God is: children's Bibles and Bible storybooks' presentation of religious values[1]

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> Biblical and religious language, which is intrinsically certitudinal and confessional, relates to the concrete, experiential relationships of the community of faith and expresses their way of seeing reality. In these utterances or statements, metaphors mediate the construction of a religious perspective on the world. (Botha, 2007:228.)[2]

Abstract

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This article considers children's Bibles and Bible storybooks as vehicles for the transfer of God concepts from one generation to the next – as God is considered central to the portrayal of the

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2 This article is dedicated to Elaine Botha in recognition of her invaluable contribution to South African scholarship. It is also in grateful tribute to her example as a first generation female scholar at a time of representational inequality in academia compounded by political isolation, for not bowing to societal dictates in lieu of pursuing professional excellence, for her scholarly ethos, for her wise council, and for her friendship.

confessional attributes of the religious collective. It identifies both the commercial and religious imperatives controlling the prevailing attributes assigned as characteristic of the divine. The presentation of the nature of God is found to align with the commercial target audience for children's Bibles: mothers and female caregivers who purchase the books on behalf of their charges and read and interpret the Bibles to the child. But it also coincides with the preferred attributes associated with a supernatural being by young children. Ultimately, God is found to be consistently portrayed by means of maternal attributes of love, protection and care in contrast to the more ambivalent portrayal of God in the adult biblical text.

Opsomming

God is: Kinderbybels en Bybelstorieboeke se uitbeelding van godsdienstige waardes

Hierdie artikel ondersoek Kinderbybels en Bybelstorieboeke as 'n manier waarop begrippe van God van een geslag na die volgende oorgedra word, aangesien God as sentraal in die uitbeelding van die godsdienstige waardes van die religieuse kollektief beskou kan word. Dit identifiseer sowel die kommersiële as die godsdienstige imperatiewe wat beheer uitoefen oor die bestaande kenmerke wat as tipiese karakteristieke eienskappe van die goddelike uitgebeeld word. Die bevinding is dat hierdie eienskappe goed in pas is met die kommersiële teikengehoor vir Kinderbybels: moeders en vroulike versorgers wat hierdie boeke namens kinders koop en dit vir die kind lees en interpreteer. Hierdie eienskappe kom egter ook ooreen met die voorkeureienskappe wat jong kinders met 'n bonatuurlike wese assosieer. Ten slotte word bevind dat God konsekwent uitgebeeld word in terme van moederlike eienskappe soos liefde, beskerming en sorg. Dit strook nie noodwendig met die ambivalente uitbeelding van God in die volwasse teks nie.

1. Introduction

Children's Bibles are valued by parents and religious functionaries in the Judaeo-Christian tradition as agency for the transmission and inculcation of societal values in young children (cf. Bottigheimer, 1996; Schine Gold, 2004). As such the depiction of the primary character, God in children's Bibles, presents an invaluable means of evaluating what a religious collective considers worthy for the cross-generational transfer of societal and religious values. This is largely due to the free reign given to authors of children's Bibles to contextualise and adapt the biblical text in the interests of making it child friendly. And this despite the fact that children's Bibles are at most marginally

recognised within the broader system of religious and academic discourse. As staple of religious bookshops and increasingly of the commercial publishing industry (cf. Elinsky, 2005; Badzinski, 2008: 178-179), these purportedly faithful "retellings", "reworkings" or "translations" of the adult Bible have until lately largely escaped the close scrutiny of male dominated academia. This happened to the extent that the late biblical scholar, Robert Carroll, could as recently as 1998 justifiably express horrified fascination upon encountering the wide selection and variety of children's Bibles in bookstores.

> Such a cornucopia of bibles left me gasping open-mouthed at the variety and inventiveness of the publishers. Here I must also confess to operating out of *ignorance reinforced by prejudice*. All my working adult life … I have tended to think of the Bible as 'an adult book written by adults for adults'. The notion of a 'Children's Bible' has always struck me as being an oxymoron or a curiously attentuated [*sic*] notion of what a bible might be. (Carroll, 1998:52.)

Carroll's astonishment and ultimately concern at the nature and variety of the selection of commercial children's Bibles on sale, speaks to the heart of the matter. The ongoing discourse is focused on the extreme reductionism favoured in the portrayal of the biblical narrative deemed appropriate in order to reproduce an adult religious text in child friendly format. In this genre the reduction of complex abstract concepts into simplistic moral object lessons is implied. It is often overtly expressed by means of the formulation of God concepts in the thematic classification of titles assigned by the author of the children's Bible or Bible storybook to categorise individual stories such as, for example, "God is the most powerful" (Exod. 4:1-5; 7:14-11:10, 14; Jos. 6:1-21; 10:1-13; 1 Kings 18:16-39), "God is our helper" (Gen. 41:39-43; Exod. 16:1-16; Judg. 16:23-30; 1 Kings 17:7-16; 1 Sam. 17:1-50; 2 Chron. 20:1-29), "God is our protector" (Gen. 19:4-16; Exod. 2:1-10, 12:1-30; Esther; Dan. 3; 6), "God is the great comforter" (Gen. 21:8-21; 1 Kings 19:1-18; 2 Kings 4:8-37; 5:1-15; 20:1-11; Job), and the ubiquitous "God is love" (1 Sam. 20; 2 Sam. 9; 2 Kings 2:1-11; 4:1-7; 1 Chron. 22:6-7; 2 Chron. 2-3; Ezek. 1:5-11) (cf. Larsen, 1995). These enhanced descriptive characteristics of the divine are repackaged in a commercial bid to appeal to a specific target audience: a conservative, predominantly protestant and female adult Christian readership (cf. Du Toit & Beard, 2007) who professes a tendency towards a belief in biblical literalism as equal to biblical inerrancy (cf. Park & Baker, 2007). This

readership represents the purchasers of such merchandise on behalf of the lap reader.[3]

However, as Botha's statement at the beginning of this article alludes, this representational trend for God in children's Bibles is not necessarily only commercially driven. It also speaks to an intrinsic tendency for religious language to veer towards the "certitudinal and confessional" in its articulation of the religious collective's expression of a religious belief system, values and norms, thus confirming Bottigheimer's (1996:71) important dictum for children's Bibles that historically, for the transfer of the biblical text to children, content follows context.

Biblical narrative is, therefore, subservient to the expression of religious values and social mores albeit by means of biblical derivation. The selection of themes and narratives deemed apt for the transfer of such religious meaning from one generation to the next is furthermore strongly influenced by the cultural context of the intended target audience. In this regard Botha (2007:228) states:

> Everyday religious metaphors such as the statement *The Lord is My Shepherd* are a way of looking at and being in the world. They are time- and history-bound and as such are very closely related to the system of categories and classifications characteristic of the specific culture. (Cf. also Ashton, 1993.)

Identifying the target audience and target culture for children's Bibles, however, is not necessarily a straightforward exercise and may prove misleading. Despite the evident simplified language, ample inclusion of pictures and educational aids (such as the proliferation of colour, flip-up covers, alphabet and numerical themes, etc.), children's Bibles are targeted first and foremost at an adult audience of religious and predominantly female caregivers (mothers, grandmothers, nannies and teachers) who buy books on behalf of the child. These books are designed to resonate most closely to the maternal religious value and belief system, expressed mainly by means of the characteristics of the God concept that would appeal to the female confessional target audience. In other words, children's Bibles' depiction of God as central to the narrative aligns

3 This study focuses on children seven years old and younger, still dependent or semi-dependent on the parent, grandparent, teacher, nanny or religious functionary for the reading and interpreting of the text. Hence the use of the term "lap reader" to emphasise the interdependent adult-child relationship required for the reading of children's Bibles at this age (cf. Oittinen, 2006).

primarily with the publisher's idea of the maternal perception of God within the religious belief and value system of the community. This partly explains the predominance of the domains of caring and protection associated with the maternal already evident in the examples listed above (Larsen, 1995; cf. also Tutu, 2010; Holmes, 2005; Maartens, 2004; Larsen, 2003; and Smit, 2002).[4] Oittinen (2006:36) confirms this for children's books in general.

> Children's books need to conform to adult tastes and likes and dislikes: to put it explicitly, the adults are the producers and the children the consumers of children's literature. … Even though translators need to translate for children, it is the adults who select the books that need to be translated; it is the adults who translate them and buy the translations for children. It is also the adults who usually read the books aloud.

The high level of contrivance in the abstraction of moral object lessons from the biblical narrative, is a further indication of the primary target audience of children's Bibles purportedly intended for toddlers and lap readers. Boyer and Walker (2000:141) state:

> It is only in the beginning of adolescence that children take Biblical stories as 'symbolic', not as literal accounts of physical events. In the same way, it is at that stage that they grasp complex aspects of Christian morality, for example, the idea that God is good to evil persons as well as good ones. Such studies … converge on a view of religious development that charts the gradual emergence of 'abstract' religion out of anthropomorphism and the development of a vision of religious messages as symbolic or inspiring rather than literal.

Making sense of the God concept in children's Bibles is therefore closely associated with making sense of a commercial perception of maternal attributes associated with western God concepts. In order to fully grasp the implications of this statement, background on the nature of children's Bibles and Bible storybooks is required.

4 The children's Bibles mentioned in this article all represent books available in commercial bookstores in South Africa since the commencement of a broader NRF Thuthuka project on children's Bibles in 2004. Therefore, although many of the children's Bibles are imports from the USA or the UK, for purposes of inclusion in this article, the books had to have been purchased in the commercial publishing trade in South Africa since 2004.

2. Translation or retelling: how to categorise the genre

The introduction to this article has already touched upon the multitudinal variations of presentation in the transfer of a text as ubiquitous as the Bible for the adult western canon to a different target system: young children. In his aforementioned study of the Bible as commodity, Carroll (1998:52) described the broad range of Bibles on offer:

> I was surprised, bemused, amazed and a little shaken by the sheer range of bibles for sale in these shops. Such amazement was especially generated by the sections devoted to children's bibles, where there appeared to be yet a further range of objects for sale.

Apart from the diverse format in which the children's versions of the adult Bible have been cloaked, the central quandary of the text remains: is it a translation or an adaptation, retelling or re-imagining of the biblical text? And should it matter? To offer a comparison from contemporary popular adult Christian literature (cf. Barrett, 2003; Mort, 2002:4-5), should the children's Bible and Bible storybook in its various guises resort under the juvenile equivalent of Francine Rivers novels based on a loose interpretation or "updating" of biblical books (cf. *Redeeming love* as update of the Book Hosea) or of biblical characters (cf. *A lineage of grace series* based on the female biblical characters Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, Ruth and Mary)? Or should these Bibles be categorised as "translations" of the adult Bible adapted only insofar it serves the purpose of suitability for a child audience, with the implied "authorship" or "inspiration" by the Divinity intact? Again the question looms: Why should it matter how they are categorised?

It matters because children's Bible authors are allowed unfettered control by the religious collective over the interpretation and adaptation of the adult biblical text in child appropriate format (cf. Du Toit, 2011). These are done by means of simplification, merging, the introduction of an intermediary source text, title insertion, the exclusion and sanitising of troubling texts, sentimentalisation and prettifying, pictures (including representations of the Deity), versification, the insertion of non-biblical tales and stories considered complementary moral object lessons to confirm, support, or extend the biblical narrative, and the disruption of canonical sequence. Such control over the interpretation of an otherwise rigidly confined canonical text is granted because of adherence to the prerequisites of didactics and comprehension that allows authors and translators of

children's literature to adapt and reinterpret the adult text with little restraint. Shavit (2006:26) explains about children's translation in general:

> … all these translational procedures are permitted only if conditioned by the translator's adherence to the following two principles on which translation for children is based: an adjustment of the text to make it appropriate and useful to the child, in accordance with what society regards (at a certain point in time) as educationally 'good for the child'; and an adjustment of plot, characterization, and language to prevailing society's perceptions of the child's ability to read and comprehend.

This broad and liberal adaptation of the adult text in children's Bibles (cf. Du Toit, 2011) fly in the face of a conservative religious tradition most often associated with the producers and consumers of children's Bibles. Such religious traditions hold the intact preservation of the existing status quo in high esteem. It also displays a strong preference for the transference of divine authority to translations of the biblical source text because of the constancy inherent to claims of faithfulness in translation associated with so-called word-for-word translation. And this, in turn, has important implications for the legitimacy of children's Bibles' authority within the religious tradition as vehicles for the presentation of a religious collective's values.[5] Yet, these agents for the transfer of societal mores require religious authority to sanction the very purpose of their existence. For this reason children's Bible authors prefer to present this genre as translations in order to claim the divine authority assigned by the tradition to the adult source text. But, more so, the metaphorical language in which the contemporary values are often imbued, aligns well with the act and nature of translation, as Tymoczko (2009:381-382) explains. Translation and metaphor, she argues, are two sides of the same coin, implying transfer, the very act the religious collective aims to achieve unbroken by means of transmission of the tradition to a younger generation.

> Implicit, then, in the English word *translation*, and as well in the words used for *translation* in the Romance languages deriving from the Latin root *trans-ducere*, 'to lead across', is the idea of a

5 Holmes (2005), for example, adapts the Bible to list these values in chapters illustrated by a selection of Bible and other stories: faith, love, joy, peace, truthfulness, self-control, obedience, kindness and sympathy, perseverance and diligence, courage, companionship and example, as well as respect and reverence.

> *between*, a *space*, that such an act of mediation will cross or bridge. In this historical sense of the word *translation*, there are similarities with the Greek concept of *metaphorein*, which gives the English term *metaphor* and which also involves the etymological sense of carrying across, namely a carrying across of an idea or relationship from one field of reference to another. Both terms – *translation* and *metaphor* – involve extensions of a known concept (specifically the physical act of carrying across) to new ideas, respectively the transportation of texts from one language to another and the transportation of an idea or relationship from one conceptual field to another. (Tymoczko (2009:381-382.)

Religious tradition relies on the claim to "faithful" translation as a means of establishing constancy and certainty in the expression of religion irrespective of contextual adaptation that might take place over generations. For the characterisation of the Deity, the history of this seemingly inherent contradiction is best described by Bottigheimer (1996:59-60):

> In children's Bibles God's nature undergoes profound shifts. … Divine immutability has been routinely claimed but it is its opposite, mutability, that reigns. Children themselves imagine God equally variously. … [Yet, in] pulpit parlance God is enduring and everlasting; eternal, infinite, and holy; absolute, pure, and perfect; omnipotent, omniscient, and immutable. The question remains, for children's Bibles, immutably *what*?

3. God concepts and religious values

The work of De Roos *et al.* (2001:19; 2004:519-520) emphasise the central importance of a concept of God in the formation of religious faith from childhood to adulthood. They define "God concept" as

> … the descriptive as well as the affective or evaluative aspect of the mental representation of God. The descriptive aspect alludes to information the child gives about what God is, what God looks like, where God is, what God can do, what God wants of people and what the child likes to say to God. The evaluative aspect is concerned with the positive or negative value a child assigns to God (i.e. a loving, comforting or a stern, rejecting God image). (De Roos *et al.*, 2001:20.)

From a questionnaire distributed to mothers, De Roos *et al.* (2004: 526) had identified preferred God concepts based on nurture and power as aligned to the maternal.

> *Loving God* (e.g., God loves people, God is patient, God is caring, God loves me even when I do something against His will, God is merciful; …), *Strict God* (e.g., God condemns, God punishes, God is strict, God controls me; …), and *Distant God* (e.g., God is aloof, God is not available, and God is available for believing people only; …).[6]

The authors found that young children's concepts of God were strongly influenced by the projection of these same maternal concepts of God. This may not necessarily come as a surprise and could have been predicted, especially for toddlers, where the mother is often the primary caregiver. Furthermore, it agrees with Bottigheimer's (1996:69) findings that since the eighteenth century the preferred portrayal of God is as "an ultimate parental and paternal principle".[7]

In summary, this results in a highly selective portrayal of the nature of God, as also pointed out by Schine Gold (2004:133) for Jewish children's Bibles, along with an interesting "reduced presence" of the Deity: "Connected with the circumscription of His role is an emphasis on certain aspects of the nature of God and the avoidance of others."

3.1 Character education

Schine Gold (2004:81) points to a development present in both American Christian and Jewish children's Bibles, which she attributes to public schooling for the emphasis on "character education" as contributory to the "highly moralized adaptations of biblical text into Bible story." Because of a prevalent tendency towards homogenisation in the global output of children's Bibles (Du Toit, s.a.), the outcome is the same for South African children's Bibles. Along with the reduction in the multi-dimensional and often paradoxical portrayal of the nature of God alluded to in the previous section, this gave rise to a peculiar set of religious didactic material outside the parameters of children's "Bibles", but aimed at the same audience: adult

6 See De Roos *et al.* (2004) for an explanation on how the association between these divine attributes and the maternal was derived.

7 Bottigheimer (1996:59-69), in her history of the development of children's Bibles, uses this statement as bridge between the discussion of the "Character of God" and a chapter on "Parents and children". Although in the abovementioned statement she, therefore, emphasises the paternal qualities of the Deity, this should in the current context not detract from the parental characteristics shared by both maternal and paternal qualities of the Deity.

female caregivers as witnessed in the emphasis on the maternally aligned characteristics attributed to the Deity. Books such as Lois Rock's *Learning about God* (2006), Beverley Lewis' *What is God like?* (2010) and Jan Godfrey and Honor Ayres' *Who made the morning?* (2008) teach the young child, through the agency of the maternal adult reader of the text, the divine characteristics considered most important for transmission of religious mores. With the added implication, explicitly asserted by Rock (2006), that the entire Christian faith may be explained by means of an understanding of the attributes assigned to God in these books.

Considering the studies of De Roos *et al.* (2001; 2004), the following discussion sets out to discover whether the same God concepts based on nurture and power are to be identified in these contemporary reductions of religious instruction on the divine for lap readers.

Learning about God (Rock, 2006) is structured according to a set of twelve questions discussed and brightly illustrated to tell the child reader "about God". Essential to this portrayal is the faith statement which follows the intimation that the entire book is based on the Bible, thus assigning authority to the present text: "We also believe that God is our friend today. We believe God is close to us and helps us" (Rock, 2006). On the last page of *Learning about God*, answers to each of the corresponding questions are provided by the author. The agenda of the text is straightforward. It is a didactic text with strong confessional and persuasive leanings intended to educate the young child, through a combination of entertainment and the transfer of religious information. The questions and corresponding answers may be listed under the overarching question posed as introduction to the book: "Who is God?" What follows is a portrayal of the Divinity posed as twelve questions formulated in typically childlike fashion.

Table 1

1. How old is God?	Christians believe that God is the One who is for ever, the One who gave this world its beginning. *God concept:* constancy, creator, power/mastery over creation
2. Does God like the world?	Christians believe that God loves the world and takes care of it. *God concept:* care, love

3. Has God noticed the bad things in the world?	Christians believe that God knows all about the bad things in the world that make people sad. *God concept:* power – omniscience
4. Can't God put the world right?	Christians believe that God has done everything to make friends with people. *God concept:* approachability
5. What does God look like?	In the Bible, Christians find words that help describe God: God is like a loving mother; God is a father in heaven; God is love. *God concept:* love, parent (mother and father)
6. Where does God live?	Christians believe that God is everywhere and always with them. *God concept:* power – protector & omnipotent
7. What does God do?	Christians believe that God takes care of everything. *God concept:* protection
8. Does God watch everything people do?	Christians believe that God watches over them with love. *God concept:* parent
9. Does God take sides?	Christians believe that God cares for everyone, especially those with no one else to help them. *God concept:* protector of the weak
10. Can people talk to God?	Christians believe that God listens to their prayers. *God concept:* parent
11. Does God speak to people?	Christians believe that God speaks to people in many different ways. *God concept:* communicator
12. What will happen to God in the end?	Christians believe that God is for always. *God concept:* omnipresence, stability, certainty

Both affective and descriptive elements are present in the God concepts represented here. In fact, in many respects the list reads

as an almost exact description of De Roos *et al*. (2001:20) definition as noted at the beginning of section 3. The emphasis in the God concepts highlighted by Rock is clearly on nurture and power, as De Roos *et al.* (2004) found in their study of the influence of maternal denomination, God concepts, and child-rearing practices on young children's God concepts.

Lewis' *What is God like?* (2010) poses the attributes of God in the form of a first person account in which a child's perceptions of a parent (father) is projected onto the Divinity. The author, who introduces herself in the afterword as mother and grandmother, formulates the purpose of the book as a universal impetus: "We want our children to know and love our great and all-powerful God, but how do we effectively teach them about someone we cannot see?" This quandary is addressed with the response: "Our loving God can be seen in His magnificent creation, in the tender and unconditional love of parent to child …". Again the Bible is called upon as "ultimate source of information about God", thus claiming authority for the present portrayal of the Divinity as parent through its purported adherence to the Bible. This is reinforced by the insertion by the author of an appropriate quote from the Bible at the bottom of each page of text. Each of these quotes refers to particular God concepts and ties the narrative to the biblical text: confirmation of monotheism and God's paternal attributes (1 Cor. 8:6), God's love and the faith community's adoption as children of God (1 John 3:1), God's loving care (Matt. 10:29-31), God's omniscience (Ps. 139:1-2, 4), and so forth.

Godfrey and Ayres' *Who made the morning?* (2008) is a story about a small bird who asks the question: "Who is God?" The bird poses this question by means of a journey that involves a range of animals to explain who made the beautiful morning. After a scary encounter with an eagle and a storm, the bird falls asleep tired, disoriented and lost and has a dream: "She dreamed that God the maker of all the world was holding her ever so gently in his hands. She felt happy. She felt safe." (Godfrey & Ayres, 2008:23.) When asked to explain God to her peers, the little bird, a stand-in for the child audience, replies: "'God is stronger than the wind, and he's brighter than the sun,' said Little Brown Bird. 'He's greater than the eagle and the storm, and he has brought me home'" (Godfrey & Ayres, 2008:28).

4. Conclusion

The quandary posed by the uniform portrayal of God in terms of the maternal attributes identified above, is that this does not accurately

reflect the multiplicity of portrayal of the Deity in the biblical narrative on which children's Bibles are supposedly faithfully based. As Bottigheimer (1996:64-65) explains:

> The canonical Bible, which purportedly provides the textual fundament for all children's Bible assertions about the unitary character of God, embarrassingly contradicts God's declared character, because of the many guises in which God appears there.

In her discussion of the changing portrayal of God in children's Bibles from the invention of the printing press, Bottigheimer explains how certain attributes of the Divinity evident in the biblical narrative falls out of fashion according to the contemporary demands of the religious collective. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century portrayal of God is a "violently wrathful being" with a righteously fierce temper. The angry God motif remained present in some children's Bible traditions up to the nineteenth century (Bottigheimer, 1996:60-61), "but in general God's anger was gradually edited out of children's Bibles all over Europe in the course of the eighteenth century" (Bottigheimer, 1996:61). Under the influence of the church and the educational ideas of John Locke, among others, a concomitant "expurgation" of the biblical narrative presented to children started to take place, resulting in a one-dimensional portrayal of the Divinity in terms of the ultimate Good. God became wise rather than vengeful, forgiving rather than retributive, and ultimately uniformly good.

This uniform portrayal fits religious tradition's confessional tendency towards certitude and constancy, as expressed by Botha (2007), but also conforms to a commercial demand towards the homogenisation of the target audience, irrespective of cultural specificity. Hence the marketing of children's Bibles in South Africa, originating in the United States and the United Kingdom, with little to no adaptation to the unique cultural and linguistic landscape of the new target audience (cf. Du Toit & Beard, 2007; Du Toit, s.a.).

In the literature little conscious acknowledgment of this general trend towards globalised homogenisation of both the portrayal of God and the selective presentation of the Bible to children, whether for moral or commercial reasons, is to be found. Yet, some resistance to selective and simplified children's Bibles does exist as counter. These "children's" Bibles contain the entire, unabridged translation of the adult Bible. The cover, and even sometimes the text, is often richly illustrated to appeal to a child audience or an adult's perception of what would appeal to a child audience, hence confirming the com-

mercial success of the children's Bibles these products are intended to counter. From the outside it is often difficult to distinguish the one version of children's Bible from the other. A good example, within the South African context, is the 1983 Afrikaans translation of the Bible in an attractive purple cover with a depiction of Jesus bending down to a child with a basket with loaves and fishes, *Bybel vir kinders: volledige 1983-vertaling* (2005). This depiction could easily have been found on any number of children's Bibles with not distinguishing feature to indicate that the present Bible would differ in any respect from an entire genre of children's Bibles and storybooks. The foreword to the reader of the Bible is taken *in toto* from the adult translation and does not mention the fact that the current publication targets a juvenile audience. The back cover indicates that the single nod to a change of communicative register from adult to child, is the inclusion of a number of colour pictures in the text to "keep young readers interested". The age of the readers are not specified, but as mention is made of the fact that the intention is for the parent to read the text *with* the child, the assumption is that this Bible is aimed for all children irrespective of their age.[8] The publisher continues to explain the purpose of the accompanying pictures:

> Op elke kleurprent is 'n verwysing na 'n Bybelteks wat die kind self kan gaan lees. So word kinders van jongs af geleer om gemaklik met die Bybel om te gaan en raak hulle vertroud met die inhoud en taalgebruik van die Bybel. (*Bybel vir kinders: volledige 1983-vertaling*, 2005.)
>
> *On each colour picture a reference to a biblical text is made which the child may look up and read. Thus children are taught from a young age to comfortably use the Bible. They are taught to become familiar with the content and language of the Bible.* (Translation – JSdT.)

It may, therefore, be safe to infer that the heart of the resistance these Bibles pose to the genre of children's Bibles, is to be found in a concern with the adaptation of content and language between

8 *Baby's First Bible* (1982) is an excellent example of the confusion of the target audience and the age of the supposed reader of the text. This Bible is an unabridged publication of the King James Version presented with a cover with a baby duck (i.e. no biblical reference) and childlike lettering in pastel colours. From the outside this Bible is yet again indistinguishable from the children's Bibles it is meant to counter. However, it would be impossible to expect a baby to read the unabridged adult translation of the Bible and the intention of an adult intermediary is therefore clear: the publisher's intent is for the parents to read this version to the child from birth.

adult and child version found in children's Bibles. Also, it is significant to note the underlying concern that children's Bibles, with their selective presentation of the adult Bible, may not prove the most appropriate vehicle of introduction to the adult text in later years.

Despite examples such as *Bybel vir Kinders* (2005; cf. also e.g. *Holy Bible: international children's Bible*, 1991; *Nelson's KidsBible.com*, 2001), the trend towards homogenisation still predominates in children's Bibles and the onesided portrayal of the God concept is most telling in this regard. This state of affairs, whether motivated by commerce or religion, leaves the scholar of the adult biblical text ill at ease, as is evident from Carroll's concerns: the reduction of the God concept to the maternal attributes considered associatively attractive to the target consumer, serves a unique purpose also as contributing to the uniform perception of God and Judaeo-Christian religion by the next generation (Carroll, 1998). The paradox is that these homogenising characteristics are unexceptionable. And, as much as they are reductionist in their cultural specificity, they are also universal in their portrayal of the social good. In this regard Botha (2007:228), therefore, also asserts for the biblical metaphor:

> [Metaphors] are time- and history-bound and as such are very closely related to the system of categories and classifications characteristic of the specific culture. And yet, exactly because a metaphorical expression is utilized to express this deep religious and certitudinal insight, it remains valid and true in vastly different settings.

But, in considering the close alignment between religious demands for certitude and commercial demands for homogenisation in presentation, Carroll's (1998:54) concern for the conservation of the complex beauty of the biblical source text rings true.

> This is not only the commodification of the Bible, it is also the infantilization of the community of Bible readers. The commodity culture renders the Bible infantile as well as a commodity. … No consumerist culture could dare to be without commodities directed towards meeting the imagined needs of children, so an endless production line of children's bibles (whether adult bibles stamped 'for children' or the genuine childish object itself) will provide more than adequate supplies for all the retail outlets for such objects.

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Key concepts:

children's Bibles
God concept
religious translation
religious values

Kernbegrippe:

godsdienstige vertaling
godsdienstige waardes
Kinderbybels
konsep/begrip van God