³⁰

The emancipatory function through (not of!) religion was theologically present above all in the 1970s and 80s, for example with the "theology of liberation" or the rise of "justice, peace and preservation of creation". The conditions prevailing at the time were criticized and visions and developments for alternative societal models were introduced. Today, this function of religion plays a less important role or is implemented more sensitively although literature such as Gudrun Pausewang's *Ich gebe dir noch eine Chance, Gott!* or *Ich habe Hunger, ich habe Durst!* is still being purchased and read. These books clearly discuss and criticize the problems of an (uncritical) belief in God and the image of God with regard to the seemingly immutable relationships of rich and poor.

Conveying a vision and taking leave of religious dogmas that can no longer be sustained also belong to this function. In *Nathan und seine Kinder*³¹, a retelling of the classic *Nathan der Weise*, Mirjam Pressler, with her own distinct focus, refers to Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech and has the protagonist Nathan say paradigmatically:

"I have a dream that one day people will rise up and live out the true meaning of their creed. I have a dream that one day the sons of Jews, Muslims and Christians will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even this city (here: Jerusalem, author's note) will be transformed into to an oasis of freedom and justice."³²

³⁰ See Langenhorst (2016), 11-12

³¹ Pressler (2011)

³² Pressler (2011), 166

This is a visionary formulation of how religion could change society positively in the direction of freedom and justice by using literary subtexts that support the central statement but are transformed by the author. This form of modification of (religious) traditions and their (narrative) transformations should be carefully analyzed in the search for religion in children's and young adult literature.

2.4. Differentiation through modification of tradition: transformations

Previously, we were dealing with the attempts to describe the substantive thematic references and their functional use in context. Now, we will focus on possible transformations. I would like to identify here the four categories of elements – traditional, transformed and religion-like and referring to religion.

2.4.1 Traditional religion

Traditional religion is important, for example, for Jewish author Lezzi, whose books take place in a “normal” liberal Jewish family who include religious holidays, prayers and talking about religion in their daily lives. *Djihad Paradise* by Anna Kuschnarowa also offers the reader traditional Islamic components although the plot takes place primarily in a Salafist religious community.

2.4.2 Transformed religion

We find transformed religion in *Das blaue Mädchen* by Monika Feth, which deals with a fictional cult (unlike *Esthers Angst* by Irma Krauß, which is about Jehovah's Witnesses) and uses the cult to illustrate typified elements of religion as well as the typical functionalities and inventory of a cult.

As a second example, we can mention Jutta Richter's *Der Hund mit dem gelben Herzen*, which presents a transformation of the story of creation. God

appears as a two-fold person – as Gustav or G. God and as his adjutant Lebkovitz, whose behavior is strongly reminiscent of Lucifer, the adversary, as the author once explained at a reading. Additionally, the dog that narrates the story plays a role in the story of creation and, with the protagonists Lotta and Prinz Neuman, is still searching for the way back to the door to the Garden of Eden. Various other texts existing in the space of Biblical traditions that are intertextually configured transform what is familiar to us. In Ulrich Hub's *An der Arche um Acht*, there are three penguins and a butterfly at the beginning of the story of the ark. How all three penguins get onto the ark (by packing one of them into a suitcase) is one of the new problems that result from the setting of the old story but were not created or presented there.

2.4.3. Religion-like elements

Many mythological motifs, such as the struggle between good and evil, the development and formation of a hero who sacrifices himself for the good and “implicit theological aspects” of salvation and forgiveness, mercy and original sin, sacrifice and sending are found in fantasy literature. Such primal experiences are found as symbols of the mythos of an idyllic world not only in Biblical texts but also here.³³ One example is the “importance of sacrifice” in Harry Potter:

Harry Potter is an orphan who survived only because his mother died for him – by sacrificing herself for her son, he received the protection of her love. From this point onwards, he is in danger and, for his own safety, he has to grow up with relatives who do not want him and who treat him badly. However, despite his initial helplessness, the reader knows that Harry is the anticipated savior, the only one who can take on Lord Voldemort, evil personified, and who has a chance of vanquishing him in order to save the good in the magical world. The savior who himself was saved grows year by year into a hero who – unlike his opponents – comes into his own strength through the support of his friends. These friends are even prepared to “sacrifice” their own lives for

³³ Compare Zimmermann (2013), 62-66

Harry (Ron in the chess scene in volume 1 ; Sirius Black in volume 3; Dumbledore in volume 6; Dobby in volume 7 etc.). The victory over evil is ultimately possible only when the hero, Harry, sacrifices his own life.³⁴

2.4.4 Elements that refer to religion

Aspects that refer to religion should be identified according to more unspecific types of reference, such as those found on the level of images or mottos. We will explain this briefly with one example:

By giving the substantively non-religious Inkworld a motto from Geoffrey Chaucer's 14th century Canterbury Tales, Cornelia Funke implicitly makes reference to religion. "The question, given God's omniscient view, is: Must what He foresees perforce come true? Or is free choice of action granted me To do a thing or else to let it be?"³⁵ This question of predestination is, however, not taken up explicitly in the mottos of the subsequent chapters nor in the plot in general.

Illustrations can also have a religious subject even though religion is not dealt with explicitly in the text itself and thus they compose an "image subtext". It has been said that the illustrator Markus Lefrancois has put religion back into Grimm's Fairy Tales through his illustrations – the religion that had been left out in the process of writing them down.³⁶ In our view, this dimension of the image that refers to religion must be taken into account particularly in picture books and is found in the works of Lefrancois in the form of religious pictures in many places.³⁷

But how do these analytical categories help in selecting suitable works for discussing theology or for religion class?

³⁴ Compare Zimmermann (2013), 64

³⁵ Funke (2007), 86, compare the english version Funke (2008), 70

³⁶ Compare lecture at the University of Siegen, Compare note 3.

³⁷ Compare lecture at the University of Siegen, Compare note 3.

3. Application: substance, function and transformation of religion as selection criteria for working with children's and young adult literature?

When investigating the educational relevance of religion in children's and young adult literature, we can begin with the analysis of religious elements with regard to their substance and function on the textual and recipient level and the transformations that take place. When doing so, the first step toward a religious-educational evaluation of the results is accomplished by clarifying the intensity and diversity of the reception of religious elements and the form of the transformation.

When discussions with children and young adults about theology deal with the question of an historical, current or personal practice of faith or with substantive faith issues, one selection criteria can be whether such aspects are actually present. Alone in the form of the transformations we find the question of which forms of deviation younger pupils recognize and can use for a productive way of talking about theology. In this case, elements that are similar to religion or refer to religion are certainly even more challenging and require more intensive preparation.

When theological work with children and young adults deals with the promotion of cognitive skills in posing and processing theological questions as well as in narrative and metaphorical ways of thinking, literarily stimulating models must be available that have the character of challenging readers to theological reflection and thus support the individual solution of theological problems. Additionally, their point of reference must be positioned between the child and the theological questions.

Because theological competence should be learnable, verifiable and capable of development and in situations where it must be applied, it should be re-

trievable as a behavioral and communication skill, it is beneficial when children's and young adult literature can offer such narrative situations of application or interpretive approaches that are highly stimulating or challenging.³⁸

The suitability of a text for use on theological questions with children and young adults can be measured according to the importance of the religious theme, the clarity of the functions of the content, the diversity of the references between substance and function, and the amount of stimulation, for example by means of the interruption of what is expected (transformation for example in Richter's *Der Hund mit dem gelben Herzen*).

Suitability can also be assessed

- by observing the religious substance and its function as well as the transformations of the religious aspects in a particular work.

- by carefully assessing whether these religious aspects reflect or transform reality correctly or with creative and constructive stimulation.

- by anticipating and assessing as exactly as possible the impact on the (young) readers, for example, whether it is stimulating or challenging for young adults to talk about themselves by talking in a role provided by literature.

The choice of an entire book³⁹ for the purpose of talking about theology is problematic with regard to religion:

- if the effort of reading the book (i.e. the length of the book) leaves little time or opportunity for talking theologically about the religious aspects. Therefore, picture books with high potential for stimulating theological discussion and with explicit religious themes (strong substantive reference) are particularly suitable.

³⁸ Zimmermann (2012), 163; Zimmermann (2015b)

³⁹ In my opinion, work with excerpts is allowed only in exceptional cases. It is always necessary to experience the entire text in order not to alter the purpose of literature.

-if religion is found only in the function of props or religious topics are developed only for the purpose of delivering knowledge and do not throw up any problems.

-if, as in the case of fantasy literature, religious references exist but are found primarily on the figurative or referential level and not on the level of meaning, for example socio-cultural insertions (for example the church as the location of evil in Funke's *Tintenherz*, Christmas for Harry Potter or literary, meta-textual insertions such as motto quotations in *Tintenherz* or in the 6th volume of *Harry Potter* etc.⁴⁰)

If we take such conditions into account when searching for religion in today's storybooks, the books that are then used in religion class for talking about theology with children or young adults will in fact all deal with God.

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Martina Steinkühler

I just tell a story!? Talking about God is not that easy

1. The first example

Come with me to a land ... a land far away ... a land with warmer days and, sometimes, colder nights. Come with me to a land ... where there is much scenery, no big towns, few villages, few houses, few people. Sheep and goats are the richness of that land. They roam the land, always looking for green pasture, for fresh water.

Sheep are hungry. They are thirsty. They like to eat green grass, they like to drink fresh water. They are not very apt, however, to find good pasture by themselves.

Sheep do not have claws or fangs. They are not wild, but gentle. Sheep fear wild animals, like wolves or vultures.

Thus, there are shepherds, shepherds to look after the sheep, to care for, to lead, to guard and to protect them.

David is such a shepherd. This is David ... David is the youngest of eight children, and as usual: the youngest child has to be the shepherd. David does not mind. No, not at all. David likes to be a shepherd, and he is really good at it. I tell you what: David has never lost a single sheep. Because David knows a trick: David has invented names for each of his sheep, and he calls them by their names. And they know their names and they know David's voice, and they come.

Today, David has made it again. He has found them a green meadow and a sparkling creek. His sheep are peacefully eating and drinking. David is sitting, his feet in the water. He is watching his sheep. He is completely at ease. And

so, he takes his little harp and plays a song, the song of the good shepherd. And this, more or less, is what he sings:

I am a good shepherd. I have pastured the sheep. I pastured them in a green meadow, I led them to fresh water. I guard them. And even though dangers may come – wolves or vultures – they need not be afraid. Because I am the good shepherd, I will stand up with my rod and my staff, and no harm will be done ...

It is getting later, and still, the sheep are enjoying themselves. So David decides to stay overnight.

The sun goes down – faster than usual, as it seems –, and all of the sudden, there is something ominous in the air. David shivers. He looks around and calls the sheep's names. "Come closer", he whispers. "This night is not safe."

He puts more wood to the fire. This night, he will not sleep. And then, – the last light has faded – he hears them. Wolves! Not one, not two or three – a whole pack. They have smelled the sheep already and they are getting closer. They are coming in a circle, from all directions, nearer and nearer. David gets up. He clutches his rod with one hand. With the other, he takes a burning log out of the fire. And he goes and stands up to the wolves. "Go away", he cries, "get away from my sheep! Go away, you wolves! I am the good shepherd!"

Then, there is this one moment – when it is touch and go whether or not the wolves will attack. Listen! Can you hear them breathe? Can you smell them? Can you feel ... - they turn. One by one, they turn away and part. Phew ... One moment later, they are gone.

David returns to his fire. He puts the burning log back. All of the sudden, his legs give way. He sinks to the ground, next to the fire. That has been a narrow escape ... That has been ... phew ... "It could have gone wrong", he thinks. And, as the night is so dark and so creepy, David cannot help thinking further:

“It could also go wrong with all the other dangers, too ... the vultures, the cliffs, the snakes ... And what if I lose one ...?”

And as the night is so dark and so creepy, David takes his little harp again. And once again, he sings his song of the shepherd. But, this time, it sounds different:

“I am a good shepherd. I pasture the sheep. I pasture them in a green meadow, I lead them to fresh water. I guard them. And even if danger comes, I will stand up with my rod and my staff ... But, o my God: who will stand up for me!? I care for my sheep. But who, who cares for me ...?”

Even after the darkest and creepiest night, morning dawns – according to the Word the Lord has spoken: “While the earth continues to exist, planting time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease” (Gen 8,22). And so, David awakes to a new day. And when he opens his eyes, it is already quite late. And he jumps and he looks around: “My sheep! How are they? Are they okay?” – They are. They are peacefully eating again. And David has got time for a short breakfast himself. Then he sits by the ashes of his fire – and takes his little harp again. And this morning, he sings the Song of the Good Shephard that people everywhere know, also you and me:

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He takes me to lush pastures, he leads me to refreshing water. He restores my strength. He leads me down the right paths for the sake of his reputation. Even when I must walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff reassure me. You prepare a feast before me in plain sight of my enemies. You refresh my head with oil; my cup is completely full. Surely your goodness and faithfulness will pursue me all my days, and I will live in the LORD's house for the rest of my life. (Psalm 23)

2. The first rule

Dear audience, dear colleagues from all over Europe, this is my first. My first time to make a speech in English. And as – getting older – you do not have so many first times any more, it's – well – quite an experience!! So I am glad to share this with you.

You just witnessed a narrative that I often use to convey my ideas about how to talk about God – not only to children, but also to all ages. I do not know how you feel about David and his adventure with the wolves.

My intention was to tell children not just what the 23rd psalm is about, but to get them involved in the making of this psalm. I feel that those five first words of the psalm “The Lord is my shepherd” are really complex.

- “The Lord” – that is God, okay.
- A shepherd ... - well, I might have to explain this to children who do not grow up in rural areas. Okay.
- “my shepherd” – this cannot be explained. It is something you are likely to feel, not understand.
- But now: the most difficult of the five words: “is”, yes: the seemingly simple modal verb “is”.

The cloth is green, you say. And everybody can look and say: “Yes, it's green.” Or, otherwise: You say: “the cloth is blue” and everybody can look and say: “No, you are wrong” or even: “No, you are lying”. Nominal phrases in the indicative are usually just statements, real, provable, provably right or wrong.

“The Lord is my shepherd”, however, is not. It is quite a different type of mode, a different type of sentence. It is a confession. Only to be spoken by someone

who has made a certain, personal experience with being led and protected by someone who he believes to be his God.

So, knowing that our children are hardly used to confessional talk or even to the idea of a God who cares for people – let alone for themselves –, I thought, I could not simply make them listen to and accept this “The Lord is my shepherd”. But I wanted to go back to the roots of it: to the process that may have caused the psalm singer to sing just these words: “The Lord is my Shepherd”.

And I thought: Well, I cannot do it in reality: lead them into danger and, after being rescued, ask them how they feel. But: The second best after real live experience is real narrative experience. And that is what they get from my narration; that is what you just got as well. Perhaps, we will have time in the end to discuss whether my idea has been working on you – and how.

Because: that, ladies and gentlemen, that is the main thing! The main advantage of re-constructing experience is: Afterwards, you may be able to talk about it. Or, what is more – and closer to our subject as well: you can get into a theological discourse: Why, all of the sudden, does David sing about God to be his shepherd? How comes, he got such an idea? What, in the night before, made him think of God, what made him believe? And – furthermore: Can you follow his lines? Do you agree? Or what would you have sung after such a night among wolves?

So, if I am to give a general instruction – I put it like that: As for confessions – do not just repeat them. But open them to your audience, so that they can see what is in them. Tell them the making of, tell them a story that may be fictional, but nevertheless, very true.

3. The second example

“Abraham”, says Sara. It is late at night, and they are sitting outside at a nice, cosy fire. “What do you think? Who will inherit all our sheep and goats, once we are dead?” Abraham heaves a sigh. “I know, Sara”, he says gently. “I know you are sad. Look, we are old and we do not have a single child. But, Sara, do not mind! You have got all my love. Is this not enough?”

Sara does not answer. She does not want to hurt her husband. But this night, she stays by the fire, long after Abraham has gone to bed. And she looks up into the sky that is dark and empty. And she sighs and she says: “And that will be all: Getting up early. Baking bread. Doing the household. Every morning, every afternoon, day by day, till I die ... That will be all ...”

But listen: How very wrong she is! Next day, about noon, Abraham comes home in a hurry! Yes, running and bounding, just like a youngster. “Sara! Sara! Get packing our bags! We are leaving this place! We are going away!” And Sara gets up and begins to pack.

Just a few days later, they are gone: Abraham and Sara, two old people, with all their sheep and their goats, with their slaves and with young Lot, Abraham’s nephew. And Abraham looks back and says good-bye to the relatives and friends, and there is no tear in his eyes, not a single one.

And then, sometime later, camping by the fire after a long days’ journey, Abraham looks into Sara’s face. “Sara”, says Abraham. “How do you feel about our breakup?” Sara is silent for a moment. “Well, Abraham”, she says, “I think, it is okay. It feels like, well, like being much more alive, somehow. But, Abraham: how did you get this idea – just out of the sky?” Abraham smiles. “Not just out of the sky, actually”, he answers. “Sara, do you remember how sad you were, back there at home, that night, by the fire?” Oh yes, she remembers, she remembers only too well ...

"Well, I went down to the water, next day", says Abraham. "To sit there and think. But then, there was this call. I got called: Abraham, Abraham!" – "Who was there, Abraham?", Sara asks. "There was no man", says Abraham. "But I heard the call: Abraham, leave your home town, leave your family and friends. And come. And go to the land that I will show you." – "Abraham", Sara asks again, "who was there?" – "I do not know", Abraham answers. "But I believe: That was God. Because He went on: I will bless you, Abraham, and you shall be a blessing for the people. – Which people?, I dared to ask. And He said: Your people, Abraham. You will be the ancestor of a great nation. I will see to that. – Well, Sara: And I believed." Sara is silent for a long time. "Yes, Abraham", she says in the end. "And so will I."

4. Rules numbers 2 to 4

You surely know the first words of this narrative in your Bible: Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Gen 12,1f.)

The problem with this is quite similar to what I said about Psalm 23. The story of Abraham's call also starts with a confession. It is not a historically or empirically provable fact that God talks to people. It is not an every-day-experience of our audiences today to hear God's voice.

On the contrary. This very first sentence of the biblical narrative is already its crucial point. The biblical narrator believes in God and in the possibility to hear God's voice. So, naturally, he can start like that. He starts with an implicit confession: "Now the Lord said" – means: "I believe that God can talk to people, and I believe that people can hear God's voice."

Our nowadays-audience, rationally and critically reflecting everything, has got two options only: Accepting the author's perspective, even if it is not theirs, or closing their minds right from the start: Ah, that is another fairy tale again – not for me. Let her talk."

Do you get my point? The very thing I would like to have a theological discussion about is God's voice. This however cannot be discussed when it is invented so early, so firmly, so matter-of-factly. Excluded are all who are not used to such confessional talk, excluded from the very beginning.

How to avoid this effect? How to open the story for everybody, that means: to a theological discourse? I hope I have been able to show you ...

Re-telling the story – what did I change? Mainly the beginning and the end. Not the plot. Abraham and Sara leave their hometown and start a brand new life, answering a call and relying on a promise that Abraham believes to have heard.

In the beginning, there is nothing about God. There is a bit of introduction about Sara and Abraham – about how they feel getting old and still being childless ... In the end, there is God's voice. God's voice, confined to Abraham's tale of what he himself has experienced.

A fundamental change? I think so. On the one side, I stick to the tradition. I tell the same plot as the biblical narrator does. On the other side, however, I open the story to theological discourse. I put the confession back onto the tongue of the person who may have made it. That is Abraham. He alone is witness to his call. He can talk about it. He alone can interpret his experience.

You see? As for Psalm 23 and as for narratives, all over the bible – it is the same thing: The Bible starts with confession. Today, we need to go back to the process which has led to confession. Otherwise we will not be able to appreciate it nor will we be able to discuss it.

I will give you further instructions – and due to the short time which is left – I will give them in a pack. What I usually try to do when retelling a bible story or talking about God:

I carefully choose my perspective. I avoid the perspective of an omniscient narrator. I consider it more helpful to take the perspective of someone who just watches and listens to what happens on the immanent stage. Whenever “God happens” – that has to be told by the characters who are acting within the scene. You might call that security distance. It is, however, a sort of distance that does not prevent the audience from sharing the acting rolls’ experiences. Moreover, I step aside and thus open the way to face-to-face-contacts within the story.

I let the audience know that I tell a story. It is the nature of narration not to be a record of empirically provable facts. Narratives are re-constructions and interpretations of events. Or they are narrative answers to otherwise unanswerable questions, e.g. about God, about life, about truth.

I rebuild the story carefully. My aim is the open end. An end that will not send out the signal: “Believe me”, but “Ask me”, “Talk about me”, “Keep me in mind as a subject that is worth second and third thoughts”.

In short: I talk about God in narratives –

telling them in a subjective way,

stating clearly the difference between fact and confession,

re-constructing the process before the confession, in order to provoke theological discussion.

It is not me who guarantees the truth of a story in the first place, it is the persons within it. But, secondly, it is everybody who, like me, have contributed and still are contributing to its long-lasting, never-ending tradition.

Elżbieta Osewska

Books for Primary Schools Children: Support or Obstacle of Children's Creativity (and Theologizing)

Books and texts for children strongly attracted scholarly attention, especially at a transitional moment in education. The field of children's literature retains in varying degrees some measure of the revolutionary spirit of those teachers who pointed out the inseparability of universal standards and systems of canonization from ideological and historical bias. Firstly, the stories were short, and the language was familiar and simple. The amusing dimension was totally lacking: the main purpose of the book was to teach, to educate, never to entertain. Children had to learn useful things, not to waste their time with amusing readings. To prove that people could gain happiness even in this life, the authors depicted a hardly credible picture of good children, men and women who managed to be happy by being satisfied with what they had and by being honest, disciplined and good workers (peasants). Nasty and idle people, on the contrary, received their inevitable punishment in this life, in accordance with a moral that excluded them from the after-life.

1. Short historical approach

For centuries, a child has been treated as a miniature of an adult. It was only an intensive development of social sciences, and in particular the recognition of a child's development processes, that contributed to their different perception. The 20th century was announced the century of a child, which consequently brought also new literary inspirations and a demand for newer, more interesting, more inspiring works for children. Therefore children literature has developed rapidly and become indeed production. In Poland, it was as late

as the mid-20th century⁴¹ when authors started to write, bearing in mind a child as the recipient (first the listener and then – the reader). Great merits in this respect has S. Jachowicz, whose works were aimed exclusively at learning and education. It is not before the end of 19th century when a new style of writing was undertaken by M. Konopnicka, overcoming didacticism in texts for children, and including laughter, a play and a song. In Poland, many works for children were created that dealt with extremely varying subjects. Because of the limits of this article, I will address only the main trends, predominantly in poetry for children.

The convention of an edifying content of poems was overcome by Maria Konopnicka, who strived to show children in their daily environment. She wrote many beautiful children poems about nature ("Tęcza" (Rainbow), "Rzeka" (River), "Mrowisko" (Anthill), "W ogrodzie" (In the Garden). However, the world she was depicting underwent a dramatic change due to development of the civilization, hence a lot of her texts are currently incomprehensible for children.

Works showing the social situation from the perspective of a child appeared in the 19th century. A particularly known novel is *Janko the Musician*, about a musically-talented boy who has no opportunity to develop his talent but is cruelly punished for it instead. Janko represents all children from poor families who cannot live child's life in whole, are not supported by their parents whilst their talent is the reason for a reprimand rather than development and support.

In the 20th century, works for children display a portrait of children's vices. They discipline and sometimes even threaten. This way, children literature rather trains than educates them. A motif of corporal, psychological or spiritual

⁴¹ Cf. E. Balcerzan, *Odbiorca w poezji dla dzieci*, Kraków 1982; J. Cieślowski, *Literatura i podkultura dziecięca*, Wrocław 1975; J. Cieślowski, *Antologia poezji dziecięcej*, Wrocław 1980; J. Cieślowski, *Literatura osobna*, Warszawa 1985; S. Frycie, *Literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży w latach 1945-1975*, Warszawa 1978; H. Ratyńska, *Literatura dziecięca w pracy przedszkola*, Warszawa 1991; K. Kulickowska, *Literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży w latach 1864-1918*, Warszawa 1974; R. Waksmund, *Literatura pokoju dzieciennego*, Warszawa 1986; B. Żurkowski, *Literatura. Wartość. Dziecko*, Kraków 1999; B. Żurkowski, *W świecie poezji dla dzieci*, Kraków 1999.

punishment that awaits children who do not listen to their parents or guardians was often used.⁴² A new current was not introduced until Janina Porazińska who made references to folk texts in a simple, melodic and funny form that can be often sung.

Similar forms were presented by Hanna Januszczyńska. Changing texts of folk songs and games into simple children stories, she wrote short anecdotes about historical events, combining fairy tale phantasies with historic realities. Her didactic poems, encouraging everybody to love their homeland, and especially to reconstruct it after the second world war and to build a new Poland are today out of date because of their message.

Attention should be given to the output of Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina who loved poor, forgotten and abandoned children. She often picked up motifs of a lullaby, a folk song and children games. Simple texts, often enriched with melody, were very popular because, easily remembered, they were used in children's education in nursery schools. Folk works were also used in artistic production for the youngest by other writers, for example Maria Kownacka, Joanna Kulmowa, Mieczysława Buczkówna and Józef Czechowicz.

Introduction of folklore to children literature has an important educational meaning: knowledge of tales, myths, legends, folk tales and novels referring to biblical events, folk games, rituals, songs, customs, etc. is a prerequisite for the preparation for taking part in culture.

Gradually, in their works, poets started to show the world from the position of a child (e.g. Julian Tuwim, Jan Brzechwa, Anna Świrszczyńska, Joanna Papużyńska and Wanda Chotomska). Their texts have ageless values as they first of all entertain and imperceptibly educate. These authors created such a type of writing that was breaking existing conventions. The objective of their

⁴² Cf. J. Białek, *Literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży w latach 1918-1939*, Warszawa 1978; I. Koźmińska, E. Olszewska, *Wychowanie przez czytanie*, Warsaw 2010; *Polish Literature for Children and Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity. A Catalogue*, red. K. Marciniak, E. Olechowska, J. Kłos, M. Kucharski, Warsaw 2013.

texts was to diverge from didacticism and moralizing and to introduce laughter, joke and craic ("Kaczka-dziwaczka" (Oddball Duck), "Słoń Trąbalski" (Elephant Trąbalski), "Figielek" (Little Trick)). A swap of roles also takes place: These are adults who do stupid things whilst children know what to do. From the pedagogical point of view, a text eases a child's complexes and an a child has at last an opportunity to notice that adults can also be wrong while children may observe and draw important conclusions. This way a child becomes a partner for a conversation, somebody entitled to their own questions and reflections. Children's simple statements, taken directly from their lives, weird questions, funny answers but also crucial children's dilemmas, e.g. Why something hurts me?; Why do I cry; What would be if the world looked differently? appear in poems.

Apart from jokes and nature, authors slowly show the world that is close to children, their environment and everyday affair while under the influence of "Winnie-the-Pooh" by A. A. Milne, "Przygody i wędrówki Misia Uszatka" (Adventures and Wanderings of Teddy Bear Flop Ear) by Czesław Janczarski appear in Poland. They present to children a harmonious, friendly life, interesting adventures, games, sympathy for friends' errors and vices. In the atmosphere of kindness and cheerfulness, colleagues can together correct errors.

Another poet is Anna Kamieńska, who emphasises in her poems the moral and philosophical sense and fantasy creation. The new metrical structure makes some difficulties in the reception ("Zajęczy pałac" (Hare's Palace), "Dębowa kołyska" (Oak Cradle) and others). Extremely important questions such as: "Where am I?", "Why am I?", or "Why does the world exist?" become apparent.

An avant-garde poet, who was writing for children, was Tadeusz Kubiak. He made such works as for example "Niby na niby" (Perhaps Seemingly), "W kraju Baj-baju" (In A Legend Country), "Wesoły deszcz" (Jolly Rain) and others. He depicted in them pictures from children lives, wanderings in distant

lands and seas, nature, games and dreams. His poems written in the avant-garde (i.e. breaking well-established conventions) style are quite highbrow for a child.

Wanda Chotomska writes for children as a friend, not a moralizer. Therefore, her poems are liked by young readers and their educators. Written in an easy style, friendly for a young reader, stimulate a child's imagination, encourage him/her for quests, looking around, asking questions, creation of their reality and expression of their reflections.

2. Patriotic and religious literature

An important element of the Polish literature for children, especially in the time of the Partitions of Poland⁴³, were patriotic texts, e.g. "Polak Mały" (A Little Pole),

"Wyznanie wiary dziecięcia polskiego (A Polish Child's Confession of Faith) also known as "Katechizm polskiego dziecka" (The Catechism of A Polish Child) – a series of questions and answers that were written to inspire patriotism among children in Poland. Władysław Bełza, who wrote this poem, was also an author of many patriotic texts: "Cnoty kardynale" (The Cardinal Virtues), "Legenda o garści ziemi polskiej" (A Legend of a Handful of Polish Soil), "Marsz Skautów" (The Scouts' March) and "Modlitwa za Ojczyznę" (Prayer for the Fatherland). Most of his output was written in a simple form, on patriotic themes, addressed to children of Poland which would not re-emerge for more than a century of the Partition until after the First World War. But the best known poem is "Polak Mały":

Kto Ty jesteś? (Who are you?)

⁴³ There were three partitions of the Poland in the end of the 18th century, resulting in the elimination of sovereign Poland for 123 years. The partitions were conducted by three countries: the Russian Empire, Kingdom of Prussia, Habsburg Austria, which divided up the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lands among themselves progressively in the process of territorial seizures. Poland was formally reconstituted in November 1918 after First World War.

Polak mały. (A young Pole)

Jaki znak twój? (What is your sign?)

Orzeł biały (The White Eagle)

Gdzie ty mieszkasz? (Where do you live?)

Między swemi (Amongst my people)

W jakim kraju? (In what country?)

W polskiej ziemi. (On Polish soil)

Czem ta ziemia? (What is that soil?)

Mą Ojczyzną. (My fatherland.)

Czem zdobyta? (How was it gained?)

Krwią i blizną. (Through blood and scars.)

Czy ją kochasz? (Do you love it?)

Kocham szczerze. (I love her sincerely.)

A w co wierzysz? (And in what do you believe?)

W Boga/Polskę wierzę! (I believe in God/Poland!)

Coś ty dla niej? (What are you to her?)

Wdzięczne dziecię. (A grateful child.)

Coś jej winien? (What do you owe her?)

Oddać życie. (The sacrifice of my life.)

The Belza's poem was often taught and repeated in Polish families also much later in the 20th century as a sign of resistance against the communist regime imposed after the Second World War and as a belief that despite the enslavement of the country by the Soviet Union and the allies' (Britain, France and the USA) betrayal, Poland will revive again one day because Poles loved their fatherland and God. Of course, this poem might not be said in the communist school, hence its value as a work defending an independent fatherland.

An important element in the Polish children literature were fairy tales and legends that reminded the times of Poland's glory or created a fairy tale atmosphere that helped to survive the difficult time of bondage, both prior to the First and Second World Wars and the communist regime after the Second World War. Perhaps the best known was the legend about Lech, Czech and Rus – the three brothers that were ancestors of three nations: the Polish, the Czechs and the Russians. The legend reminded also about the national emblem – a white eagle – a strong bird that can be tied but one day will shake off its shackles and fly high above.

In the communist era in Poland⁴⁴, in many families, a bit in the form of a legend, events connected with the family, the fatherland and the Church were told, yet with a strong emphasis that children would tell nothing about it at school as this was endangered with devastating consequences for adults. In villages, an excellent moment was the time of joint works performed by groups of neighbours, e.g. removing fluff from goose feathers, pickling gherkins or making preserves for winter. Then, most often older women, were telling stories from their childhood, hagiography, particularly of Polish saints, and Polish legends and were passing life wisdom to the young generation. Children in villages and small towns were growing up, being sure that the fatherland and

⁴⁴ After Second World War Poland like many Central and Eastern nations had to endure again the presence of Soviet troops on their territories. As a result, Poland was governed by a communist party, which reported directly to the authority of the Soviet government. But the Polish nation did not reconcile itself with the Soviet domination and the alien economic, cultural and anti-Christian system imposed on the Polish population in the process. The communist government applied various measures of suppression directed against the anticommunist opposition as well as against the Roman Catholic Church.

faith are a Pole's fundamental values. Even though we were experiencing the period of the imposed Soviet ideology, deep inside the people there was strength that one day would be awakened again. Histories of individual families were closely tied with the history of the nation while the figures of the blessed and saints were very dear for the young generation. Particularly frequent references were made to the heroism and piety of young Poles, e.g. St. Stanisław Kostka – the patron saint of the Polish young people – who despite many unfavourable circumstances remained faithful to God and the fatherland.

In the post-war period, when in Poland it was difficult to buy children books, sometimes children took an initiative to make the books by themselves. On A4 format sheets of paper, children were writing their own simple texts and colour illustrations. They often wrote down the heard legends and stories, slightly changing them. Other times, they made up stories about their adventures, fantasy travels or meetings with other children. Colour illustrations made by children added details that were not expressed by words but could be depicted with crayons. Therefore, characters often wore beautiful, decorative clothes that expressed the child's escape from the communist reality in which it was difficult to buy a good-looking attire and stores offered only extremely rough-hewn, cut-and-dried, universal garments totally not adjusted to children. On pages of books written by children, appeared beautiful made-up structures that varied from old apartment blocks or gardens full of weirdest flowers, butterflies and animals. I, myself, thanks to my imagination, made my own author's booklets in which I could express my desire of parents' closeness (They both worked and in the afternoon were involved in the construction of the family house), security (I drew angels who were protecting me and my siblings), joy (stories about walks, balls and journeys in clouds) and even a simple expectation of tasty meals and desserts (I received cakes only when I was ill, therefore they appeared on pages of the book as sumptuous banquets). When as a few-year old, I took responsibility for my younger siblings, I made up various stories that were sometimes expressed only with words

and on other occasions, together with my brothers and sisters, I wrote them on paper. Many times we returned to our booklets together. Interestingly, when reading them, each time we added something new. When I was seventeen, I went to university to a different city, nearly 300 kilometres from my village. I could visit home only at Christmas, Easter and on other bank holidays. During summer holidays, my younger brothers and sisters were asking me to continue stories written in our booklets or told by me. From time to time I forgot what exactly my stories were about but they remembered it very well. So I thought up new adventures of our characters, adding variety with statements or drawings of my younger siblings.

A similar role was (and still is) played by events, celebrations and religious rites. Many customs are related to the seasons of the year and the majority of holidays are arranged according to the Catholic liturgical calendar, the stories are naturally arranged on the month-by-month basis starting with December to embrace the whole traditions of Advent and Christmas, up to Easter and the ordinary part of the liturgical year. A very distinctive for Poland is the cult of saints, especially the cult of the Virgin Mary. Therefore, a lot of patriotic stories combined the content concerning the fatherland and religion into one, building the identity of the young generation. The stories often showed that Poland is under special protection of Mary who loves her children and cares about them. There were references made to historical events, for example the defence of Częstochowa against the Swedes in the 17th century, the defence of Warsaw against the Bolsheviks in 1920, being understood as interventions of Mary who cares about the nation that recognizes her as their queen.⁴⁵ The stories were strengthened by liturgical celebrations, processions and family rituals, creating a mutually complementary cultural and religious context.

⁴⁵ In 1656 in Lvov, King Jan Kazimierz declared Mary the Queen of Poland whilst the Feast of Mary the Queen of Poland celebrated on 3 May was entered into the liturgical calendar as late as in 1920.

The concept of a child's Christian education with the use of patriotic and religious literature applies in Poland directly to a child themselves, but through him/her – also their family and society. In the Christian perspective, patriotic and religious education is to awake a human being within the person, make him/her more sensitive to the needs of other people, society and nation and lead to a personal encounter with God. Religious literature for children presents a specific project of life based on examples of blessed and saints. It teaches responsible freedom and judgement of what happens to a person, based on the requirements of truth, good and beauty. Christian education presented this way respects not only the basic and fundamental rights of a human person but also the principle of subsidiarity but it also respects the principle of subsidiarity, the principle of the common good and the universal solidarity.⁴⁶

3. Assessment of children literature

It was long assumed that a child must learn and be busy. Only then, he/she prepares for the future. Thanks to appropriate children literature, a child was first of all disciplined. Through works of children literature, children were provided with knowledge of the surrounding world, their interest was aroused and faith started. Individual works introduced a child into the sphere of desirable attitudes and behaviours in different environments: the family, the Church, the nursery school, among peers, acquaintances and strangers. A principle was applied that a child, also through stories and children literature, enters into the world of values, is taught to distinguish between good and evil and to do good. The world presented in these works was safe, just and friendly for children. Values were often called for and condemned indirectly through satirical pictures.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. Rynio, *The integral education of a person as an opportunity to develop and retain human identity in "liquid modernity"*, in: *World Youth Days. A Testimony to the Hope of Young People*, eds. J. Stala, A. Porębski, Kraków 2016, pp. 505-520.

The forms created by adults for children included such genres as fairy tale, fable, adage, rhyme, "child rhyme, poems, occasional poems ("wishes" and "congratulations") or connected with play: counting-out rhymes, rhymes, and "songs."⁴⁷ Some genres were determined by the situation of the receipt, e.g. a counting-out rhyme used for a play, a lullaby for falling asleep and short poems to say wishes.

However, many works of writers of the 19th and the 20th centuries do not match the contemporary requirements. The moralizing tone and excessive rules make children reject a given text because the rules are too strict. On the other hand, in these texts there has always been a phenomenon of using diminutives, making something bizarre, softening the language that was supposed to be this way closer to a child's language. However, excessive diminutives brought an opposite effect of rejecting the text rather than accepting it by children. This is why amusing texts were started to be used to convey different contents through them. Texts were often linked to a child's activity, e.g. staging, drawing, making art forms, looking for elements of nature. Simple texts were converted into a song or a dance.⁴⁸

Children literature took many new distinctive features. The content of works for younger children are often presented as short, funny texts, even fairy tales and legends that have the form of a poem, e.g. "Legandy warszawskie" (Warsaw Legends). They refer to what is close to a child and to their subculture. Some are full of fantasies, fabrications and defamiliarization that children like and accept. Children quite quickly distinguish the made-up, seeming, fairy tale world from the real world. However, today a difficulty for this distinguishment are online films and works for children that are sometimes taken as more real than everyday situations.

An important feature that distinguishes children literature from other written works is a specific construction of the world presented in the work. The world

⁴⁷ B. Żurkowski, *W świecie poezji dla dzieci*, Kraków 1999, p. 33.

⁴⁸ Cf. J. Cieślowski, *Antologia poezji dziecięcej*, Łódź 1981, p. 5.

is often presented in a smaller scale and underspecified: "Once upon a time, far away, behind mountains, seas, woods, etc.," animals are similar to toys.

In children literature, the world is anthropomorphic. Thus, plants, animals, objects and toys speak, perform different activities, dance, run, have their adventures, similar to children's ones. At the same time, authors remember that a small child thinks realistically and to the point and draws up general conclusions from something concrete. While examining the issue of children literature, one may not forget that the vision of the contemporary world, also the world of values, is shaped by free market economy.⁴⁹ Therefore, there are publications for children that promote asocial behaviours that "shuffle" the hierarchy of values and support a continuous search for always new sensations and experiences.

A valuable support for a child's contact with children literature were "Cała Polska Czyta Dzieciom" (All of Poland Reads to Kids⁵⁰) and "Mądra Szkoła Czyta Dzieciom" (Wise School Reads to Children) campaigns, initiated in Poland, within the frames of which parents, guardians and carers were encouraged to read with and to children. The campaign was joined by known Polish actors, journalists and writers who prepared a series of recordings of children literature, inviting both to play them as well as to read, retell and discuss them with children. Likewise, in many Polish nursery and primary schools various campaigns were organized, inspiring parents to read texts to their children.⁵¹

Children literature has gone a dramatic change from disciplinary works, sometimes even training a child to present behaviours that are desirable by carers, to a gradual adjustment to children's development level, allowing them to produce their own stories about their world. Not only did a child become the character of novels and poems but their problems, sorrows, joys and

⁴⁹ Cf. J. Kowalski, *Etyka katolicka wobec neoliberalizmu*, "Polonia Sacra" 5 (1999), pp. 188-189; J. Mariański, *Kryzys moralny czy transformacja wartości. Studium socjologiczne*, Lublin 2001, pp. 176-177.

⁵⁰ Cf. <http://www.allofpolandreadstokids.org/home> (21.07.207).

⁵¹ Cf. I. Koźmińska, E. Olszewska, *Wychowanie przez czytanie*, Warsaw 2010.

games were incorporated into them. Literary texts began to convey the world of children's sensations and experiences, describing their everyday life.

It is worth adding that a link between religion and children literature is disclosed as a twofold perspective of one educational process. Religion and children literature participate in the educational process of a child that gets to know the surrounding world, observes, judges and asks questions about the sense of a given phenomenon, its value and purpose. A child's appropriate religious development requires support by children literature that not only creates favourable conditions for showing child's world but also gradually supports listening, arguing and passing judgements, directs to values, forms conscience, develops empathy and sensitivity to another person and gives positive examples of activities.

The literature addressed to children, prepared not only by adults for children but in collaboration with children and by children for children brings important questions: How to prepare the young generation for life in a changing society? How to motivate children so that despite an intensive development of information and communication technology (ICT) will want to read children publications? How to become open to values present in children literature?

Gehrmann Anna

Jesus Between Saviour and Knight - the Construction of Religious Meaning During Picture-book Reading

1. Introduction

Let me start with a short example to illustrate the construction of meaning. Imagine a 4-year-old Markus and his mother, while they are reading Janosch's „Oh How Beautiful is Panama“: mother (somewhere in the middle of the story): but that was wrong again, because if you always turn right you, / Markus: (())ge/ mother: where does this get you? Markus: Where you've been again.⁵²

This, and many other examples, show what extraordinary cognitive utterances 4-year-old children are already capable of, if they have the necessary guidance from their parents during the repeated reading of a picture book. Petra Wieler has given a few examples of this in a study she conducted in 1997.⁵³ Those subtle acts of encouragement, coming from parents, already form the basis for a child's later ability to perform well at reading in school. Hanna Roose has also shown parallels between literary talks and theological talks.⁵⁴ In order to show the influence of conversations during picture-book-reading on the religious understanding of children, I have conducted a small, yet slightly modified version of Wieler's study. After a short description of her version and its' applicability on the theological context, I will introduce you to some aspects of my own study.

⁵² Wieler (1997), 246.

⁵³ Wieler (1997).

⁵⁴ Roose (2016).

2. Theory

2.1 Theoretical Background: Wieler's Study

Wieler conducted her study with 15 families: 10 from the Netherlands and 5 from Germany. She explicitly states that she did not pursue a comparison between the two countries, but rather focused on the common practice of reading picture-books to children among the different social classes. In line with ethnographic research, the perspective of the participating adults played an important role for her study. She used three instruments for research: the conversation during picture-book-reading, which she recorded in her presence, an interview with the involved mothers and a reading journal, which was supposed to document the families' routines and general preferences concerning picture-book reading.

As a literary basis, she used the afore mentioned book "Oh How Beautiful is Panama" by Janosch, which was available in both Dutch and German. The specific characteristic of this book is, that it demands a high cognitive competence from the 4-year-old children Wieler studied. The main body of the piece has two protagonists, tiger and bear, which is accompanied by constant comments from the author. These comments are a reminder of the questions typically asked during picture book reading and are designed to draw the children's attention to the circular design of the story, which can already be inferred from the example given at the beginning. The analysis of Wieler's data showed, that the role of guiding conversation was of different importance in the different social classes. The mothers also had differing intentions. Mothers of a higher social class pursued more educational purposes. They wanted to guide their children's understanding through comments and an intensive exchange about the text, while always putting their children's interests first. Wieler also points out the effect of this conversation on language acquisition. The structure of conversations with higher social class mothers already showed similarities with literary talks used in schools.

The situation of picture-book reading is, through its highly ritualised structure, better suited for analysis than spontaneous utterances of children. As Christoph Morgenthaler has shown, picture book reading often happens at the same time each day; in Germany mainly in the evenings. Morgenthaler also shows that this is the place where glimpses of religion, or spirituality, still have a place in the life of children today, even if the rituals themselves are not necessarily religious in nature.⁵⁵ Another characteristic of this special situation is that children learn about cultural norms and values in these conversations.⁵⁶ Religion is still a part of Western culture, hence this situation constructs an ideal ground for introducing children to this aspect of their culture.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Literary and Theological Talks

In the context of my talk, I will use the term theological talks, suggested by Petra Freudenberger-Lötz, due to spontaneous conversations with theological content being the focus of the project. In order to classify it as “theologizing”, a reflexive element would be required, such as Friedrich Schweitzer⁵⁷ and Mirjam Zimmermann⁵⁸ have pointed out. This reflexive element, however cannot be expected from 4-year-old-children, as their thinking is still very ego-centric in nature. Kammeyer attributes an orientation at the process and a general openness regarding the outcome to theological talks as well as to theologizing.⁵⁹ This openness and orientation at the process is also the aim of my talk. It is not intended to show how children acquire certain competencies or to regard every utterance as a theology that I can learn from, as a theology from children would do. It is rather intended to retrace the steps children and their parents take during the construction of meaning.

⁵⁵ Morgenthaler (2011), 20;151.

⁵⁶ Compare Wieler (1997), 37.

⁵⁷ Compare Roose (2016), 211.

⁵⁸ Zimmermann (2012), 83.

⁵⁹ Kunze-Beiküfner (2012), 169.

This “processuality” goes back to Gerhard Härle, a professor for German literature and the didactics of German language teaching. He postulates this as well as the general openness for every answer in literary talks.⁶⁰ Wieler shows this for the context of picture book readings as well, when she claims that it is mainly about the joint search for and the construction of meaning. Conjointly in a theological context, the joint search for meaning plays an important role. Especially when the difference in knowledge is not as prominent. Theology deals with some undecidable questions. Regarding those, adults may have a deeper background knowledge than children, but they do not always have one correct solution at hand. This makes them, and their children, equal partners in the search for meaning.

Nevertheless, the adult, representing an “expert” is responsible to keep the answers from straying too far off topic. They still need to be in line with the beliefs of the religious communities. In literary, as well as in theological talks, the utterances of a child are only being validated through the partner in that talk. The child has an opportunity to reassure him/herself that his construction of the world is the same as that of the adult he/she is talking to. Hanna Roose has pointed out that primary school children are especially subjectively involved when they are talking about religion. They waver between a religiously-theological construction of meaning and trying these new constructs out and reflecting upon them on a cognitive metalevel. Whether they are in the process of constructing or already in the phase of reflecting upon their new constructs is hard to determine, especially when an observer only gets a glimpse into the families’ lives. How much they are simply assimilating from their parents and how much they actively construct, cannot be said with certainty. Wieler gives an example taken from Bruner’s works. He shows that in a complex situation, the way a task is being presented to the child by the adult becomes the main criterion for the child’s ability to understand and accommodate the complex task.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Roose (2016), 211.

⁶¹ Wieler (1997), 47.

Härle showed that children are able to make sense of the situation, even if they do not understand the meaning of every single word. This is due to the basic structure of picture book reading: the situation is marked by the proximity to the mother (often the children are sitting on their mother's laps or snuggling up in their arms), the sound of her voice and the dyadic symbiosis of mother and child.⁶² According to Steinbrenner & Wiprächtiger, another constituting element for the situation of reading a picture book is the immediate and affectively connotated reaction to the text.⁶³ This is partly given by the intimacy of the situation, but in picture book reading, the role of the pictures should not be underestimated as well. Christian Butt and Mirjam Zimmermann have shown that the combination of a text and a picture forms something, which is more than only the sum of its' parts.⁶⁴ Härle postulates a direct connection between text and literary talk, which, in this context, needs to be extended to the level of pictures as well.

Literary talks and their role in class has been dealt with extensively. Hanna Roose has recently managed to viably apply this approach to children's theology and theological talks.⁶⁵ She traces parallels between literary and theological talks and shows that both can be interpreted as a format according to Jerome Bruner. Formats in this sense are usually characterised by three elements: they are based on rules and routines, a strong relationship between child and reader and an asymmetry regarding knowledge is constitutive.⁶⁶ As the children are treated as equal partners, a communicative and affective pull, a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky) can be established.⁶⁷ Exactly this pull is the element that enables children to say things which adults do not expect from them. And this exactly is where theology enters the game, as it can be inferred, that children will share extraordinary things about their religious ideas as well.

⁶² Compare Roose (2016), 210.

⁶³ Compare Roose (2016), 209.

⁶⁴ Zimmermann und Butt (2016)

⁶⁵ Roose (2016).

⁶⁶ Compare Roose (2016), 210.

⁶⁷ Roose (2016), 211.

2.3 Theoretical background: Religious Sensitivity

Let me return to the parents as experts: Of course not all parents are theology experts. This is where the term of religious sensitivity comes in: Katrin Bederna defined it as particularly not in accordance with the teachings of the religious communities, but rather oriented at the children's needs.⁶⁸ This makes parents, who are not studied theologians explicitly qualified for working in a religiously sensitive way with their children. The question that arose was: How religiously sensitive did I want the approach to be? As I wanted to examine utterances on religious topics, it did not seem to make sense to only orient the project along the children's needs. The Christmas story which I used in the end is definitely going beyond the boundaries of religious sensitivity, as it is a story on which part of our faith is built. Nevertheless, it seemed important to introduce God as an active player in the story to bring him to the children's minds. Another important factor was the timing: shortly before Christmas, the children had heard the story in kindergarten and were familiar with it. I want to draw attention to a confusion surrounding the Christmas story which Gerhard Büttner has analysed in pre-school children⁶⁹: In Germany, traditionally the Christkind brings the presents. This name literally translates to Christ child. It is usually imagined as a female, angel-like creature and is, for some, connected to baby Jesus in the crib. We then have Jesus, the actual child in the crib, as well as Santa Claus, who is being brought over from America and causing some confusion to who is actually bringing the presents. When I was babysitting for a Finnish family a couple of years ago, the boy, five at that point, actually asked me where the difference was. This was due to his parents telling him about Santa Claus, but the children at kindergarten all talking about the Christkind. Again showing the confusion perfectly.

Now that I have illustrated the theoretical background, and given some reasons for choosing the story which I have chosen, I want to go into more detail about my study. I will first begin by telling the similarities and differences in

⁶⁸ Compare Bederna (2009).

⁶⁹ Compare Büttner (2008).

Wieler's and my approach. I will then introduce you to the boys and their religious background, as well as some main points from the interviews. I will conclude by giving you two examples from the recording.

3. The Study: My Approach in Comparison to Wieler's

In contrast to Wieler, I did not only want to look at general understanding and construction of meaning. I wanted to extend it to the theological context, to see its influence on the construction of religious meaning. Therefore, it was not necessary to have a deeper look into the social classes. Wieler's study had already shown, that the best results, as were to be expected, were from families in a higher social situation. The gender of the participants did not play a role either, and as I knew two little boys and their families, I asked them. But of course, I needed to include the religious dimension and wanted to see how much religion there actually is in the boys' lives. I started by expanding the interview questions accordingly. I added questions such as "does your son attend a public or a Christian kindergarten?" "Is religion a common topic in your talks?" "Do you go to church or do you attend children's services with your son?" I did not change the reading journals, but I wanted to see whether other religious stories were being read to the children at all.

As I have mentioned before, I have changed the story from "Oh How Beautiful is Panama" to the Christmas story, in order to include a religious dimension. At first, I asked the families to read the story of Noah and his arch.⁷⁰ In this specific story, God had an even more active role in comparison to the Christmas story⁷¹. I deliberately chose to not interfere with the families' privacy more than necessary and had them videotape themselves. Of course, cameras or smartphones are a source of distraction for children, as Morgenthaler has documented.⁷² However, the boys did not show an overly increased interest

⁷⁰ Langen (2009b).

⁷¹ Langen (2009a).

⁷² Morgenthaler (2011), 11.

in them. Even though I let the families record two stories, there was a far more of an active reaction to the Christmas story. In my opinion, this is based on the fact, that it was familiar to them, and therefore easier to access. By choosing a children's bible with 5-minute- stories, I wanted to reduce the complexity, as well as the length, that the parents had criticised in Wieler's study. I was hoping that a simpler story would also leave more cognitive activity for religious thoughts and explanations from the mothers.

When I was looking for the ideal bible, I first proceeded intuitively. I went to non-Christian book stores and spend quite some time looking at the versions of the Christmas story, which they had in various bibles. When I examined the chosen bible⁷³, with the help of Annegret Meyer's⁷⁴ criteria for religiously sensitive bibles, it held up. This specific version has got an aesthetic layout: angels are not depicted as humans with wings, but as lights, which was an important factor for me. I wanted to give the children's imagination the freedom they needed without letting it run entirely wild, an idea that formed when thinking about the „corridors for thought“, which Mirjam Zimmermann uses in the context of religious education at school. I checked the language as well and the bible represents a balance between the biblical, elevated language and the children's language. I also examined the image of God in the texts. Of course, this is not much of a problem in the new testament, but Meyer has shown, that the portrayals of God in the old testament vary significantly in children's bibles. Here a positive image is painted in Noah's story. He only wants to eradicate the bad and he is protecting Noah and his family.

⁷³ Langen/Weldin (2009).

⁷⁴ Meyer (2009).

3.1 The Study: The Participants

But let us turn our attention to the two little boys, who I quickly want to introduce to you. Jakob is 3 years and 9 months old when his family did the recording. He has got two younger siblings, a 2-year-old brother and a 3-months-old sister. His mother works as a primary school teacher and his father as a human biologist. Most of the interview was done in the presence of both parents. They portray themselves as not very religious at all. However, they had bought a version of the Christmas story to familiarise Jakob with the story. Jakob and his brother have both been baptised. He is attending a public kindergarten where the annual feasts are talked about with the children.

The second boy, Peter is 3 years and 6 months old when he is being recorded and is an only child. His mother is a primary school teacher as well, but it is important to know that she studied protestant theology as a subject. His father works as a business consultant for the Chamber of Trades. In contrast to the first family, the mother points out that religion is important to her, even though she does not attend church regularly. Peter has been baptised and already owns a children's bible. The biblical stories are being told every now and then, without being imposed on him. She has noticed a growing interest in religion on his side. He wants to participate in the nativity play next year and every so often starts talking about God. He loves doing his own nativity play with the large figurines, which are set up in the living room and knows the story very well. He is also attending a public kindergarten, but religion is not raised very often.

Both families describe the level of development as adequate for the boy's age. Jakob's mother points out, that his motoric skills are a lot further developed than his speaking skills. This is why he is not too fond of picture book reading. This can be seen in specific fragmentation of the recordings. He turns the page as soon as he gets bored and his mother plays along. This response is very typical for mothers from higher social class families, as they put their children's interest first. This brings the format according to Bruner back to

mind: the son feels understood and accepted and he is close to his mother. She uses her advantage in knowledge to help him understand the text by providing additional information, which some examples in the scene which I will provide later will show.

Peter's mother pays attention to his needs as well. When he gets bored during the first reading of the Christmas story, they negotiate whether they should continue or not. The mother wants him to, but he does not. In the end, she gives into his wishes. Generally, when comparing the two boys, Peter is a lot more attentive and patient during picture book reading.

In the interview, I also asked the mothers to state their personal evaluation of the story as it was told in the bible. The opinions on the complexity were rather different. While Jakob's mother thinks that it is too demanding for her son, Peter's mother thinks it is appropriate. In her opinion, Peter does not have to understand every word to make sense of the story – just as Härle postulates. Both generally like the bible and its' design. Jakob's mother likes the style of writing, but classifies it as more suitable for older children. Peter's mother on the other hand, thinks that the text can be explained to her son with her guidance. This guidance is primarily referring to the explanations on words. This matches Wieler's thesis, that the talk about the book is very constitutive for the children's construction of reality and their first access to the text. Peter's mother appreciates the freedom the illustrations give her son's fantasy. Fun enough, her son looks at the picture and is searching for the angel. This seems to be on his mind for quite a while, because he later looks at the light in the upper left corner of the picture and asks: This is the angel? He is trying to validate his assumption through the other- in this case his mother.

3.2 The Study: Two Incidents

Just as in Wieler's project, I have primarily paid attention to situations with a high change of speakers. Only the parts in which the children were actually talking, religious utterances could take place. I want to look at two scenes in detail, one with Jakob, which shows the clarification of the different characters in the Christmas story and illustrates how the mother caters for his needs. Another situation is taken from the recording with Peter, in which he thinks about Jesus' role as a saviour due to a misunderstanding.

Let us start with Jakob: The mother is reading after Jakob has opened the bible to the story of the three wise men and declared that this is the Christmas story. [...] „more than anything else he (Herodes) wanted to know where this newborn prince was.“

Jakob gets up: „I'm getting it, okay?“ [...]

Mother: “Ah okay, he is getting something.”

Jakob: “this. Look.”

Mother: “What is it?”

Jakob: „this is Jesus' home (he got a plastic musical stable and one of the three wise men)”

Mother: “from what is it?”

Jakob: “Jesus' home”

Mother: “ah, Jesus' home, right? This is his stable, right?”

Jakob: “hmhm.” (plays with the stable)

Mother: „let me check if I can find it, where Jesus is born (turns the pages of the book) Ah look, here it is.”

Jakob: yes, this is it" mother: "this is where Jesus is born. Shall we read it again?"

Jakob: „yes“

Mother: „okay. 2000 years ago- that was very, very, very long ago, a foreign king reigned the country of the Israelites. His name was Herodes and he was very mean. And even more powerful than Herodes was the emperor Augustus, who"

Jakob: "who's that? (points at the picture)

Mother: "that could- who could that be?"

Jakob: "dunno" [...]

This goes on for a while, until the mother asks again:

Mother: "And who is that?"

Jakob: "uh. Dunno"

Mother: "who could that be?"

Jakob: „Dunno“

Mother: "look, you were just looking for something a minute ago. Who did you look for"

Jakob: "her (points at a picture showing Mary)

Mother: "Mary, right."

Jakob continues to be distracted, but is able to re-focus after a while.

Mother: "Shall we continue reading? But the angel said to her: Don't be afraid. God has chosen you. You will give birth to a son you shall call him- what's Mary's son called?"

Jakob: "Josef"

Mother: "no, that was Mary's husband, right? What is her child called?"

Jakob: "eeehm" mother: "What's the name of the baby in the crib?" Jakob: "ehm. Jesus Christ child."

Mother: „Jesus Christ child, correct.“

Jakob is not the first one to confuse Jesus for the father, as Gerhard Büttner has shown (Büttner (2008)). Interestingly, the combination of Jesus and Christ child is not illicit in the concept of Christkind, even though the name Christ is in there. When he is playing with his little stable, he calls him Jesus. It remains unclear, whether this concept is his own or simply the learned answer to that question. His parents supplied me with an additional videography, where they recorded themselves and Jakob, reading "their" version of the Christmas story. It is a book with shorter texts and a lot more pictures, designed for 2- to 4-year-old children (Taube und Scharff-Kniemeyer (2016)). In this recording, he is also asked to name the child and again uses the aforementioned combination. The assumption that this is a concept he did not construct himself, is underlined by the mother's verbal ("correct") and non-verbal approval (she nods). The chosen term Jesus Christ child, which at first seems rather random, shows that the mother is trying to carefully help her son draw the connection. She is avoiding to explain the Christkind to him- as this would destroy the myth. She is also avoiding further questions that her son might have in this case. If she explains that Jesus actually is the Christkind who brings the presents, the gender question arises. Any type of explanation seems rather complex for a 4-year-old child, so the mother decides to not overwhelm her child, but to gently make him accommodate both concepts as belonging together. So it seems unlikely, yet not impossible, that Jakob is sharing a deeper understanding of his Christology with us, as Büttner has shown it for little Viktoria in his article.

Peter

The second situation I want to share with you was recorded with Peter. I will quote the beginning in German, as it is based on a pun. I will then provide a translation and explain further.

Mother: „...Heute Nacht wurde in Bethlehem der Retter geboren. Er ist es, auf den alle Menschen-“

Peter: „huuuuh, welcher Ritter?“

Mother: „Jesus, ne?“

Father: „Retter nich Ritter, Peter!“

Mother: „Reetter“

Peter: „Ritter?“

Mother: „Kein Ritter, ein Retter.“

Peter is listening to the story, but instead of the word Retter, which means saviour in German, he misunderstands it for Ritter, which means knight. The two words form a minimal pair in German, so their semantic meaning can only be distinguished by one sound. In this case “i” and “e”, which sound rather similar. And of course knights are a lot more relevant for a three-and-a-half-year-old boy, than saviours. This is the reason it takes Peter a while to realise his misunderstanding. He wants to make sure that he has heard correctly, by asking again:

Peter: “a saviour?”

Mother: “yes.”

Peter: “saviour”

Mother: “who saves people”

Peter: "who saves people?"

Mother: "hmhm"

Peter: "the sick people?"

Mother: "yes he helped the sick people"

Peter: "saviour"

Mother: "hmhm. Jesus, right?"

The mother provides help here, by explaining the unknown noun saviour with the help of the verb from the same word stem. She is successful. Peter repeats the word, as if to test the sound of it and then tries to prove his hypothesis regarding its meaning. He does this by transferring it to the area of sick people. As theologians in line with a theology from children, we are quick to take this as a hidden gem, a hint at the fact that he understood what Jesus did. But thinking about the life of a three-and-a-half-year-old-boy, his thoughts could have been somewhere else entirely. A German word for ambulance is Rettungswagen, a word which Peter will be familiar with and which is derived from the same stem as well. His mother's answer however, attributes this utterance to Jesus. After all she is a theologian, so we do not know whether this happens consciously or unconsciously. Further research would be necessary to see, up to what extent the "practice of a habitus" (Büttner, 2013, quoted in Roose 2016) can be detected here. This would be possible, because the statement that Jesus helped the sick already includes a Christian line of argumentation. The mother offers this argumentation to her son.

She encourages him, when he repeats the word: "hmhm, Jesus, right?". The question remains, whether Peter really sees Jesus as a saviour in the religious sense or not. He might only be accommodating his mother's words into his world view, but he might eventually assimilate them and make them his own. This uncertainty is the reason why I think the processuality of the conversations should be the focus during the construction of meaning. It's the

mothers' guiding words that guide and support this process and finally validate their children's thoughts. But let us return to Peter and his mother:

Peter: "Yes. There? There? (he points at the picture)"

Mother: "yes those are the shepherds. It ends at the crib- It's him that all people are impatiently waiting for."

Peter: "I cannot see the angel"

Mother: "no, he is not in the picture, the angel, right? It's him that all people are impatiently waiting for. This is his sign [...]"

The mother continues the story without any further questions from Peter. Once they are done, the mother says: "Story is over. (child turns the pages) That is a different story"

Peter: "There?"

Mother: "There are also many stories about Jesus, what he has done"

Peter: "where is the angel?"

Mother: "The angel? Well he only announced that Jesus has been born, right?"

Peter: "And here?"

Mother: "that is Jesus in- in the garden of Gethsemane"

Peter: "And there?"

Mother: "that is not Jesus, that is a different story".

4. Conclusion

Both examples show how the mother's try to help their children discover the religious dimension of the story. They try to sensitise their sons' awareness for Jesus and help them make sense of his role in the Christmas story. By doing so, they introduce God- or rather his son- into their own son's imagination. Some deeper theological contexts may be too difficult to understand, but the mothers show how much more understanding can be achieved when providing them with some simple explanations. This was the aim of this project: To show possible ways of introducing religious thoughts to young children during picture book reading. Especially the last scene where Peter nicely illustrates the stages of his cognitive process. They also mirror the characteristics of a format in the sense of Bruner: He feels understood and taken seriously and is therefore able to ask questions about the unknown word saviour freely. He receives an answer which broadens his religious horizon. By using a traditional Christian story, it seemed very likely that religion would be a topic during the conversation with the children. Looking back on the utterances, which both mothers (not only the religious education teacher) have evoked from their children, shows not only great intuition, but also an amazingly sensitive approach to help their children construct their own religious meaning.

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“Perhaps God also speaks in fantasy language”

Theologizing with the book Robin and God

1. Introduction

Children’s books take an important place in primary education in the Netherlands and Flanders. Classrooms have a book corner, where children can choose and read a book. Teachers and children read books or passages to each other. Together, they engage in conversation about the characters and their experiences. From about nine years onwards, the children themselves take turns in giving a presentation about a book to their group. For the approach of this subject a teacher can refer to specific didactic publications on reading lessons and on how to deal with children’s literature. The Annual Kinderboekenweek (Children’s Book Week) in the Netherlands and the Jeugdboekenweek (Week of the Book for Young People) in Flanders have a prominent place. Almost all schools participate.⁷⁵

Philosophizing with Children – widely valued in the Netherlands and Flanders – uses children’s books a lot.⁷⁶ Theologizing with Children, emergent for a number of years now, is mainly focused on Bible stories. In this contribution we report on an experimental children’s theological project around the children’s book Robin and God. We bring together Theologising with Children and literature education. In this project, we were allowed to listen to statements made by children that provide food for thought in terms of literature, philosophy and theology. For instance, the statement: “Perhaps God also speaks in fantasy language.”

⁷⁵ See for instance: Pol van der (2010). Ghesquière (2009)

⁷⁶ Anthone/Moors (2002)

2. The book Robin and God

The book *Robin and God* (1996)⁷⁷ is by the also internationally famous, Dutch children's book writer Sjoerd Kuyper. In this book the young school child Robin sets out to search for God. Who is God? How does God act? How do you come into contact with God? These are questions Robin is asking himself. His environment is the family he grows up in and the school where he interacts with other children. With his grandfather Robin enters into a conversation about his questions. On the subject of praying, for instance, he asks:

"Can God really hear you when you pray?"

"Yes," says granddad. I think so."

"But what if a lot of people pray at the same time? Then he hears everything higgledy-piggledy! Can he then hear what I am saying?"

"Easily," says granddad.

"Then God must have a lot of ears, for sure."

"You get it," says granddad.

"God has very many ears. For each human being God has one ear."

Robin's dad does not find God any longer relevant in this day and age. God belongs to the past. But granddad has different ideas about that. His answers to Robin's questions show that. He does not give these answers in a monologue. Sjoerd Kuyper gives him the role of a mystagogue. He walks, as it were, with Robin past his questions. He shares his own experiences, thoughts and doubts that make Robin think again and again and ask questions. In a dialogue with his granddad Robin advances, in small steps, in his search for God.

⁷⁷ Kuyper (1996)

In *Robin and God* Sjoerd Kuyper raises many, sometimes complex, theological questions. To do this he chooses a clear and humorous narrative tone, which brings children, in an engaging manner, into contact with the subject matter of the book.

Till today Kuyper's book *Robin and God* is appreciated. In the Netherlands and Flanders Kuyper's book is seen as a classic. In 2016 the book was published in a completely renewed twenty-first edition. In 1997 Sjoerd Kuyper received the Gouden Griffel (The Golden Pencil) for his book. This is the highest Dutch prize for children's literature. By now the book has been translated into Italian, Slovenian, Frisian and German.⁷⁸

3. The context of the project

The project of the children's book *Robin and God* was an experiment for us. Never before have we designed a learning environment where Theologising with Children, Philosophising with Children and Literature education come together.

In the summer of 2016 we carried out the project in De Voorpoort, a small school (83 pupils) for primary education in the old fishing town of Vollenhove; situated in the northeast of the Netherlands.

De Voorpoort is a non-denominational school. In the Netherlands, roughly speaking, one third of all schools for primary education is non-denominational, one third is Roman-Catholic and a third is Protestant Christian. In non-denominational education parents have the right to request from the school board Protestant, Roman-Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Hinduistic or humanistic education. In De Voorpoort more than half of the parents choose Protestant-

⁷⁸The German version was the first to be published after the Dutch edition: Kuyper (1997)

Christian religious education.⁷⁹ Most parents are not church-going or religious. Yet, they find it important that their children take part in religious education and that they come into contact with religion and believing. Liesbeth teaches three groups with an average of 16 pupils each Monday for one hour. She is not employed by the school. She works for the national Protestant Centre for Religious Education in Utrecht. This organisation offers religious education throughout the Netherlands and contributes to its quality by means of training, support and materials. Henk is as a pedagogue of religion involved in this.

4. Why the project Robin and God?

Teachers of Protestant Christian Religious Education such as Liesbeth make their own year programme. To do this they receive guidelines from the Protestant Centre for Religious Education in a basic document, entitled *Krijtlijnen*⁸⁰ (Chalk-lines). The lessons according to *Krijtlijnen*, must serve the personal development of the children. Narration and meaningful reflecting on that via philosophising and theologising, and forms of expression must be the didactic method. The environment of the children and the culture in which they live must be the starting point when choosing the content of lessons. The objective is that children achieve construction of their own religious story when coming into contact with religious stories.

The choice of the story Robin and God fully satisfies these guidelines. The children can completely identify with the home and school situation in which the story is set. Robin's questions about God can also be the questions that the children of the Voorpoort may have. Of Christmas, the framework of Sjoerd Kuyper's narrative, all children will have formed cultural and religious ideas.

⁷⁹ The population of Vollenhove is predominantly Protestant.

⁸⁰ Pol (2013)

An also strong cultural, actually by chance, motive of choice is that the Children's Book Week 2016 in the Netherlands has as its theme Granddads and Grandmas forever young. Many granddads and grandmas pass by via stories and poems. Robin's funny granddad fits very well into this theme.

Focus on the Children's Book Week also fits completely in with the vision on children and culture of the Protestant Centre for Religious Education. Every year teachers are encouraged to participate in the Children's Book Week with a special publication. For 2016 Liesbeth was asked to put together this publication⁸¹ and to give courses on the subject.⁸² Experiences with the experiment in the primary school De Voorpoort in Vollenhove could be incorporated in this publication and thus benefit religious education in the whole of the Netherlands.

Structure of the Robin and God project

Inspired by modern reading methodology we choose the book *Robin and God* as the first lesson for a reading circle. Two pupils, Madelief and Hilde, are asked to read the book and to tell their fellow pupils who Robin and his granddad are and what the story is about in outline. Our objective is especially that the children will identify with Robin and to raise awareness of their own questions.

In the two in-depth lessons we want to focus more specifically on Robin's questions and his search for God. To do that we selected fragments from the book where Robin and granddad exchange images of God when answering questions. In a third lesson we add drawings to those images of God from a new, special Dutch publication: called *Samenleesbijbel*⁸³ (read-together Bi-

⁸¹ Winters (2016)

⁸² These courses were held at various locations: Leeuwarden, Utrecht, Zoetermeer and Oud-Beijerland. The courses attracted a great deal of interest. An extra session in Leeuwarden was necessary.

⁸³ Bolhuis-Drieënhuizen/Hutter/Smit/Verburg (2015)

ble); aimed at children from eight years old. This publication with brief fragments of background information and several suggestions for chats with children and assignments is also inspired by *Theologising with Children*.⁸⁴

5. The reading circle

The two pupils, Madelief and Hilde, who were asked to present Robin and God in the reading circle, appear to be fully aware of their task, i.e. presenting Robin's questions and his granddad's answers to the children. So as to succeed in their task both girls have chosen an interesting chapter from Robin and God. In turn, they read the chapter out aloud. Afterwards, the other children may ask questions about the text read out to them.

The chapter is about the Christmas story. Grandma, who together with Granddad, is staying at Robin's house, suggests that they all act out the Christmas story. Madelief and Hilde visibly enjoy the sense of humour in this fragment.⁸⁵ All kinds of thoughts that Robin has about who can or cannot play which role show up.

After the reading session questions are asked.

Dorien asks for instance: "Why did they choose Knor, a toy animal, to be Maria, surely it is not big enough?" Madelief answers: "The grandma did not want to be Maria. Knor, the pig, is not big, but it is fat. As if it is pregnant. Then it is possible."

Niké asks: "Did Robin have many friends?" Hilde answers: "He does have friends in class, but not many. He also gets bullied in class when he is scared to do something. It think his granddad is his friend."

⁸⁴ Kuindersma (2008).

⁸⁵ Kuyper (1996), 91 usw.

In the course of the reading circle the identification we hoped for happens. The children, just like Robin, begin to express their own religious thoughts and to ask very serious questions. For instance, Dorien.

Dorien: "Uhm.... Why would you actually think that you come back to earth after you die? You really never know. But why should you think of this? If you will never find out anyway. Why will you ever know?"

(Teacher) Liesbeth: "So you are really asking --...whether you return to earth after death?"

Dorien: "Yes. Because you do not know anything anymore. If you know, that you have lived before. If you are here already. How do you do that then?"

Liesbeth: "Why do you want to know this so badly?"

Dorien: "Then I will know or not. Then I don't have to ask anymore. Because then I must have a lot of fun because I am not coming back."

6. First in-depth lesson

In the second lesson we, together with the children, want to go deeply into the main theme of Robin and our project 'asking about God'. Kuyper's book does give us a lot of opportunities to do that. We choose the fragment, where Robin is in the bath with his granddad in attendance.

Robin points to his knee.

"Look at that," he says. "An island in a rough sea."

"Bare island," says granddad.

"Not at all," says Robin. "There is a lot on the island. Trees and mountains and houses. People also live there.....But it is all so small, you can easily see that."

"O, yes, says granddad, "now I get it."⁸⁶

"Granddad " says Robin. "Do you think that real people live on the knee of the real God?"

"How should I know, my dear boy," says granddad.

"Look," says Robin, "then God can do this.... "

His knee disappears underwater. Gone is the island.

"Then they all drown!"

"No, says granddad, "that is not like God... you get out of the bath and I will dry you till you tingle."⁸⁷

After reading these fragments to the pupils they are told to write down, in pairs, what they think of Robin's ideas. Afterwards they chat and share their thoughts.

Cornil: "I think that Robin has a lot of imagination because he thinks that his knee is a small island."

Stef: "We wrote down that Robin thinks he is a god. But we think that that is not true. For a knee can never be an island. In fantasy it is possible but not in reality."

Liesbeth: "But Robin thought: could real people live on God's real knee? What do you think about that?"

Noömi: "I don't think that is possible because it is only a knee. People will fall off just like that.

Mick: "It is possible. For a knee is round and so is the earth."

⁸⁶ Kuyper (1996), 93.

⁸⁷ Kuyper (1996), 95.

Dyon: "Well, a knee cannot be an island, because if you hit your knee it hurts. And you can't make holes in it like a way in to a cave. That will cause the most pain."

Nike: "If you get an anaesthetic, it is possible."

Dyon: "How can you anesthetise the earth?"

Liesbeth: "This is all about other things. As if.....the knee is not a real island. But the knee is like an island. It is another sort of language, maybe?"

Dyon: "Maybe a fantasy language. Maybe Robin also uses fantasy language and everything he thinks about God. Maybe God also speaks in fantasy language."

Second in-depth lesson

In the second lesson we go deeper into the various images of God. Teacher Liesbeth reads aloud the chapter where Robin and granddad attend the church service on Christmas Eve. Afterwards, Robin meets his class mate Nellie, who talks to him in a very serious tone.

"You do not go to Sunday school, do you?", asks Nellie.

Robin shakes his head.

"Then God most likely will punish you severely, I think," says Nellie.

That scares Robin!

"I don't have to go to Sunday school at all," he says quickly. "I already know everything about God."⁸⁸

Yet, the things Nellie said to him keep on playing on his mind:

⁸⁸ Kuyper (1996), 77

"Granddad," asks Robin. "Can God do something to you?"

"Do something?"

"Yes, punish you firmly?"

"Are you mad!" says granddad.

"If you do something naughty," says Robin.

"God does not pay attention to that," says granddad.

"And if you don't go to Sunday school?"

"Makes no difference to God," says granddad.⁸⁹

With reference to this fragment about punishment we show a real-life judge in a gown. We then ask the question: In what respect does God look like a judge and in what respect does he not? ⁹⁰

Dyon: "God does not wear a neat outfit but God can be angry."

Wout: "God also has a hammer to hit the earth when he punishes somebody."

Hilde: "I do think that God can sometimes be angry but I don't think that he sends anybody to prison."

Alex: "God does not write everything down on a piece of paper."

Madelief: "God does not talk like a judge. He does not speak strict but also not nice. He looks like.....you deserve to be punished, because, for instance, you have set a car on fire....and then he looks at you and says: you deserve to be punished and what is good for you."

In a next fragment granddad says about God, that He cannot see Robin. And that He only has contact with people if they themselves want this.

⁸⁹ Kuyper (1996), 79

⁹⁰ This method of giving meaning to metaphors is derived from the game 'Take and Break' of John Hull. See: Hull (1997), 10.

..... "By the way, God can't see you at all?" asks Robin.

"No, really," says granddad, "God can't see you."

"But he can hear me, can't he?" asks Robin. "He does have one ear for everybody?"

"That is true," says granddad. "But God can only hear you if you really want that. Only if you want that then he can hear you. Then he listens. Only then."

"How can that be?"

"It is like you call him on the phone," says granddad.⁹¹

From this fragment emerges a conversation about the contact between God and people. At the level of imagination children come to giving meaning. It is remarkable to hear the role of grandmas in the statements of the children.

Alex: "Apparently this is a sign (Alex folds his hands and closes his eyes) to get into contact with God. And then you can talk. Aloud or with words in your head, that makes no difference. It is just what you are used to doing. But this is the sign (folded hands).

Rosalie: "I do that at grandma's. Saying grace before dinner. You get into contact with God if you are grateful."

Dorien : "You can also sing songs before you go to sleep. My grandma does that. A song of God."

Stefan: "You can only talk to God if you phone up, that says Robin's granddad."

Noömi: "Then this is kind of making a phone call." (Noömi folds her hands and closes her eyes)

⁹¹ Kuyper (1996), 79.

Closure of the project

We close this project with a written assignment about images of God. Via the book *Robin and God* the children were handed images of God. For instance: God lends an ear to all people; God does not have people on a large knee in the middle of a lot of water and will not let them drown either; God is not constantly looking for your mistakes; God is not a judge, who takes pleasure in punishing; God listens to you if you want him to listen; by praying (hands folded and eyes closed) you can contact God.

From these images of God we want to move one small step up with the children. Via a work sheet we introduce Biblical images of God. These God's images are derived from the above-mentioned *Read-Together Bible*. God's images such as rock, shepherd, father, shield and king.⁹²

Prior to the assignment teacher Liesbeth explores the features of the images together with the children in a group discussion. The children are able to aptly describe the features: a rock gives firmness under your feet; a shepherd takes care of his flock; a judge must punish wisely.

On the work sheet we ask the question: 'Which image do you think looks like God and why?'

It is notable that most children chose the image of God as a shield. The second choice was: God as judge. These two images were discussed the most in the group.

In the fragment on punishment from *Robin and God*, God as judge had already been discussed. Possibly, the images of shield and judge were given the most substance in the lesson situation and they were chosen for that reason.

⁹² Bolhuis-Drieënhuizen/Hutter/Smit/Verburg (2015), 587.

At the end of the project we ask the children about their experiences. Most children find Robin and God a funny and interesting book. Madelief's response must be noted; she is one of the girls who introduced the book into the book circle: "I like Robin and God very much. My granddad goes to church on Sundays. I will tell him about the book and what we have done in school."

7. Didactics

Which didactic sources inspired us when developing our experimental project? That was especially the book *Verwonderen en Ontdekken* (Amazing and Discover).⁹³ This teaching methodology for religion in primary education is especially written to develop projects such as ours about Robin and God. German-speaking religion educationalists⁹⁴ supplied the basic theory Theologising with Children for the book *Verwonderen en Ontdekken*. Insights from the Dutch-speaking region are incorporated into this basic theory. For our project we were mainly led by Chapter 8 of the mentioned publication: *Verhalen als leeromgeving* (stories as learning environment).⁹⁵ This chapter directs us, before creating any learning environment, to properly account for the context and the culture of the children, their prior knowledge of religion and what they themselves can contribute to the learning process. In this first step of chapter 8 we become aware of the secular situation in which the children find themselves and of the fact that their religious prior knowledge is limited. They do have reading, story-telling and conversation competencies; competencies that we can employ. As a result, we decide as a second step to organise a story-telling circle as the first part of our learning environment. We let ourselves here be inspired by the English reading educationalist and author of children's books Aidan Chambers. His insights into reading and literature education can be found in various Dutch and Flemish publications. To

⁹³ Valstar/Kuindersma (2008)

⁹⁴ For instance: Schweitzer (2003)

⁹⁵ Valstar/Kuindersma (2008) 230 usw.

give children's competencies space in the learning process and to further develop these is an important principle. We call in these competencies to get to know the protagonists and the subject matter of the book *Robin and God*.

From identification with Robin we like to give children the opportunity to ask questions themselves about God as a form of Theologising of Children.

In the third step, in this case, the first in-depth lesson we focus on Theologising with Children. In our learning environment we use parts from the book *Robin and God* as incentives⁹⁶, which bring the children in contact with God's images in the book. After which children subsequently get every opportunity to reflect on those. In the fourth and final step, the second in-depth lesson, we emphasize Theologising for children. In that lesson we introduce Biblical images of God to think about these, to discuss these and to determine their value for themselves.

When structuring and executing our learning environment we were also inspired by the theory of the Russian educationalist psychologist Lev Vygotsky. This theory is widely valued in the Netherlands and Flanders.⁹⁷ In particular, his instruction that the teacher must deploy the zone of proximal development. The teacher must offer the children scaffolding steps so as to enable children to take the next developmental step. In our project *Robin and God* this happened for via the 'eye opener' of Liesbeth: "Maybe a different type of language?"; the game *Take and Break* by John Hull and the introduction to Biblical images of God.

In the entire process Liesbeth, the teacher, has the successive and alternating roles of discussion partner and content expert.

⁹⁶ An incentive is a stimulus that fires up a particular emotion or action as if by magic. in: Valstar/Kuindersma (2008), 120. See also: Valstar (2013), 20/21

⁹⁷ Valstar/Kuindersma (2008), special Lev Vygotsky, 69 usw.

8. What we learned from our experiment

We learned from our experiment that a children's book such as Robin and God is very useful in religious projects in non-denominational education in the Netherlands. The vision and didactics of the Protestant Centre for Religious Education, religious stories and content (images of God) and reflection on these came together as an integrative and comprehensive approach via Theologising with Children. Children were interested and actively involved. We view further experiments as a meaningful challenge.

A first point of attention for us will be the strengthening of competencies, which are needed for reading circles. A study of the reading didactics teaches us that there are many possibilities for children to enrich learning processes.⁹⁸ Then a transfer of competencies to Theologising of Children (religious education) can be expected. Collaboration with regular group teachers, who take care of reading education, is desirable and definitely belongs to the possibilities.⁹⁹

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⁹⁹ The teachers of *De Voorpoort* already indicated a desire to intensify reading circles.

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Anika Loose

Theologizing with the Biblical Storybooks of Martina Steinkühler and Rainer Oberthür

1. Introduction

The presentation of a biblical story in a biblical storybook influences thinking, knowledge, language and phantasy of children.

The biblical storybooks of Martina Steinkühler and Rainer Oberthür stand for two different concepts of presenting a biblical story.

I will try to show in how far these two opposing ways of presenting a biblical story remind of the narrative tradition of the protestant theologians Dietrich Steinwede and Walter Neidhart.¹⁰⁰

The two biblical storybooks of Steinkühler and Oberthür offer different material for theologizing with children. In how far do they support explicitly or implicitly religious thinking und religious education? This essay aims to point out the characteristics of both story books and recommends methods for using these biblical story books in a pedagogical setting.

The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15.11-32) serves as an example for presenting ways of theologizing with children with the help of these storybooks at primary school.

¹⁰⁰ Cp. chapter 3.

2. Two biblical storybooks – two concepts of presenting biblical stories

2.1 *Rainer Oberthür, The Bible For Children and Everyone In The House*

For a start, I will present the biblical storybook of Rainer Oberthür. “The Bible For Children and Everyone In The House”¹⁰¹ is, at first sight, a children’s bible, but it is as well a bible for the whole family. It is addressed to children who are 8- 12 years old. The children’s bible of Oberthür contains biblical stories of the First and the New Testament. An angel, painted by Giotto 700 years ago, invites the reader to open the blue colored bible. The color blue is the color of heaven and God.¹⁰² The color demonstrates that “This book is about more than everything”¹⁰³.

At the beginning of the introduction Oberthür asks existential questions about the beginning of the world – questions that the reader has as well.¹⁰⁴ He claims that the bible constantly treats these questions and he predicts that the reader will find himself in the bible.¹⁰⁵ Oberthür explains that the bible treats this “I-AM-THERE and you are there”.¹⁰⁶ He explains this by referring to our life.¹⁰⁷

The author supports the lecture of the bible by his commentaries.¹⁰⁸ Oberthür encourages the child to talk about the biblical stories with other children or with adults, with friends or mum and dad in order to become “an expert of the bible”¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰¹ The German title is *Die Bibel für Kinder und alle im Haus*.

¹⁰² Oberthür 2007, 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Cp. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Cp. ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Cp. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Oberthür 2007, 14.

He explains that the bible consists of stories of the people of Israel, the story of Jesus and the first Christians. However, he says that the bible does not only want to report what has happened.¹¹⁰ For him, it is more important how people interpreted their experiences.¹¹¹

Oberthür wants to take the child seriously. That is why he does not adapt his bible. As a consequence, he keeps as close to the original text as possible¹¹² and explains that he has compared several translations to develop a text for his bible that is easy to understand and close to the original at the same time.¹¹³ He justifies his choice of biblical stories by saying that those stories are important and beautiful that help to understand the overall bible message.¹¹⁴

Oberthür's children's bible is illustrated with pictures of famous artists. Rita Burrichter¹¹⁵ helped to choose these pictures for the bible and commented on them to support the interpretation of the biblical stories.¹¹⁶ Oberthür is sure that children can understand them more easily than adults.¹¹⁷

Oberthür then reveals his understanding of the bible. Jews and Christians believe that the bible has been inspired by God. However, he explains that human people wrote it with the help of God. "God speaks to us through other people and often it takes time until we understand the words and the will of God."¹¹⁸

The bible of Oberthür contains the commentary by Burrichter to all pictures, an epilogue with recommendations of books, an appendix with a register of

¹¹⁰ Cp. 14.

¹¹¹ Cp. 15.

¹¹² Cp. 15- 16.

¹¹³ Cp. *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Cp. 16- 17.

¹¹⁵ She is professor of Practical Theology at the University of Paderborn and studied catholic theology and history of art.

¹¹⁶ Cp. 17.

¹¹⁷ Cp. *ebd.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

all the biblical stories of the children's bible and a register of the topics and pictures.

2.2 Martina Steinkühler, *The New Narrative Bible*¹¹⁹

As a second step, I will present the biblical storybook of Martina Steinkühler.¹²⁰ The bible for children, "The New Narrative Bible", is addressed to children aged 8 years plus and their parents. The cover is colorful and shows Adam and Eve with a bird, plants and a Zebra and thus is suitable for children.

The children's bible of Steinkühler contains biblical stories from the first and second part of the bible. Both parts have a short introduction that invites the child to read in God's book and in the book of Jesus Christ.¹²¹ Steinkühler points out that wise men and women collected the stories of the first testament for more than 3000 years ago and made of it a holy book.¹²² First, she presents the stories of Abraham und Sarah, Moses and Miriam, David and Michal. Second, she tells the stories about the difficult questions of life such as the beginning of the world, of the straights and weakness of mankind and those of disaster and protection. This is followed by the prophets.¹²³ These stories from the Old Testament reveal a generous God that is not comparable to anyone else.¹²⁴ The stories of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament demonstrate that Jesus takes away the sin. Jesus represents the kingdom of God. People realized that they could experience God in him.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ The German title is *Die neue Erzählbibel*.

¹²⁰ Steinkühler explains her concept of narration in: Steinkühler 2011.

¹²¹ Cp. 5 and 149.

¹²² Cp. 5.

¹²³ Cp. 245.

¹²⁴ Cp. 5.

¹²⁵ Cp. 149.

In the epilogue Steinkühler emphasizes her responsibility for the children, her responsibility for the parents and her responsibility for the child.¹²⁶ „I have to reflect carefully, if I can accept pedagogical and theological.“¹²⁷

Steinkühler then differentiates renarrations from new narratives. Renarrations keep close to the original text. New narratives only adhere to the meaning sense of the original text.¹²⁸ The stories of the bible have a reporting style.¹²⁹ In contrast, new narratives involve their readers and invite them to identify with the characters of the story, to reflect and to ask questions. Steinkühler tells new narratives in order to make children make up their own minds about the text.¹³⁰ She wants to make sure that they do not lose their overall interest in the biblical text. Steinkühler's narrative is open. She wants to make sure that even for critically minded children the truth of the bible does not appear obsolete or even naïve.¹³¹

On the basis of her sound theological knowledge Steinkühler has decided to change details of a biblical story if it seems necessary in her eyes. She explains three fundamental decisions.

- 1.) Steinkühler decides to tell the old tradition of belief first. For this purpose, she does not follow the biblical order that seems to be chronologically.
- 2.) Steinkühler narrates subjectively by telling what other witnesses report. It is the task of the child to get an idea of it.
- 3.) Steinkühler takes care that the genre of the bible is explicit. If you read about the Noachian flood the reader shall ask why people thought that God acted this way.¹³²

¹²⁶ Cp. 244.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Cp. *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Cp. *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Cp. *ibid.*

¹³¹ Cp. *ibid.*

¹³² Cp. *ibid.*

The notion of God that Steinkühler wants to evoke is not meant to be static because this would restrain the development of children. In contrast, it should be possible for the children to develop several leitmotifs of God such as the one who blesses, who accompanies, who judges, who is king, who is friend, who is father. God is incomparable and loves all his loved children.¹³³ "Jesus is God among his people."¹³⁴ People who encounter him, encounter God. In Jesus, the requirements of God are visible.¹³⁵

Steinkühler reflects on her narrative and compares it with the dough for biscuits. The narrative deviates from the original one because of reductions and amendments of the narrator and his new perspectives that he gained for theological as well as for pedagogical reasons.¹³⁶

Steinkühler points out the role of women in the Old and in the New Testament.¹³⁷

She lays emphasis on general human topics and theologies and renounces to explain the story of the folk Israel as well as of explanations of the new role of Christians within the Jewry.¹³⁸ In doing so, she can renounce of historical explanations. She wants to communicate that "God loves life and not death" as well as the message that "God is gracious and merciful. Thus, you shall be alike."¹³⁹

The bible contains a register with theological words and their explanations which are addressed to the children and an epilogue for the parents.

¹³³ Cp. 246.

¹³⁴ Cp. *ibid.*

¹³⁵ Cp. *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Cp. 246- 247.

¹³⁷ Cp. 247.

¹³⁸ Cp. *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Cp. *ibid.*

2.3 Comparison of the two concepts

In the following schedule the two concepts are compared systematically.

	Oberthür, The Bible For Children and Everyone in the House	Steinkühler, The New Narrative Bible
Biblical storybook	narration close to the biblical text biblical stories from the First and New Testament are not facilitated for children commentaries help to understand the biblical stories illustrated by famous pictures that are explained by Burrichter cover with precious colors (blue, red, yellow and gold) and an angel ribbon gives the reader orientation epilogue with recommendations of books appendix with a register of all the biblical stories of the children's bible	new narration, bound to the sense of the original text narration deviates from the original because of the narrator and his new perspectives as well as for theological and pedagogical reasons biblical stories from the first and second part of the bible, but not in the order of the bible short introduction to every testament colorful cover shows Adam and Eve with a bird, plants and a Zebra modern, colorful illustrations register with theological words and their explanations which are addressed to the children epilogue for the parents

	register of the topics and pictures.	
Author	helps to understand and supports the lecture with the help of his comments has chosen those biblical stories that he considers as important and beautiful that help to understand the whole of the bible "his bible"	responsible for the child, the parent and the bible narrative is open changes biblical details due to her theological knowledge to avoid misunderstandings narrates subjectively by telling what other witnesses report lays emphasis on general human topics and theologies renounces to explain the story of the folk Israel as well as of explanations of the new role of Christians within the Jewry renounces of historical explanations
Child(ren)	from 8- 12 years, their parents and everyone in the house is taken serious is invited to think about existential questions of life	for children from 8 years and their parents shall be involved, identify, reflect and ask questions shall not think that the stories are obsolete or naïve

	is encouraged to talk about the biblical stories with his friends and his adults can become a bible expert is considered to find himself in the bible	his critical thinking is taken earnest it is the task of the child to get an idea of it the notion of God that is evoked shall not restrain the development of children should have the possibility to develop several leitmotifs of God. register of words with explanations is adapted to the understanding of the child
Parents	are considered to talk about the biblical stories with their child	are explicitly addressed in the epilogue
God	"God speaks to us through other people and often it takes time until we understand the words and the will of God."¹⁴⁰ All voices of the bible belong to the one voice of one God.¹⁴¹	Old Testament: a merciful God that is not comparable to anyone else New Testament: "Jesus is God among people."¹⁴² Jesus abolishes the sin

¹⁴⁰ Cp. 17.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Steinkühler 2015, 246.

		Jesus stands for the kingdom of God. "God loves life and not death."¹⁴³ "God is gracious and merciful."¹⁴⁴
Explicit/ implicit Refer- ences to Child Theology	treats existential questions that the reader has well Oberthür considers his biblical storybook as theology for children	the introduction to the two parts of the bible contain explanations for the child (theology for children) questions and introductory phrases invite to think about the content of the biblical stories that follow

Oberthür keeps his narratives close to the biblical tradition. He strictly separates his version of the biblical text from his commentary.

Oberthür presents his bible as theology for children¹⁴⁵, but he does not explicitly consider his young readers to make up their own mind about the biblical stories. By his commentaries he presents one interpretation of the biblical story. By doing so, he helps his readers to understand the biblical text without

¹⁴³ Ibid. 247.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.rainer-oberthuer.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/NEU-%C3%9Cbersicht-Theologisieren-B%C3%BCcher.pdf> (20.02.2017).

influencing the biblical tradition. However, Oberthür's notion of the biblical tradition reveals that he considers the reader to have a part of it because he asks the same existential questions.¹⁴⁶

In contrast, Steinkühler emphasizes her concern for the child, the parent and the biblical text. However, she compares her idea of New Narration with dough for biscuits that she forms. She changes details of the biblical text and she invents dialogues which frame the biblical story. In this way, she makes it plausible why she tells the biblical story.

It is the task of the child to get an idea of the biblical story by reflecting and asking questions. For this purpose, the register of words with explanations is adapted to the understanding of the child. Steinkühler intends to involve the child in the biblical story. The parents are explicitly addressed in the epilogue. Steinkühler's New Narrative Bible is also considered to be read aloud.

3. The narrative tradition

The German protestant theologian Dietrich Steinwede stands for a narrating concept that adheres close to the biblical tradition. Steinwede offers information about the historical and cultural context of biblical stories in his problem-orientated narrations.¹⁴⁷ His listeners are considered to be involved in his renarration. Steinwede points out that he is responsible for telling a biblical story accurately in orientation to the biblical tradition.¹⁴⁸ He takes care that his renarration has the same form as the biblical narration. Thus, Steinwede can be classified as a bible-orientated narrator.¹⁴⁹ Steinwede's concept can be described as "Renarration in continuity of the biblical narration"¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁶ Cp. Oberthür 2007, 13.

¹⁴⁷ Steinwede 1976.

¹⁴⁸ Cp. Steinwede 1981.

¹⁴⁹ Cp. Hartmann 1989.

¹⁵⁰ Loose 2016, 119.

The way Oberthür narrates a biblical story is remindful of the concept of Steinwede. Oberthür offers commented renarrations close to the biblical tradition. His commentaries help to understand the biblical stories. The form of his biblical stories also adheres close to the biblical tradition.

Steinkühler also wants to involve the child like Steinwede and she also points out her responsibility for the biblical tradition. However, the narratives of the biblical story of Steinkühler are more evocative of the concept of the Swiss protestant theologian Walter Neidhart. Neidhart narrates subjectively. He is interested in the question what the biblical story can mean for him as well as for his listeners. Then the biblical text inspires him and he uses his phantasy in order to tell an exciting biblical story.¹⁵¹ His approach can be described as a “transforming deconstruction of a biblical story.”¹⁵²

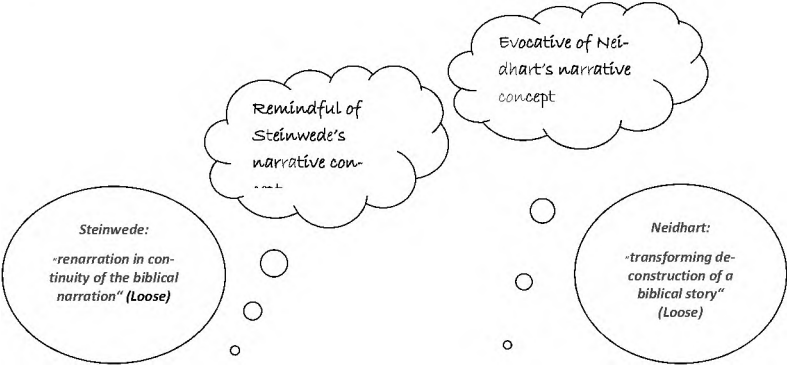
Steinkühler presents involving, dialogue-framed new narrations. She narrates subjectively and lays emphasis on general human topics. For this purpose, she renounces of historical explanations and she does not explain the story of the folk Israel or the new role of Christians within the Jewry. She lays emphasis on her responsibility for the child, the parent and the bible. Steinkühler’s narrative is open. In contrast to Oberthür she does not comment the biblical story and she does not present her interpretation of the biblical story explicitly. Take, for example, her parables that are presented as miracles. It is Jesus who resolves the miracle within the dialogue that frames the parable.

The following diagram helps to compare the two concepts of Oberthür and Steinkühler systematically with reference to the narrative tradition of Steinwede and Neidhart and the biblical tradition.

¹⁵¹ Cp. Neidhart 1981.

¹⁵² Loose 2016, 119.

The biblical texts and the biblical tradition



Rainer Oberthür,
The Bible for Children and Everyone in the House
(⁵2007)

Martina Steinkühler,
The New Narrative Bible
(2015)



Commented renarration
close to the biblical tradition



Involving dialogue-framed
New Narration

4. Theologizing with the biblical storybooks of Rainer Oberthür and Martina Steinkühler

In a first step, I will analyse the presentation of the parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15.11-32) in the children's bibles of Oberthür and Steinkühler. In a second step, I am going to outline how these storybooks can help to theologize with children. The presented exercises can help to initiate a theological conversation with children at primary school.

4.1 Analysis the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15.11-32) in the biblical storybooks of Rainer Oberthür and Martina Steinkühler

The biblical story of the Lost Son in Oberthür's bible is framed by an accompanying commentary which is printed in blue letters. This commentary can be considered as theology for children. In this commentary, Oberthür reveals his notion of God and explains why the parable was told. "Pious people did not want to understand that Jesus took seriously godless people and did not give them up."¹⁵³ For this purpose, Jesus told the parables of losing and finding. God does not give up on anyone. On the contrary, he is looking for everyone and is happy about everyone who will return to him.¹⁵⁴ Oberthür remarks that the Parable of the Lost Son narrates the three perspectives of the youngest son, the father and the elder brother. Oberthür clarifies that the parable is addressed to those people who do not understand why Jesus socializes with godless people. He then interprets the parable elaborately¹⁵⁵ by expressing empathy for the behavior of the elder son and by seeking explanations for the

¹⁵³ Oberthür 2007: 218.

¹⁵⁴ Cp. 218.

¹⁵⁵ Cp. 220- 221.

father's behavior. By doing so, Oberthür's notion of God becomes clear. "Jesus is the image of the invisible God."¹⁵⁶ Jesus behaves like the father of the two sons in the parable.¹⁵⁷

The Parable is illustrated by the famous picture of Rembrandt van Rijn, "The Homecoming of The Lost Son"¹⁵⁸. A commentary of the picture supports the understanding and the interpretation of the picture as well as of the biblical story.¹⁵⁹

The biblical story in Oberthür's storybook keeps close to the biblical tradition. Oberthür guides the reader through this parable by his comments as well as by the title and the picture. At the moment of his homecoming, the father wholeheartedly feels pity for his son.¹⁶⁰ But he does not only run toward his Lost Son. He also turns to the elder son who has refused to enter the house. The father encourages him to be happy for his brother and invites him to take part at the party.¹⁶¹

The biblical story of the Lost Son in Steinkühler's bible is framed by a dialogue between Salome, Jesus, Petrus, Andreas and other disciples. Salome's mother housed her daughter, Jesus and his other disciples. Salome says, "How wonderful it is to return home!"¹⁶², and introduces Jesus narration of the parable which is presented as a mystery¹⁶³. The mystery is resolved by Jesus in the dialogue referring to the parable. Within this dialogue Jesus explains "God is like the father."¹⁶⁴ The dialogue makes it clear why Jesus tells the parable of the Lost Son. At the end of the dialogue Andreas, one of the disciples, says that he understands the elder son and the others nod. Jesus asks

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 222.

¹⁵⁷ Cp. *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 221.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Cp. *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 220.

¹⁶² Steinkühler 2015, 181- 182.

¹⁶³ Cp. 181.

¹⁶⁴ Cp. 182.

if they can understand the father. They do not.¹⁶⁵ The dialogue ends with the words of Salome who repeats “How wonderful it is to return home!”¹⁶⁶

Steinkühler guides the lecture of the parable by the dialogue and by the title “About The Merciful Father”¹⁶⁷. By doing so, she lays emphasis on the father. Steinkühler’s ‘mystery’ of the merciful father deviates from the biblical original.

In contrast to the biblical text, only the youngest son is paid out his inheritance.¹⁶⁸

The elder son is empathetic with his father. He asks him if he is sad, because he knows that his father misses his younger brother.¹⁶⁹

For two years, the youngest son does not even write a letter to his family. Then in the third year, he returns home.¹⁷⁰

The emotions of the elder son are presented vividly. He crosses his arms and angrily curses his brother.¹⁷¹ At this moment, he is no more empathic with his father. He is jealous. In contrast, the face of the father is gleaming because with joy.

4.2 Theologizing about the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15.11-32) with help of the biblical storybooks of Rainer Oberthür and Martina Steinkühler

Oberthür supports the theological understanding of the parable by his commentary that can be understood as theology for children. The commentary can help to theologize with children, but it should not replace the dialogue with the child. An adult can read the commentary to clarify his understanding of

¹⁶⁵ Cp. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 181.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Cp. 182.

¹⁶⁹ Cp. *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Cp. *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Cp. *ibid.*

the parable before talking about it with the child. For theologizing with children, the commentary should be set aside. The understanding of the biblical story of the child can be found and formulated by the child in the dialogue.

The picture of Rembrandt van Rijn inspires to reflect about the homecoming and the perspectives of the youngest son, the father and the elder son. Oberthür remarks that it helps to change the perspectives and points out the importance of the elder son. Because of him, the picture stirs the reader to think about relationships as well as of love and justice.¹⁷² The commentary of the picture by Burrichter¹⁷³ can help the adult to prepare the conversation.

For theologizing about Oberthür's "Parable of the Lost Son and the Merciful Father", the emphasis can lay on a change of the three perspectives.

Focus on the Lost Son

The father says to his elder son: "We have to be glad und celebrate a party, because your brother was dead und he is alive again. He was lost and now he is found."¹⁷⁴

Think about the father's joy about the homecoming of his youngest son. Try to explain why the father says that "he was dead and is alive again". What does he mean by that?

Discuss the statement of a 10-year-old boy who said: The return to the father "was like a resurrection."¹⁷⁵

Support: Rembrandt van Rijn's picture "The Homecoming of The Lost Son"

¹⁷² Cp. 311- 312.

¹⁷³ Cp. *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 220.

¹⁷⁵ Felix in: Hoegen-Rohls 2005, 116.

Focus on father and son

Describe the father's and his son's position. Try to explain their emotions. What do they say to each other? What do you learn about God if you identify the father with God?

Can you identify with one of the brothers? Try to express your notion of God in a freeze pantomime. Let somebody else interpret it before you comment it.

Focus on the elder son

Describe the elder son. What does he think? Use one the following key words pairs for theologizing.

Love and justice – Love and forgiveness – Sorrow and forgiveness – sorrow and joy

In the biblical storybook of Martina Steinkühler the children are invited to identify with Salome and the other disciples who are together with Jesus. They listen carefully to him and ask him questions. The children can also identify with Salome's joy to return home. Steinkühler lays emphasis on the perspective of the elder son. Because of the perspective in the storybook the children will probably identify with him.

Thus, theologizing with the biblical story of Steinkühler can be based on his perspective. The following exercise and fictitious scenes can help to talk about the elder son's perspective and his feelings as well as the children's notion of God.

Draw a comic strip with three pictures that shows the shinning face of the father at the moment of the homecoming of the youngest son and the anger of the elder son (picture 1). Imagine how the father seeks to convince his elder son to take part at the party (picture 2). Will the elder brother decide to take part at the party or not (picture 3)? Comment your comic strip. Try to explain the role of God in the story.

Imagine! The elder son decides to take part at the party for his brother. He wants to know the reasons for his decision to return home. So, he asks him for his experiences apart from home. Discuss if he should forgive his brother. Why does his father forgive him? Try to explain the role of God and Jesus in the story.

For the following exercise for advanced learners the children have to know the Parable of The Workers In The Vineyard (Mt 20.1-16).¹⁷⁶

Imagine! The elder son is angry and decides not to take part in the party for his brother. He goes into a tavern and meets the workers of the Vineyard who worked the whole day. They tell each other what they have experienced. The host listens carefully. He is a good friend of the elder son's father. What advice does he give to the grumbling men? Discuss what you learn about God in the two parables if you identify the father of the sons and the owner of the vineyard with God.

5. Conclusion

The biblical storybooks of Martina Steinkühler and Rainer Oberthür stand for two different concepts of presenting a biblical story. Every biblical storybook has its own narrating concept. However, they can be traced back to the narrative tradition of two Steinwede and Neidhart.

The biblical storybook of Oberthür resembles Steinwede's concept of a biblical orientated renarration in continuity of the biblical narration. Oberthür offers commented renarrations close to the biblical original.

Steinkühler's concept reminds of Neidhart's transforming deconstruction of a biblical story. Steinkühler offers involving, dialogue-framed New Narrations.

¹⁷⁶ Primary school's children often have problems to understand the metaphorical dimension of parables (cp. Loose 2014). Thus, the adult should initiate to talk about immanent and transcendent aspects of a parable. Like that the child can learn for example to identify the owner of the vineyard or the merciful father with God.

The two biblical storybooks of Oberthür and Steinkühler present different material for theologizing with children such as the biblical text and additional information. Both biblical stories are presented individually.

Oberthür explicitly helps to understand the biblical story of “The Parable Of The Lost Son And The Merciful Father” by his commentary and by the pictures of Rembrandt van Rijn that is commented as well. His presentation invites to think about the three perspectives of the protagonists of the parable with help of the picture.

Steinkühler supports the religious thinking explicitly by her introductions and implicitly by the dialogues that frame the biblical stories. Her presentation of the mystery of “The Merciful Father” is focused on the perspective of the elder brother and his anger.

The presented exercises for theologizing are inspired by the focus of these two storybooks. The adult can help the child to recognize the transcendent dimension of a biblical story by speaking explicitly about God.

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Christine Hubka

The truth will set you free.

**The use of storybooks as a means of support
in crisis situations.**

The truth will set you free, says Jesus in the gospel of John.¹⁷⁷

We turn some pages in our bible and find Pilate asking Jesus: What is truth?¹⁷⁸

So I will deal with three questions:

1. What is truth?
2. What kind of freedom does this truth promise?
3. How can storybooks help to find this freedom?

Let me start with some biography.

I grew up as a child of migrants from Eastern Europe. My parents were refugees of World War II. They had suffered through many terrible experiences before they met in Vienna, settled safely and started their family.

I was an only child: A child that my parents wanted to protect from all bad experiences; a child that should live in a very calm and peaceful world; a child that should not get near anything sad, tragic or troubling. They built a protective wall of many secrets around my life. When they wanted to talk about somebody being seriously ill or even dying, they told me to go to my room.

¹⁷⁷ John 8, 32

¹⁷⁸ John 18, 38

My father needed to have serious surgery once. They didn't tell me, that he was going to the hospital. My father, my mother and the two grandmothers told me, that he was going on a very long business trip.

I heard, what they were saying. But I could feel something else. I could feel how anxious they were, how upset, how nervous. This so called business trip just didn't feel right, because my father did business trips very frequently. There had never before been this kind of atmosphere connected to it. Here I was with my feelings, but I had no words for them. I was not able to tell them, what I experienced, that this business trip was different from all the others. And I knew if I started asking questions, I would not get any answers. Not true ones, that is.

I was very much alone with my own phantasies about what was really the matter. I suspected that my parents were going to divorce, that my father was about to leave the family. I dreamed about my father dying and never coming back home again. These pictures not only filled my head but my whole body with cold fear. And above all I felt guilty of not being worth to participate in whatever was going on in our family.

It's just one out of many experiences of the same kind during my childhood.

At the age of thirty I became a pastor of the Lutheran Church in Vienna.

Once or twice a week I met people, who had just lost a member of the family to plan the funeral together. In these meetings I always asked the question, whether children would be attending the service.

Let me give you an impression of the dialogue that usually follows:

Most of the people still say:

"O no, the children are not coming. Children should not suffer through a funeral."

I ask: "What do you tell your children, when they ask about the dead person?"

The possible answers:

"We tell them, that she is a star in the sky."

"We tell them, that he is now an angle with God."

"We tell them, that he or she has gone to another land, to a better land, to a land, where life is good for her or him."

I ask: "Do you yourself belief that the deceased is a star, or an angle or has gone to the better land."

The answer is always: "No." "It's just for the sake of the child", they say.

So what I found out over the years are two things:

1. Very many people don't have comforting words and pictures for themselves in troubled situations to share with their children.
2. And because of this they fear to face reality.

What is truth in this context?

For me truth is to face reality instead of evading it.

Truth is to use words that describe reality.

Like:

Grandma is dead.

Grandpa has died in the hospital.

Your father has been killed in an accident ... that's what I told my children.

At that time my daughter was five; my son was six months old.

These short sentences seem to be very shocking.

How can you say something terrible so bluntly to a child?

But reality is always easier to bear than the fantasies that pop up when truth is evaded. Reality is always easier to bear than the feeling that there is a dark and dangerous secret in our family and I am not included.

For me facing reality, putting reality into words is the first step towards freedom from even more terrible pictures in the head.

The second step might come after this:

Once reality has come in, the door might be open for the wonderful and comforting pictures the bible offers.

But it should always be the second step. For me it would be an abuse of religion, to evade the first step and jump into religion right away.

That leads us to the question: How can storybooks help to face reality and open the door for the message of the bible? Not only for the children but also for the adults around them?

Well, I think it is urgent to give the adults words and pictures they can share with their children. I brought along three examples out of my own book making.

One book I made for mourning families.

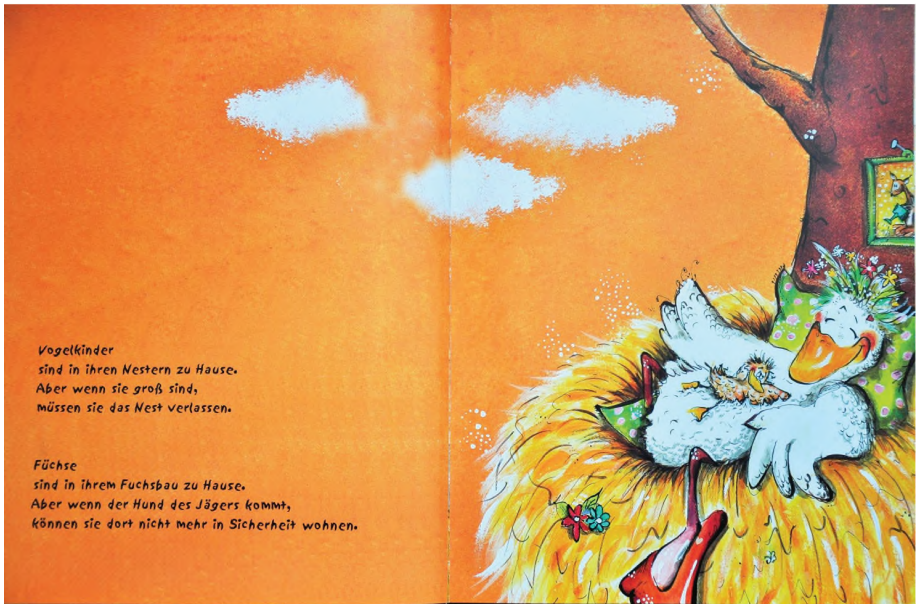
In the gospel of John Jesus talks about his father's house. He will go there. He will prepare everything and then come back to bring his friends to this place where they will be very welcome.¹⁷⁹

But before you talk about this house of God, you have to face reality.

Reality is that in this world nobody will stay at home for ever.

So step by step the book leads the reader to the final farewell of the deceased.

¹⁷⁹ John 14



Step one – I translate the text:

“The little birds are at home in their cozy nests. When they grow up, they have to leave.”

This is something normal, something natural.

It is nothing to be troubled about.

Step two brings in some drama – the translation:

“Foxes are at home in their cave.

But when the hunter’s dogs come,

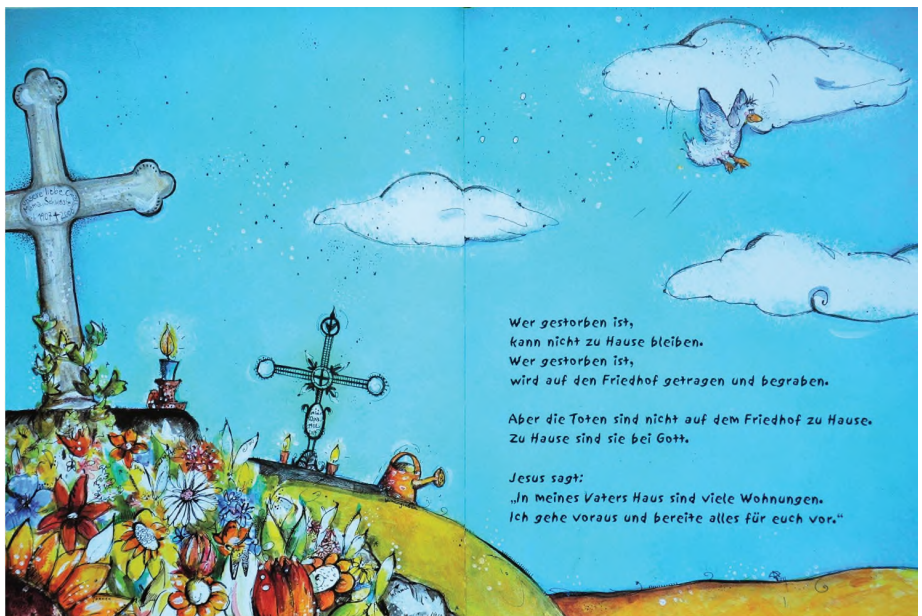
they cannot live there safely anymore.”

We might feel sorry for the foxes. But going away saves their lives.

Step three brings us to people:



People live in different homes. Like igloos, tents, skyscrapers, mobile homes.



"But when they die, they cannot stay at home.

When they die they are carried to the graveyard.

They are buried there."

Welcome to reality: We have faced the words die, graveyard and bury. These so very difficult words for adults who have to handle their own grieve and help their children through the experience of death.

Now, perhaps the first time we read the book, we stop here. And read it over again tomorrow.

And perhaps we become curious about the last paragraph on this page:

"But the dead person is not at home at the graveyard. Her home, his home is in the house of God. Because Jesus said: "My Father's house has many rooms; ... I am going there to prepare a place for you."¹⁸⁰

Now we have a picture that we can fill with a lot of details. Because everybody, every man, every woman, every child has good pictures, warm pictures, comforting pictures connected with houses.

We now can proceed in different ways. We can talk with the child about his or her pictures connected with the house, Jesus refers to.

What do you think it is like to be there?

What do you think the people will do there?

Perhaps the deceased has had a heavy handicap. Let's say he was blind. She had troubles walking. Then we might turn to the page that tells about the healing God.

Or if he or she has been a very angry person, we turn to the page that tells us,

¹⁸⁰ John 14, 2

That God will bless this person with his peace.



Now where do these ideas come from about what is going on in this house of God? They come from the bible; each and every one of them can be attached to a biblical story or quote.

Let's talk about the pictures in this book. Let me tell you, that I do not like them. It took me years to get used to them. I would have preferred pictures that rather showed some atmosphere instead of comic figures; pictures that would allow the child's mind to paint its own details. The problem was that the publisher had a hard time to find an artist willing and capable to illustrate this book. Which I think is pretty amazing. These were the only pictures we could get after five artists had tried and given up.

Let's turn to the second example.

This picture is from a book that I made for fathers, and mothers in prison.



Since I retired as a pastor of a parish I visit people in prison twice a week.

Almost all of them have children. Almost all of them do not dare tell their children, where they are. Why they are not coming home.

So the family at home starts telling big huge lies to the children.

When they ask: "Where is Daddy? Why doesn't he come home?"

"Why did Mommy go away when I was in school without telling me beforehand and saying good bye?"

The answers the children get are very similar throughout the prison:

"Daddy has to work abroad."

"Mommy is seriously ill. She is in the hospital."

But the children are thinking and asking very logic questions.

“So why does Daddy not call on my birthday from abroad? Why does he not come home for Christmas?”

“Why can I not go to the hospital and visit Mommy and hug her and bring her a present and tell her that she shall recover quickly because I need her so much.”

And since the adults go on evading the truth a dragon is growing inside the child’s belly. That’s what the story is about.

Dark secrets make the dragon grow. The amazing thing is when the book is read to a child, it knows at once where the dragon comes from. Each and everyone have made acquaintance with such a dragon. And I assume that many of you have experienced this dragon-feeling inside of you at least once in your lifetime.

But the story goes on: Once the truth is told, reality is faced, the dragon will pop out. The child will be able to cope with the situation and will learn to ride the dragon.

When people in prison, mothers or fathers, start talking about their children and how to explain their absence to them, I give them this book. Reading it, they remember their own childhood and how they were longing for true answers then, which the adults would not give to them.

Each and every one who has dared grant their children the truth with the help of this weeping dragon, have experienced this freedom. And they have been able to deal with reality in a stronger way, with more clearness. Keeping the secret had cost them so much energy. This energy is set free when they dare to be truthful to their children.

Let me give you a third and last example.

This deals with a more complicated situation than the death of a family member or the imprisonment of a mother or a father.

It deals with the clash of religions – as it is looked upon recently in the public. Actually, I do not think, that there is a clash. And that is where children theology comes in.

At least in Vienna the children with different religious background are together in the schools from day one.

That is a big change compared with my days in school in the 1950s. At that time little Jewish Pauli and I were the only non-Catholics in my grade school class.

Today there are children with catholic background, a variety of orthodox, some – very few – protestants, and several without any religious context in their lives. And there is an increasing number of children from Muslim families.

So this religious mixture is very normal for the kids from the age six on.

And they are curious.

What is it like to have catholic religious instruction?

What are you Protestants doing in your class?

And what does the teacher with the beautiful dress and very stylish head scarf teach the Muslim children?

Is it true, that Muslim women always have to stand behind the men?

Well, let's give them a little lesson that religious traditions and stories are always good for a surprise.

You all know the biblical story where three men come to visit Abraham. The purpose of their visit is to tell him, that Sara will give birth to a son in the near future. In the Bible Sara listens to the conversation of the men hidden behind

the tent. She is in the expected position of a woman. And there, in the shadow of the tent, she cannot help but laugh about what these strangers are telling her husband.

Now if you read the same story in the Koran you will find Sara not hidden behind the tent but in the middle of the scene. These men talk to Abraham and they talk to Sara. Like Sara in the Bible Sara in the Koran starts laughing when she hears that she will be pregnant with a son in her age. But the men talk to her why she is laughing. They do not talk about her as we read in the Bible.

Now I think this is a story that turns our prejudice upside down. We would expect the position of Sara to be the other way round in the two traditions, the Bible and the Koran.

The truth is that religious traditions do not simply serve our prejudice. The truth is that religious traditions are colorful and complex.

So let's give the children the opportunity to try Sara's position behind the tent. What is it like to listen to the men talk about her becoming pregnant pretty soon? And then let's play the same scene again in the way the Koran tells it: with Sara being in the middle of the action.

Imagine these children going home that day, telling their parents about Sara and the visitors.

Now somebody might say that this is too complicated for children in elementary school; that they cannot understand the meaning of variety in traditions of the same story; that they must be taught that there is a right story with the consequence that the other story must then be wrong.

But let me tell you about my grandchildren. We are a family that loves cooking. Very often we cook potato dumplings (Erdäpfelknödel). When I make them my grandchildren like to watch. And they love to tell me that the other grandmother, and their dad and their mom are making them slightly different than I

do. It doesn't mean that my potato dumplings are not as good as the others. Because each of us makes them a little bit different from the rest. From their early childhood the children have realized that different people do things differently, even cook potato dumplings differently. So why should they not be able to understand that stories can be told differently.

The truth that we have different traditions will bring us to face the reality that people do things differently and have very different beliefs. And this will make me free to go ahead and get to know you as a person. Then I have the freedom to decide whether I like you. But this decision will not be based on some traditions in your religious or cultural life but on the experiences I make with you every day.

That's why I made this very new book about Abraham in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim tradition together with an imam for children in primary school.

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Noemi Bravena

Interviews about the Soul with Children Using a Children's Book

The Relevance of the Subject¹⁸¹

We can talk about the abstract concept of the soul (Kropač)¹⁸² with school children, but to which extent can we do this with preschoolers? Asking ourselves about what a soul is and what it looks like means that we will probably have to think for a little bit, as the topic is not simple. However, shouldn't children's theology also deal with complicated subjects?

There are two relevant reasons for doing this. The first one is that the soul represents one of the main terms of soteriology. The Bible says that "you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1,9)¹⁸³. This means that the invisible part in a man is saved for the kingdom of God (saved to be in the kingdom of God); the earthly visible body (sarx) perishes. The other reason is that a child becomes familiar with the term "soul" in his or her family. This first situation when a child learns about the term is spontaneous and can be totally independent of any religious education. This was proved by the following enquiry.

¹⁸¹ This text was written as part of a research project of the Charles University: PROGRES Q01 "Concepts of the Soul by Preschool Children and Their Development – A Contribution to Children's Theology."

¹⁸² Kropač, Ulrich, „Wenn ein Mensch stirbt, kommt der Staubsauger-Engel und saugt die Gedanken und die Seele aus – aber nur die guten“: ein Projekt zur thanatologischen Kompetenz von Kindern, in JaBuKi 6 (2007) 178-192, 181.

¹⁸³ For a theologically robust understanding of the concept of "salvation of the soul" with reference to the *unio mystica*, i.e. the believer's union with Christ in the so-called "joyful exchange between Christ and the believer", see: Valčo, Michal/Valčová, Katarína, *Teologické posolstvo Lutherovej reformácie a výzvy súčasnej doby*. Žilina 2012, 139.

1. The Early Understanding of the Soul as a Term in Preschool Children

A small qualitative enquiry into children's anthropology in preschool children aged four or five showed¹⁸⁴ that two of the children had heard the word soul as a term and remembered it. The children verbalized the term the way they had learnt it in their cultural context. This turned out to be very important, as the first idea of the soul opens room for understanding "soul" as a term used in religion. Two examples which illustrate this are given below.

1.1. The term "soul" as a part of popular sayings.

Magdalena, a four-year-old girl, knew the word soul as a term in connection with a children's book by Eva Papoušková entitled "Kosprd a Telecí."¹⁸⁵ The main characters, a boy and a girl, live through various experiences in kindergarten. In one of the stories, they run away, and the girl feels bad because she has a bad conscience. The book describes this by using a common Czech phrase saying that "the girl's soul was very small." The children's book uses the term soul showing it as something which stirs the inner feelings in a man.

1.2. The term "soul" as a part of children's stories.

Tobiáš, a four-year-old boy, remembered seeing a soul in a Czech animated cartoon about a mole. The mole gets into a car accident, he is lying unconscious and—for a moment—his soul leaves his body. The boy, however, wrongly considered the soul to be a bunny. There were probably two reasons for this: The first one was that, according to his mother, the child kept confusing the mouse and the bunny, which were both characters in the story. The second reason was that, in the given video sequence, the parent did not point her finger directly at the place where the soul was. The child therefore knew

¹⁸⁴ Büttner, Gerhard/Bravená, Noemi, „Was ist ein Mensch...? Eine (theologische Anthropologie der Vierjährigen. Was + Wie 2 (2016), 36-38.

¹⁸⁵ Papoušková, Eva, *Kosprd a Telecí*. Prague 2013.

that the soul was somewhere on the screen, but he was unable to link it with a specific location. The story shows the child that the soul is not identical with the body and that it leaves the body when we die.

2. The Enquiry Design

Based on the conclusions drawn from the previous enquiry, I was interested in the following questions:

What is the role of children's literature and children's film stories in discussions about the soul with preschool children?

What kind of information about the soul can be shared (verbalized) by children?

If a child does not know the word soul as a term, what will his or her reaction be during the interview?

The interview was conducted with five children aged between four and five (four boys and a girl). All boys go to preschool or kindergarten, while only the girl stays at home with her mother. As for the families' church affiliation, two were Protestant, two were Catholic and one was mixed. As I needed a video-recording, I addressed pre-selected families.

In all of the cases, the interview took place in the child's home. In two cases, mothers intervened in the interview spontaneously to motivate their child to answer. (They used another word, explained why the child should answer a question – "Auntie doesn't know this," or they assured the child by saying, "Oh, you can surely draw this.") The children reacted very well to these stimuli.

The interview with children talking about the soul consisted of four parts with variable duration.

Part 1 of the interview: The child's pre-understanding of the word soul as a term

I asked each child to draw a person – a boy or a girl – and show me where their heart, stomach, brain and soul was. Subsequently, I asked the child to tell me what a man's soul is and what it looks like.

Part 2 of the interview: Elaborating on the subject of soul and soul concepts together

The child was confronted with three ideas of soul: in a book, in an animated cartoon about a mole, and in a picture. A brief description of the three is found below:

a) A book entitled *The Soul Bird*:

The main part of the interview with the children consisted reading a book. In the Czech environment it is impossible to find a book for small children dealing with the soul. Therefore, I selected a book by Michal Snunit, an Israeli author, illustrated by Na'ama Golomb and called *The Soul Bird*. The book contains 16 double-page spreads with a short text and a picture of a white bird on an orange or violet background. The story explains the relation between ourselves and our soul. The book begins with the following words:

Deep down, inside our bodies, lives the soul.

No one has ever seen it, but we all know it's there.

Not only do we know it's there, we know what's in it, too.

Inside the soul, right in the very middle of it, there is a bird standing on one foot.

This is the soul bird. It feels everything we feel. ¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Snunit, Michal, *The Soul Bird*. London 1998.

After reading the book, I asked each of the children to draw the soul bird and tell me the story of this bird. I observed both the child's reaction as we were reading and what the child remembered from the book afterwards.

b) The animated cartoon about a mole:

I let each of the children watch a video sequence showing the mole's accident. The mole and the mouse are traveling to town by car. A frog runs under their wheels. The car crashes and the mole falls on the ground and remains lying unconscious. All of a sudden, we can see two moles in the picture – a black mole lying on the ground and a white mole ascending upwards (his soul). The frog and the mouse push the white mole (the soul) back inside the lying body and thus save it.

If the child did not know the story, I let him/her watch the whole story so they knew that the mole recovered and the story had a happy ending. I was interested to see whether the child would spontaneously refer to the white mole as the "soul" and, if not, what characteristics they would verbalize.

c) John Amos Comenius' work entitled *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*¹⁸⁷ contains a chapter called "The Soul of Man." This short text is accompanied with a picture drawn by the author himself. I showed this picture to the children and explained the text. Like in Aristoteles' philosophy, the text describes the different types of soul in plants, animals, and in man. The interesting feature of the picture is that the soul has the shape of a man opening his arms to the reader. I observed the children's reaction to the picture.

d) Part 3 of the interview: The spiritual understanding of the soul

As most of the parents do not talk about the soul with their children, I analyzed whether the children had any idea of the relation between the soul and God

¹⁸⁷ Komenský, Jan Amos, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (or *The World of Things Obvious to the Senses drawn in Picture, 1658*), Prague 2001.

and the soul and baptism. In this stage, I did not postulate any knowledge on the part of the children.

e) Part 4 of the interview: The idea a child has about his or her own soul

At the end of the interview, I asked each of the children to draw what they thought their own soul was like. I analyzed whether the book on which we had spent most of our time together had an impact on the children's idea of their soul.

3. Children's First Ideas about the Soul

Four of the children had a specific idea about the soul before they read the book.

3.1. Where the soul lives

In their research, Richert and Harriscome reached the conclusion that children aged 4-12 distinguish between a mind and a soul.¹⁸⁸ The children whom I enquired did the same. According to them, a man thinks using his head (brain). One of the boys even drew a brain with projections emphasizing that it was protected by a skull. Moreover, he told me about how he fell down and, fortunately enough, did not break his skull (Jirka, 5 years old). Instead of talking about the brain, Violka used the image of a nut shell covering a ball made of play-dough. Her mother intervened to explain that she had used this symbolic parallel to give her daughter an idea of what the head and brain looked like. Even the boy who did not know the word soul as a term knew that you think with your head.

Unlike the mind (brain) that is inside one's head, the soul can, according to children, be found in several places:

¹⁸⁸ Richert, Rebekah A./Harris, Paul L, The Ghost in My Body: Children's Developing Concept of the Soul. *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 6 (2006), 409-427.

in your abdomen

in your throat

in your chest

in the whole of your body.

This shows that preschool children's idea of the soul is very individual and diverse.

3.2. What the soul looks like

Children's knowledge of body organs depend on the kind of explanations that they receive from their parents, since children follow their senses. As Violka said on the subject, "I don't know what a heart looks like because I cannot see it." Therefore, instead of drawing the organ, she drew a person wearing a jacket decorated with little hearts. Nevertheless, a moment later, she drew a soul which cannot be seen either. Where did the child get the idea from? And why does she take a different approach to two parts of a human body which are both invisible? Unfortunately, this was impossible to determine.

What is interesting is that boys in particular did not attribute a different meaning to the word soul as a term. The Czech word for a soul ("duše") also refers to a tire on a car or a bicycle.

The soul can have the shape of a circle, a rectangle, or two circles. One of the boys did not answer the question. Two of the boys did not draw any specific shape and said that the soul could be found in the whole of the body. To these children, the soul is part of the head and thus, indirectly, also of the mind. The children, however, did not say this specifically. Only the oldest boy characterized the soul by saying that it was "light and liquid" (Jirka, 5 years old).

4. Children and the Book *The Soul Bird*

4.1. *The text of the book*

The book provides children with three kinds of information: It tells them where the bird lives, what it is made of, and what its behavior is. This information is blended in the text without forming separate chapters, which would facilitate the child's orientation in the story and provide the child with more impulses to talk.

Some parts of the text were too complicated for preschoolers. The reason was that the way the book tells the story is not common to other children's books. The book says, for instance, that the bird has been hurt and feels pain all over. This is, however, the result of another story which is not told by the book. As a result, to increase the child's involvement in the interview, the adult has to come up with his/her own initiative and ask questions such as the following: "Have you ever been hurt by anyone?" "Could you tell me about it?" "Do you understand what we are reading?" The advantage to using this approach is that the adult talks with the child about a specific story and applies it to the bird's situation. The inconvenience consists in the time consumed and in the fact that the questions divert the child's attention from the main line of the story.

I have gone through the entire book with all of the children. During the reading, all of them started to play, move from one chair to another, look in other directions, and do similar actions. For this reason, I left parts of the text out. Nevertheless, I kept all the content correlations. Except for one boy, all of the children remembered the main message of the book, i.e., what the bird does when it is happy or upset, the fact that the bird has little drawers, and the like.

4.2. The book symbolism

The book contains two symbols with a great potential not only for philosophizing and theologizing about abstract terms with children, but also for the development of attention, memory, and thinking of a preschooler.

The soul bird is the first symbol. The soul bird lives in the middle of a soul and symbolizes the visible part of the invisible soul. It is a simple symbol present in each of the texts. The bird is the same, but each time it has a different posture and expresses different emotions. It appeared that the children's attention diminished as the whole book only depicted the bird. An adult can work with the images in a way different from classical illustrations and motivate the child to observe that which changes in the bird, i.e.:

- 1) its body (the posture, the symbol of a drawer and a key),
- 2) its facial expression (happiness or sadness) and
- 3) the expressed emotions (jumping, cringing).

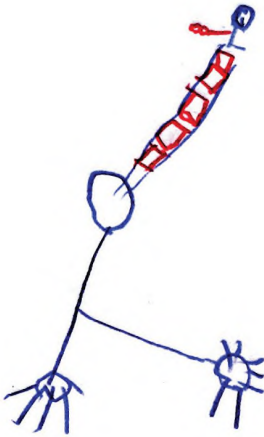
Having read the story, all children except for one boy were able to draw the bird.

The symbol helps children to understand the analogy between the visible representation (the bird) and the invisible abstract reality (the man's soul), which is something that a preschooler still has to learn. The child's analogical reasoning focuses primarily on the visible elements of the two notions, such as color. The book says that each person has a different bird. One of the boys (Pavel) reacted to this by saying that my bird was orange, yellow or pink, that is, different from the white one in the book.

The second symbol takes the form of a drawer. Each of the children have seen a drawer at their home. It is closed, but you can open it and look at what is inside. A young boy gave a list of things you can find in a drawer: "A car, a Mazda or a motorbike, an airplane, or a bus or a motorbike or a police car or

a firefighter truck or an ambulance“ (Pavlík). The child thus verbalized his wishes. A shift in reasoning could be observed in an older boy, who imagined abstract notions hidden in the drawer and was able to work with them in a creative way (Jirka, 5 years old):

Picture of the Soulbird (Jirka, 5 years old).



Interview No. 1

J: This is a drawer of sadness, this is a drawer of strangeness.

N: Sorry, this is a drawer of sadness; and what kind of drawer is this?

J: Strangeness.

N: Strangeness. And what does a drawer of strangeness mean?

J: It means he (a man) feels strange.

N: He feels strange, I see.

J: And this is a drawer of joy and glory.

N: A drawer of joy and glory. Glory – what kind of glory?

J: Well, for instance he feels good and is happy.

N: That's nice.

J: This drawer, that's a drawer of good and evil. There are good and evil deeds inside.

N: I see, would you know what a good deed and an evil deed is?

J: Here is the key.

N: Yeah, that's where it got the key. That's a beautiful key.

N: And would you know what ...

J: And it wants to open these two deeds. And on this deed, there is a sort of diamond. You take this and stick it inside this.

N: I see. Is this how you open it?

J: Yeah. You take it and you put it inside this. Inside this little diamond.

N: And what do you think the good and evil deeds are?

J: Good and evil. For instance, you have a temperature or you feel sad or you've never gone to school and nobody likes you and nobody wants you. And a good deed, that's when you feel good, everything's all right and you don't miss anything.

While at the beginning of the interview, the boy is talking about the bird and its little drawers, in the end he is sharing his personal or indirect experience. The second person (you) is commonly used by children to refer to the first person singular (I have).

5. Video Sequence about the Mole

Unlike a book, an animated cartoon involves movement. This allowed the children to watch a soul leaving the body. This cannot be demonstrated using a text or a picture. Let us now look at the reaction of two children:

Interview No. 2 (Pavel, 4 years old)

N: Oh, look at this, the little frog is crying. Why do you think the frog is crying?

P: I guess because he had an accident and then he went like this (he is making a movement showing the mole falling down) and he is dead.

N: Oh, look at this, what's going on? What's this?

P: That's THAT and they put it back inside the mole.

N: And what is it that was going upwards and what they put back inside him? That white thing, what do you think THAT was?

P: It was like the mole and it was white.

N: It was the mole and it was white? And why did one mole – the black one – remain lying on the road and the white one was floating up?

P: I guess it was heavy.. ...

N: Can you see this? There is the two of them, both at the same time. Look, can you see it?

P: And that's the body too.

N: Yes, the body.

P: And it's not heavy.

N: It is not a heavy body, excellent.

P: And it's whole again!

N: And it's whole again, you see. He looks quite the same. Does the mole look the same?

P: But (the mole) over there ... is white and has a red nose, but it's all white.

N: Look at that. One of the moles is white, but they both have red noses, right?

P: Yeah.

N: Hm. The first one is white and light, and the other one is heavy – the one on the ground, right?

P: And the white one is quite WHOLE.

N: Look at that, he is quite whole!

P: And it is just like the one on the ground (= the one on the ground is whole as well).

N: Hm, the one on the ground too. See? It looks the same. And do you think this could be the soul?

P: I don't know.

N: Could the mole have a soul?

P: No, I don't know.

N: You don't know, ok. All right, I won't bother you any longer.

Interview No. 3 (Violka, 4 years old)

N: What's this white mole?

V: The soul.

N: The soul? I see. And what is the soul doing?

V: It is flying away to meet God.

N: It is flying away to meet God? I see. And do you think that this is the color a soul has?

V: Yeah, I think so.

N: I mean this sort of white, transparent color?

V: I don't know, but I guess so.

N: You guess so. And what do you think has happened there just now? What do you think the frog and the mouse are doing right now?

V: They'll put IT (the soul) down on the mole. But it doesn't work like this. Usually, he can't be saved any more.

N: I see. So usually it doesn't work like this, usually you won't see a mole saved. Mhm. And do you think that they are trying to save him?

V: Yes.

N: What makes you think so?

V: I think so. I've already seen this story once, but I don't remember whether they'll save him or not.

M: Why do you think they want to save him?

V: Because they liked him. ...

N: And what do you think they have just done? Look, the soul has disappeared,

V: They've put it back into the mole.

N. What do you think they've done by this, by putting the soul back into the mole?

V: I believe they've saved him.

Both of the children were able to tell that the mole died. The boy did not know the word soul so he referred to the white mole as "THAT" or something "LIKE the mole" or a "BODY." The boy was surprised to see that the white mole too had a body. Also, he emphasized that the mole got divided into two: the black one is heavier because he remained lying on the ground. Although the child did not know the word and apparently did not have any clear idea about its meaning, he was surprised to see the mole divided into two parts, which resulted in his personal involvement and creativity in the interview. This was not observed when reading the book.

The girl knew the word soul and had a clear idea about what it was. She described the white mole immediately as the SOUL despite the fact that her idea of soul was different both at the beginning and at the end of the interview. Besides the shape and location of the soul, the child also has to work with a third characteristic of this term in his or her reasoning. This characteristic consists in the soul's ability to leave the body. In the girl's case, this information turned out to be more important than the fact that the shape of the soul in the movie differed from what she had drawn. Apparently, the girl had already dealt with the question of death involving the soul leaving the body. This was expressed twice during the interview, once indirectly (it does not work like this in real life, you cannot push the soul back inside the animal), and once directly (the soul is leaving to meet God).

6. Picture – The Soul of Man

Looking at the picture by John Amos Comenius, the children commented on the fact that the soul was made up of "triangles." This was a reaction to the

style of the drawing. They did not comment on any other features. While the girl thought that everyone had a soul (i.e., not only people, but also animals and plants), two of the boys (aged 4 and 5) believed that plants did not have a soul, but dogs definitely had one. Nevertheless, the children were not able to justify their opinion. The other children did not make any comments on the picture or on the text.

7. The Relationship between our Soul and God

One boy (Jirka, 5 years old) described the soul pre- and post-existence as follows:

Interview No. 4

J: God made the world and He also made us people. He also made bones, animals and teeth. He also made this wood (the child is pointing at a shelf), He also made color.

N: Do you think that He also made the soul?

J: Yes.

N: And how do you make a soul?

J: He (God) simply takes a piece of cloud and then (He says): "loud, loud, it's a soul – clouds." He says this magic formula and the cloud turns into a soul.

N: I see.

J: Many souls. For the whole world.

N: And then the soul gets into the body, when you are born?

J: Yes. That's right.

N: That's nice. ...

N: What does God do with the soul when a man dies?

J: He gives it to another man. That's true.

N: So He will give your soul to another man as well?

J: That's right.

N: And can a soul get to heaven? (fly to, reach heaven)

J: That's true, that's also possible.

The above extract shows that, according to the child, the soul is created by God and, like in Platonism, it goes into the body when a man is born. After the man's death, it goes through the process of reincarnation or goes to heaven. This double solution was not explained by the child. The idea of soul post-existence is in this case probably influenced by the preschooler's "hybrid thinking"¹⁸⁹ or "paradoxical thinking"¹⁹⁰, for which it is typical that the solution in the form of two variants are correct.

Only Viola understood the word baptism and in an interesting way settled the question of whether the baptism spurred any change inside. The other children did not understand the word nor did they react when I provided an explanation.

¹⁸⁹ Büttner, Gerhard/Dieterich, Veit-Jakobus. *Entwicklungspsychologie in der Religionspädagogik*. Göttingen 2013, 90-91.

¹⁹⁰ Bravená, Noemi. „Nezabývej se jen sám sebou..." *Přesah a jeho význam pro socializaci a formování dítěte jako osobnosti*. Prague, 2016, 135-140.

Interview No. 5

N: Do you know what baptism is? When you have somebody baptized?

V: You stick him under water real fast and then you stick their head out real fast again.

N: Sorry, I didn't quite understand. You mean that you immerse the person into water?

V: Yes, and then you pull them out real fast.

N: Great. Have you already seen it?

V: I haven't seen it, but I know it.

N: Somebody told you about it"

V: Yes, but ...my Daddy told me about it, I guess ... or my Daddy.

N: I see, your Daddy or your Daddy told you?

V: Mummy or Daddy.

N: And do you know why they put those people under water and then pull them out again?

V: Yeah, because this is how your shadow gets clean I guess, and then you have to eat bread and wine.

N: So people get baptized to be cleansed?

V: Yeah.

N: And do you think that, during baptism, anything happens with the soul bird or with the soul?

V: I don't know. Only the Lord Jesus knows that.

The girl is describing baptism by immersion which she knew from her parents. She was able to remember not only the visible act (the ritual) consisting in the immersion of the baptized beneath the water, but also the information that baptism involved an internal change in the believer (he is cleansed).

It is therefore interesting to hear her answer to the last question from the extract. The girl does not know whether the soul is affected by baptism in any way. Nevertheless, one needs to keep in mind her way of reasoning. In the beginning, she said, "I don't know what a heart looks like because I can't see it." From this perspective, she cannot see inside the believer's heart during baptism. Therefore, based on her religious knowledge, she answers, "I don't know, but the Lord Jesus knows that."

In the Christian understanding of soul, there is a fourth characteristic which needs to be understood by children. In addition to the soul's shape, location and ability to leave the body, they also have to understand that there is a specific relation between the man's soul and God.

8. A Child's Idea of His or Her Soul

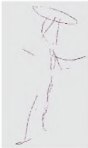
Comparing the children's statements or drawings at the beginning and at the end of the interview, we find an interesting phenomenon: the interview (i.e., the book, film, or picture) had no impact on any of the children's idea of the soul's shape. Three of the children drew the soul the same way in the beginning and in the end. One boy (Jirka) did not draw any soul in the beginning, but at the end of the interview, he drew a round shape. The boy who had not known the word soul before, drew a square at the end of the interview; nevertheless, he emphasized that it was not his soul, because he did not know what his soul looked like (Pavel).

In three of the children, the interview did not have an impact on their understanding of the soul's content (what it is made up of). One of the boys (Jirka)

drew a symbol of a good and evil deed inside the soul, which we touched on while reading the book. Another boy (Pavel) drew a drawer in the middle of the soul. The book about the soul bird helped to define the notion of soul with these two children. None of the stimuli was strong enough to influence their idea of the soul's shape. Was this a deficiency of the book, film, picture or the adult's approach or was this caused by the children's specific idea of the soul and their inner conviction that that is the reality and that it cannot be otherwise?

Child	First idea about the soul	Where the soul lives	Shape	Soul of the child	Interview - impact of the shape	Interview -impact of the idea of the soul
Jirka 5 years	YES	abdomen, perhaps in hands, head... in the whole body 	--- no special shape soul is light and liquid	--- soul is IN the circle with good and bad deeds (soul is not circle) 	NO	YES good and bad deeds

Max 5 years	YES	two places in the ab- domen 	two cir- cles 	two cir- cles 	NO	NO
Violka 4 ½ years	YES	in the abdo- men but she pointed at her throat 	rectangle 	orange rectangle with a cross- hatch 	NO	NO
Pavel 4 ½ years	NO	He does not know the term soul; that is why he did not have any idea	He does not know the term soul; that is why he did not have any idea	didn't know, how it looks like 	NO Square - but "it is not my soul"	YES drawer

Antonín 4 years	YES	in the whole body 	---	The whole body 	NO	NO
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9. Conclusion

One can talk with children about the soul as early as when they are four years old. Their knowledge and ability to express themselves correspond to their psychological development, speech abilities, and the level of cultural and religious socialization. Profane preconceptions of the soul in children's literature, films, and pictures are very important, as they provide the child with a basic idea of what a soul is. Theologizing and philosophizing with preschoolers must reflect both the children's differing ideas of the soul and their varying ability to talk about it as well. However, the results of the qualitative probe opens a large area for further research. Two very important questions have been raised: (1) Why does the children's imagination differ so much in the conception of the soul? (2) Why did none of the children mention the eyes of a man which are seen as a location of the self as the windows to the soul (Starmans, Bloom)?¹⁹¹

A book is an influential medium, as it develops the child's creativity as well as his/her analogical and symbolical reasoning. The role of a book is very important as it presents the child with a palpable (visible) picture of an abstract

¹⁹¹ Bloom, Paul/Starmans, Christina, "Windows to the Soul: Children and Adults See the Eyes as the Location of the Self." *Cognition* 123 (2012) 313-318.

notion. Despite this, it is not and cannot be the only source of information about concepts as complicated as a soul. A film story involves movement which helps the child to understand complex subjects more easily (for example, the distinction between the soul and the body). Parents' personal religious experience and their effort to explain complex issues in a simple way to their children are irreplaceable¹⁹² in formulating the child's religious understanding of what a soul is.

¹⁹² Parents are viewed as one of the seven major "anchors" of religious understanding and religious commitment among both children and emerging adults in general, as Valčová (et al., 2016) points out. See: Valčová, Katarína – Pavlíková, Martina – Roubalová, Marie. Religious Existentialism as Countermeasure to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, p. 100. In *Communications: Scientific Letters of the University of Zilina*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2016), p. 98-104.

Sabine Pemsel-Maier

Picturebooks about Christmas –

Nurture for Theologising with Children? –

Theological perspectives and children's theology

1. Children need Calories

There is a consensus in children's theology: "The power of imagination of children in theology needs calories for its action: stories, images, legends, terms."¹⁹³ But in this context it is not arbitrary which kind of calories they are offered, how they are "nourished" in a theological sense, which stories are used to inspire their theologising.¹⁹⁴ The same is true for the version of the biblical Christmas story. It is not only retold in children's bibles but also in numerous (picture) storybooks, partly closely related to bible texts, partly very loosely relating to the text.

Which of these offer inspiring impulses for theologising – and which seem to be less useful? Three well-known picture books in the German speaking area are analysed in regards to the theology used in each and are then employed as a medium for joint theologising in the subject religion in schools:

Anselm Grün: Die Weihnachtsgeschichte, Freiburg 2015, mit Bildern von Giuliano Ferri;¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Bucher (2002), 9-27, 21.

¹⁹⁴ Compare Pemsel-Maier (2013), 57-67.

¹⁹⁵ Anselm Grün, born in 1945, is a theologian, Benedictine monk, and famous as a spiritual companion, leader of meditation classes and has authored numerous books in the area of spirituality and life, whose editions have reached millions. Giuliano Ferri, born in 1965, has been an illustrator of children's books for many years. Both have published other biblical picture books together.

Dörte Beutler: Die Weihnachtsgeschichte, Stuttgart 82014, mit Bildern von Kerstin M. Schuld;¹⁹⁶

Erik Szegedi: Die Weihnachtsgeschichte, Hamburg 22005, mit Bildern von Miriam Cordes.¹⁹⁷

2. The Selection of Books for Theologising

2.1 Similarities in regards to content and form

These three picture books were chosen because despite their differences they all show a number of commonalities that make a comparison possible and useful. All three of them have the title “The Christmas Story” and relate content wise explicitly to the biblical Christmas story – in a different way than many other Christmas storybooks. They differ in the scope of the content related: Beutler focuses exclusively on the birth of Jesus while Szegedi and Grün also offer the tale of the magi, Grün even tells about the flight to Egypt, because Herod wanted to kill the newborn child, as well the return to Nazareth. They distinguish themselves also in the amount of text: in Grün’s story nearly 19000 characters, in Beutler’s just above 6000, and in Szegedi’s just above 2000 characters.

The books can be compared in regards to the form: All three of them are storytelling picture books with illustrations and text that are characterised by an authorial perspective (an omniscient author describes the events, characters and their actions) and a time lapse (the plot develops as a sequence of situations¹⁹⁸). The illustrations are depicting a single scene: Each picture shows a singular situation.

¹⁹⁶ Dörte Beutler, born in 1974, is a free-lance author and teacher following studies in cultural science, pedagogy of art and German studies. Kerstin M. Schuld, born in 1964, is an illustrator and author for several German publishing houses.

¹⁹⁷ Erik Szegedi, born in 1968, is a teacher and free-lance author following studies in pedagogy. Myriam Cordes, born in 1970, is a free-lance artist and illustrates picture books and novels for adolescents.

¹⁹⁸ The design of the book shows this by depicting a new situation on each spread.

Furthermore, the books are comparable in the sense that all three are comparatively recent works, are in high demand¹⁹⁹, easily accessible and are reasonably priced. In regards to the typography of the texts (type and size of fonts, presentation of text blocks) they are geared more to experienced readers and are mainly suited to be read to children.

Last but not least all three books conform to the recommended quality criteria for children's books with respect to the suitability for children, the relation of text and illustration, the mode of relating the story, the linguistic and illustrative design.²⁰⁰

2.2 Considerations regarding Reader's Age

The reader's age recommended by the publishers is set fairly low, probably due to marketing considerations: Grün's book is rec. for ages four to six, Beutler's for 3 year olds, Szegedi from the age of 2. The latter 2 recommendations don't seem realistic, because in both cases, but especially in Szegedi's, syntax (...) and vocabulary (many unknown words, like inn, wise men, etc.) are not geared to small children. Tellingly the reading portal Onilo recommends Szegedi's book for grades 1 and 2²⁰¹; the other two are not catalogued in the portal mentioned. Language, syntax and choice of words are clearly geared to the level of elementary school. Beutler's book could be used also at the end of the pre-school period due to its succinctness as well as is linguistic style and illustrations, but can also be read in elementary school. Keeping this in mind as well as for practical purposes it seemed reasonable to use all three books in the second year of elementary school, particularly because grade two pupils have a higher competence in language than grade ones.

¹⁹⁹ Compare the numbers published as well as in Szegedi the opening rate of the Boardstory. This book has been available since as a Boardstory via the reading platform Onilo; thus it can be displayed during class in a large scale and animated way.

²⁰⁰ Comp. Butt/Zimmermann (2016), 26-29; Hollstein/Sonnenmoser (2006).

²⁰¹ https://www.onilo.de/startseite/suche/?tx_solr%5Bfilter%5D%5B1%5D=type%3Aall&tx_solr%5Bq%5D=Szegedi.

3. The Sequences of Theologising

3.1 Pupils and Teacher

For the theologising three concurrent grade twos in an elementary school in southern Germany were chosen, all of which were taught by one and the same experienced teacher in the subject of religion.²⁰²

In regards to the children it neither seem sensible nor goal oriented to theologise about all three books in one and the same class or to compare them respectively. Therefore the three books became the subject for theologising in three different classes. The class most advanced worked on the most demanding Christmas story in theological terms, the one by Anselm Grün, the comparatively weakest learners used Szegedi's story.

3.2 The Method: Conversation and Reading with Phases of Theologising

The teacher for religion read the book to each class during Advent season with breaks in between and showed the illustrations with the help of a projector. At the start she showed the cover of the book chosen with the title hidden and posed the question: "What do you think, what story does this book tell?" In all three classes the Christmas story or parts of it were known to many children but in no way to all of them. Some thought that the covers showed "Isaac" or "Moses".

When reading the story to the children the teacher followed the rules for theologising with the help of stories²⁰³ as well as the pertinent criteria for conversations based on being read to²⁰⁴: "The teacher paused several times, asks about the perceptions of the illustrations and invites anticipatory ideas" (ibid. 88), "the teacher employs stimuli to support the involvement with the text" (92); "the teacher encourages explaining the own understanding" (ibid.), „she

²⁰² Special thanks fort to Dipl. Relpäd. Stefanie Maier.

²⁰³ Kalloch (2014), 63-68; Butt/Zimmermann (2016), 33-35.

²⁰⁴ Extensively Pieper (2016), 75-93, 80-92; in approach Roose (2016), 207–222.

makes it possible to develop a common understanding and to reflect“ (ibid.) Reading was interrupted at points that induce further questions and/or theological potential in regards to a children’s theology. At this point joint sequences of theologising are formulated. The lessons concerned were recorded and the sequences of theologising with the children were transcribed.

4. The Contents

4.1 Narrative Theology and Christology

The biblical Christmas story is a designed narrative „Theo-logy“, understood here as a talk about God specifically, and it is at the same time a designed narrative Christology. The following analysis of the theology for children used in the picture books focuses therefore on the theological and christological perspectives. Further aspects, like for instance the role of the protagonists Mary and Joseph or the animals that appear in the respective narrative, should not be excluded from the process of theologising if the children want to talk about them. The theological and christological analysis does not only relate to the text but also extends to the illustrations because both complement each other. For this precise reason a short characterisation of the illustrative design is placed at the beginning of each analysis.

4.2 Central Questions and Theological Momentum

For the analysis of the theology dealt with in the books the following central questions have been explored that are at the same time the stimuli for the theologising with the children:

Theologically:

How does God appear in the scene or does he appear at all? Is the word God mentioned at all? What is said about him?

Which role do the messengers of God, the angels play in the role of the angel of the annunciation as well as in the role of the heavenly hosts praising God? How are the angels depicted? What is told about them?

Christologically:

How is the newborn child referred to? What is Jesus called? Which names are given to him? How is he characterised?

Which symbols relate to the newborn child? Which role does the light play? Which role does the star that announces the birth of the child play? Which significance do the presents, that the magi bring, have?

With the help of such central questions the theological potential or the theology utilized in the stories were explored. At the same time they serve as the concrete preparation of the facilitator for the process of theologising: On one hand she herself became more attuned to parts of the text and illustrative elements that are relevant for theology but at the same time for possible gaps. On the other hand she derived from there the questions and prompts for the conversation with the children.

5. The Christmas Story according to Anselm Grün

5.1 Illustrative Design

The characters depicted appear in a dynamic and expressive way in motion and expression. In "close caption" (e.g. picture. p.3; 12) particularly the faces, specifically the eyes, designed realistically, and make a lively impression. Also the animals (p. 11; 21) and the landscapes are depicted in detailed and realistic manner (e.g. picture p. 21; 22). This is also valid for the facial expression. The facial features show the relevant emotions: the joy of the shepherds (p. 13) as well as Herod's rage (p. 20). Overall the persons featured are rather serious. The illustrators refrain from any minimisation or showing cuteness.

The pictures do not simply aim “to please” but invite intentional viewing and exploration of them.

5.2 Theology for Children

That the expected child has something to do with God the angel introduces with the statement: “The people will call him Son of God.” (p. 3)²⁰⁵. Elizabeth specifies the relationship of the child with God in her meeting with Mary: „God has given you a very special child.“ (p. 5). That for God “nothing is impossible“, the angel had already stressed (p. 4). Mary herself lives her life out of her experience of a vital relation to God: „She was thinking about what God wanted from her and how she could live so that her life would be a blessing for others.“ (p. 1). Therefore she trusts the angel and later „sings God’s (...) praises“, „because God has done great things for me“ (p. 5).

As God’s messenger angel fulfill an important function: An angel announces to Mary and later to the shepherds the glad tidings; „many other angels“ join in and sing of the heavens (p. 14). The angel in the annunciation is just a silhouette and wraithlike and thus leaves room for the children’s imagination; they refrain from the frequently used stereotypical clichéd illustration and also from depicting wings (p. 4). He seems „quiet and still full of brilliance“ (p. 3) and illuminates the room with light. The other angel, who announces the glad tidings with outstretched arms to the shepherds from the top of the mountain, seems in contrast like a nice female person; she also does not have any wings (p. 14). The fright that is associated with the encounter with the angels is striking: It is indeed threefold told of Mary, that „something frightened her deeply“, that „she was frightened“ and „that she was afraid“ (p. 3); likewise the shepherds“ started „to be afraid“ (p. 13). The incursion of transcendence is therefore a huge event that also causes fear and trembling. But through the assurance by the angels transforms Mary’s fright into faith (p. 4) and into joy with the shepherds (p. 14).

²⁰⁵ None of the books has a page count. The following page numbers assume the first page of the narrative as page 1 and from there continuing.

5.3 Christology for Children

Manifold are the terms and traits that are used to describe the expected and the newborn child respectively. The angel announces a son to Mary „who will reign over all of Israel“ and will be called „Son of God“ (p. 3). Elizabeth talks about „a very special“ child in her meeting with her cousin Mary (p. 5). The angel announces the „Redeemer“ and „Saviour of the world“ to the shepherds (p. 13); many other angels sing about the „peace that would spread all over the world“ (p. 14). The magi recognize him as „a new King“ (p. 18) and the „Divine Child“ (p. 21). In the end he will be introduced as „Deliverer of the World“, „for a blessing for all of us, even today.“ (p. 24) Pivotal Christological sovereign titles and metaphors have come into play but they are not explained in detail.

The special significance of the child is emphasised by the symbols of light, star, and the gifts: Brilliant light envelopes Mary and Joseph with the newborn (p. 12); warm, bright light floods the stable and casts its rays onto the shepherds that have come to see the child (p. 16); rays of light also shine on the trio on their way to Egypt (p. 23). It is said in particular of the child that „he illuminates all“ (p. 21). The light is accompanied by the star of Bethlehem with its bright tail. It is depicted on the first and the last page (p. 26) and thus frames the story. Simultaneously, it is the sign for the magi to depart and search for the child/king (p. 18). Finally, all the gifts point to the significance of the child: gold for the king, myrrh that heals all diseases, incense because „in this child heaven and earth touched each other“ (p. 21).

5.4 The Process of Theologising: Observations and Conclusions

Anselm Grün's narrative opens up such a variety of possibilities for theologising that not all could be utilized with the children. In the theological discourses three topics emerged. An extensive as well as intensive theological sequence focussed on the reflecting on the question whether nothing is impossible for God and „everything is possible“ for him. While most pupils confirm this –

„because he is up in heaven“ – “because he can help all people“, “because God is able to do everything“ –, one girl had her doubts: “Back then he made everything. But we cannot just request something from God; that does not work. He could probably do much more.“ The difficult resolution of the question regarded God’s work in general and the birth of the Redeemer in particular. The children disputed the proposition of one pupil: “God is a mind reader. And what he reads he tells the messenger.”

With that we are touching on the second topic that the conversations revolved around the angels. One child imagines them as “people who are already dead and who can fly” – an idea that met with much opposition, “because angels are not normal people”. There was considerable agreement that angels “are messengers of God” and “something like a dear mailman”. As the device connecting the angels and God several children pointed to light: “The angel is brilliant like God. That shows that he belongs to God.“ – “They are full of light because they are transparent and the light of God shines through” - “There are rays of light with the angels, because they come from God.“ That the angels in the book are depicted without wings was heavily criticised by all children without exception. Apparently the motifs are so well-known and familiar that the missing wings did not lead to a positive irritation of habitual modes of viewing something but to the impression: “He did not know how to paint angels.”

A third area for theologising were the particular traits of the child. There was no doubt in the group that he was something special: “He is something special because he is the son of God.“ – “Yes, he is special. He is born in a stable, others are not.“ – “He later has a crown because he is the descendant of the king.“ One of the pupils thought beyond the manger: „He did and reappeared, that is why he is something special.“ Overall one can get the impression that it was not only a special birth but at the same time the already existing christological knowledge of the knowledge lead to the conclusion “something special“.

The story by Grün does not only open up the possibility for many different discussions but also demanded a considerable measure of theological competence from the teacher. While unknown expressions and easily decidable questions – „Is myrrh something like a carrot?“²⁰⁶, „What are Jewa?“ – can be explained comparatively easily, specific questions like „Whom did Jesus save and how did he do it?“ or „Why is Jesus a healer?“ focus on the centre of Christian faith and offered the potential for further theologising, but the latter could only applied in part. At the same time some of the statements in the narrative confuse the children: „I do not understand why Mary is frightened and afraid. The angel is something lovely.“ – „Why did the king want to kill Jesus and all the other little infants?“

Thus Grün's story offers „nourishing calories“ on the one hand but on the other comes up with statements that are not easily digestible and that has high expectations of the educator in regards to theologising.

6. The Christmas Story according to Dörte Beutler

6.1 Illustrative Design

The style of the pictures can be described as „naive realism“: The illustrations impress through pure and brilliant colours that applied in a planar and unmodulated way; thus the arrangements of the folds are just presented schematically (e.g. p. 2; 5; 6). Clear outlines of the forms are dominant, spatial perspectives are just implied (e.g. p. 4; 5; 7;10;12;15; 16; 22; 24). Design of the characters depends on the traditional type of images of stereotypes: Mary as a young girl in a blue dress, that occupies herself with handiwork at home (p. 1), Joseph as a skilled tradesman of medium age, who looks affectionately after on the journey to Bethlehem (p. 8; 10-13). The illustration of the characters according to „little child mode“ is striking: Friendly faces with big round

²⁰⁶ In German both words are similar.

eyes that are set far apart and a pug nose kindle sympathy with the beholder and invite identification among the children. This is associated with a feeling of reassurance and an “idyllic” world (e.g. p.1-6).

6.2 Theology for Children

God is mentioned in this book only implicitly, through the mentioning of the fact that the child, whose birth is announced, is the „Son of God“ (p. 1). Furthermore this is exemplified by the appearance of the angels without them being connected to God in an explicit way (p. 2; 19).

The angel that announces the birth of a son to Mary is depicted as a smart boy with blonde curly hair and wings. Mary „was very surprised and a little bit frightened“ (p. 2), but when the angel also appears to Joseph in a dream and announces the same to him, they are able to believe it (p. 3). A very similar type of angel, but this time without sandals but outfitted with a halo, appears to the shepherds (p. 20). Both angels look like people with wings; there is no particular appearance of light in relation to this. That the “even more angels” appear to the shepherds, and that these „rejoice and say“, is mentioned in the text but not in the illustration (p. 19).

6.3 Christology for Children

The son, whose birth is announced, is introduced as “a special child” (p. 3) and as the “Son of God” (p. 1). This label is mentioned several times in the course of the narrative (ppgs.15; 19; 21), without it being explained any further. Towards the end, when the shepherds tell “all the people” what they have seen in the stable in Bethlehem, they talk of “Jesus Christ”, although before the name of the child was only ever given as Jesus (p. 23). Also in this case there is not further explanation.

The child that lies in the manger is not accompanied by pertinent symbols, like light or a star (p. 22). Although the book opens with an illustration that

shows a brilliant starry sky, but one cannot make out the specific star of Bethlehem. This could possibly be related to the fact that the book does not offer a narrative about the magi.

The newborn child has a particular significance becomes obvious in a different way: by the shepherds who “told all people whom they encountered on their way(...) what had seen in the stable in Bethlehem.” (p. 23) The pertinent page shows a couple with a child that are on their way to the stable (p. 23). But the story does not end with this. The spread that follows offers the music and the lyrics of the well-known carol „Ihr Kinderlein kommet“, illustrated with happy and amazed children, a medium that leads beyond the story, something that the other books do not offer and that makes identifying much easier (p. 25; 26): In this way all of the children are invited to join the flock and tag along to the stable with the child.

6.4 The Process of Theologising: Observations and Conclusions

This story offers significantly less theological momentum than in the narrative told by Grün. This became an advantage in the stage of theologising because to potential available could in fact be realised within the class. God was not an explicit topic, but developed into it through a detour via the angels. Like in the other class there were children that were convinced that: „Humans turn into angels once they have died“, presumably handed down as the pertinent family theology.²⁰⁷ On the other hand most pupils acknowledged that angels must have something to do with God: “The angels ask the questions of God, they pass on messages from him.” Responses to the question, how the ones concerned could know this or where they had heard this, did not emerge.

As it was the case with Grün the focus here turned also to the “special child” and led to a discussion as to who the father of this child is: “The child is something special because the dad of Jesus has created the whole world.” – “But

²⁰⁷ Comp. Pemsel-Maier (2011), 85-96.

the dad of Jesus is Joseph, because it is Mary who has Jesus, therefore Joseph is the dad.“ – “No, Jesus has two dads. One is in heaven and that is God, and the other one in on earth, Joseph. I think it is good that he has two dads.”²⁰⁸ That the „special child“ is called Jesus is known to all; the children could not relate to the term „Christ“. „My friend is called Christian, that is like Christ.“ The attempt by the teacher to explain this word did not resonate with the children in any significant way.

The motif of the story, that the shepherds announced the glad tidings to „all“, was not seized upon by the children, not even when prompted by the teacher: “They just told it to everybody.” Identifying with the story by way of the song was very effective and the children wanted to sing it over and over again: “That means that we also should celebrate Christmas.”

7. The Christmas Story according to Erik Szegedi

7.1 Illustrative Design

Large format single scene illustrations are dominant in this book. Each spread depicts a situation in the narrative. The illustrations change, from showing static situations (e.g. introduction of Mary and Joseph pp.1-2, Mary and Joseph with the child in the stable pp.7-8) to those depicting dynamic (e.g.the journey to Bethlehem pp..3-4, busy activities in Bethlehem pp.5-6, Annunciation among the shepherds pp.9-10). The colour design shows mainly bright colours that make the pictures appear in a friendly manner (e.g. p. 1-2). Overall the design and colour make the figures appear in harmony with their environment. People as well as animals are depicted partly in a naïve-realistic way, and partly cartoon like. This is true particularly for children and the young shepherds (p. 1; 6; 12). The facial expressions are consistently friendly, only the wise men show a serious countenance (p. 13). The childlike depiction

²⁰⁸ Comp. Ziegler (2006), 48–65.

especially of the shepherds can facilitate the identification of children with them (p. 12).

This book sets the scene for an ideal world: The stable is occupied by many friendly-looking animals – apart from the ox and two donkeys one can find a dog, a cat, a mouse, a goose, a mole, and a hedgehog (p. 11-12). The shepherds carry food and beverages and “thus it became warm and cozy in the stable” (p. 11). That Herod wants to kill the newborn child and that the Wise Men have to take a detour because of him, is not mentioned. In the end the idyllic Christmas scene appears to be perfect when a community of people, shepherds, Wise Men, and animals gather in order to see the child (p. 16).

The aesthetics of the illustration emphasises this impression: the naive realism of the depiction has a tendency to minimize the animals, to show the facial expressions of the characters as emotionally touching, the sharp outlines, the bright but not shrill colours that appear in a friendly manner, all of which prevail in all the pictures. All of this appeals to children and offers the opportunity for identifying. On the other hand, there is no surprise, there are no confusing or even disturbing effects. Therefore there is little incentive to discuss the pictures intentionally or to question them.

7.2 Theology for Children

God is not mentioned once in the book. Neither is it obvious that the expected birth has anything to do with God's actions, but it just says: “Mary would soon have a son, that would be called Jesus.” (p. 1) The annunciation by the angel is not happening. An angel appears only on the occasion of the annunciation to the shepherds. He is depicted as a creature coming out of heaven and like a girl surrounded by light with long blond hair and a fine white robe (p. 10). This attends to typical and cliché ideas of angels respectively.

7.3 Christology for Children

The book offers neither a theology nor a christology for children. In the beginning it is mentioned that the child „would become someone very special“ (p.1), without further explaining this particularity. Through the annunciation by the angels to the shepherds it becomes more concrete that the newborn child „will bring peace to the world and joy to the people“ (p. 9). There are no hints that the child is of divine origin. Symbols that point to this are at best rudimentary. The book cover shows a bright star that stands out because it looks like it has been cut from glittering foil. But he only has a role to play towards the end when he becomes the reason for “the Wise Men from a country far away” to set out (p. 13). In the last illustration the star hovers over the stable with the manger (p. 16). It does not become clear what the significance of the star is and why the Wise Men travel to Bethlehem after they have seen it. Neither is it mentioned what kind of „valuable gifts“ they bring to the child – gold, incense and myrrh – and their symbolism are not remarked on (p. 14). Nevertheless the story points at the end to the fact that all who saw the child became “very happy and joyful” (p. 16).

7.4 The Process of Theologising: Observations and Conclusions

Because this book hardly contains any theological potential it was mainly up to the teacher in this case to inspire. It was agreed that she would wait at first and get the children to speak about the story, with intent also to see whether they are already familiar with the Christmas story and if so, to what extent, and whether they could complement the narrative or criticise that which is lacking.

This was indeed often the case. The children added by themselves elements from versions of the Christmas story that they knew into the blank spots. They themselves also narrated the continuation of the story: „Then the kings come and bring gifts. But he has in this case forgotten about it.“ Some directly demanded the well-known missing parts to be added – the visit of the Wise Men,

infanticide, flight to Egypt: "Why is approximately half of the story missing? Could you tell us that?" They intensely related to the numerous animals that are depicted and that distract from the plot rather than illustrate it: „Who is the dog? What is its name? What does it do?“ – „Why are there mice there? They are not mentioned in the other story.“

Theology for children was brought into the discussion mainly by questions and prompts of the teacher: "Can you think of where the angel came from?" – „I am asking myself why the shepherds are so happy that a little child was born. What is the special thing about the baby?“ For some children it was particularly important that Jesus is a „holy child“: „because God is holy. And one is holy when one does good things.“ It became possible to theologise together in this way and lead children also to pose subsequent questions relating to completely different topics: „Has Jesus been truly resurrected later?“ In the end we can ask why and if a book by itself is needed to engage in theologising.

8. Conclusion

The processes of theologising that occurred in different ways with the various books have shown that it indeed matters which „calories“ are employed in order to „nourish“ children in regards to the significance of Christmas. Not all books that are recommended by the publishers as „valuable in a theological sense“, can justify that claim and offer enough inspirations for theologising. A content that has entertainment value and attractive illustrations is not enough. No matter which book is chosen it is up to the facilitator to play the decisive role in regards to success or failure of theological conversations.

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Martina Steinkühler

„Ich sehe die kleine Knospe ...“

Theologisieren mit Geschichten – Beispiele für die (Unterrichts)-Praxis

- „Ich sehe die kleine Knospe. Und ich sehe, was sie werden kann. Manchmal bin ich selbst wie diese kleine Knospe. Dann sage ich mir: Die werden schon sehen. Bald bin ich groß.“
- „Ich bin wie die Schnecke. Was für einen verschlungenen Weg ist sie gegangen. Ich frage mich: Ist sie schon angekommen?“
- „Ich mag Wasser. Ich mag segeln. Draußen sein mag ich. Und ankommen in einem neuen Land. Manchmal auch: wieder ankommen bei mir zu Hause.“
- „Kann es nicht immer so sein? Bunt und schön ist die Welt. Es herrscht Frieden. Mir gefällt dieses Bild. Es zeigt richtig gut, wovon ich manchmal träume.“
- „Zuerst habe ich mich erschrocken. Das arme Kind, warum hat es keine Farbe? Jetzt denke ich: Gut hat sie es. Inmitten des Trubels ist sie ganz bei sich. Im Rücken hat sie eine starke Stütze. Ich bin das nicht. Aber vielleicht wäre ich es gern.“

1. Verbindungen lockern

„Kannst du etwas von dir erzählen, mit diesem Bild?“ Mit nahezu allen Altersgruppen habe ich mit Bildern von Barbara Nascimbeni (vornehmlich aus „Wie

siehst du aus, Gott“, deutsch von Rainer Oberthür²⁰⁹) gearbeitet und diese Frage gestellt. Die Antworten sind immer sehr verschieden ausgefallen. Ich habe aus der Erinnerung einige genannt. Die Antworten fallen verschieden aus. Aber: Antworten finden sich immer. Gleichgültig, ob ich jedem ein Bild zuteile oder ob ich frei wählen lasse: Diese Bilder bieten eine Menge Zugänge. Sie sprechen direkt mit ihren Farben und ihrer ein- oder ausdrucksvollen Symbolsprache.

Ich habe den Titel des Buches schon verraten (auch, weil ich annahm, die Insider unter Ihnen werden ihn ohnehin kennen). Das tue ich in Unterrichtsbezügen erst danach, also erst nach einem ersten Arbeitsgang, wie eben beschrieben. Wenn alle ihr Bild vorgestellt und sich auf ihm verortet haben, dann zeige ich das Buch und den Titel: Ach, es geht gar nicht um mich? Es geht um Gott?

In einer zweiten Runde setzt man sich zu dritt oder viert zusammen: „Sucht eines der Bilder aus, von dem ihr sagt: Da ist etwas drauf, das wir heute von Gott erzählen wollen.“ Diese Aufgabe umfasst zwei Herausforderungen auf einmal: Gott sehen. Und: sich über Gott verständigen.

Die methodische Schwierigkeit an dieser Stelle sei nicht verschwiegen: Die Kleingruppen haben in der Regel einen sehr unterschiedlichen Zeitbedarf.

Ich gebe Ihnen keine Beispiele für Ergebnisse. Ich denke, Sie sind bereits, jede und jeder für sich, dabei, den Bildern Gottesvorstellungen abzugewinnen. Eines nur, und das finde ich sehr interessant: Meistens werden gerade nicht die scheinbar so naheliegenden Bilder gewählt – von der Harmonie der Schöpfung oder des Miteinanders. Sondern eher sperrige. „Weil: So einfach ist es ja nicht, in echt.“ Theologische Kompetenz ist Lebenskompetenz.

²⁰⁹ Marie-Helene Delval / Barbara Nascimbeni, *Wie siehst du aus, Gott?* (deutsch von: Rainer Oberthür / Jean-Pierre Sterck-Deguelde, Stuttgart / Wien 2011).

Ich habe dieses Beispiel zum Einstieg mitgebracht in mein Thema: „Theologisieren mit Geschichten“, erstens, weil auch Bilder Geschichten erzählen. Und zweitens, um Ihnen eine erste Regel zu entfalten: „Weniger ist mehr.“

Genau genommen habe ich dieses Buch „missbraucht“. Es ist als Einheit von Text und Bild komponiert. Zuerst war der Text, dann – jedenfalls kenne ich es so aus meiner eigenen Zusammenarbeit mit Barbara Nascimbeni²¹⁰ – im Dialog mit dem Text die Bilder.

Wenn man das Buch so wahrnimmt, Doppelseite für Doppelseite, so gibt es viel zu entdecken. So also kann man das ausdrücken ... Gnade, Trost, Vertrauen!

Und doch ist für mich religionspädagogisch etwas anderes noch reizvoller. Indem ich die Bilder aus ihrem angestammten Kontext löse, fordere ich die Lernenden noch stärker heraus. Sie sehen das Eigene in die Bilder hinein. Sie führen den Dialog mit dem Bild dann selbst, durchaus auch kontrovers.

Es kommt auf den Gebrauch an. Zu Hause, für die private Lektüre, ist das Buch als Buch zu nutzen, Doppelseite für Doppelseite. Im Unterricht aber, wenn ich anleiten will zu eigenständiger Arbeit am Gottesbild in der Auseinandersetzung und Verständigung mit anderen – da brauche ich weniger. Diese Bilder sind offen für vieles. Und gerade deshalb eine wunderbare Gelegenheit zum Theologisieren.

2. Doppelt sehen

Opa erzählte gern ... er erzählte mir, seinem Enkel, gern aus seinem Leben. „Junge“, sagte Opa. „Mir konnte keiner was!“ Sein Leben, erzählt Opa, sei voller Herausforderungen gewesen, aber – welch ein Glück: Er ist immer zu-rechtgekommen. Es gab Schlaglöcher auf seinem Weg zur Schule; da waren

²¹⁰ Martina Steinkühler, Barbara Nascimbeni, Die neue Erzählbibel, Stuttgart (Gabriel) 2015.

die Gänse, die nach ihm schnappten, die großen Jungs, mit denen man sich kloppen musste; da waren die hohen Bäume, auf die man klettern, und die tiefen Seen, in die man herabtauchen musste. Und später: Beruf, Krieg, Liebe, Kind und Enkel. „Es war seltsam, mein Leben“, sagt Opa. „Aber weißt du: Irgendwie war es gut.“

Wie hat Opa sein Leben gemeistert? Aus eigener Kraft, aufgrund seltsamer Zufälle und, wie wir es aus dem Musical kennen: „mit nem klein' bisschen Glück“. Das ist die eine Geschichte, die Geschichte, die Opa seinem Enkel erzählt.

Wer aber das Buch anschaut, das Buch, in dem dieser Text steht, der liest nicht nur den Text. Der sieht auch Bilder. Und diese Bilder erzählen eine andere Geschichte: „Opas Engel“²¹¹: Die Künstlerin erzählt sie, gewissermaßen über Opa hinweg. Sehen Sie: Da war immer ein Engel dabei. Der hat sich schon mal eine von den schnappenden Gänsen unter den Arm geklemmt. Der hat die großen Jungs schon mal gebremst und auch die Wucht so manchen Absturzes.

Nicht der Engel (oder nicht zuerst der Engel) macht dieses Buch zu einer höchst spannenden Fundgrube zur Schulung religiöser Kompetenz, sondern vor allem dieses „Verdoppeln“²¹². Wenn Sie den Engel ausschneiden und Opas Geschichte einmal mit und einmal ohne Engel erzählen, dann wird unmittelbar erlebbar, was Religionspädagog*innen meinen, wenn sie von der Ambivalenz der Weltbilder, Wirklichkeitsverständnisse und Sichtweisen sprechen. Denselben Lebensweg, dasselbe Leben, dieselbe Lebensgeschichte kann man (mindestens) zweimal erzählen: mit und ohne Gott.

Welche ist richtig?, fragen die Kinder. Sie neigen – wie alle Menschen – dazu, das, was geschrieben steht, für wahr zu halten. Aber sie halten auch für wahr, was sie sehen. Das ist bei Jutta Bauers Buch nun wirklich ein Dilemma. Wem

²¹¹ Jutta Bauer, *Opas Engel*, Hamburg (Carlsen Verlag) 2003.

²¹² Vgl. Friedhelm Kraft, *Theologisieren und Kompetenzerwerb*, in: Gerhard Büttner u.a. (Hg.), *Handbuch Theologisieren mit Kindern. Einführung – Schlüsselthemen – Methoden*, Stuttgart/München 2014, 28f.

soll man mehr glauben? Der Erzählerfigur, die die Autorin erfunden hat, oder den Bildern, die dieselbe Künstlerin gemalt hat? Augenzwinkernd verständigt sie sich mit dem Betrachter: Der Opa hat nicht alles wahrgenommen und gesehen. Da war bzw. da ist noch mehr.

Wenn diese doppelte Weltdeutung erst einmal wahrgenommen ist und wenn erst einmal, wie anfänglich auch immer, entdeckt ist, dass die eine nicht gegen die andere ausgespielt werden kann, dann können Kinder die religiöse Weltsicht selbst probenhalber an immanente Weltsichten herantragen. Ein schönes Übungsfeld bietet ein noch ziemlich neues Buch (von dem ich deshalb hoffe, dass Sie es noch nicht kennen: Ghislaine Roman, Puh, so ein Glück!²¹³

Auf großformatigen, schwelgerisch ausgemalten Naturbildern sehen wir zu, wie ein Samenkorn zum Baum heranwächst. Und was alles hätte dazwischen kommen können. Eine atemlose Folge von near missings – und jedes Mal der Kommentar: „puh, so ein Glück!“

Dieses Buch ruft geradezu nach dem theologischen Gespräch: Ist das Zufall, ist das Glück, dass der Kleine durchkommt? Oder ist das Segen? Aber wenn das Segen ist, Gottes Wille, Gottes Hand – was ist dann mit den unzähligen anderen Samenkörnern, die nicht durchkommen? Religiöse Fragen brechen auf, an einem genuin religiösen Motiv: dem Wachsen eines Samenkorns. (Auch Jesus denkt in seinem Gleichnis nicht an die, die es nicht schaffen.)

3. Immanente Transzendenz entdecken

„Die Maus spazierte im Wald umher ...“ – Ein Bilderbuch machte Karriere, das mir zunächst überhaupt nicht imponierte: Eine kleine Maus, neunmalklug, die zuerst ihre Fressfeinde unter Berufung auf einen „großen Freund“ in die Flucht schlägt, und dann – nach dessen überraschenden Auftreten – auch

²¹³ Ghislaine Roman / Tom Schamp, Puh, so ein Glück!, Zürich (Bohem Press) 2016.

den großen Freund selbst, da der sich nämlich als Feind entpuppt. Diese Maus ist ein modernes tapferes Schneiderlein – eine Figur, die mir schon als Kind nie recht gefallen hat. Zu frech, zu anmaßend und allzu schlau. Die Rede ist von der kleinen Maus aus dem Bilderbuch „Der Gröffelo“²¹⁴.

Dann aber stieß ich auf den dazu gehörigen Film²¹⁵. Und siehe da: Auf einmal bekommt die kleine Geschichte Tiefe und buchstäblich eine dritte Dimension. Der Charakter des Mäuschens verändert sich: von „durchweg unbeirrt“ zu einer ganzen Palette von Gefühlen: panisch, hilflos, trotzig. Verwundert, selbstbewusst, verschmitzt. Und gegenüber dem „Gröffelo“: bei aller äußerlich berechtigten Furcht zwischendurch vertrauensvoll Halt suchend.

Das Verhältnis des Mäuschens zu seiner Umwelt ist schillernd: staunend, resigniert, aktiv eingreifend. Und: Die Wanderung des Mäuschen bekommt ein Ziel – ein Sehnsuchtsziel: Immer wieder taucht in der Ferne ein Hügel auf, mit einem großen Haselnussbaum. Das Beste, was sich das Mäuschen erträumen kann, ist ein Bad in Haselnüssen. Der Traum des Mäuschens: eine Überfülle von dem, was sattmacht. (Dass das nicht „Nüsse“ sind für Mäuse, weiß das Kind (eigentlich – der Film geht so selbstsicher mit seinen Setzungen um, dass man bisweilen vergisst, Fragen zu stellen).)

Der Film öffnet (mindestens) vier Fragenkomplexe

- Fressen und gefressen werden: die furchtbar friedliche Welt und die Maus in ihr.
- Groß und klein, und wie das Kleine sich behauptet.
- Die höhere Macht: Quelle der Angst, Quelle der Sehnsucht.
- Sehnsuchtsbilder oder: Warum ich immer wieder aufbreche.

²¹⁴ Axel Scheffer / Julia Donaldson, Der Gröffelo, Weinheim (Beltz & Gelberg) 2016 (18. Auflage)

²¹⁵ Der Gröffelo. Trickfilm von Max Lang und Jakob Schuh, Deutschland 2009.

Das Religionspädagog*innen-Ich spürt, wie die Transzendenz dieser rein immanenten Geschichte aus jedem Knopfloch lugt. Schöpfung, „was ist der Mensch“. Ethik. Das Positionswechsel-Motiv²¹⁶. Das Himmelreich ist nicht essen und trinken ...

Um Missverständnissen vorzubeugen: Ich konstruiere keine einfachen Analogien. Ich mache niemanden glauben, dass dieser Film „religiös“ ist im Sinn einer materialen Religion. Ich lasse ihm sein Recht und seinen eigenen Zugang. Und doch ist es möglich, hier und da innezuhalten und aufmerksam wahrzunehmen: die Stolpersteine auf dem Weg dieser kleinen Maus:

Wie sie zuschaut, als ein Specht eine Ameise nach der anderen frisst. Und sich dann kurzerhand auf den Ameisenweg setzt und den emsigen Zug einfach umleitet. Was kann ich tun?

Wie sie auf Grüffelos Hand über den Fluss reitet. Und trotz der für sie brenzligen Lage auf einmal ganz entspannt ist. Kennen Sie das: „Und bis wir uns wiedersehen, halte Gott dich fest an seiner Hand ...“ und im selben Lied²¹⁷: „... doch drücke seine Faust dich nicht zu fest.“

Wie sie verzweifelt nach etwas sucht, dass ihr in der Konfrontation mit dem sicheren Tod noch helfen kann – und sich an das Bild des großen Freundes klammert, tastend erst, eher nicht erwartend, dass es ihn gibt. Woher kommt mir Hilfe?

Wie sie das Bild vom Bad in den Nüssen immer wieder vorantreibt, bis sie am Ende mit einer Nuss vollkommen glücklich ist. Für den Augenblick, denke ich. Was brauche ich wirklich?

²¹⁶ Vgl. Gerd Theißen, Zur Bibel motivieren, Aufgaben, Methoden und Inhalte einer offenen Bibeldidaktik, Gütersloh 2003, 161f.

²¹⁷ Irisches Segenslied: Text (nach irischen Vorlagen) und Musik: Markus Pytlík ((c) Strube, München).

Ich bleibe mit den Kindern im Rahmen dieser bezaubernden Geschichte und locke sie doch, in solchen Szenen mehr zu sehen und mehr zu suchen. Eigene Erfahrungen und Gedanken und Vorstellungen. Und vielleicht stelle ich daneben: David und Goliath. Das Symbol der Hand Gottes. Das Gleichnis vom Samenkorn. Den Lobgesang der Maria. Oder eine Bearbeitung der Speisung der 5000:

Ich esse, esse für mein Leben gern²¹⁸ ...

Ich esse, ich esse für mein Leben gern. Für mein Leben gern, so sagt man doch. ich habe immer Angst, dass ich nicht genug bekomme. Dabei bekomme ich immer das meiste. Neulich kam meine Frau von einem Besuch bei der Kusine und lachte: „Ich habe von einem gehört – der macht satt.“ „Erzähl!“, sagte ich. „Wer? Wo? Bring mich zu ihm!“

Und sie erzählte von einem Mann namens Jesus. in die Einsamkeit hatte er sich begeben. Viele Leute waren ihm gefolgt. Man sagte, er könne heilen, mit Worten und Taten. Das wollten sie erleben. Und er hat Worte gefunden an diesem Tag, Worte von mittags bis abends. Vom Himmelreich und von Hoffnung, von Sehnsucht, die gesättigt wird.

Abends schauten sich Jesu Jünger an und ihnen fiel auf, dass es Essenszeit war. aber keiner von den Leuten hatte daran gedacht, etwas zu essen mitzunehmen. Gerade mal fünf Brote und zwei Fische waren da. Für Tausende. Da fragten sie Jesus, wie er die Menschen satt bekommen wollte. Jesus lächelte. Er ließ sich die fünf Brote und die zwei Fische bringen, segnete sie, sprach ein Dankgebet und sagte seinen Jüngern: „Teilt sie aus.“ Die Jünger hoben die Schultern und warfen sich Blicke zu. Aber sie taten es. Am Ende blieb noch ganz viel übrig. Aber niemand klagte über Hunger. Sie waren alle satt geworden.

ich sehe meine Frau an. „Wie sind sie satt geworden?“, frage ich. „Von fünf Broten?“ Meine Frau schüttelt den Kopf. „Ich glaube nicht“, sagt sie. „Ich glaube, sie waren vorher schon satt.“ Ich stehe schon an der Tür. „Bring mich zu ihm“, sage ich. Ich

²¹⁸ Martina Steinkühler, Bibelgeschichten sind Lebensgeschichten. Erzählen in Familie, Gemeinde und Schule, Göttingen 2011, 89f.

verrate euch ein Geheimnis: Ich esse gar nicht so sehr gern. In Wahrheit sehne ich mich, satt zu werden ...

Ich möchte, dass wir – gleichgültig, welchen Alters – dem Geheimnis religiöser Sprache auf die Spur kommen: dem Stoff, aus dem die „Lebenswetten“²¹⁹ sind – gegen den Anschein. Mit trotzigem Mut zur Hoffnung.

4. Resilienzfaktoren verstärken

„Wann gehen die wieder?“ – „Die gehen nicht. Die bleiben.“ Der Räuber-Papa hat sich in eine Prinzessin verliebt. Der Räuber-Papa hat RäuberKinder, die Prinzessin hat PrinzessinnenKinder. Es ist leicht einzusehen: Diese beiden „Sorten“ Kinder passen nicht besonders gut zusammen. Zumal, wenn da im ursprünglichen Elternhaus noch die Räuber-Mama sitzt und Trübsal bläst. „Da nahmen wir die Sache in die Hand“, erzählt das Ich-Erzähler-RäuberKind. Mit einem klassischen Streich – Betten und Mäuse spielen dabei die Hauptrolle – schlagen sie die PrinzessinnenKinder in die Flucht.

Geschafft! Jetzt kann wieder alles so werden wie früher! Der RäuberKind-Ich-Erzähler beschreibt lapidar, was es da für ihn und seine Geschwister zu lernen gibt. „Da hatten wir uns geirrt.“ Der Erfolg der Intervention sieht so aus: Jetzt bläst auch der Papa Trübsal. Und offenbar anhaltend.

Die Räuber-Kinder handeln wieder. Über eine Brücke müssen sie, über die Schlucht. Und dann die Prinzessinnen-Kinder aus dem Sumpf ziehen.

Es fehlt an großen Worten in diesem Bilderbuch von Ute Krause.²²⁰ Zwei Stilmittel helfen, das Grauen über zerbrechende Beziehungen im Nahbereich der Kinder auf Abstand zu halten: zum einen die unreal anmutenden Charaktere, zum anderen der coole Ton angesichts der Schilderung extremer Gefühlslagen.

²¹⁹ Vgl. Bernd Beuscher, Tacheles glauben. Christliche Klischees auf dem Prüfstand, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2014, 13.

²²⁰ Ute Krause, Wann gehen die wieder? Berlin (Berlin-Verlag) 2010 (2. Auflage).

Ute Krause hat ihrem Thema ein Märchengewand verpasst, und das wiederum gebrochen. „Das bin nicht ich“, sagen bzw. denken junge Leser*innen zu Recht. Sicherheitsabstand. „Puh, so ein Glück!“ Sie können Beobachtende sein, zuschauen, wie die Räuberkinde das nur allzu nachvollziehbare Problem lösen. Mit einem lachenden und einem weinenden Auge.

Die Botschaft des Buches: In Beziehungskisten sind Große genauso überfordert wie Kleine. Und selten lassen die Räder sich zurückdrehen, so gern man das auch möchte. Daher: Kleine, fasst euch ein Herz, packt die Sache zuversichtlich an!

Zwar ist das Happy End im Märchen genauso wenig „echt“ wie eine Geschichte von Räubern, Prinzessinnen und Drachen – aber es macht doch Mut.

Sie fragen sich, was an dieser Story religiös ist? Und wo sich da theologisieren lässt? Wie wäre es denn, wenn ich die Geschichte zunächst einmal ganz bei sich bleiben lasse? Ich frage *nicht*: „Hast du auch schon mal ...“, „Kennst du das auch ...“, oder „Wie würdest du dich fühlen ...?“

Stattdessen bleiben wir ganz auf der Ebene des Märchens. Gemeinsam rekonstruieren wir es. Wo sind die Stellen, an denen die Kinder „die Sache in die Hand nehmen“? Einmal geht es schief, einmal geht es gut ... Woran liegt das? Was haben sie gelernt? Vielleicht schaffen wir es, einen Kernsatz zu formulieren, etwas wie: „Wenn nichts mehr ist wie früher – probieren wir etwas Neues.“

Mit so einem Motto kann man spielen. Man kann weitere Geschichten erkunden, die dieses Motto variieren. Das sind dann allesamt *Resilienz fördernde* Geschichten. Ganz gewiss werden Bibelgeschichten darunter sein. Denn – immanent oder transzendent: Aufbrüche sind zutiefst religiös; sich neu orientieren ist zutiefst religiös; sich aus einem tiefen Tal mit neuer Kraft herausarbeiten, in der Hoffnung auf neue Wege – das ist der Kern von Religion.

Die verkrümmte Frau, der Gelähmte, der rasende Gerasener – sie alle wagen es sich aufzurichten. Im Vertrauen – und das kommt hinzu, wenn es explizit religiös wird – nicht auf sich selbst, sondern auf die heilende Macht, die ihnen beisteht.

5. In der Verfremdung Vertrautes aufspüren

„Nerv nicht, Bruni ... Schweine haben doch nichts mit Weihnachten zu tun!“ Bruni ist klein und Bruni ist Schwein – zwei Gründe, weshalb die anderen Tiere im Stall sie nicht ernstnehmen und ihre Fragen nicht beantworten. Ihre Fragen nach Weihnachten. Denn „niemand hat mir je etwas von Weihnachten erzählt“, gesteht Bruni und möchte unbedingt aufgeklärt werden.

Während die anderen Tiere im Stall sich brüsten, ihre Vorfahren seien nicht nur „dabei“ gewesen, sondern hätten auch einen wichtigen Beitrag geleistet (offenbar bei der Geburt eines Kindes im Stall), geht Bruni beleidigt weg. Allein stapft sie hinaus in die eisige Schneelandschaft und wäre beinahe umgekommen in ihrem Frust und Trotz – bis sie eine junge Frau mit einem Kind auf dem Arm entdeckt, die beide offensichtlich Hilfe brauchen. Angesichts dieser Notlage gelingt es Bruni, ihren Zorn und ihren Stolz hintanzustellen. Sie führt die junge Frau zurück zum Stall. Wo es warm ist und man sich um sie kümmert.

Die Tiere im Stall sind zunächst der Meinung, das Kind der Frau sei „nichts Besonderes“, so wie das Christkind. Aber sie lernen rasch um und entdecken, dass es mehr mit Weihnachten zu tun hat, selbst Gutes zu tun, als von vergangenen Zeiten zu träumen. Sie haben allerhand zu geben, diese Tiere (Wolle, Milch, eine Decke, ein Schlaflied) – und Bruni übrigens auch: Sie hat den anderen Tieren ein wirklich echtes Weihnachtsfest beschert.

Das Buch heißt „Brunis Weihnacht“²²¹ und kann hier als Beispiel für ein explizit religiöses Buch dienen. „Weihnachten“ – das Thema christlicher Religion schlechthin. Auch hier gibt es den ersten und den zweiten Blick. Zuerst mag man denken: Schon wieder ein Weihnachtsbuch, das die Geschichte variiert, indem ein neuer Charakter hinzugefügt wird, diesmal also ein Schwein. Ist das nicht sogar despektierlich (im Sinn von Schmidt-Salomons provozierendem Ferkel-Buch²²²)? Neue Charaktere in

²²¹ Jean Little / Werner Zimmermann, *Pippin, the Christmas Pig*, Ontario 2003, dt. Von Renate Günzel-Horatz, Ostfildern (Patmos) 2009 (4. Auflage).

²²² Michael Schmidt-Salomon, *Wo bitte geht's zu Gott, fragte das kleine Ferkel*, Aschaffenburg (Alibri) 2007.

alten Geschichten sind nur dann wertvoll, wenn sie eine neue, fruchtbare Perspektive und damit etwas Neues zur Deutung beitragen. Der zweite Blick zeigt: Das tut Bruni durchaus.

Und zwar gerade dadurch, dass sie Schwein ist: Sie repräsentiert nicht nur eine verachtete Randgruppe und nicht nur die Kleinen und Naiven. Sie steuert außerdem den ganz und gar fremden Blick bei. Sie hat keine gemeinsame Geschichte mit Weihachten. Sie hat noch nie etwas davon gehört.

Die erste Möglichkeit, mit diesem Buch zu theologisieren, ist: Kinder zu bitten (bzw. sie werden sich ganz von selbst dazu herausgefordert fühlen), Brunis Fragen zu beantworten, ihr also die Weihnachtsgeschichte zu erzählen, so wie sie sie verstehen. Das wird als gemeinsamer Gruppenprozess (ohne Lehrkraft) arrangiert. Das Ergebnis wird vorgetragen.

Das ist aber nur die eine Ebene, auf der dieses Buch funktioniert: um Vorwissen über eine biblische Geschichte bzw. ein Stück Tradition abzurufen und zu reorganisieren.

Die zweite Lernchance liegt darin, anhand dieses Buches dem „Geist der Weihnacht“ bzw. des Evangeliums auf die Spur zu kommen. Zwei Themenbereiche liegen unter der Oberfläche der Frage nach Weihnachten: der Umgang mit den Kleinen und mit Randgruppen einerseits und andererseits die Nächstenliebe.

Kinder beobachten sehr sensibel, wie die großen Tiere mit Bruni umgehen. Die Erzählerin gibt gezielte Hinweise: „Aber niemand hörte ihr zu“, die der Zeichner auf seine Weise unterstützt: Auf den Bildern wird Bruni immer „kleiner“. „Lasst die Kinder zu mir kommen und wehret ihnen nicht; denn ihnen gehört das Reich Gottes“ – Mk 10 liegt nahe.

Das zweite ist ebenso evident: Da ist diese Frau in Not. Und da ist Bruni, die sie *sieht*. Das Gleichnis vom barmherzigen Samariter (Lk 10) erzählt: Auf das Sehen kommt es an, auf das Sehen mit dem Herzen: Der Priester sieht und geht vorbei; der Tempeldiener sieht und geht vorbei. Der Samariter sieht und lässt sie anrühren. Obwohl der Graben breit ist. Genauso geht es Bruni. Sie sieht – und der Graben ist denkbar breit. „Die armen Leute“, murmelte Bruni und vergaß für eine Weile ihre eigenen Sorgen.“

Wiederum: um keine Missverständnisse aufkommen zu lassen: Es ist in meinem Augen nicht nötig, aus dem Buch auszusteigen und sich dankbar der Kindersegnung und dem Samariter zuzuwenden, um diese nun zu „unterrichten“ oder „durchzunehmen“. Wenn Gespräche über das Buch jedoch mit älteren, christlich sozialisierten Kindern dazu führen, dass die Kinder die christlichen Grundlagen des Zusammenlebens in diesem verfremdeten Plot entdecken und bergen – und wenn man dann gemeinsam überlegen kann: Ansehen und Nächstenliebe: Ist das nicht Weihnachten? – dann ist das eine sehr produktive Weise, an religiöser Kompetenz zu arbeiten. Der Verständigung und des Verstehens.

6. Bibellesen als Sinnsuche

- Eines Tages wollten Kain und Abel Gott auf dem Feld ein Dankopfer darbringen, so wie sie es von den Eltern gelernt hatten. Kain suchte hastig ein paar Steine zusammen und legte feuchtes Reisig darauf. Er nahm eine Handvoll Korn und einige Früchte, die schon angefault waren. [...] Abel jedoch baute einen schönen Altar. Er suchte trockenes Feuerholz. Dann schlachtete er das schönste von seinen neugeborenen Lämmern ...²²³
- Beide wollen sich bei Gott bedanken. Kain opfert* Korn von seinem Feld. Abel opfert ein Lamm. Doch nur der Rauch von Abels Opfer*steigt in den Himmel. „Nimmt Gott mein Opfer nicht an?“, fragt Kain. Zornig sieht er zu Boden.²²⁴
- Und dann geschieht es: Kain bringt Gott eine Spende, Korn von seinem Feld..Und Abel bringt Gott eine Spende, ein Lamm. Gott aber achtet auf Abel und seine Spende. Auf Kain und seine Spende aber achtet er nicht.Gott weiß, warum.²²⁵

²²³ Ursel Scheffler, Herders Kinderbibel, Freiburg 2001 (Neuausgabe 2014).

²²⁴ Michael Landgraf, Kinderlesebibel, Göttingen 2013.

²²⁵ Dietrich Steinwede, Kommt und schaut die großen Taten Gottes, Göttingen 1982.

- Kain bestellte den Acker, sein Bruder Abel hütete die Schafe. Abel hatte Erfolg im Leben. Kain mühte sich oft vergeblich. Warum? Es wird erzählt, dass Gott Abels Opfer annahm, Kains Opfer aber nicht akzeptierte.²²⁶
- Als die beiden groß waren, wurde Kain ein Ackermann und Abel ein Schäfer. „Auf meinem Acker wächst viel: Getreide, Gemüse und Früchte. Ich habe genug zum Leben. Gott sei Dank!“ Und Kain baute einen Altar und verbrannte etwas von den Früchten, um es Gott zu schenken. „In meiner Schafherde sind viele Tiere. Ich habe Milch und Wolle, Fleisch und Felle. Ich habe genug zum Leben. Gott sei Dank!“ Und Abel baute einen Altar und verbrannte etwas von seinen Schafen, um es Gott zu schenken. Da geschah es, dass Gott sich sehr freute über das Geschenk von Abel, aber nicht über das Geschenk von Kain.²²⁷

Luther 2017: Es begab sich aber nach etlicher Zeit, dass Kain dem HERRN Opfer brachte von den Früchten des Feldes. Und auch Abel brachte von den Erstlingen seiner Herde und von ihrem Fett. Und der HERR sah gnädig an Abel und sein Opfer, aber Kain und sein Opfer sah er nicht gnädig an ... (Gen 4,3f.)

Religionspädagog*innen sind es gewöhnt, auszuwählen, was sie theologisch und pädagogisch verantworten können. Was die Kain-und-Abel-Geschichte angeht, so haben sie gelernt: Die Leerstellen, die die Bibel hier lässt – warum ist das so, dass Gott Abels Opfer anschaut, Kains Opfer aber nicht – und woran erkennen das die Brüder?) – *nicht* auszufüllen.²²⁸

Das heißt, sie würden die verschiedenen Kinderbibelversionen (s.o.) vergleichen und eine ganz gewiss sogleich verwerfen (das erste Beispiel und auch das Bild aus der Elementarbibel²²⁹); bei beiden ist es sehr augenfällig, dass sie die Leerstellen auf eine ganz bestimmte Art und Weise füllen:

- Kain hat sich nicht genug Mühe gegeben.
- Der aufsteigende Rauch ist das Zeichen, dass Gott das Opfer akzeptiert.

²²⁶ Horst Heinemann, Schulranzenbibel, Altenstadt 2008.

²²⁷ Jochem Westhof, Die 3-Minuten-Kinderbibel, Neukirchen-Vluyn (Aussaat Verlag) 2006.

²²⁸ Vgl. Burkard Porzelt, Grundzüge biblischer Didaktik, Bad Heilbrunn (Klinkhardt UTB) 2012.

²²⁹ Anneliese Pokrandt / Reinhard Hermann, Elementarbibel, Lahr (Kaufmann Verlag) 1998.

Auf den zweiten Blick geben aber auch andere Versionen, wenn auch zurückhaltender, Deutungshinweise:

Landgraf erzählt mit Sicherheitsabstand: nicht, was Gott tat oder nicht tat, sondern wie es bei Kain angekommen ist: „Nimmt Gott mein Opfer nicht an?“

Steinwede erzählt streng parallel: Beide tun das Gleiche – aber der eine bekommt dafür Beachtung, der andere nicht. Interessant ist die Unterschrift: „Gott weiß, warum“. Schillernd bleibt offen, was Steinwede meint: Gott wird schon einen Grund haben – auch wenn er für die Menschen nicht sichtlich ist. Oder: ich habe keine Ahnung, warum – im Sinn von „Weiß der Geier“.

Heinemann versucht es mit einer eigentümlichen Mischung aus rational-psychologisierender und narrativer Deutung – wobei die eine die andere beschäftigt.

Westhof schließlich betont wie Steinwede: Beide Brüder tun das Gleiche. Mit der Metapher des Geschenkes versetzt er Gott in die Rolle des Beschenkten. Dass man sich über das eine Geschenk freut und über das andere nicht, das ist – auf der gewählten emotionalen Ebene – „normal“.

Die Frage ist hier nicht: Welche Version ist „richtig“ oder, modifiziert, welche Version will ich für meine Kinder? Wenn Kindertheologie in ihren drei Dimensionen ernstgenommen wird, dann ist nicht mehr einzusehen, warum Religionspädagog*innen diese Entscheidung allein treffen sollten.²³⁰ Dann ist es adäquat, den Kindern zuzutrauen, dass sie sie – im Vergleich und im Gruppenprozess gemeinsam mit der Fachfrau, dem Fachmann treffen.

Die erste Kompetenz, die hier zu schulen ist, ist bereits die Wahrnehmung der hermeneutischen Ausgangslage: Es gibt einen Grundtext und viele Versionen. Offenbar wird dieser Grundtext sehr unterschiedlich verstanden.

Die zweite Kompetenz ist eine analytisch-rekonstruktive: die Leerstellen im Grundtext zu finden und zu untersuchen, wie sie gefüllt werden und mit welcher Wirkung.

²³⁰ Übrigens neigen auch die Schul- und Jugendbibeln dazu, ihren Zielgruppen die Entscheidung abzunehmen; zwar häufig nicht mehr, indem sie eine einseitige Erzählversion anbieten, wohl aber, indem sie in ihren Kommentaren und Marginalspalten nur einen Weg der Deutung skizzieren – scheinbar objektiv, und daher umso direkter.

Am Ende steht (ebenso wenig, wie in der Vorbereitung der Lehrkraft) nicht die eine „gute“ Version, sondern wieder der Grundtext: In der Gruppe sind Deutungsversuche erkundet worden. Der Grundtext behält sein Geheimnis – beziehungsweise seine Offenheit, eigene Erfahrungen und Deutung an ihn heranzutragen, ohne dass er selbst sich ändert.

„Man kann es nicht wissen“, meint Lirian. Und Joscha: „Da kann man sich mega ärgern. Bloß: Mit den Fäusten kriege ich das nicht geregelt.“

7. Ertrag

Sechs Beispiele – sechs sehr unterschiedliche Ausgangsmedien. Es waren implizit und explizit religiöse darunter, was eine Grundorientierung geben kann. Was hier jedoch gezeigt werden sollte:

- Es kommt einerseits darauf an, dem Werk seine Eigenständigkeit zu lassen. Keines von ihnen, auch nicht der Bibeltext, ist aus religionspädagogischer Perspektive geschrieben.
- Und es kommt andererseits darauf an, welche religionspädagogischen Fantasien das Werk bei der Lehrperson auslöst.

Sie kann sich solch ein Werk „leihen“, *nicht*, um es für ihre Zwecke zurechtzumachen. Wohl aber, um aus religionspädagogischer Perspektive produktiv Anstoß zu nehmen. Sie kann einen Fokus setzen, den die Gruppe verfolgen kann: im Dreiecksgespräch – mit dem Medium zum einen, mit „Religion“ zum anderen. Letzteres kann sein:

- eigene religiöse Erfahrung,
- Religion als Haltung zur Welt oder auch
- ein Stück materiale Religion, etwa aus christlicher Tradition.

So können die Bilder von *Barbara Nascimbeni* vorübergehend von mir erzählen – und von meinem Gott. So kann Jutta Bauers Geschichte über Opas Abschied vom

Enkel vorübergehend die Frage nach religiöser Weltdeutung aufwerfen und ein Animationsfilm vorübergehend zum Nachdenken über das Himmelreich einladen (uns im RU, andere möglicherweise nicht). Ein modernes Weihnachtsbuch, das an der Krippe endet, weist *uns* auf das, was im Alltag christlich ist, und eine Bibelgeschichte wird nicht „richtig“ verstanden, sondern vor allem immer wieder neu befragt. Jenseits dogmatischer Festschreibung: Die Bibel ist ein Probenraum. Andere Literatur ist es auch.

Damaris Knapp

**„Hat Gott das Kind, das nicht die Wahrheit sagt,
genauso lieb wie das Kind, das die Wahrheit sagt?“**

Reflexion einer Unterrichtssequenz

Manchmal ergeben sich Theologische Gespräche spontan im Religionsunterricht. Doch es macht durchaus Sinn, diese – soweit es möglich ist – bewusst zu planen und in ein Lernsetting zu integrieren. Theologisieren mit Kindern ist mehr als ein Gespräch, das Raum für theologische Gedanken und Konstruktionen der Kinder bietet. Es ist vielmehr ein didaktischer Ansatz, in dem die Fragen der Kinder in einem anregenden und methodisch gestalteten Unterrichtssetting nachgegangen und gemeinsam nach Antworten gesucht wird. Gleichzeitig steht dahinter eine Haltung der Achtung, der Wertschätzung und der Wahrnehmung der Kinder.²³¹ Eine solche Lernsequenz, in der es um die Wahrheit geht, steht im Mittelpunkt dieses Beitrags. Er ist entstanden auf der Grundlage eines Workshops bei der Tagung „Children’s Book – Nurture for Children’s Theology“ in Salzburg.

Die Lernsequenz wird zunächst kurz dargestellt, um dann im Folgenden ausgewählte Aspekte zu reflektieren und zu diskutieren: das Finden einer geeigneten Ausgangsfrage für das Theologische Gespräch, die Frage, ob Theologische Gespräche nicht eher zur Beliebigkeit beitragen als Orientierung zu ermöglichen und schließlich die Bedeutung des Lernsettings für das Gelingen Theologischer Gespräche.

1. Einblick in die Lernsequenz

Die Lernsequenz wurde in einer jahrgangsgemischten Lerngruppe mit Kindern des ersten bis dritten Schuljahres sowie einer Lerngruppe mit Dritt- und Viertklässlern durchgeführt, wobei beide Sequenzen im Unterricht sehr unterschiedlich verlaufen sind, da die Kinder ihre je eigenen „Themen“ eingebracht haben und das unterricht-

²³¹ Vgl. Freudenberger-Lötz 2007

liche Vorgehen infolgedessen angepasst wurde. Exemplarisch wird hier das Lernsetting der Erst- bis Drittklässler dargestellt.²³² Grundlage ist das Bilderbuchkino zu der Geschichte von „König Wirklichwahr“²³³ nach dem gleichnamigen Bilderbuch von Edith Schreiber-Wicke und Carola Holland.²³⁴

Zu Beginn der Geschichte weist die Mutter ihren Sohn Leo darauf hin, dass man immer die Wahrheit sagen muss. Dies nimmt sich Leo zu Herzen und erlebt in unterschiedlichen Begegnungen, dass das Aussprechen der Wahrheit andere Menschen enttäuschen, verärgern und verletzen kann.

Einstieg in die Lernsequenz

Spiel: Die Kinder formulieren Sätze, die wahr oder nicht wahr sind. Die anderen Kinder schätzen ein, ob die getroffene Aussage wahr oder nicht wahr ist (wahr – Daumen hoch / nicht wahr – „Stopp-Hand“).

Begegnung mit der Geschichte (Teil 1)

Der erste Teil des Bilderbuchkinos, in dem Leo nach der Erfahrung mit seiner Mutter Laura, Simon und Tante Karin begegnet, wird gemeinsam angeschaut. Im Anschluss spielen die Kinder in kleinen Gruppen diese vier Szenen nach und tauschen sich darüber aus.

Philosophisch-Theologisches Gespräch

Ausgehend von der Feststellung der Mutter „Man muss immer die Wahrheit sagen. Das weißt du doch“ gehen die Kinder der Frage „Muss man (immer) die Wahrheit sagen?“ nach. Eine zweite Runde des Rollenspiels ermöglicht es ihnen, neue und eigene Antworten für die vier Personen zu finden.²³⁵

Gott, die Wahrheit und ich – Statements diskutieren

Die Kinder diskutierten je eines der untenstehenden Statements in 2er- bzw. 3er-Gruppen. Dabei überlegen sie, ob sie der jeweiligen Aussage zustimmen oder nicht,

²³² In beiden Lerngruppen lernen die Kinder in allen Fächern in der jeweiligen Jahrgangsmischung.

²³³ Das Bilderbuchkino ist auf der DVD komplett „Den Dingen auf den Grund gehen. Theologisieren und Philosophieren mit Kindern“ zu finden, die vom Evangelischen Medienhaus in Stuttgart (2014) heraus gegeben wurde.

²³⁴ „König Wirklichwahr“ ist im Thienemann Verlag (Stuttgart/Wien) 2007 erschienen.

²³⁵ Hier endete die erste Unterrichtssequenz.

und formulieren dann eine Begründung, sowie wenn möglich ein passendes Beispiel.

„Gott weiß, wie es mir geht, wenn ich nicht die Wahrheit sage.“

„Wenn ich mich traue die Wahrheit zu sagen, dann ist Gott mir dabei nahe.“

„Ob ich die Wahrheit sage oder nicht, hat nichts mit Gott zu tun.“

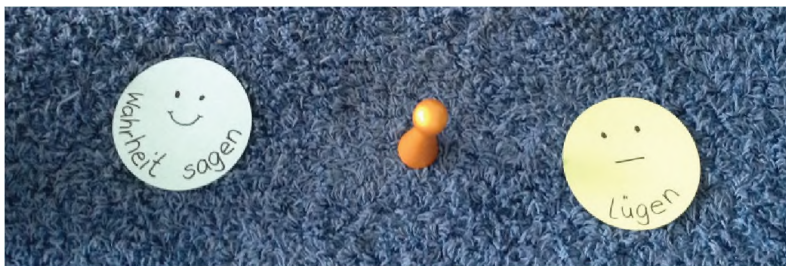
Im Plenum stellen sie dann ihre Aussage vorgestellt und begründen, ob und warum sie dieser zustimmen oder nicht zustimmen. Die anderen Kinder der Lerngruppe können nun ihre Gedanken ergänzen.

Begegnung mit der Geschichte (Teil 2)

Gemeinsam wird jetzt das ganze Bilderbuchkino angeschaut. Ein kurzer Austausch darüber, was sie besonders beeindruckt hat bzw. was sie sich fragen, schließt sich an.

Theologisches Gespräch²³⁶

Im Theologischen Gespräch setzten sie sich dann mit der Frage „Hat Gott das Kind, das nicht die Wahrheit sagt, genauso lieb wie das Kind, das die Wahrheit sagt?“²³⁷ auseinander.



²³⁶ Hierzu wird folgendes Material gebraucht: blauer Kreis (für ein Kind, das die Wahrheit sagt), grüner Kreis (für ein Kind, das nicht die Wahrheit sagt), goldener Kegel (für Gott), jeweils ein Klebepunkt in den Farben blau, grün und gelb für jedes Kind, Papier DIN A5. Auf dem grünen Kreis steht „lügen“ und ist ein Gesicht mit einem geraden Mund abgebildet, weil dieses kurze Wort verbunden mit einer Visualisierung für die Erstklässler in der Lerngruppe so besser zugänglich wird. Im Gespräch wurde von der Lehrerin meist die Formulierung „nicht die Wahrheit sagen“ verwendet, um eine moralische Stigmatisierung nicht zusätzlich zu befördern.

²³⁷ Diese Frage wurde im ersten Gespräch von einem Kind in die Runde geworfen, jedoch zunächst nicht beachtet.

Nachdem die Frage nun im Raum steht, überlegen die Kinder zunächst für sich selbst, an welcher Stelle sie Gott (in Form des Kegels) hier verorten würden. Steht er näher bei dem Kind, das die Wahrheit sagt, oder bei demjenigen, das nicht die Wahrheit sagt? Sie kleben dafür einen blauen und einen grünen Klebepunkt auf ihr Blatt und stellen die Spielfigur für „Gott“ an diejenige Stelle, an der sie ihn im Moment verorten würden. Im gemeinsamen Gespräch werden dann unterschiedliche Positionen durchgespielt und begründet. Dabei sollen die Kinder ihre Sichtweise auch mit Hilfe von biblischen Geschichten begründen.

Die eigene Sichtweise festhalten

Am Ende des Gesprächs werden die Kinder aufgefordert, ihre Anfangsposition zu überdenken und die Spielfigur auf ihrer Karte gegebenenfalls neu positionieren. Dies wird dann mit einem gelben Klebepunkt sichtbar festgehalten. Auf die Rückseite schreiben die Kinder dann ihre Begründung für die neue (oder die unveränderte) Position bzw. die Erstklässler dürfen diese der Lehrerin diktieren.

Abschluss

In der Kreismitte liegt für jedes Kind ein kleiner „König Wirklichwahr“ in Form einer Karte. Die Kinder formulieren einen Gedanken oder einen Wunsch formuliert, den sie für sich mitnehmen. Als Erinnerung dürfen sie die kleine Karte mit dem König mitnehmen.

Mögliche Weiterarbeit

Ausgehend vom dritten Bild, auf dem die Mutter übergroß und mit erhobenem Zeigefinger dargestellt ist, kann im Anschluss der Frage nachgegangen werden, wer denn „bestimmt“, was man tun darf und was nicht. Der zweite Teil der Geschichte bringt mit anschaulichen Beispielen den Aspekt der Perspektivität ins Spiel, so dass für die Kinder die Bedeutung von Kontext und Subjektivität von Sichtweisen plausibel wird. So sagt beispielsweise eine Ameise in der Geschichte zu einem Elefanten: „Ich bin viel stärker als du.“ Darüber lacht sich der Elefant schief und es stellt sich die Frage, wer denn jetzt tatsächlich stärker ist. Davon ausgehend kann der Aspekt der Perspektivität diskutiert und im Hinblick auf den Wahrheitsbegriff differenziert

herausgearbeitet werden. Schließlich könnte auch die Bedeutung des Königs für die Geschichte diskutiert werden.

2. Reflexion ausgewählter Aspekte

2.1 Eine „gute“ Ausgangsfrage finden

In der Vorbereitung ist zu überlegen, von welcher Frage ausgehend das Theologische Gespräch eröffnet werden kann. Wie aber kommt die Lehrperson zu einer „guten“ Frage kommt, die die Kinder interessiert und die sie zum Nach- und Weiterdenken herausfordert? Insbesondere im ersten Gespräch sollen sich die Kinder damit auseinandersetzen, was eine wahre von einer nicht wahren Aussage unterscheidet, ebenso sollten sie eigene Beispiele einbringen und reflektieren sowie Emotionen beschreiben können. Die Aussage der Mutter „Man muss immer die Wahrheit sagen. Das weißt du doch!“ bietet sich als Gesprächsanlass an. Ist es wirklich so? Muss man die Wahrheit sagen? Und gilt das immer bzw. was wäre eine Ausnahme? – Darüber denken die Kinder nach bringen ihre Argumente ein.

Bei der Durchführung der Lernsequenz erwies sich diese Frage als fruchtbar. Die Kinder zeigten großes Interesse, brachten mitunter eigene Beispiele bzw. Erfahrungen ein und zeigten eine besondere Sensibilität bezüglich der Tatsache, dass eine Aussage bei einer Person unterschiedliche Emotionen auslösen kann. Schnell war klar, dass Meinungen subjektiv sind und immer nur einen Teil der Wirklichkeit zum Ausdruck bringen. Dies klingt auf den ersten Blick möglicherweise banal, ist für Kinder jedoch insofern eine wichtige Erkenntnis, da ihnen das in konkreten Situationen oft nicht bewusst ist. Im Alltag reagieren sie immer wieder enttäuscht, beleidigt, verletzt oder auch aggressiv, weil sie ihre eigene Aussage als „die“ Wahrheit ansehen und dabei nicht im Blick haben, dass es neben ihrer noch weitere Sichtweisen gibt. Auch Erwachsenen fällt dies ja im Übrigen nicht immer leicht.

In der Vorbereitung auf die nächste Sequenz stellte sich die Frage, wie es gelingen könnte, eine religiöse Dimension im Gespräch zu öffnen. Eine Möglichkeit wurde in der aus Godly Play bekannten Frage „Wo ist Gott in der Geschichte?“ gesehen. Da die Kinder im ersten Gespräch jedoch an einer Stelle die Frage nach Gottes Liebe

aufgemacht haben, wurde nach reiflichem Abwägen schließlich die Frage „Hat Gott das Kind, das nicht die Wahrheit sagt, genauso lieb wie das Kind, das die Wahrheit sagt?“ als Ausgangsfrage gewählt. Bewusst war an dieser Stelle, dass durch die Frage möglicherweise die Problematik des Tun-Ergehens-Zusammenhangs ins Spiel gebracht wird. Doch die Tatsache, dass dies die ureigene Frage der Kinder war, sprach für deren Auswahl. Gleichzeitig wurde darin die Chance gesehen, einen Zusammenhang zwischen dem eigenen Tun und der Liebe Gottes in Frage zu stellen. Interessanterweise spielte der Tun-Ergehens-Zusammenhang für die meisten Kinder im Gespräch dann kaum eine Rolle in ihrer Argumentation. Sie stellten vielmehr von Anfang an die Liebe Gottes heraus, die allen Menschen gilt. Da Gott alle erschaffen hat, die „Guten“ und die „Bösen“ – wie es diese Kinder formulieren – muss er auch alle lieben. Für sie ist klar, dass Gottes Liebe allen gilt, weil er sie alle erschaffen hat. Gott steht zu jedem Menschen.

Dies wird exemplarisch in folgendem Gesprächsausschnitt deutlich:

Pauline: Eigentlich hat der Gott, eigentlich hat der Gott ja alle Menschen gleich lieb, weil – er mag uns halt einfach alle, genauso wie auch die Bösen, die gerade gelogen haben – und die an ihn glauben und ja, auch die an, die auch nicht an ihn glauben, die mag er auch.

G:²³⁸ Mhm.

Pauline: Er mag einfach alle.

Anna: Gott hat alle gleich lieb, deswegen habe ich ihn auch in die Mitte gestellt.

G: Anna, wie kommst du darauf, dass Gott alle gleich lieb hat?

Anna: Weil er hat ja alle, er hat ja alle erschaffen und jeder soll eigentlich gleich behandelt werden.

Sam: Also Gott hat alle lieb, auch die Bösen, weil er die ja alle erschaffen hat und er kann ja jetzt nicht (...) aber trotzdem mag er alle.

(...)

²³⁸ „G“ ist die Abkürzung für Gesprächsleiterin.

Eliana: Also, ich würde es auch in die Mitte stellen, weil ich finde, Gott hat alle gleich lieb und natürlich findet er das besser, wenn man die Wahrheit sagt, aber eigentlich hat er alle gleich lieb.

Offen bleibt, wie das Gespräch verlaufen wäre, wenn nicht bereits das erste Kind den Gedanken Gottes guter Schöpfung eingebracht hätte. Damit hängt auch die Frage zusammen, inwiefern einzelne Kinder einen Gesprächsverlauf beeinflussen und prägen.

Lediglich zwei Kinder entscheiden sich am Ende des Gesprächs dafür, dass Gott das Kind, das die Wahrheit sagt, mehr liebt. Ihre Begründung ist dabei in erster Linie moralisch, denn man muss doch die Wahrheit sagen. Eliana bringt in ihrer Aussage (s.o.) beide Positionen zusammen, wenn sie sagt, dass Gott alle Menschen gleich liebt, es aber besser „findet“, wenn man die Wahrheit sagt. In ihrer abschließenden Position entscheidet sie sich dafür, dass Gott beide gleich liebt und keinen Unterschied macht. Dass es besser ist, die Wahrheit zu sagen, ordnet sie damit der Liebe Gottes unter.

Ein Mädchen hält der restlichen Lerngruppe entgegen und positioniert Gott bei dem Kind, das nicht die Wahrheit gesagt hat, mit der Begründung, dass gerade dieses Kind Gott in besonderer Weise braucht.

Luisa: Ich würde eigentlich sagen, dass Gott eigentlich erst dem zustimmt, weil eigentlich Gott der wo so, wo halt Gott – mehr mag, den – den, dem hier braucht eigentlich Gott nicht zu helfen, aber also dem, der, der lügt, hat, der braucht ...

G: (dazwischen) Der braucht Gottes Nähe?

Luisa: Ja.

Ob eine Frage eine „gute“ Ausgangsfrage ist, zeigt sich oft erst im Verlauf des Gesprächs. Nämlich dann, wenn es gelingt, das Interesse der Kinder zu wecken und sie zum Nach- und Weiterdenken anzuregen. So kann eine auf den ersten Blick theologisch kritische Frage, wie „Hat Gott das Kind, das nicht die Wahrheit sagt genauso lieb wie das Kind, das die Wahrheit sagt?“ ein fruchtbares und die Kinder in ihren Gedanken weiterführendes Gespräch eröffnet.

2.2 Führen Theologische Gespräche in die Beliebigkeit?

Dass es bei solchen Gesprächen nicht um das Finden einer „richtigen“ Antwort geht, darüber ist man sich in der religionspädagogischen Diskussion einig.²³⁹ Aufgrund von Pluralität und Individualismus in der Gesellschaft wird in diesem Zusammenhang jedoch immer wieder die Frage gestellt, ob solche Gespräche nicht zu einer Relativierung bzw. Beliebigkeit beitragen, anstatt zentrale theologische Aussagen deutlich zu machen. Hier ist zu klären, aus welcher Perspektive heraus argumentiert wird. Ist es die Sorge um den Verlust eines verbindlichen Glaubenswissens und damit verbunden der Wunsch nach theologischer Orientierung oder steht dahinter die Frage nach den Lernchancen, die Kinder in solch offenen Gesprächen haben? Insbesondere im Zusammenhang mit der Frage nach theologischer Wahrheit ist die Anfrage durchaus nachvollziehbar.²⁴⁰ An dieser Stelle soll der Blick jedoch auf das Lernen der Kinder gerichtet werden. Gerade für Grundschulkinder ist es von besonderer Bedeutung, sich in Theologischen Gesprächen ihrer eigenen Gedanken und ihrer Sichtweise zunächst einmal bewusst zu werden und diese formulieren zu können, andere Perspektiven kennenzulernen, unterschiedliche Positionen auszuprobieren und schließlich eine plausible Begründung für eine (eigene) Position zu finden. Eine Relativierung der eigenen Sichtweise, Offenheit für andere Denkweisen und das Kennenlernen vielfältiger Meinungen und Begründungen sind ausdrücklich erwünscht, ebenso aber auch das Ausbilden der Fähigkeit, eine eigene, plausibel begründete Antwort zu einer Frage finden bzw. formulieren zu können. All diese Ziele haben ihre Berechtigung. Die prozessbezogene Kompetenz der Urteilsfähigkeit²⁴¹, die hier in besonderer Weise gefördert wird, trägt schließlich auch dazu bei, sich in einer pluralen Gesellschaft zurechtfinden zu können. „Ein konstruktiver Umgang mit Pluralität kann weder in einer Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber allen Unterschieden bestehen noch in einem Rückzug von der Pluralität dadurch, dass nur noch die eigene Wahrheit gesehen wird.“²⁴²

²³⁹ Vgl. zahlreiche Veröffentlichungen in der Reihe „Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie“.

²⁴⁰ Dieser Frage gehe ich in meiner Dissertation nach, die zum jetzigen Zeitpunkt jedoch noch nicht abgeschlossen ist, so dass an dieser Stelle nicht konkret darauf verwiesen werden kann.

²⁴¹ Vgl. Bildungsplan für die Grundschule 2016, Baden-Württemberg, Evangelische Religion. Urteilsfähigkeit als prozessbezogene Kompetenz für den Evangelischen Religionsunterricht ist auch in den von der EKD formulierten Kompetenzen enthalten. (Vgl. Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 01.12.1989 i. d. F. vom 16.11.2006, S.8–9).

²⁴² EKD (2014): Religiöse Orientierung gewinnen, S. 60.

An folgendem Beispiel wird sichtbar, wie unterschiedlich die Antworten auf die Frage, ob man immer die Wahrheit sagen muss, ausfallen. Die Kinder bringen ihre subjektive Sichtweise ein und entdecken im Gespräch, dass es durchaus andere Meinungen und Begründungen zu der diskutierten Frage gibt.



Schnell wurde den Kindern in diesem Beispiel deutlich, dass es eine Rolle spielt, wie man etwas formuliert. Sie versetzten sich in die andere Person und überlegten, wie eine angemessene Antwort aussehen könnte. Anna z.B. schlägt als Alternative für den Satz in der Geschichte „Der Zweite. Mama mag ihn auch nicht.“ vor: „Ich mag Rosinen, aber den Kuchen mag ich leider nicht. Aber andere mögen den Kuchen sicher. Kann ich dafür etwas anderes haben?“ In dieser Antwort zeigt Anna, dass sie die Situation differenziert aufnehmen und sogar ein Lösungsangebot einbringen kann. Auf Lauras Frage nach ihrer neuen Frisur antwortet Leo in der Geschichte: „Gar nicht. Jetzt sieht man, dass du zu große Ohren hast.“ Lukas schlägt stattdessen als mögliche Antwort vor: „Deine Zopfgummis sind sehr schön! Die gefallen mir sehr gut.“ Daraufhin melden sich gleich zwei Kinder zu Wort und wenden ein, dass Lukas mit seiner Aussage nicht genau auf Lauras Frage nach ihrer Frisur geantwortet hat. Die Diskussion geht daraufhin weiter hin und her. Eindrücklich ist dabei, wie unterschiedlich die Kinder die Aussagen auffassen und deuten, sowie mit welcher unterschiedlichen Erfahrungen und Emotionen diese in Beziehung stehen. Ohne selbst betroffen zu sein können sie hier argumentieren und sich mit anderen Positionen auseinander setzen. Relevant für das Lernen der Kinder ist neben

dem Bewusstwerden und Formulieren eigener Gedanken das Sich-Einlassen auf neue Sichtweisen und die davon ausgehenden Impulse.

Inwieweit Kinder ihre Position im Laufe eines Gesprächs verändern kann hier nicht beurteilt werden. Auffallend ist jedoch, dass sie immer wieder ihre zuvor schon einmal eingebrachte Sichtweise erneut aufgegriffen haben, diese im Verlauf aber differenzierter und vielfältiger begründen konnten.

Ob ein theologisches Gespräch in die Beliebigkeit führt oder nicht, hängt mitunter davon ab, ob das Theologische Gespräch genügend stimulierende Impulse bereithält, die die Kinder zum Nach- und Weiterdenken anregen. Diese ergeben sich entweder von selbst durch Äußerungen anderer Kinder oder können bewusst von der Lehrperson eingebracht werden. Dabei können auch theologische Bezüge hergestellt oder elementarisiertes theologisches Wissen offen ins Gespräch eingespielt werden. In einem der Gespräche wurde von der Lehrperson mehrmals Bezug auf das achte Gebot genommen, da sich die Kinder erst kurz zuvor mit den zehn Geboten auseinandergesetzt hatten, doch die Kinder nahmen diese Impulse nicht auf. Dreimal knüpften sie an vorherige Gedanken an oder brachten neue ein. Es war also zu diesem Zeitpunkt nicht ihr Thema bzw. hatte für sie nichts mit ihren Fragen zu tun. Dies zeigt deutlich, dass die Lehrperson zwar Themen bzw. Impulse einbringen kann, was sich dadurch für das einzelne Kind bzw. die Lerngruppe ergibt ist nicht vorhersehbar.

Hingegen wurde der Impuls, ihre Position mit biblischen Geschichten zu begründen, gerne von den Kindern aufgenommen und es gelang ihnen, eine schlüssige Begründung zu formulieren. Dass die Liebe Gottes allen Menschen gilt, zeigte sich für sie neben der Schöpfung beispielsweise bei Jona, den Gott gerettet hat, obwohl er seinen Auftrag nicht erfüllt hat, oder bei der Heilung, in der Jesus einen Gelähmten bedingungslos seine Liebe erfahren ließ.

Stefan: Zum Beispiel, der so abgehauen ist, wo nicht den Aufgabe von Gott annehmen wollte, das war ein Prophet und trotzdem mochte er den und hat ihn gerettet, bevor er von einem, bevor er ...

G: Von dem Fisch gefressen wurde?

Stefan: Nein, von einem Wal.

Paul: Den Jona

Somit geht es beim Theologisieren mit Kindern nicht darum, beliebige Antworten lediglich nebeneinander zu stellen, sondern vielmehr darum die Qualität und Tragfähigkeit von Antworten zu prüfen, um schließlich eine subjektive, eigene Antwort finden zu können.

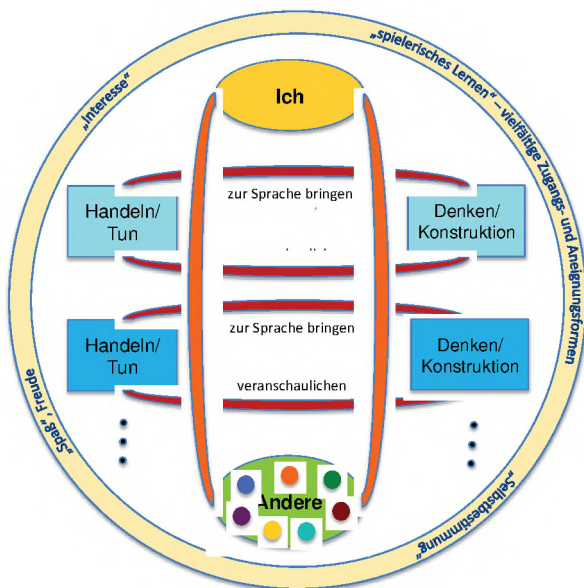
2.3 Ein anregungsreiches Lernsetting ermöglicht ein vertieftes Nachdenken

Neben dem Finden einer für das Theologische Gespräch fruchtbaren Ausgangsfrage, ist in der Vorbereitung das gesamte Lernsetting in den Blick zu nehmen. Dabei ist zu überlegen, wie die Kinder auf vielfältige Art und Weise auf das Nach- und Weiterdenken eingestimmt und durch die Wahl der Methoden dazu angeregt werden können, damit das Gespräch nicht im Darstellen von Selbstverständlichkeiten aufgeht, sondern Lernen im Sinne von Kompetenzförderung und -erweiterung bzw. Lernen in der „Zone der nächsten Entwicklung“²⁴³ möglich wird. Im Unterrichtsalltag ist es immer wieder eine Herausforderung, Theologischen Gesprächen die nötige Tiefe zu verleihen. Dies kann unterschiedliche Gründe haben, wie z.B. dass Kinder in solchen Gesprächen wenig geübt sind, es der Lehrperson nicht leicht fällt, Ruhe auszuhalten und sie zu früh gedanklich voranschreitet oder das Gespräch zu wenig herausfordernde und weiterführende Impulse bereit hält. Ein weiterer Grund hierfür kann sein, dass die Kinder zu wenig Zeit hatten, sich mit dem Thema, der Fragestellung bzw. der damit verbundenen Problematik auseinanderzusetzen.

In einer qualitativen Studie – auf der Grundlage von Gruppengesprächen und Gruppendiskussionen – in der sich Kinder rückblickend mit ihrem Lernen beim Theologisieren auseinandergesetzt haben, zeigte sich, dass das gesamte Lernsetting, in welches das gemeinsame Nachdenken im Theologischen Gespräch eingebunden ist, für die Kinder eine Rolle spielt. Von den Kindern wurde immer wieder betont, wie wichtig vielfältige und kreative Auseinandersetzungsmöglichkeiten und Impulse sind, um sich der eigenen Gedanken erst einmal bewusst zu werden.

²⁴³ Lew Wygotski verbindet mit der „Zone der nächsten Entwicklung“ ein Lernen, das „mehr an dem Stand der möglichen Entwicklung als an dem Stand der aktuellen Entwicklung“ (Rapp) orientiert ist.

Wie Kinder sich ihr Lernen beim Theologisieren erklären, wird in folgendem Modell sichtbar.²⁴⁴



Um das komplexe Schaubild verstehen zu können, wird es schrittweise erklärt. „Spaß“, „Interesse“, „Selbstbestimmung“ und „spielerisches Lernen“, das sich in vielfältigen Zugangs- und Aneignungsformen zeigt, sind für die Kinder wichtige Voraussetzungen für ihr Lernen. Sie bilden sozusagen einen Rahmen, in den das unterrichtliche Geschehen eingebettet ist.

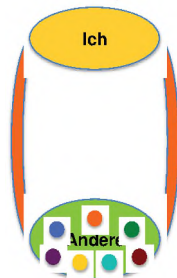
²⁴⁴ Dieses Modell ist im Rahmen meiner Dissertation entstanden.

Das Lernen selbst bezieht sich auf zwei Spannungsfelder:

- (1) Lernen im Spannungsfeld zwischen dem eigenem Handeln/Tun und Denken/Konstruieren²⁴⁵



- (2) Lernen in der Auseinandersetzung mit sich selbst und mit anderen



Zum Lernen gehört sowohl das eigene, konkrete Handeln als auch das Nachdenken und Konstruieren von Gedanken. Die Dimension „Handeln“, welches im konkreten Tun im Unterricht zum Tragen kommt (z.B. beim kreativen Gestalten, im Rollenspiel, beim kreativen Schreiben) und die Dimension „Denken“, die sich im Überlegen, Nachdenken, Fragen o.ä. zeigt, werden beim Theologisieren dadurch miteinander verknüpft, dass die Kinder eigene Vorstellungen und Gedanken visualisieren und auch zur Sprache bringen. Gleichzeitig öffnet das zweite Spannungsfeld die Perspektive für die Mitlernenden. Lernen ist zwar subjektiver Prozess, doch ohne „Anderere“ nicht zu denken.

²⁴⁵ Dieser Ausschnitt ist im Schaubild zweimal dargestellt, müsste aber entsprechend der Anzahl der Kinder in der Lerngruppe fortgesetzt werden, da das Lernen der Kinder ein subjektiver Akt ist.

Es ist für die Kinder von großer Bedeutung, dass sie eigene Vorstellungen, Gedanken oder Erkenntnisse gestalterisch, musisch oder schriftlich darstellen können. Bereits beim konkreten Tun formen sich Gedanken, die den Kindern an dieser Stelle oft noch gar nicht bewusst sind. Im Gespräch mit anderen formulieren sie dann ihre eigenen Gedanken und sind daran interessiert, was und wie andere dies sehen und verstehen. Gerade in dieser Auseinandersetzung, die im Rahmen eines Theologischen Gesprächs stattfinden kann, sehen sie für sich ein großes anregendes Potenzial. Denn die Sichtweisen anderer können die eigene Perspektive erweitern, zum Nach- und Weiterdenken anregen und schließlich Rückmeldung zum eigenen Tun und Denken geben.

Ausgehend von diesem Ergebnis wird verständlich, dass Kinder immer wieder Zeit sowie vielfältige Zugangs- und Aneignungsmöglichkeiten im Kontext einer Fragestellung brauchen, um sich auf ein vertieftes Nachdenken einlassen zu können.²⁴⁶ Um alle Lerntypen zu erreichen und die individuelle Theologie anzuregen, sollte das Theologische Gespräch selbst deshalb zumeist nicht an erster Stelle stehen.

Eine sorgfältige Vorbereitung und Durchführung tragen zum Gelingen des Theologisierens mit Kindern bei. Auf die Frage, wie viel von der Lehrperson tatsächlich geplant und wie viel Theologie von ihr eingebracht werden kann oder soll, kann jedoch keine abschließende Antwort erfolgen. Dies bleibt eine Gratwanderung und muss jeweils im Einzelfall entschieden werden. Gezeigt hat sich, dass es hilfreich war, sich von den Fragen und Gedanken der Kinder leiten zu lassen, auch wenn dies theologisch zunächst fragwürdig erschien. Entscheidender waren die Impulse, die im Gespräch gesetzt wurden und die dann zur Tiefe des Gesprächs beitrugen. Diese Ausführungen lassen erahnen, wie viele Entscheidungen in solch einem Lernsetting von der Lehrperson zu treffen sind und in der konkreten komplexen Situation eine große Herausforderung darstellen. Deshalb ist es wichtig, die Lernsituation nach der Unterrichtsstunde aus der Distanz heraus zu reflektieren und davon ausgehend das weitere Vorgehen ohne Handlungsdruck in den Blick zu nehmen.

²⁴⁶ Ähnliches wird auch in der Studie von Annike Reiß (2015) bestätigt.

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Ludmila Muchová

Wie kann man eine gute philosophische Geschichte schreiben? ²⁴⁷

Ankündigung:

In diesem Workshop können die Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer Prinzipien der philosophischen Kindergeschichten nach M. Lipman entdecken. Sie reflektieren die Unterschiede zu der allgemeinen Kinderliteratur und können in eigener kreativer Arbeit selbst eine philosophische Geschichte verfassen.

1. Textliche Grundlage des Workshops:

Wenn wir mit den Kindern philosophieren wollen, dann haben wir einige Möglichkeiten, wie wir einen solchen philosophischen Dialog eröffnen können. Die erste Möglichkeit ist es, die Situation zu nutzen, in der die Kinder selbst an ein Problem stoßen, das wir mit ihnen in eine philosophierende Reflexion entwickeln können. Z.B. in einem Kindergarten haben die Kinder darüber spontan gesprochen, dass ihr Schulfreund Glück hatte, dass er von einem Wagen nicht überfahren wurde. Die Lehrerin hat mit ihnen eine Weile über dieses Ereignis gesprochen, und dann ist sie nicht auffallend zum Thema „Glück“ übergegangen. Von den konkreten Situationen, die die Kinder selbst erlebt haben, was es heißt, Glück zu haben, ist sie zu der Frage übergegangen, ob etwas oder jemand Glück bringen kann – zum Schluss eines fünfzehnminütigen Gesprächs kamen die Kinder dazu, dass Glück Zwerge, Hufen, Vierblätter oder Geld bringen können, aber dass das Glück auch in Menschen „wohnt“ und dass es aus ihnen rauskommt, wenn sie gütig sind...

²⁴⁷ Im Text benutze ich die Ideen aus den Fachseminaren unter der Führung von Prof. M. Sassevill, Université Laval Quebec, Kanada, die er als Gastprofessor an der Theologischen Fakultät der Südböhmischen Universität in den Jahren 2003 – 2006 geführt hat. Diese Gedanken entwickeln Ideen Darryl M. De Marzio's: What happens in philosophical texts: Matthew Lipman's theory and practice of the philosophical text as model. Accessible on <http://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/childhood/article/viewFile/20577/14903> (zit. 15. 2. 2017)

Eine andere Möglichkeit ist es, die Kindergeschichten aus der zugänglichen Kinderliteratur zu benutzen. Die sind sowohl den Pädagogen als auch den Kindern nahe. Man kann ihre Zeitbezogenheit nutzen. Als Beispiel kann wieder die Situation aus dem Kindergarten dienen, als die Lehrerin den Kindern das russische Volksmärchen Die große Rübe vorgelesen hat. Die Geschichte ist kurz und weist darauf hin, wie wichtig für das Ganze die Hilfe auch eines winzigen Einzelnen (einer kleinen Maus) sein kann. Selbstverständlich, man kann von einer solchen Geschichte ausgehen und gemeinsam mit den Kindern fragen, warum es gut ist, einander zu helfen. Eine philosophische Schwierigkeit besteht jedoch darin, dass die Geschichte selbst diese Frage beantwortet hat. Die Kinderliteratur verbirgt in sich oft auch die Belehrung, wegen der sie eigentlich geschaffen wurde. Und die Antwort wird oft eindeutig geäußert. (Erinnern wir uns z.B. an das Buch Der kleine Prinz von Exupéry: Richtig sieht man nur mit dem Herzen, was wichtig ist, ist für die Augen unsichtbar. Der Autor hat ein Problem durchdacht und seine Lösung hat er in die Geschichte gelegt. Aber auch trotzdem kann man solche Geschichten benutzen. (Z.B. ist es möglich, eine solche Lösung in Frage zu stellen und die Reflexion weiter zu führen.)

In meinen Erfahrungen mit dem Philosophieren mit den Kindern spielen eine wichtige Rolle die Geschichten, die selbst einen philosophierenden Charakter haben. Sie wurden nämlich deswegen verfasst, um das kindliche Denken anzuregen. Gerade mit ihnen möchte ich heute mit euch arbeiten. Wenn wir nämlich ihre Konstruktion verstehen werden, können wir selbst ihre Autoren werden und sie direkt auf Maß unseren Gruppen gestalten.

Die Grundsätze für eine solche Konstruktion der philosophischen Geschichten vermittelte uns in Tschechien M. Sassewille, ein kanadischer Philosoph, der sich mit der Philosophie für Kinder nach M. Lipman befasst:

In den Geschichten der Philosophie für Kinder treten die Helden auf, die ein übliches Leben erfahren: sie besuchen eine Schule, kaufen ein usw...., aber dabei gliedern sie sich in eine Gemeinschaft ein, die Antworten auf die Fragen sucht, die das Leben mit sich bringt.

Die Geschichten sind ein Modellmuster für die suchende Gemeinschaft. Wir können in ihnen Muster des gemeinsamen Suchens von Kindern und den Erwachsenen

sehen. In der ersten Reihe also gilt es: Der Text der Geschichte muss eine Geschichte der suchenden Gemeinschaft sein. Das zeigt sich darin folgendermaßen:

- Der innere Gedankenaustausch des Kindes, dank dem es über seine Erlebnisse nachdenkt und der äußere Gedankenaustausch mit anderen Kindern oder Erwachsenen
- Die kognitive Dimension des Suchens: also die Inhalte der kindlichen Gedanken
- Die soziale Dimension des Suchens: also das Zuhören den Argumenten der anderen, die Selbstkorrektion und das Ziehen der Konsequenzen für das weitere Handeln
- Emotionelle Äußerungen der Helden: Emotionen werden als ein Motor dargestellt, das dem kindlichen Denken Dynamik und Einrichtung an das Handeln bietet.

2. Die suchende Gemeinschaft, die die Geschichte charakterisiert, muss folgenden Kriterien entsprechen:

- Die Menschen schalten sich in den Dialog ein: In der Geschichte müssen Kinder, Erwachsene und gemeinsam Kinder mit den Erwachsenen zusammenarbeiten und sie müssen einen Dialog führen. Dieser Dialog muss noch dazu zu einer selbstkorrektiven Praxis führen, zur Selbstreflexion (z.B. in meiner Geschichte Die Frage von Vojta. Ein zehnjähriger Junge handelt nach dem Rat seines besten Freundes und täuscht eine Krankheit vor, um die Probleme in der Schule zu meiden. Von der Sicht der Kinder ist es eine gute Lösung. Unmittelbar danach begreift Vojta, dass es von der Sicht seiner Mutter um eine ernste Krankheit gehen konnte, die vor kurzem in ihrer Familie vorkam. Vojta nimmt sich vor: So eine Angst wollte ich der Mutter nicht verursachen. Nächstes Mal werde ich nicht mehr betrügen – ich kann damit

auch etwas Schlechtes verursachen, was ich nicht wollte.²⁴⁸). Beim Schreiben solcher Episoden muss der Autor eigene Erlebnisse wahrnehmen.

- Die Dialoge müssen verschiedene Ansichten und ihre Konflikte beinhalten – wobei eine Ansicht muss nicht besser sein als die andere (Z.B. die Eltern des besten Freundes von Vojta lassen sich scheiden. Vojta hört es in der Debatte der Erwachsenen in seiner Familie. Die Erwachsenen äußern die Reue über das Schicksal seines Freundes. Vojta stimmt damit jedoch nicht überein. Sein Freund Peter hat ihm erklärt, welche gute Folgen die Scheidung seiner Eltern für sein Leben hat: er hat mehr Freiheit, er bekommt mehr Geschenke...)
- Die Geschichte muss wichtige philosophische Begriffe beinhalten (z.B. Denken, Glauben, Existenz, Tod, Liebe, Geheimnis, Wahrheit, Gutes, Schönheit, Mensch, Gerechtigkeit). Hier liegt es daran, mit welchem Thema wir uns befassen (z.B. Vojta erlebt sehr stark die Gerechtigkeit oder Ungerechtigkeit der Noten in der Schule. Im Denken überträgt er die Anforderung der Gerechtigkeit auch auf Gott: Es ist doch ungerecht, dass er vor dem schriftlichen Test lernt und betet für seinen Erfolg – und dass er eine schlechtere Note bekommt, als sein Freund, der einfach mehr begabt ist und dazu noch ein wenig betrügt. Wie kann Gott zulassen, dass die Betrüger und Atheisten mehr Erfolg erleben, als die ehrlichen und frommen Katholiken? Der Autor geht dabei so vor, dass er im Voraus eine „Begriffsmappe“ bildet – in diesem Fall waren es vor allem die Begriffe, die sich zu Glauben, Liebe, Vergebung beziehen... - aber so, dass sie sich gleichzeitig auf Philosophie beziehen. (Solche Begriffe kann man in jedem philosophischen Wörterbuch finden.)
- Die Helden der Geschichte müssen frei sein, sie müssen frei handeln. Es darf aus ihnen nicht im Voraus „eine Belehrung ziehen“.
- Die Geschichte muss witzig sein, sie muss Sinn für Humor beinhalten, damit sie das Interesse der suchenden Gemeinschaft erweckt.

²⁴⁸ Die Geschichte: „Die Frage von Vojta“ ist von mir selbst für die Kurse P4C für Religionslehrer/Innen in der Tschechischen Republik entwickelt worden.

- Alle Akteure der Handlung sollten sich selbst Fragen stellen, wenn schon im Rahmen des eigenen Nachdenkens, oder im Rahmen des Austausches von Ideen und Argumenten.
- Die Geschichte muss Bezeichnungen von Emotionen beinhalten (z.B. Vojta wurde traurig, er spürte etwas wie Glück, er wurde zornig...) Lipmann hat zu diesem Zweck den so genannten „Baum der Emotionen“ erarbeitet. In dieser Phase können der Geschichte auch Psychologen helfen. Dank diesem Ausmaß der Geschichte sind die Charakteristiken der Personen „saftig“.
- In der Geschichte sollte auch Anspielung auf die Philosophie der Sprache sein (Wortspiele, bekannte Zitate aus den populären Filmen usw.) Es ist wichtig für das Pflegen der Sensibilität für die Bedeutung der Worte.
- Die Geschichte sollte auch eine gewisse Entwicklung der Gruppe registrieren.
- Die Geschichte sollte keinen festen Schluss haben, etwas in ihr bleibt nicht zu Ende erzählt, etwas bleibt offen... (z.B. die Geschichte von Vojta endet mit der Frage des Erzählers, ob Gott ein Wunder machen kann, damit sich das verwirklicht, wonach sich Vojta sehnt. Die Geschichte beantwortet jedoch diese Frage nicht, die Autorin überlässt den kindlichen Lesern, dass sie selbst überlegen sollen und nach diesen Überlegungen sollen sie die Geschichte zu Ende schreiben.)
- Die Geschichte sollte den Typ der Untersuchung zeigen, die nicht nur von dem Fragenstellen ausgeht, sondern die in einer gewissen Frustration wurzelt, in einer Unzufriedenheit, etwas geht nicht so, wie wir es wünschen würden. Aus diesem Gefühl resultiert das Suchen. Das Suchen zeigt sich in den problematischen Formulierungen, in den Beispielen, in Gegenbeispielen, in der Bildung und Beglaubigung der Hypothesen, wenn die Helden prüfen, ob ihre Voraussetzungen auch in der Praxis, im Leben funktionieren.

- Die Geschichte sollte auch neue Blickwinkel auf die Welt beinhalten und sollte dabei in Tiefe eintauchen. Aber die Geschichte sollte keine fertigen Antworten anbieten. Die Helden der Geschichte und auch die suchende Gemeinschaft sollen in dem realen Leben die Chance zu haben, auch keine Antwort zu finden.
- Die Geschichte sollte eine Verwicklung beinhalten (in der Vojta-Geschichte ist die Verwicklung die Scheidung der Eltern von seinem Schulfreund, wobei es ihm droht, dass er in eine andere Stadt umziehen muss. Eine andere Verwicklung ist die Entstehung der Vojtas ersten Liebe – er „verliebt sich“ in eine vietnamesische Mitschülerin usw.) Vorsicht bei der Formulierung der Fragen! Die Kinder übernehmen oft die Fragen direkt aus der Geschichte, sie nehmen sie auf als ihre eigene. Üblicherweise stellen sie sich z.B. nicht die Frage: „Was ist das Gute?“ Aber wenn diese Frage im Laufe des Kapitels erscheint, dann gewinnt sie an der Anziehungskraft.
- Die Autoren sollen in der Geschichte mentale Vorgänge benennen. Es ist ziemlich ungewöhnlich. Es ist ein wichtiges Zwischenstück zwischen dem Lernen der Kenntnisse und Lernen zu denken, oder – anders gesagt – von Wissen zu Nachdenken. Der Autor der Geschichte sollte das Schema aller mentalen Vorgänge und Zustände zur Verfügung haben: glauben, zweifeln, schockiert sein, im Kopf herumgehen, sich zu einer Tat entscheiden, in einen Zustand gelangen... Überdies sollte die Geschichte auch die Akten des „Metadenkens“ beinhalten, z.B. die Formulierungen des Typs: „er hat geglaubt, dass er weiß“. (Dabei hilft Logik viel: einige Argumente sind besser als die anderen. Vor dem Schreiben einer Geschichte sollte der Autor die Grundlagen der informellen Logik sehr gut studieren, besonders die Fehler in der Logik (sie sind sehr zahlreich, z.B. ad hominem – statt gegen das Argument attackiert man den Menschen... oder man verwechselt die Zeitfolge mit der Ursache und Folge...) Es ist gut, ab und zu einen solchen logischen Fehler in die Geschichte einzureihen.
- Die Geschichte sollte verschiedene Stile des menschlichen Denkens zeigen. Die Geschichte soll nicht nur einen Stil des Denkens zeigen. Z.B. einer ist eher ein Experimentator, ein anderer denkt so, dass er ihre Ideen in einer

lauten Sprache artikuliert, jemand hat das intuitive Denken entwickelt, jemand ist im Denken langsam, jemand schnell... Wir helfen so Toleranz zu pflegen, die es nicht nur gegenüber verschiedenen Typen der Menschen gibt, sondern auch gegenüber verschiedenen Typen des Denkens.

- Die Geschichte muss auch die Dimension von „carry“ zeigen – also, dass es für die Menschen wirklich wichtig ist – man kann es vielleicht mit den Worten „verantwortetes Denken“ ausdrücken. Die Menschen sorgen einander für den Verlauf ihres Denkens, sie empfinden in diesem Sinn die Verantwortung für ihr Durchdenken der Probleme zu Gunsten der anderen und des Themas selbst. Sie sind dabei emphatisch, ihr Denken drückt ihre Emotionen aus, sie zeigen das Bemühen, zu einem möglichst präzisen Schluss zu kommen – dabei gerade „pflegen sie das Thema“.
- Der Autor der Geschichte muss auch gegenüber den Mitteln der Untersuchung aufmerksam sein (Definitionen der Begriffe, Aussprechen der Behauptungen, die Argumentation usw.) – Die Geschichte muss Respekt zu diesen Mitteln äußern.

Wenn ich zum Schluss das Wesen einer philosophischen Autorengeschichte mit einem einzigen Satz charakterisieren sollte, dann wäre es so:

Der Text muss in der ersten Reihe die Verschiebung von den Kenntnissen der Welt und der Menschen zu ihrem eigenen Durchdenken modellieren!

Das betrifft selbstverständlich auch die mit dem christlichen Glauben verbundenen Fragen inmitten der weltanschaulichen Pluralitätsgesellschaft: Die Kenntnisse der Inhalte des christlichen Glaubens sind hier deswegen sehr wichtig, damit die Kinder und junge Menschen ihre Bedeutung in der Welt durchdenken, in der sie leben, und in dem Leben, das sie selbst inmitten der heutigen Welt und der zeitgenössischen Menschen führen.

3. Die große Rübe

Großvater hatte eine Rübe in den Boden gesteckt und sagte zu ihr: „Wachse, meine Rübe, wachse, werde süß, wachse, meine Rübe, wachse, werde fest!“ Und die Rübe wuchs und wuchs. Sie wurde süß, fest und groß – riesig groß. Da ging der Großvater, um die Rübe herauszuziehen. Er zog und zog – aber sie ging nicht heraus. Da rief der Großvater die Großmutter. Die Oma hielt den Opa, Der Opa hielt die Rübe und sie zogen und zogen – aber sie ging nicht heraus. Da rief die Großmutter ihre Enkelin. Das Mädchen hielt die Oma, Die Oma hielt den Opa, Der Opa hielt die Rübe und sie zogen und zogen – aber sie ging nicht heraus. Da rief die Enkelin ihr Hündchen. Das Hündchen hielt das Mädchen, Das Mädchen hielt die Oma, Die Oma hielt den Opa, Der Opa hielt die Rübe und sie zogen und zogen – aber sie ging immer noch nicht heraus. Da rief das Hündchen das Kätzchen. Das Kätzchen hielt das Hündchen, Das Hündchen hielt das Mädchen, Das Mädchen hielt die Oma, Die Oma hielt den Opa, Der Opa hielt die Rübe und sie zogen und zogen – aber sie ging immer noch nicht heraus. Da rief das Kätzchen das Mäuschen. Das Mäuschen hielt das Kätzchen, Das Kätzchen hielt das Hündchen, Das Hündchen hielt das Mädchen, Das Mädchen hielt die Oma, Die Oma hielt den Opa, Der Opa hielt die Rübe. Und sie zogen und zogen – und zogen die Rübe heraus.

Russisches Volksmärchen²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Die Große Rübe (on-line), zugänglich: http://www.maerchen-sammlung.de/Russische-Maerchen_16/Die-Ruebe_431.html (zit. am 15.2.2017)

Helene Miklas

Wohin gehe ich?

Sterben und Tod mit Kinderbüchern erarbeiten –

Always and for ever: working with Children's books on death, dying and consolation elements.

Workshop 22.2.2017

Werkstattbericht

1. Einleitung

Eine bewährte Möglichkeit, mit Kindern über das Thema Sterben und Tod zu arbeiten, ist es, Kinderbücher einzusetzen. Doch zeigt die Erfahrung, dass die Auswahl der Kinderbücher meistens aus sehr persönlichen Motiven geschieht und daher auf der subjektiven Ebene bleibt: Ein Buch gefällt oder gefällt nicht – man traut sich drüber, fühlt sich wohl damit, ist zögerlich oder lehnt es sogar emotional heftig ab. Es gibt aber auch fachdidaktische Kriterien, die über die subjektiv-intuitiven hinausgehen und eine begründete Auswahl ermöglichen, die vor allem einen Diskurs ermöglichen. Sie sind wohl am gründlichsten ausgearbeitet worden von Prof. habil. Dr. Martina Plieth der Evangelischen Hochschule Nürnberg, die sie bei einem Workshop am 29.4.2016 an der Kirchlichen Pädagogischen Hochschule Wien vorstellte.²⁵⁰

Eine zweite Frage, die darüber hinaus geht und das Thema der Tagung in Salzburg "Children's book – Nurture for Children's theology" noch enger betrifft: Wann ist ein Buch über Sterben und Tod nun geeignet zum Theologisieren? Sind es die gleichen fachdidaktischen Kriterien, die eine Rolle spielen? Oder einige davon? Kommen

²⁵⁰ Plieth (2001)

noch andere dazu? Und: Kann der Einsatz solcher Kriterien Gelegenheit für Gesprächsanlässe zum Theologisieren mit Kindern und Jugendlichen bieten? Dies war das Thema des obigen Workshops.

In einem ersten Abschnitt dieses Artikels werden sieben Kriterien zur Auswahl und zur Analyse von Kinderbüchern auf der Grundlage der Arbeit von Martina Plieth vorgestellt. Da der Workshop zweisprachig angeboten worden ist, sind die Kriterien in beiden Sprachen angeführt (Kap. 2). In einem nächsten Schritt wird kurz über die Arbeitsphase berichtet, in denen die gemischtsprachigen Gruppen Buchanalysen anhand der Kriterien miteinander durchgeführt haben (Kap. 3). Danach werden die Ergebnisse aus dem anschließenden Plenum vorgestellt (Kap. 4). Das Kap. 5 rundet mit einer kurzen Zusammenfassung ab.

2. Auswahlkriterien für Kinderbücher zum Thema Tod, Sterben, Trauer und Trost

2.1 Qualität der bildhaften Elemente – Quality of the pictures

Auf welche Weise fordern die Bilder zum genauen Hinsehen auf?

Do the pictures in the book encourage a closer look?

In welcher Weise wirken die Bilder horizontöffnend – oder horizonterweiternd?

Do the pictures broaden the horizon?

Sind sie entwicklungsfördernd? Sind sie entwicklungshemmend?

Do the pictures allow a progress in development or have they got development-impeding effects?

Inwieweit sind Textaussage und Bilder aufeinander abgestimmt?

Does the text correspond with the pictures?

2.2 Authentizität der Sterbe- und Todesdarstellungen – *Authenticity of the representation*

Welche typische kindliche Erfahrungen sind widerspiegelt?

Are there any typical experiences of the children's world being reflected in the book?

Wird der Tod bzw. der Sterbeprozess realistisch und somit für das Kind annehmbar dargestellt?

Is death and the process of dying being represented in a realistic and yet acceptable way for children?

Werden Euphemismen wie „schlafen“, „von uns gegangen“, „er lebt jetzt im Himmel“ aufgeklärt?

Have euphemisms like „grandpa is sleeping“, „he has left us“, „he is living in heaven“ etc. been explained for the children in the book?

2.3 Veranschaulichungsgrad von Stimmungswerten – *Illustration of atmosphere and emotions*

Auf welche Weise vermitteln Personen Emotionen bzw. Stimmungen mit ihrer Mimik und Gestik?

How do the various persons commit themselves to their emotions with their facial expressions and with their gestures?

Inwiefern können verschiedene Identifikationsmöglichkeiten geboten werden?

To what extent are the persons in the book identification models for the children?

2.4 Plausibilität von Lösungsstrategien – *Plausibility of coping strategies*

Welche Bewältigungsstrategien werden aufgezeigt?

Which kind of coping strategies are being offered/shown?

Welche Lösungsansätze werden Kindern angeboten?

Which problem-solving approaches are being offered to the children?

Sind die Verarbeitungsstrategien für Kinder nachvollziehbar?

Is the way of coping with death and dying easily comprehensible and plausible for the children?

Kommt der symbolisch-modellhafter Charakter genügend zur Geltung?

Is it clear that this is not the only solution but one of many?

2.5 Tragfähigkeit von Trostelementen – Sustainability of consolation elements

Wird angesichts des Schreckens und der Verunsicherung, die durch Sterben und Tod ausgelöst werden, genügend Tröstliches zum Ausdruck gebracht?

Are there sufficient comforting and consoling elements shown in the book on the sometimes terrifying reality of dying and death?

Können die einzelnen Trost- und Hoffnungselemente auch auf Dauer überzeugen?

Are these comforting and consoling elements viable and stable for the children's future?

2.6 Kontinuität von Kommunikations- und Interaktionsstrukturen – continuity of communication and interaction patterns

Welche Beziehungsmuster werden vorgestellt?

Inwieweit findet ein Austausch über Sterben und Tod statt, der längerfristig und aufbauend fortgeführt werden kann?

Have a look at the relation and interaction patterns. Are the persons communicating together on the subject of death and dying doing this in a constructive and reassuring way?

2.7 Offenheitsgrad bezüglich religiöser und christlicher Wertmaßstäbe – Openness of religious and christian values

In welcher Weise finden religiöse Grundprägungen Beachtung und wie werden sie ventiliert? Qualifizieren sie zu einer eigenständigen Bearbeitung?

In which way are religious standards being introduced and how are they being reflected? Do these elements qualify for an independent process in handling this subject?

3. Arbeitsgruppen

Den Arbeitsgruppen wurden Bücher angeboten, die verschiedenste Gesprächsanlässe bieten, um mit Kindern und Jugendlichen ins Gespräch zu kommen. Bewusst wurde darauf verzichtet, explizit religiöse Inhalte zu nehmen.

- Missing Mummy: A book about bereavement²⁵¹
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies. Explaining death to young children²⁵²
- Badger's Parting Gifts - Leb wohl, lieber Dachs ²⁵³
- Der Baum der Erinnerung – The Memory Tree²⁵⁴
- Und was kommt nach Tausend – And what comes after a Thousand²⁵⁵
- Granddad's Island - Opa's Insel²⁵⁶
- Tschüss, kleiner Piepsi²⁵⁷
- Als Oma ein Vogel wurde²⁵⁸
- Für immer²⁵⁹

4. Erkenntnisse aus den Arbeitsgruppen

²⁵¹ Cobb (2012)

²⁵² Stickney (2004)

²⁵³ Varley (1997/2009)

²⁵⁴ Teckentrup (2013)

²⁵⁵ Bley (2005)

²⁵⁶ Davies (2015/2016)

²⁵⁷ Meyer et al. (2009)

²⁵⁸ Aertssen (2011)

²⁵⁹ Löffner/Gehrmann (2016)

„Es war sehr spannend gemeinsam Bücher zu vergleichen und wenn wir dabei auch nicht nur an die Kriterien gedacht haben, sind wir doch auch immer wieder auf diese zurückgekommen.“, berichtet eine Teilnehmerin. Drei Kriterien, die immer wieder zur Sprache kamen und als die wichtigsten empfunden wurden, waren die Plausibilität der Lösungsstrategien, die Tragfähigkeit von Trostelementen und der Offenheitsgrad bezüglich religiöser und christlicher Wertmaßstäbe. *„Uns hat sehr beschäftigt, wie die emotionale Seite des Todes dargestellt wurde – z.B. verharmlosend oder eben vielschichtig und ob es auch eine spirituelle Ebene gibt“*, meint die gleiche Teilnehmerin. Zunächst schien es etwas ungewohnt, dass inhaltlich kein Bezug auf religiöse Inhalte genommen wurde: *„Zuerst habe ich gedacht bei dem Buch ‚Missing Mummy‘: Da ist ja nichts Religiöses drinnen. Dann habe ich aber gemerkt: Man kann sehr wohl mit den Kindern von verschiedenen Perspektiven daraus darüber ins Gespräch kommen.“* Alle Teilnehmerinnen fanden in den verschiedensten Büchern den Ansatz von Trost und Getröstet werden als geeignete Gesprächsanlässe zum Theologisieren.

Ein überraschendes Ergebnis aus den Gruppen war, dass nicht nur immer die im Vorfeld „passenden“ Bücher für das Theologisieren interessant sein könnten: *„Obwohl wir uns schwer getan haben mit dem Buch ‚Als Oma ein Vogel wurde‘, würde sich das Buch gar nicht so schlecht für das Theologisieren eignen. Wir könnten ja einsteigen mit einem ehrlichen Impuls: ‚Ich habe hier ein Buch, da weiß ich noch nicht genau, was ich davon halten soll. Ich will es euch einmal vorlesen‘... Die Kinder können dann ihre eigenen Gedanken entwickeln. Sie haben vielleicht auch ganz eigene Bilder im Kopf und die zu erfragen oder mit ihnen darüber zu theologisieren, scheint eine lohnende Möglichkeit.“* Einheitlich wurde befunden, dass man vielleicht hier als Lehrperson weniger geneigt wäre, die eigene Meinung hinein zu legen als bei Büchern, die einem selbst besonders lieb und wert sind: *„Wenn du ein Buch hast, das du ganz besonders liebst, dann bist du geneigt, deine eigenen Vorlieben hineinzulegen.“*

Die gleiche Herausforderung wurde auch im Buch „Für Immer“ gesehen. Obwohl die Plausibilität von Lösungsstrategien und vor allem die Trostelemente als sehr gering betrachtet wurden (*„Wir waren darüber fast erschrocken!“*), schien es der Gruppe durchaus reizvoll, ein solch „schwieriges“ Buch zum Theologisieren auszusuchen. So ein Arbeiten hätte, so eine Teilnehmerin, *„eine hohe mediendidaktische*

Relevanz“. Im Gegensatz dazu wurde das Buch „Der Baum der Erinnerung“ mit dem Baum, der durch die Erinnerung immer größer wurde, als „zu *harmonisch*“ befunden. „*Da ist ja kein einziges eckiges Element drinnen. Alle sind so nett, das ist ja fast schon ein bisschen unheimlich!*“ Hier wurde es ebenfalls als spannend gesehen, mit den Kindern ins kritische Theologisieren zu kommen: „*Mein Impuls wäre hier: ‚Ich habe hier so ein ungutes Gefühl im Bauch... die Tiere sind einfach so nett, zu nett...‘ Oder sagen: ‚Der Baum ist so groß, ich kann das einfach nicht glauben...‘*“ Hier könnte, so meinten die Teilnehmerinnen, wirklich auch genau diskutiert werden, ob es reicht, in der Erinnerung weiterzuleben.

Viel gelacht wurde über das Buch „Opa’s Insel“. In diesem Buch „*findet sich nun wirklich nichts Theologisches, obwohl...*“, meinte die Gruppe einerseits. Das Paradiesbild der Insel, auf dem der Großvater zurückbleibt, würde andererseits genügend Anlässe zum Theologisieren bilden, vielleicht vor allem für die 10-14Jährigen. Das wurde von der Gruppe als neue, reizvolle Aufgabe gesehen.

Als „*vielschichtig*“ wurde das Buch „Und was kommt nach Tausend“ empfunden. Doch die Vielschichtigkeit sei vielleicht auch wieder ein geeignetes Kriterium für das Theologisieren mit Kindern und Jugendlichen?

Viele Fragen blieben offen, was aber möglicher Weise dem Charakter des Theologisierens entspricht. „*Wir hätten den Workshop gerne länger gehabt*“, fasste es eine Teilnehmerin zusammen. „*und das ist doch wunderbar, wenn das von einem Workshop übrigbleibt.*“

5. Zusammenfassung

Auch wenn der Zugang der Teilnehmerinnen zu den Bilderbüchern spontan-intuitiv war, so spielten die Kriterien immer wieder eine Rolle. Sie schärften den Blick und machten die Gedanken für neue Zugänge frei, wie aus dem Vorherigen sichtbar wird. Kinderbücher über den Tod zur Sprache bringen und sie frag-würdig zu machen, auch wenn die Lösungsstrategien nicht explizit religiös sind, scheint für die Gruppe zu einer lohnenden Aufgabe geworden zu sein. Vielschichtigkeit und Sperrigkeit werden begrüßt und zu viel an Harmonie würde das theologische Gespräch nicht in Fluss bringen.

Ein lohnender Vormittag, bei dem gemeinsam viel und neu gelernt wurde – und dabei schließe ich mich keineswegs aus!

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Gerhard Büttner

Familienkonstellation und Gottesbild im Kinder- und Jugendbuch

1. Was ist ein „religiöses Kinder- oder Jugendbuch“?

Wer bei Autorinnen wie Johanna Spyri oder Astrid Lindgren blättert, findet immer wieder Szenen, in denen Religion eine Rolle spielt, ohne dass man hier von Spezialistinnen für dieses Genre sprechen würde. Religion gehörte in der einen oder anderen Weise zum Alltag der beschriebenen Kinderwelt. Heute ist das insofern anders, als eine Differenzierung im Buchmarkt eingetreten ist. Wer als Autor/in religiöse Themen aufgreift, der tut dies oft, weil ein entsprechender Verlag ihn dazu speziell aufgefordert hat. Dabei gibt es viele Versionen dessen, was mit Religion gemeint sein kann.²⁶⁰ Gemeinsam ist diesen Büchern – gerade auch, wenn sie eine interreligiöse Perspektive vertreten –, dass sich in irgendeiner Weise die Gottesfrage stellt. Diese bildet insofern zurecht einen Fixpunkt, als sie nach bekannten Definitionen eine Art letzten Grund darstellt, der sich an irgend welchen numinosen Erfahrungen festmachen lässt, die aber auch anschlussfähig ist an die Konkretionen einer bestimmten Religion.

Nun gehört es von Epikur bis zu den Religionskritikern des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts zu den Binsenweisheiten, dass es Entsprechungen gibt zwischen den Gottesvorstellungen und bestimmten Erfahrungen in der eigenen Lebenswelt. Eine prominente Rolle spielen hier die Images der Elternfiguren – traditionell besonders das Vaterbild. Man geht wohl zu Recht davon aus, dass die Genese eines bestimmten Gottesbildes beim Kind nicht „naturwüchsig“ geschieht, sondern im Rahmen der Sozialisation vermittelt wird, aber eben auch mehr oder weniger intentional geschieht. Kinderbücher spielen dabei insoweit eine Rolle, als sie Spielmaterial für die kindliche Phantasie bieten, für die Eltern aber oft auch Orientierungen darstellen, von denen sie sich beim Gespräch mit den Kindern gern leiten lassen. Insofern

²⁶⁰ Büttner (2018).

könnte man fragen, welche Gottesbilder vermitteln Kinderbücher? Doch diese Fragestellung ist zu einseitig. Die Autor/innen dieser Bücher arbeiten ja auch nicht im luftleeren Raum, sondern ihre Figuren entstammen zumindest in einem weiteren Sinne deren Erfahrungsraum. Insofern lassen sich diese Bücher auch als Diagnosemittel nehmen, anhand dessen erschlossen werden kann, welche Trends in einer bestimmten Lebenswelt in dieser Frage erkennbar sind. So kann ich in diesem Kontext meine Untersuchungsfrage genauer bestimmen: Gibt es einen Zusammenhang zwischen dem Gottesbild, wie es sich in den Kinder- und Jugendbüchern zeigt und der dort erkennbaren Familienkonstellation?

2. Elternbild und Gottesbild

Betrachtet man die einschlägige Forschung, dann war man in der Religionspsychologie daran interessiert, herauszufinden, ob die etwa von Sigmund Freud prominent vertretene Vorstellung vom Zusammenhang von Vaterbild und Gottesbild universell so stimmt. Es gab immerhin auch die Idee, dass das Mutterbild u. U. eine entscheidendere Rolle spielen könnte. Eine gewisse Klärung lässt sich der umfassenden vergleichenden Studie von Vergote und Tamayo entnehmen. Diese zeigt, dass Elemente beider Elternimages ins Gottesbild eingehen:²⁶¹

„The representation of God integrates to a high degree the two parental dimensions, and is therefore more complex than the father figure. In a certain way the representation of God is more maternal than paternal because it stresses more the maternal qualities than the paternal.“

Friedrich Schweitzer macht deutlich, dass diese Images zwar notwendig sind, ihre spezifische Ausprägung aber nicht nur von den realen Eltern abhängig ist, sondern auch geprägt ist von herrschenden Idealen und dem Einfluss spezifischer religiöser Traditionen.²⁶² Wir wissen aus einer Studie von Simone de Roos, dass bei nichtreligiösen Eltern das Gottesbild der Erzieherinnen im Kindergarten Einfluss auf das der Kinder hat.²⁶³ Es wäre von daher interessant, einen Blick auf die Auswirkungen

²⁶¹ Vergote (1981), 206.

²⁶² Schweitzer, (1984), 93f.

²⁶³ De Roos (2005).

von sog. Patchwork-Familien für die religiöse Erziehung zu erhalten. Dabei kommt auch dort Religion wohl nur in dem Maße vor, in dem dies in der Alltagskommunikation der Partner eine Rolle spielt. Als mögliche Informationsquelle ziehe ich wie gesagt Kinderbücher heran.

3. Fragmentarische Wirklichkeit im Kinderbuch

In ihrem Überblick über die neueren Kinderbücher in Westeuropa kommt Rita Ghesquière zu der Einsicht, dass diese inzwischen keinen kindlichen Schonraum mehr repräsentieren, sondern ein Spiegel all dessen sind, was heutigen Kindern alles zustoßen kann.²⁶⁴ Insofern kann uns ein Blick in solche Kinderbücher auch sensibel dafür machen, in welchem (familiären) Kontext sich für die Heranwachsenden die Gottesfrage stellt. Nun hält sich die Anzahl der Kinderbücher, die religiöse Fragen thematisieren, in Grenzen. Trotzdem ist meine Auswahl eher zufällig. Sie ist das Resultat einer Recherche zu einem Seminar zum Thema und basiert auch auf Tipps befreundeter Kolleg/innen.²⁶⁵ Für mich – das sei vorweg genommen – war es dann aber doch erstaunlich, wie sehr sich die Bücher ganz unterschiedlicher Autoren dann thematisch ähnelten. Ich referiere den Inhalt von drei Büchern und diskutiere dann, welche Muster zum Zusammenhang von Familie und Gottesvorstellung sich hier zeigen.

Die deutsche Kinderbuchautorin Gudrun Pausewang²⁶⁶, mit ihren internationalen Bestsellern zur Bedrohung durch Krieg und nuklearer Verseuchung, hat ein Kinderbuch zur Theodizeethematik geschrieben „Ich geb dir noch eine Chance Gott!“.²⁶⁷

Die achtjährige Nina sieht, wie vor ihren Augen eine Katzenmutter überfahren wird und ein Junges neben der sterbenden Mutter sitzt. Nina nimmt sich des Tierchens an, doch ihre alleinerziehende Mutter erklärt ihr, dass Nina die Katze nicht nach Hause bringen darf. Daraufhin irrt das kleine Mädchen mit seiner Katze durch die Großstadt. Es begegnet den verschiedensten Personen und gerät auch in Gefahren

²⁶⁴ Ghesquière, R. (2010), 402f.

²⁶⁵ Zwei der von mir ausgewählten Bücher finden sich besprochen in Zimmermann (2012): (Pausewang 40ff und Thiel 88ff).

²⁶⁶ Zu Pausewang: Jahnke (2010) und Tebbutt (1994).

²⁶⁷ Pausewang, G. (1999).

u.a. durch einen Mann, der offenbar das Mädchen missbrauchen möchte. Doch am Ende der Nacht trifft es auf einen jungen Mann, den Sprayer, mit dem es sein Problem besprechen kann und der ihm mitteilt, dass seine Mutter – auch mit Katze – sehnlich auf sie wartet.

In diese Handlung versponnen ist Ninas Frage nach Gott und wie er all die schlimmen Dinge zulassen kann. Ninas Gottesbild aus einer Kinderbibel mit einer anthropomorphen Gestalt wird von ihr nach der Episode mit der sterbenden Katzenmutter abgetan – wie Osterhase und Weihnachtsmann. Sie ist fasziniert von einem Spraybild, das sie für einen „Schweinegott“ hält. Dieses Zutrauen entwickelt sich zusammen mit ihrer Fürsorge für das Katzenkind. Doch im Laufe des Tages und der Nacht wird auch dieses Bild brüchig, zumal sie auch von anderen Göttern (im Plural) hört. Doch im Gespräch mit dem Sprayer eröffnet sich ihr ein neues Bild von Gott, auch wenn dieses viele Fragen, etwa das nach der Gerechtigkeit, nicht beantwortet. Der Sprayer versucht dann ein entsprechendes Bild an eine Wand zu malen. Gleichzeitig erfährt Nina aber auch, dass der Sprayer sie auffängt, als sie von der Friedhofsmauer herunter zu fallen droht, auf die sie geklettert sind. Schließlich weist der Sprayer sie zurück zu ihrer wartenden Mutter.

So gesehen lässt sich noch eine dritte Ebene in der Erzählung einzeichnen – die der *providentia dei*. D.h., dass jenseits der Schrecknisse und Bedrohungen, die Nina begegnen, auch die Bewahrung und Fürsorge Gottes erkennbar ist.

Stellt man unsere Fragestellung in Rechnung, dann fällt auf, dass auf der familialen Ebene die Rolle des Vaters nicht besetzt ist. Sie wird – zumindest episodisch – eingenommen von der Gestalt des jungen Mannes mit den Spraydosen. Schon bevor das Mädchen ihn persönlich kennt, ist sie von dessen Bildern beeindruckt, die ihre Phantasie beflügeln. Nicht zufällig ist es er, der ihr dazu verhilft, ein neues Gottesbild zu finden – auch wenn sie nicht alles versteht, was der Sprayer ihr zu seinem neuen Bild erklärt. Der beiläufig erzählte Vertrauenssprung ist eine häufig gebrauchte Metapher für das Vertrauen in den väterlichen Gott der Bibel. Wir sehen, dies sei im Vorgriff schon gesagt, dass die Autorinnen der Kinderbücher gerade im Kontext nichtklassischer Familienkonstellationen männlichen Figuren im Hinblick auf Glaubensfragen einiges zutrauen.

Das zweite Buch stammt von der ebenfalls bekannten Kinderbuchautorin Irma Krauß.²⁶⁸ Auch bei „Gott zieht um“ geht es vordergründig um die Theodizeethematik.²⁶⁹

Der Viertklässler Jörg und sein Bruder, der Erstklässler Märten leben mit ihrer Mutter in einer Kleinstadt. Fast zeitgleich mit der Geburt Märtens verunglückt der Vater tödlich. Dieses Ereignis führte dazu, dass das Thema „Gott“ in der Familie tabuisiert ist. Nun stoßen die beiden Kinder durch ihre Fragen an dieses Tabu. Der kleine Märten wird durch den Bau einer Moschee neben seinem Schulweg auf die Idee gebracht, dass Gott wohl umziehe, wenn er, der nach seiner Meinung bisher in der Kirche wohnte, jetzt ein neues Haus bekommt. Jörg hingegen, der, wie er herausbekommt, früher getauft worden und mit dem auch gebetet worden war, ringt mit der Frage nach der Existenz Gottes. Beide Kinder gehören zu den wenigen nicht-muslimischen Kindern, die statt des Religionsunterrichts den Ethikunterricht besuchen. Diesen erteilt Oliver, der als Schwangerschaftsvertretung für kürzere Zeit an der Schule der beiden Brüder unterrichtet. Jörg freundet sich mit Oliver an, mit dem er seine Fragen endlich besprechen kann. Oliver selbst ist – ähnlich wie der Sprayer bei Pausewang – ein Gottsucher und fühlt sich durch die Fragen Jörgs selbst herausgefordert. Am Ende kommt Oliver zum gemeinsamen Spieleabend in die Familie der beiden Jungen. Die Mutter erkennt, dass sie durch ihre durch die Trauer bestimmte Haltung ihre Kinder blockiert und öffnet sich der neuen Situation. Für Jörg wird die Erfahrung mit Oliver und die Veränderung in seiner Familie selbst zum Gottesbeweis.

Wieder begegnen wir hier einer unvollständigen Familie, die durch ein schlimmes Ereignis in ihrem Vertrauen zu Gott beeinträchtigt ist. Im Gegensatz der ersten Geschichte sind hier die Rollen vertauscht: die Mutter ist durch den Tod ihres Mannes im Hinblick auf das Thema Religion blockiert. Es sind die Kinder, die durch ihr naives (Märten) oder reflektiertes (Jörg) Fragen die Blockade der Mutter lösen können. Wieder ist es eine männliche Gestalt von Außerhalb, die Nachdenken und Vertrauen in die Familie zurückbringt, wobei Oliver in dieser Geschichte wie ein Kata-

²⁶⁸ Staudigl (2006), 133; Büttner (2018), 47.

²⁶⁹ Krauß (2005).

lysator wirkt. Jörgs Evidenzerfahrung im Hinblick auf Gott macht ihm (und den Leser/innen) deutlich, dass das Reflektieren in dieser Frage, wozu ihm Oliver hilft, zwar wichtig ist, Glaube aber auf andere Weise existentiell erfahrbar wird.

Das dritte hier vorgestellte Buch fällt insofern etwas aus der Reihe, als es der literarische Erstling der Pfarrerin Christiane Thiel ist.²⁷⁰ Die Geschichte „Das Jahr, in dem ich 13 ½ war“²⁷¹ spielt in der extrem säkularisierten Stadt Leipzig.

Nach dem Tod ihres Vaters hat die Mutter der dreizehnjährigen Ich-Erzählerin Tine sich mitsamt ihrer Familie von Glauben entfernt. Nach der Trennung der Mutter von ihrem Mann lebt diese mit ihren beiden Töchtern in Leipzig. Diese Situation wird nun dadurch gestört, dass die Mutter einen neuen Partner hat und die beiden ein Kind bekommen. Tine schätzt den neuen Vater sehr und freut sich auch über das neue Geschwister. Zur großen Irritation für die pubertierende Tine wird die Tatsache, dass der neue Stiefvater Carsten gläubig ist und gerne möchte, dass seine neue Tochter getauft wird. Für Tine ist diese Abweichung von der ihr geläufigen *Normalität* *peinlich*. Doch durch die freundlichen Impulse Carstens und vor allem die von dessen Eltern, ihren „neuen Großeltern“, nähert sich Tine im Laufe des Buches immer mehr dem christlichen Glauben an. Parallel dazu entwickelt sich eine für Tine sehr belastende Situation mit einer Freundin, die sie massiv unter Druck setzt. Zu Tines Überraschung bietet hier ein Beichtgespräch bei der Pfarrerin einen Ausweg. So finden am Ende beide Erzählstränge zusammen.

Auch dieses Buch präsentiert eine Parallelentwicklung von Prozessen in der Familie und den Glaubensvorstellungen der Protagonistin. Der neue Vater und seine Eltern werden zu Impulsgebern für die Glaubensentwicklung bei Tine.

²⁷⁰ Zu den Details Zimmermann (2012), 88ff.

²⁷¹ Thiel (2007).

4. Ein zusammenfassendes Schaubild

Im folgenden Schaubild möchte ich die obigen Überlegungen nochmals zusammenfassen.

Buch	Familienkonstellation	Theodizee-Anlass	Veränderte Familienkonstellation	Inhaltlicher Impuls	Schlüsselszene
Pausewang	Alleinerziehende Mutter	Tod der Katzenmutter	„Sprayer“ als hilfreiche männliche Figur	Sprayer erklärt sein „neues Gottesbild“	Vertrauenssprung – Mutter lenkt ein
Krauß	Alleinerziehende Mutter	Tod d. Ehemanns / Vaters	Ethiklehrer als „Freund“	Gottesbild des Ethiklehrers	Jörigs „Gotteserfahrung“
Thiel	Neuer „Vater“	Tod der Eltern der Mutter	Neuer Vater ist Christ	„Vertrauenstheologie“ der Großeltern	Gespräch zur Taufe

Interessant ist, in welchem Maße bereits bei Kindern hier eine *individualisierte* Religion gezeichnet wird. Bestimmend ist nicht zuletzt der Beziehungsaspekt. Man ist bereit, eine neue religiöse Orientierung dann vorzunehmen, wenn diese durch entsprechende Erwachsene glaubwürdig verbürgt werden kann.²⁷² Letzteres kann - so die Botschaft der Bücher – durch professionelle „Theologen“ oder „Philosophen“ geschehen, aber auch durch jedes überzeugende Familienmitglied.

²⁷² Dazu eindrücklich Harris (2015).

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