

A black and white photograph of two children on a pebbly shore looking at a large body of water under a cloudy sky. The child on the left is standing, wearing a dark hoodie and shorts. The child on the right is crouching, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and shorts, reaching towards the water. The background shows a large body of water, a forested hillside, and mountains in the distance under a cloudy sky.

**SITUATING PĀKEHĀ
CHILDREN AND
PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY
IN NEW ZEALAND'S
RELIGIOUS HISTORY**

HUGH MORRISON

In 1927 New Zealand Methodist children entered an essay writing competition on the “missionary lessons” to be found in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The winners were Wilson Milliken of Morrinsville and Enid Saunders of Lower Hutt.¹ Both idealized the Good Samaritan as a missionary exemplar who went “out to heathen lands to save the souls of the natives and heal their bodies”, and who gave aid to anyone needing assistance, “either material or spiritual” and “irrespective of colour and creed”. They suggested that children could emulate him through missionary giving or by finding other ways to support missionaries “whole-heartedly”, even if “we ourselves may not be able to enter the foreign field”. This was the winning factor. The editor noted that it was a “delightful discovery to find another lesson in the giving of our pence to help when others have the work in hand”. There was nothing remarkable here; children’s energies and money had long been the focus of religious organizations and denominations. What was noteworthy, however, was the fact that by the early twentieth century it was evidently normal in Protestant circles for children to have a public space and voice; to be heard, seen and constructively involved in religious life.

In this article I focus on Protestant settler children in New Zealand’s religious history. This group has received limited attention in recent decades. That stands strangely at odds with the burgeoning wider field of children’s and childhood history.² I suggest that we should know more about the Wilson Millikens and the Enid Saunders, both for their own sake and for their wider significance. “Children” and “age” are historical categories that require reclaiming, with respect to religious history, similar to what previously occurred for “women” and “gender”. I also suggest that we should think about their relationship to religion and society beyond the traditional emphasis on institutions or education. While undoubtedly important, these did not exclusively define their lives. The sources that tell us so much about children in Sunday schools and churches, for example, also provide other interesting angles by which to think about the historical complexities of children’s religious lives. The article aims to advance discussion in two ways: by evaluating the state of research for the New Zealand context and by focusing on three facets – material culture, emotions and children’s

1 *The Lotu*, August 1927, 13.

2 See for example Heidi Morrison, ed., *The Global History of Childhood Reader* (Routledge: London and New York, 2012).

memories – in order to broaden our understanding of children’s historical religious lives.

WIDER PERSPECTIVES

Children have been historically present in religious contexts, but this presence has been problematic, mediated mostly by adults or through adult-produced sources and often not noticed by historians. Nevertheless, in the history of Christianity at least children have always fulfilled complex roles as both subjects and active agents or as resisters to adult religious structures. In general terms there is still much to understand about how children have been shaped by or interacted with religion. Growing interest in these issues internationally coincides with a more general interest in the histories of childhood and of religion. Emphasis on the interrelationship between childhood and religion also reflects prevailing social and cultural trends, including a more child/adolescent-centred focus readily seen in our schools and media. The religious lives of children, both historical and contemporary, is a lively field of enquiry.³ At the same time it is appropriate

to note that the connection between religion and childhood is complex and not to be treated lightly. For many that connection is painful, borne out in the growing evidence for abuse by adults in religious settings and highlighted in both popular and academic media. For others the relationship is distant or benign, tagged to memories of Sunday school, church events, religious rites of passage or schooling. Yet as historian Sandy Brewer notes for the British context, the influence of childhood experiences of religion lives on “in the memories and attitudes of hundreds or thousands of former Sunday school scholars”.⁴

For the New Zealand context, where do we find children as religious subjects and participants? As the examples of Wilson Milliken and Enid Saunders suggest, children were evident in religious contexts from the beginning; although the subsequent history of colonialism indicates that their experiences have been differentiated by things like race or ethnicity. By and large, however,

3 Don S. Browning and Marcia Bunge, eds, *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 2–4; Susan Ridgely, “Children and Religion,” *Religion Compass* 6, no. 4 (2012): 236–48; Peter J. Hemming and Nicola Madge, “Researching Children, Youth and Religion: Identity, Complexity and Agency,” *Childhood* 19 (2012): 38–51.

4 Sandy Brewer, “From Darkest England to the Hope of the World: Protestant Pedagogy and the Visual Culture of the London Missionary Society,” *Material Religion* 1 no. 1 (2005): 119.

Sunday schools, day religious schools and “Bible in Schools” have dominated discussion of New Zealand children’s historical religion both in denominational histories and specialist studies.⁵ Very rarely do they appear in more personal form. Sisters Muriel and Dorothy Laishley, for example, feature in text and photographic form as a side bar in Laurie Barber’s essay on early-twentieth-century Presbyterianism. Muriel and Dorothy founded the Busy Bees, which later became a national Presbyterian children’s institution for missionary support. More typically, however, children appear anonymously in visual representations as children of clergy and missionaries or as regular participants in the ubiquitous Sunday school picnic.⁶

This is an impoverished view of children’s religious involvement; the realities were much broader and deserve to be known. In New Zealand’s history, Jeanine Graham notes that in fact “very few [colonial] children were devoid of contact with religion in some form or other” and indicates the ways in which religion was more broadly formative. For example: Sunday schools were widely enjoyed; religious instruction gave children “some sense of their own worth”, reassuring them that “they had both a place and a purpose in life”; a sense of “God’s immediacy” was a “powerful” social moderator; and children both absorbed and reflected prevailing socio-religious distinctions. Religious and other influences gave children social mobility and a sense of security reflected through “basic home rules”, “neighbourhood knowledge”, and “widespread social conformity to fundamental Christian values”.⁷

Thankfully we are now on track towards forming a much more satisfying and complex understanding of children’s religion. In this respect a 2006 survey, by Geoffrey Troughton, is significant for at least two reasons. First, he links children’s history to

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wider New Zealand history, both as a “window into social values” and because it “provides a rich source for investigation of broader social and religious patterns”.⁸ Second, he outlines a programme for further historical research. Troughton draws our attention to: the sites of and rationale for society’s investment in children’s religion; theological and cultural influences; children’s perceptions of, or responses to, religion; the role of emotions and gender; and the connections between later religious decline and social change. He concludes that “while many New Zealanders moved out of organized religion with the end of childhood, religion did not die – institutionally, or in individual experience”.⁹ He has since canvassed a range of important themes: the relationship of children’s religion to wider theological motifs (especially the image of Jesus in early modern New Zealand); the impact of changing cultural notions of childhood and of philosophical shifts in educational practice; and

children as consumers of popular religious material culture, especially print media.¹⁰ Troughton’s work highlights a range of issues or themes that are now being developed further,

including both my own research (see further) and recent notable writing by Grace Bateman and Peter Lineham.¹¹

At the same time an institutional perspective on settler society children’s religion should not be abandoned altogether. Homes, families, neighbourhoods, suburbs, churches and schools were all key sites of religious expression and identity formation; of which Sunday schools were arguably the most important in New Zealand and

5 See: Dennis McEldowney, ed., *Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840–1990* (Wellington: Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1990); Ian Breward, *A History of the Churches in Australasia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Allan K. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa* (Wellington: The New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 2004); Frank Hanson, *The Sunday School in New Zealand Methodism* (Auckland: The Wesley Historical Society, 1998); and David Keen, “Feeding the Lambs”: The Influence of Sunday Schools on the Socialization of Children in Otago and Southland, 1848–1901” (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1999).

6 Laurie Barber, “1901–1930: The Expanding Frontier,” in McEldowney, ed., *Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840–1990*, 75, 79, 94, 95.

7 Jeanine Graham, *My Brother and I: Glimpses of Childhood in Our Colonial Past* (Dunedin: Hocken Library, University of Otago, 1992), 13–15.

8 Geoffrey Troughton, “Religion, Churches and Childhood in New Zealand, c.1900–1940,” *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH) 40, no. 1 (2006): 39.

9 Ibid, 52.

10 Troughton, *New Zealand Jesus: Social and Religious Transformations of an Image, 1890–1940* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 151–90; “Religious Education and the Rise of Psychological Childhood in New Zealand”, *History of Education Review* 33, no. 2 (2004): 30–44; and “Making Kiwi Christians: New Zealand Children and Religion in the House of Reed,” in Hugh Morrison and Mary Clare Martin, eds, *Creating Religious Childhoods in Anglo-World and British Colonial Contexts, 1800–1950* (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming).

11 Grace Bateman, “Signs and Graces: Remembering Religion in Childhood in Southern Dunedin, 1920–1950” (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2014); Peter J. Lineham, “Brethren Childhood as a Historical Pattern,” in Neil T. R. Dickson and T. J. Marinello, eds, *Culture, Spirituality, and the Brethren* (Troon, Ayrshire: Brethren Archivists and Historians Network, 2014), 41–64.

beyond.¹² Institutions and institutional perspectives are important here for at least two reasons. First, children's religion is most easily explored within an institutional framework. Sunday schools were transplanted from their British homelands to the settler colonies, taking on a life of their own and engaging large numbers of colonial children. One nineteenth-century commentator speculated that all the world's Sunday school children could make a circle "that would go round one-third of the world".¹³ At the same time Sunday schools did not operate by themselves; they were complemented by an array of other groups that reinforced this institutionalization of children's religious lives. These included: Christian Endeavour; Bands of Hope and the Blue Ribbon Army; missionary support groups like the Presbyterian Busy Bees, Anglican Sowers Bands, and the Baptist Ropeholders' League; and the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Boys' Brigade and Girls' Life Brigade. Second, the archive of children's religion would be significantly impoverished without these institutions' records. Religious repositories are replete with attendance and financial records, annual reports, curricula and pedagogical materials, newsletters, magazines, missionary ephemera, camp and convention programmes, and photographs. On the one hand they enable us to reconstruct the structures, institutions, cultures, theologies, activities, attitudes and expectations that shaped children's lives. On the other hand they provide insights into how children participated in or responded to religious activities, and offer other ways of looking at children's historical religion. The rest of the article will now consider the possibilities of thinking about children's religion with respect to material culture, emotions, and memory.

RELIGION, MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE MIND

From the late nineteenth century onward settler children were catered for, and thus subscribed to, a growing body of religious literature; especially

12 Christine Weir, "Deeply Interested in These Children Whom You Have Not Seen: The Protestant Sunday School View of the Pacific, 1900–1940," *Journal of Pacific History* 48, no. 1 (2013): 43–62; John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1988), 58–9; Sarah Duff, *Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony: Dutch Reformed Church Evangelicalism and Colonial Childhood, 1860–1895* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 65–87; Robert Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 281–2.

13 *Supplement to the N.Z. Christian Record*, December 3, 1880, 1.

magazines. In turn religious literature was a prominent and important element of the wider emergence of juvenile consumer culture. From early on settler Protestant children were explicitly catered for in denominational literature and through imported British materials. By the early 1900s periodical material also existed in other forms, ranging from parish handouts to inserts within denominational newspapers and children's magazines. Presbyterian children first read the *New Zealand Missionary Record* (1882–1885) and later *The Break of Day* (1909), young Salvation Army folk *The Young Soldier* (1892), Methodist children *The Lotu* (1922) and Baptists *The Young Folks Missionary Messenger* (1904), while Anglican children devoured various British magazines and, later, dedicated pages in *The Reaper* [New Zealand Anglican Board of Missions].¹⁴ Alongside these were a host of other locally and internationally produced magazines – for example Barnados, temperance and missionary

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groups – with dedicated children's pages. All of these were eagerly awaited and quickly devoured items, still remembered warmly by older adults. They were part of a huge body of Western juvenile religious literature whose genealogy stretched back two centuries,¹⁵ and existed alongside a proliferation of similar local reading material in schools exemplified by the *School Journal* and a large number of readers.

These magazines were deliberately religious. As one Salvation Army editorial in an issue of *The Young Soldier* told children, the aim was "neither to amuse or instruct ... but to help in making every boy and girl who reads our pages a true fighting soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ".¹⁶ In effect, however, magazines served a range of purposes. They provided a readily accessible vehicle for children's words and thoughts, albeit edited and often "self-conscious and earnest",¹⁷ in which children "conversed" with adults. Their content provides a window into children's daily lives, what they valued or were concerned about, and what they were taught (morality, values, geography, history and theology). Magazines typically covered

14 Dates in brackets are for the first published issue of each magazine.

15 Hugh Morrison, "As the sunshine dispels the darkness of the night": Settler Protestant Children's Missionary Magazines in New Zealand c.1840–1940,' *NZJH* 49, no. 2 (2015): 136–59.

16 *The Young Soldier Official Gazette of the Junior Soldiers in Australasia*, January 23, 1892, 7.

17 Troughton, "Religion, Churches and Childhood," 50.

a breadth of material. Presbyterian readers in 1885 for example: learnt about missionary work amongst Māori, in Madras (India), New Guinea, and China; encountered exemplary biographical material about General Gordon and James Chalmers, read the final instalment of a story on “The victory of love”; were presented with a number of theological or morality pieces extracted from American or British magazines; and completed various puzzles and activities.¹⁸ At the same time local children were enculturated into a global community of young readers. Religious magazines became a transnational genre, embracing children across the Western world. As such they served as a means of circulating both information and values that any child might recognize, irrespective of their location.¹⁹

The notion of nineteenth-century juvenile popular fiction leaving a “sediment in the mind” of children²⁰ is useful when assessing the influence of magazine reading. In the New Zealand setting this mental or cultural “sediment” was subtly differentiated. First, magazines helped to forge a sense of geographical and denominational identity, thus reinforcing children’s religious loyalties. Again this dynamic was evident, for example, in the pages of the *New Zealand Missionary Record*.²¹ Here children read about places like India, China and Africa, though the greater focus was on the South West Pacific (particularly Presbyterian work in Vanuatu [New Hebrides] and the London Missionary Society in New Guinea) and on New Zealand (emphasizing mission to Māori, Chinese and remote rural communities).²² Some 25 years later the Presbyterian *Break of Day* aimed to give children information “about God’s work in the world to-day” (including “our own beautiful

New Zealand”) and to focus children’s attention among other things on “our missionaries”.²³ To grow up Presbyterian through the early 1900s thus involved internalizing links with the central North Island, Vanuatu, southern China and northern India. Similar links were made for children in other denominations’ literature: especially Anglicans with Melanesia, Baptists with East Bengal, and Methodists with the Solomon Islands.

Second, magazines complicated religious identity by encouraging a sometimes uncomfortable triple citizenship, wherein children were simultaneously enculturated into empire, nation and the kingdom of Christ. Writing to Methodist children in 1927 the Rev. Edgar Blamires underscored this tension when he noted that while “We British people have a king”, ideally children should be counted amongst “[t]hose who have His [Jesus’] spirit working within their hearts”.²⁴ His words reflected the strong imperial sentiments that suffused wider society.²⁵

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Imperial messages were at their loudest when monarchs died and especially during and after World War I. By 1930 the imperial message began to morph into a

more internationalized notion of citizenship, configured around the need for peace and mutual understanding. Yet the temporal empire was trumped by the spiritual one. Again Methodist children were reminded in 1937 that “with such a great Empire to reign over, their Majesties will need all the wisdom and patience that God can give to them”. Thus children should pray both that “Thou wilt bless [them] as rulers over a great Empire” and “may glory and power and dominion belong to Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords”.²⁶

It is unclear how children actually responded to the tensions inherent within this reading material, but we can at least speculate with respect to cultural attitudes and citizenship. Juvenile readers probably wrestled with a dualistic view of non-European peoples presented in the texts or images of both religious and secular pedagogical literature. The two were not dissimilar. In religious magazines, however, theological constructions of racial equality were often undermined by the inclusion of Western cultural imperatives. Material in the *Break of Day*,

18 The New Zealand Missionary Record [NZMR], May and April, 1885.

19 Hanna Acke, “Missionary Periodicals as a Genre: Models of Writing, Horizons of Expectation,” in Felicity Jensz and Hanna Acke, eds, *Missions and Media: The Politics of Missionary Periodicals in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 225; Isabel Hofmeyr, “Introduction: World Literature and the Imperial Textual Commons,” *English Studies in Africa* 57, no. 1 (2014): 1–8.

20 Jeffrey Richards, “Introduction,” in Jeffrey Richards, ed., *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 1–2.

21 For a close reading see Hugh Morrison, “The ‘Joy and Heroism of Doing Good’: The New Zealand Missionary Record and Late-Nineteenth-Century Protestant Children’s Missionary Support,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 28, no. 2 (2010): 158–82.

22 NZMR November 1882, 4–6, 7–8.

23 *The Break of Day*, February 1909, 1–3.

24 *The Lotu*, August 1927, 4–5.

25 Hugh Morrison, ‘Empire, Nation and Religion in Canadian and New Zealand Protestant Juvenile Missionary Periodicals, c.1890s–1930s,’ in Jensz and Acke, 19–38.

26 *The Lotu*, May 1937, 15.

for example, tended to represent Māori in terms of difference, disadvantage and as the recipients of Western/Christian progress.²⁷ In so doing it helped to create mental barriers between “them” and “us” for children, in ways that fed into a society-wide differentiation of Māori and Pākehā childhoods by 1900.²⁸ This was the kind of cultural “sediment” that accrued from such readings, indicating the links between religious products and both identity and attitudinal formation of children from childhood into adulthood.

RELIGION AND EMOTIONS

Children’s religion was not just a cerebral pursuit. It is perhaps significant that the material traces within institutional records contain many photographs or accounts of picnics, trips into the countryside, and of children simply having fun. For example, when the Anglican Melanesian Mission Bishop John Selwyn visited Wellington, in 1877, he took local children for a half-day voyage on the mission ship *Southern Cross*. The children reportedly “enjoyed themselves unspeakably” including having access to “an unlimited supply of buns, ginger beer, etc.”²⁹ In effect childhood religion was as much embodied or experiential as it was cerebral and it is perhaps significant that this element remains in the collective memories of adults in later life. Troughton astutely noted that “children imbibed feelings about religion as much as they absorbed information” and that the impact of those feelings spanned the spectrum from warmly to fearfully recalled memories.³⁰ Therefore emotional elements are important to consider, in terms of how children both engaged with or experienced religious life. Children’s sermons provide an interesting case in point. While hard to find in the archive, where they exist they offer an obvious window into the theological, moral and other educational messages addressed to children. The advice that adult preachers should have “a smile that children love”, and communicate “all the taste and feelings

27 Hugh Morrison, “Representations of Māori in Presbyterian Children’s Missionary Literature, 1909–1939,” in Hugh Morrison, Lachy Paterson, Brett Knowles and Murray Rae, eds, *Mana Maori and Christianity* (Wellington: Huia Publishers Ltd, 2012), 159–78.

28 Helen May, “Mapping Some Landscapes of Colonial-Global Childhood”, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2001): 5–20.

29 *The Evangelist*, March 1869, 13; *The New Zealand Church News*, May 1877, 91.

30 Troughton, “Religion, Churches and Childhood,” 50.

of their childhood years”,³¹ however, suggests that children’s sermons may also be a productive source for a broader examination of children’s emotions. Here I consider surviving sermons given by the Rev. Rutherford Waddell at Dunedin’s St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church 1906–1916 as an example.³²

Waddell’s children’s sermons were regularly replete with words and imagery, or characterized by stories, that were designed to evoke emotion. Comments in his sermon transcripts indicate that they were full sensory experiences. Waddell took an interactive approach to his talks: he used physical illustrations or props; he expected children to bring, open and use their Bibles; to take notes; to answer verbal questions; and to do “homework” by reading ahead or discussing at home. Over the ten years of extant sermons a wide range of emotions or emotional themes were canvassed, including: happiness and unhappiness, joy, laughter, love, kindness, sympathy and care, gratitude and thankfulness,

fear, frowning, smiling, and envy. Happiness, in particular, was a popular theme, reflecting a contemporary Western emphasis on happiness

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EMOTIONAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF CHILDREN’S SERMONS WAS COMPLEX.

as a defining emotion of modern childhood.³³ There were also strong links between emotions and stories drawn from nature. He often used the example of the snowdrop to talk about cheerfulness and optimism, the connection between purity and happiness, and between humility, service and personal strength. At the same time Waddell drew on emotional experiences common to childhood (such as nightmares) or used current events, especially through the years of World War I, to talk about heroism or to offer comfort. Many of these messages utilized stories or illustrations drawn from multiple sources: classical mythology, Romantic literature, historical events and personalities (especially British), and from both the Old and New Testaments, with a focus on Jesus Christ as the exemplar.

The relationship between the emotional and theological content of children’s sermons was complex. Sermons may have been perceived as an appropriate means for packaging theological messages, but theological imperatives did not

31 Rev. Edward Payson Hammond, *The Conversion of Children* (London: Morgan and Scott, n.d. [1870s]), 68.

32 All quotes in this section come from: Rev. Dr Rutherford Waddell, “Children’s Talks,” [typed transcripts], 1906–1916, Folder, Personal Collection, 394/8, DC1/4, Presbyterian Research Centre (PRC), Dunedin.

33 Peter N. Stearns, “Defining Happy Childhoods: Assessing a Recent Change,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no. 2 (2010): 165–86.

necessarily take precedence over emotional ones; the two dimensions were complementary. The emphasis on happiness in the wider culture, for example, was given distinctive Christian meaning. It was viewed as dispositional rather than whimsical or circumstantial, rooted in a relationship with Jesus Christ and marked by generosity of spirit to all humanity. Thus theology and emotions were mutually important for understanding Christian character. Theological/emotional narratives helped to define and buttress an “emotional community”³⁴ of adults and children marked by right emotions (and therefore behaviour). If learnt early these emotions and behaviours would last a lifetime. Waddell insisted that such communities should be motivated by Christian love (which was also seen as dispositional) and be places of emotional security. Furthermore, these communities potentially linked New Zealand children to Protestant children in other British or colonial settings through similar textual and didactic messages. Indeed there was a lot of congruence between children’s lives in both colonial and metropole settings. Emotional communities were thus both local and global, at least in theory, indicating ways in which various dimensions of childhood were simultaneously shaped and defined by extrinsic factors.³⁵

The sheer amount of emotion-related content in these sermons requires us to think carefully about its significance. Was there, for example, anything distinctive about the emotional language of churches and Sunday schools compared with other contemporary educational contexts? How closely, or otherwise, did Christian emotional rhetoric reflect changing concepts of modern childhood? To what extent were messages and emotional registers shaped by notions of race and gender? These questions await further answers. Yet, while it is not clear how children responded to or were impacted by these messages, it does seem evident that an emotional reading of children’s sermons can

34 For the concept of “emotional communities” see for example Jan Plamper, “The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 237–65.

35 See further: Stephanie Olsen, “Introduction,” in Stephanie Olsen, ed., *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6; and Hugh Morrison, “Settler Childhood, Protestant Christianity and Emotions in Colonial New Zealand, 1880s–1920s,” in Olsen, *Childhood, Youth and Emotions*, 88–9.

deepen our understanding of childhood formation, particularly in relation to its religious and theological dimensions.

REMEMBERING RELIGIOUS LIVES

Emotions, memory and experience are tightly linked, yet while “the emotional life of children has [become] the focus of ever-increasing levels of adult attention”, historians of childhood “have been able to make few authoritative pronouncements” about children’s “lived inner experiences”.³⁶ Understanding children’s lived religious experience remains an area of both challenge and opportunity. As the preceding discussion indicates, much of what passes for the “religious history” of children and childhood is circumscribed by print text sources produced by adults. While immensely valuable, they only provide access to part of the story and give an overly “institutionalized” perspective.

Troughton’s observations about the importance of feelings, derived from a mixture of denominational literature and personal reminiscences, indicate wider possibilities. Sources like letters, diaries, memoirs and oral history provide a balance, allowing us to better discern children’s perspectives.³⁷ The article finishes by considering the

intersections of children’s religious experience and memories for one specific group: the children of missionary families.

While large numbers of colonial Protestant children learnt about or supported the overseas activities of their respective churches or denominations, the children of missionary families experienced this activity first hand. Their lives were not necessarily any more “religious” than their peers at home, but were defined partly by the religious vocations of their parents. There is an emerging body of international literature on this topic but, while there are increasing numbers of published memoirs outlining New Zealand children’s

36 Nicole Eustace, “Emotional Life,” in Paula Fass, ed., *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004), 313.

37 For a helpful discussion of children’s religion that elaborates the usefulness of oral sources see Grace Bateman, “Signs and Graces: Children’s Experiences of Confirmation in New Zealand, 1920s–1950s” in Hugh Morrison and Mary Clare Martin, eds, *Creating Religious Childhoods in Anglo-World and British Colonial Contexts, 1800–1950* (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming).

experiences,³⁸ the historical research for the local context is only beginning. My own research focuses on Presbyterian missionary children from both New Zealand and Scottish missionary families between 1870 and 1940, who variously lived in such settings as Vanuatu, southern China, Manchuria, northern India, Japan and southern Africa. Institutional sources exist to varying extents, consisting especially of runs of letters from missionary parents, annual reports, financial registers and very occasionally family papers.³⁹ I have been able to supplement these institutional sources with reminiscences and memoirs, and a selection of interviews.

Institutional records provide the basis for demographic and thematic analysis. From these sources we can, for example, reconstruct most of the New Zealand Presbyterian missionary families in terms of size, child spacing, gender, education, illness and mortality. Thematically it is possible to identify a number of dominant narrative lines constructed around children by their parents. These typically included parental concerns to maintain domestic life and normality, to protect children from ill health, and to ensure the best access to education. A quip by one New Zealand missionary doctor that “bringing up children in India is no joke”⁴⁰ indicates that missionary children’s lives need to be read partly within the context of both parents’ emotions and of historical constructions of the family.

Personal narratives, while are not completely unproblematic, provide access to the children’s side of the story. We begin to get inside the experiences of living in another location or culture, of living or playing amongst other people, of going to school, of incessant travel, of separation, and of what was important from a child’s perspective. This last point is significant, as most interviewees remembered their lives somewhat differently from the ways that their parents thought or wrote. Parents were keen to maintain ordinary family life in what they saw as extraordinary circumstances. Children, however, often viewed this life in hindsight as very ordinary

38 John P. Crozier, *Will the Rajah say No?* (Nelson: J.P. Crozier, 1985); Chris Crump and Dorothy McKenzie, *Christina’s Story: Realities of Family Life on an Isolated Pacific Island, 1938–1956* (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 2000); Ian Gray, *We Travel Together: Lesley’s and Ian’s Journey* (Nelson: The Copy Press, 2014).

39 Institutional records are held by the Presbyterian Research Centre (PRC), Dunedin (for New Zealand Presbyterian children); and by the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (for Church of Scotland children).

40 Dr Adam Harvie to Rev. George Jupp, December 26, 1927, Staff File 6.1, GAO149 Punjab Mission, PRC.

and unremarkable, and had little perception until later that their lives might have been potentially perilous or in some cases exotic. Family, siblings, play and school were all central elements to their recollections as key frames of reference in their respective childhoods. As Scott Gray commented about the north Indian context in which he grew up, life focused primarily around “where your parents were”.⁴¹ That this happened to be India was important, and possibly life-changing in hindsight, but it was incidental in terms of how he remembers thinking as a child. Family was more important than geography.

This example highlights the importance of keeping children’s perspectives central if we are to genuinely pursue children’s history – in religious or other contexts. The value of oral testimony in supporting this imperative can be further glimpsed in at least two ways. First, oral testimony provides a necessary corrective to dominant denominational,

educational or societal rhetoric and thus empowers children’s historical voices. For example, many Scottish Presbyterian children lived in one of two Edinburgh

missionary children’s homes while attending school in Scotland separated from their parents. These homes were characteristically represented, in church literature, as “two happy homes” or “the home that is like home” where the children resided together as a surrogate “happy family”.⁴² This rhetoric was aimed most specifically at adult readers, either to garner further financial support or to reassure missionary parents. Children, however, remembered these homes variously in both positive and negative terms. One interviewee had two separate stints of residence, one positive but the other decidedly negative. The negative experience related to his older age and resentment at being separated from parents and has coloured his memories ever since.⁴³ Another person (with an absent father and deceased mother) remembered her years very positively, wherein the home community literally acted as a family for her. At the same time she remembers that “not everybody ... had that kind of experience, some people really suffered and [there were] some children [who]

41 Scott Gray, interview by Hugh Morrison, Dunedin, June 15, 2014. Name used by permission.

42 *Other Lands*, January 1922, 62–63; *Life and Work*, March 1934, 121–2.

43 Name withheld, interview by Hugh Morrison, Edinburgh, January 7, 2015.

also just felt completely deprived of their mother's love".⁴⁴

Furthermore, oral testimony also provides a means by which the written record can be elaborated or reflected upon by historical participants. It is an obvious entry point into childhood experience that, while mediated through adult hindsight, also provides an opportunity for personal meaning-making. One final example will suffice. Prior to his interview Ian Gray had not long published his memoir, in which he wrote candidly but briefly about his unhappy boarding school experiences in both India and New Zealand.⁴⁵ During the interview, however, he was able to reflect further, thus providing extra informal commentary on the printed text. He remembered, for instance, how he had learnt boxing at high school, prompted by his headmaster, which then boosted his own self confidence in a range of adolescent and adult settings. More particularly the interview process allowed him to talk about how, despite these experiences, his life had been rich.⁴⁶ This did not undermine the fact that Ian's younger years were difficult. It did, however, provide the opportunity for one form of remembering to complement the other. In so doing we are reminded that the fragments of history never tell the complete story and, for the religious history of childhood, both memory and reflective hindsight help to provide a more complete view of the past.

CONCLUSION

Some months after his interview, Ian's brother Scott sat with me at the Presbyterian Research Centre as we opened together their father's letters from India to New Zealand. He had never read these letters before. As he perused them he stopped short. He was reading a letter in which his father described how Scott had nearly died from dysentery at the age of two. Scott knew this from family lore and it had been part of the narrative he earlier recounted in his interview. What he had never been told, however, was contained in the next sentence; that "a further complication in the shape of meningitis set in". He realised that his condition was much more dire than imagined.⁴⁷ For both Scott and me this was poignant and powerful moment. Here, among other things, the written record, oral history, and collective memory intersected or coincided both to

elaborate the past and to reconnect that past with the present. Throughout this article I have argued that we need to bring together all of these perspectives, as we pursue a well-rounded religious history of childhood in New Zealand that will, in turn, add value to wider historical knowledge or discussion. Children are important for any reconstruction of our religious and social pasts, and the pursuit of their pasts is both an exhilarating and complex process. To do this well requires us to listen to both children and adults, utilizing all the sources and perspectives at our disposal.

This article is a broad survey of some of the possibilities in pursuing such a history. It has spanned a range of selected sources and interpretive possibilities; from the more identifiably or specifically "religious" to settings and contexts wherein children's lives were defined by religious factors, but where the details of their lives were not wholly "religious" in how they remembered or defined them. Here we can think of "religion" as either a subset, a subcategory or an intersecting element of wider historical childhoods in New Zealand and indeed of wider society or culture. Therefore the issues or concepts canvassed here – identity, memory, education, socialization, attitudinal formation, emotional expressions and practices, family, and childhood separations – are framed in a religious context but have wider resonances. Thus whether it is religious childhoods or childhoods in general, we are required to think complexly, contextually and holistically about their location in the religious, political, social, cultural and economic spaces of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century colonialism.

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44 Alison Robertson, interview by Hugh Morrison, Edinburgh, January 13, 2015. Name used by permission.

45 Gray, *We Travel Together*, 19.

46 Ian Gray, interview by Hugh Morrison, Hamilton, December 29, 2014. Name used by permission.

47 Rev. James Gray to Rev. H. Barton, October 10, 1925, Staff File 6.6, GAO149 Punjab Mission, PRC.