

Chapter 10

Emotional Expression in Children's Drawings of God



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Abstract Experimental psychological research on the expressive aspects of children's drawings has grown considerably in the last 40 years. It has reported consistently that children use the same expressive techniques as artists, despite varying opinions on how expressive drawing develops in childhood (e.g., U-shaped curve or age incremental patterns). The developmental findings have largely derived from drawing tasks that explicitly ask children to draw an emotion or mood (e.g. happy, sad, angry). Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of expression in children's drawings is such that we might expect children to spontaneously communicate expressively in drawing tasks that do not specifically request mood. "Drawing God" is such an example due to the potential emotive aspects of the subject, both in terms of the "God Figure" and the potential representation of other subject matter in the drawing. With this in mind, this chapter sets forth two sets of analyses of over 500 children's drawings from Switzerland, obtained from a sample of 6- to 16-year-olds. First, we report findings from a quantitative study based on artist ratings that the intensity (strength) and valence (negative to positive) of the emotional expression in the drawings varies according to gender and religiosity. Age was not a significant predictor of intensity and only weakly predicted valence. Second, we describe narrative themes derived from our own observations of the dataset, in which all themes consistently indicated the same expressive techniques reported in the psychological experimental literature. Furthermore, despite being asked only to "draw God", the drawings displayed a wide variety of themes which can be presented as a narrative story of the Christian Gospel.

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The assessment and investigation of expressive drawing in children within psychology has taken two largely independent directions: clinical and developmental/aesthetic. The clinical approach assumes that children with a clinical diagnosis express characteristics of their maladjusted emotionality in features of their drawings. In particular, interpretations of an emotional nature contribute to an assessment of the child's personality (Hammer, 1958, 1997; Machover, 1949; Swenson, 1968), current emotional state (Catte & Cox, 1999, 1999; Koppitz, 1968, 1984) and the emotional significance of the topics drawn by the child (Burns & Kaufman, 1970; Thomas & Jolley, 1998). This body of work includes both clinical case studies, and experimental and review studies testing the claims made in clinical case study papers. Furthermore, a related field of experimental studies has compared drawings of children from special populations with drawings of both typically developing children and children with learning difficulties in order to investigate whether the former group's expressive drawings are developmentally delayed or qualitatively different. This question is particularly pertinent to disorders and syndromes presenting with emotional deficits, such as in autism (see, e.g., Jolley et al., 2013).

In contrast, the developmental/aesthetic approach has studied expressive drawing in experimental tasks administered to nonclinical populations of children (for review, see Jolley, 2010). Expression in this body of work is defined as the communication of moods, emotions, feelings, ideas and concepts. These are affective and cognitive responses applicable to humans generally, and therefore the assumption in this work is that emotional expression is a fundamental part of the psychology of the child, without necessitating a clinical interpretation. The majority of studies focus on children's drawings of emotions and mood (e.g., Bonoti & Misalidi, 2015; Davis, 1997; Jolley et al., 2016; Morra et al., 1994), although some further research in children's drawings has examined the depiction of emotionally-related abstract concepts, such as love and friendship (Brechet, 2015; Pinto et al., 1997).

The aim of this present chapter is to extend this body of work further to examine typically developing children's use of expression to communicate an abstract concept (God¹). God is a universal concept that has multilayered emotional connotations, and might be expected to provoke expressive communication in children's drawings. Nevertheless, despite the wealth of research on children's drawings of God (as evidenced by this book alone), the expressive aspects of the drawings have previously not been reported in the literature. As concepts of God are universally held, including by children, and are potentially depicted in their pictures with emotional communication, investigating the drawings from the developmental/aesthetic perspective was taken. Accordingly, the following section provides a brief overview

¹Why the term *god* begins sometimes with an uppercase letter G, sometimes with a lowercase letter g, and why it appears sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural, is explained in the introductory chapter of this book (Chap. 1, this volume).

of research on the psychology of children's expressive drawing to provide a developmental and aesthetic foundation for our own research we present.

The Development of Expressive Drawing and Individual Differences

In the literature of children's expressive drawings there is a consensus that children use three broad techniques: literal, content and abstract expression (Ives, 1984; Jolley, 2010; Jolley et al., 2004; Morra et al., 1994; Picard et al., 2007). In literal expression the emotion or mood is depicted in the facial expression of people, although it can be shown in animals, nature or even objects (where it is known as personification). In contrast, content and abstract expression are regarded as metaphorical techniques. Content expression is found in subject matter from real-world content, whereas abstract expression is expressive through formal properties such as line, colour and composition. For instance, in Fig. 10.1,² all three expressive techniques are present in a poignant depiction of the crucifixion scene. For literal expression, the sad face is clearly depicted in the downward mouth and the two streams of tears falling down from the eyes. Additional to the crucifix, content expression is conveyed principally through a weather theme (e.g. clouds, rain, lightning). Finally, abstract expression is communicated through colour (darkness of the cross and clouds), line (jagged lightning, drooping raindrops, heaviness and multidirectional lines in cloud), and composition (centrality of a cross placed against a somewhat barren background). All three techniques are employed to serve the same common purpose that might be interpreted as to communicate the starkness and magnitude of Jesus' crucifixion, in which even the weather takes a part (see Luke 23: 44–46). Although the techniques have been categorised in the literature as literal, content and abstract expression, and measured independently in some research studies, they should not be seen as completely independent. For instance, formal properties are necessary to produce both literal and content expression (e.g., line is necessary to produce a happy face and a countryside scene). In addition, people (displaying literal expression) are often depicted within a broader context of other expressive content.

Research studies commonly ask children to produce "mood" drawings (such as happy, sad, and angry), either in respect of a particular subject matter (e.g., person, tree, house, or simply lines) or "free" drawings where the child has the freedom on what to draw. In terms of the assessment of expressive drawings two distinct but complementary approaches have been used. The counting approach assesses the frequency in which the three techniques (literal, content and abstract) are used and developed with increasing age (e.g., see Ives, 1984; Picard & Gauthier, 2012;

²This drawing was produced by a British child in an expressive drawing research project supervised by the first author, and independent of the *Children's Drawings of Gods* project.

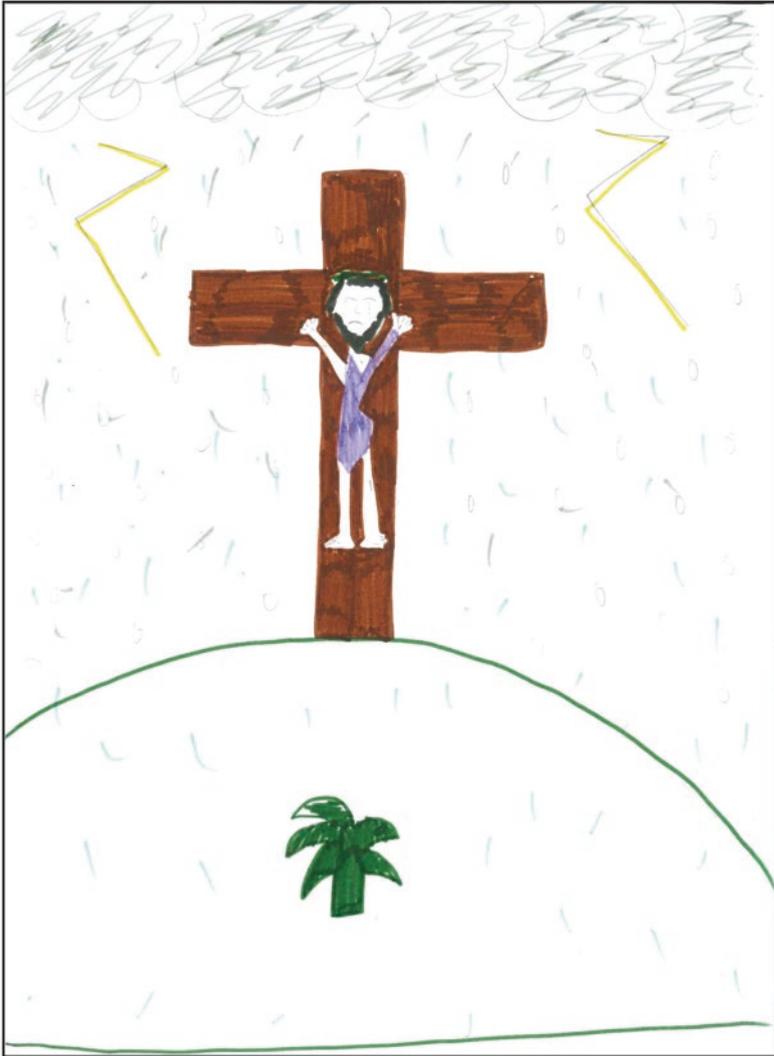


Fig. 10.1 Jesus crucifixion on a hill in a thunderstorm illustrating literal, content and abstract expression

Winston et al., 1995). Alternatively, children's expressive drawings are assessed (often using Likert-type scales) for the quality of how these techniques have been used (Davis, 1997; Jolley et al., 2004, 2016; Pariser & van den Berg, 1997, 2001; Pariser et al., 2008).

It is in the quality approach that the developmental question of progressive patterns has been most debated, in particular, whether it develops according to a U-shaped or age incremental pattern (for review, see Jolley, 2010). Initial

developmental interest in children's aesthetic drawings came from the Harvard Project Zero team, who claimed from their observations that the developmental pattern reflects a U-shaped curve (Gardner, 1980; Rosenblatt & Winner, 1988; Winner, 1982). That is, young (preschool) children's expressive drawings are of similar artistic merit to those produced by artistic adolescents or artists, each representing the elevated points of the "U", with the trough or dip occurring in middle childhood. In contrast, the age incremental approach argues that the expressive quality of children's drawings progresses upwardly with age, although not necessarily linearly. Both patterns have been found in experimental studies (Davis, 1997; Jolley et al., 2004, 2016; Pariser & van den Berg, 1997). The issue has also been debated theoretically (Duncum, 1986; Gardner, 2006; Jolley, 2010; Kindler, 2004; Wilson, 2004). One of the central issues from this debate is the extent to which the apparently inconsistent patterns are culturally determined, and dependent upon how and by whom the drawings are rated. As representational realism in pictures varies across cultures and in its prominence in the assessment criteria of expressive drawing tasks, Jolley et al. (2016) investigated the role of representational drawing ability in the expressive developmental patterns. They reported that a variety of expressive drawing assessments consistently converged to linear trends in expressive drawings made by preschoolers, children, adolescents and young adults. Nevertheless, when the expressive drawing scores were statistically adjusted for the participants' representational realism ability (assessed by separate drawing tasks) then the developmental trends followed patterns more akin to a U-shaped curve.

Finally, there is a growing body of work that has examined individual differences in expressive drawing. For instance, there is evidence that expressive drawing is stronger among girls (Picard & Boulhais, 2011; Picard & Gauthier, 2012). In addition, expressive drawing has found to be linked with higher levels of emotional comprehension (Brechet & Jolley, 2014), visual metaphor comprehension (Winston et al., 1995), divergent thinking (Picard & Boulhais, 2011), working memory (Morra et al., 1994) and representational drawing skill (Brechet & Jolley, 2014; Jolley et al., 2004; Picard et al., 2007). Such individual differences also provide an indication of the demographic and psychological factors that influence expressive drawing.

Despite the growing body of research in children's expressive drawing, it has taken a rather narrow focus on the drawing of emotions and moods. As stated above, expression also includes the communications of ideas and concepts. Although abstract in nature, ideas and concepts can be communicated through the metaphoric and symbolic use of real-world subject matter. Indeed, studies have shown that children can draw abstract notions such as romantic love (Brechet, 2015), death (Bonoti et al., 2013; Tamm & Granqvist, 1995) and the soul (Yamada & Kato, 2001). The concepts of death and the soul, in particular, are closely related to the concept of God. In the next section we shall argue that the subject of God is a particularly relevant topic to investigate how children may show emotion expression in their ideas.

The Case for Studying Emotional Expression in Children's Concept of God

Most of the worldwide population (86.2% in 2010) identify as religious adherents (Maoz & Henderson, 2013). God representations may play an essential role in religious individuals' worldviews, both for global and local aspects of their personal belief systems (Park, 2005). Furthermore, emotions and affects play a multitude of roles in people's concept and experiences of God. We argue that this occurs in at least two differing but related conceptual levels of God: experiential and attributional. In the case of the experiential, our emotional experiences and states can be closely related to our concept of the Divine (Corwin, 2012; Exline & Grubbs, 2011; Samuels & Lester, 1985), including trait mental health outcomes (Dezutter et al., 2010; Exline & Grubbs, 2011; Rizzuto, 1979; Schaap-Jonker et al., 2002). The way individuals conceive of God can be integrated into the religious and spiritual coping strategies they will use to face adverse life events, in general (Pargament et al., 1990) or in particular, such as chronic illness (Koenig, 2013). In the face of hardship or help, people also happen to either blame or praise God, who is thus perceived as the ultimate moral agent (Gray & Wegner, 2010).

In contrast, at the attributional conceptual level emotions are attributed directly to God. From a Christian perspective, special emotions characterize the Divine, such as *agape* love (Beck, 2008), a love that gives but requires nothing in return, as God's love for humanity (Romans 5: 5). In addition, on the basis of God's actions, a range of positive emotional characteristics may be attributed to God, such as supportive, nurturing, benevolent and guiding, and even intimate (Heller, 1986; Krejci, 1998; Maynard et al., 2001; Nelsen et al., 1985; Roberts, 1989). This can also be the case of a range of negative emotional characteristics, such as authoritarian, judgmental, vindictive, or punitive (Gorsuch, 1968; Hammersla et al., 1986; Johnson et al., 2015; Krejci, 1998; Kunkel et al., 1999; Nelsen & Kroliczak, 1984).

As children's drawings are expressive, and that our concepts of God include emotionality—both to explain our own emotional experiences but also the emotions of God—the next questions are to what extent do children's drawings of God communicate emotions and in what ways? The following section provides an overview of the research on children's drawings of God, and what information this research provides to us regarding the emotionality in the drawings.

Research on Children's Drawings of God

The main focus of the children's drawings of God literature has been on the extent to which God is depicted with human features and/or symbolically. It has been consistently reported that there is a developmental shift from anthropomorphic God figures to non-anthropomorphic or symbolic ones (Brandt et al., 2009; Dessart, Chap. 3, this volume; Dessart & Brandt, Chap. 4 this volume; Harms, 1944; Ladd

et al., 1998; Pitts, 1976, 1977; Tamm, 1996) or from figurative to non-figurative ones (Dandarova, 2013). Older children are generally more likely to draw God as a light, a heart, or other non-human or non-figurative entity. Besides age, other socio-demographic variables have been shown to play an important role in the way one would draw God, such as religious socialization and gender. Religious socialization makes children more likely to draw God in non-anthropomorphic ways (Brandt et al., 2009; Dessart, Chap. 3, this volume; Dessart & Brandt, Chap. 4, this volume; Hanisch, 1996), although there are differences between religious denominations (Ladd et al., 1998; Pitts, 1976). Girls tend to depict God more often as a mystery (Tamm, 1996) or as feminine (Brandt et al., 2009; Dandarova, 2013; Dessart et al., 2020; Kay & Ray, 2004).

To the best of our knowledge, emotional expression in children's drawings of God has never been examined in a systematic fashion. Nevertheless, a few authors have noticed and commented upon emotionally-relevant features of the drawings. In Harms's (1944) stage account based on observing thousands of children's drawings of God the final *individualistic* stage included a sub-group of drawings that were reported as demonstrating a high degree of emotional sensitivity for their originality and inventiveness of divine themes. Unfortunately, emotionality was not defined further and it could be argued that this sub-group was not exclusively characterized by emotional expression per se.

In other studies authors have made reference to the emotional aspects of the depiction of God through words such as *smiling* or *angry* (Brandt et al., 2009) or *happy* (Kay & Ray, 2004). In other instances, emotions were alluded to through terms that are emotionally connoted. Examples include God being attributed to categories such as *protector* or *guardian of morality* (Tamm, 1996) or similar terms (Hanisch, 1996), and reflect an attributional concept of God discussed above. In comments recorded by the children we can see instances of the child's own emotional experience of God. For instance, a boy from Brandt et al.'s (2009) study, conducted in Japan, provides a vivid example through his own written description of his drawing of God: "It is something that is deep in my heart and in anybody's heart." (p. 17).³ On occasions, authors refer to the expressive techniques that children use in their drawings of God, and it is noticeable that these concur with the three techniques in the general literature on children's expressive drawings: literal, content, and abstract. Identifying God as smiling (Brandt et al., 2009) directly underlines a literal aesthetic technique. Children happen to insert content that is very emotionally loaded by drawing God as a monster, for example (Brandt et al., 2009). As for abstract properties, one of the more consistent expressive representations of God found in children's drawings is the depiction of a yellow light (e.g., Dandarova-Robert et al., 2016).

Although none of the research on children's drawings of God has directly and systematically analysed the emotional expression in the drawings, it is nevertheless clear from the frequent observations of emotionality that expression is very evident

³Translated from French by the second author.

in the drawings to many authors. Furthermore, where expressive techniques are referred to, it appears that children are using the same expressive techniques that have been analysed in experimental studies using emotion/mood drawing tasks reported above. Accordingly, there is a strong case for systematically analysing how children use emotional expression in their drawings of God. For the remaining part of this chapter we present two lines of evidence of emotionality in children's drawings of God, based on a sample of around 500 Swiss 6- to 16-year-olds. First, we present a quantitative study on both the intensity and valence of emotion in these drawings, and ask whether either of these varies according to age, gender, and religiosity of the children. Second, we offer a narrative account of the diverse themes in which God and accompanying subject matter in the drawings were depicted, and how emotional expression serves to communicate these themes.

A Quantitative Examination on the Intensity and Valence of Emotional Expression in Children's Drawings of God

As valence and intensity are considered two central dimensions in the psychology of emotion literature (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Davidson, 2000; Larsen et al., 1987; Russell, 2003; Scherer, 2005), we used those two dimensions to assess the Swiss sample of children's drawings of God. Valence may be considered to vary along a positive-negative or pleasure-displeasure dimension, whereas intensity refers to the strength of emotion, or arousal (cf. activation-deactivation range). Furthermore, we investigated the extent to which age, gender, and religiosity predict variations in both dimensions. A full scientific report of the study is currently being prepared (Dessart et al., 2021), but in the following, we provide a brief summary of the methodology and main findings.

Our data consisted of 407⁴ drawings of God composed by children aged 6–15 years of age. The sample was balance almost equally by gender (52% girls), and between regular schooling (48%) and religious schooling (52%). Participants' religious background was mainly Christian, and Roman Catholic or Protestant Reformed in particular.

Drawings were assessed on emotional intensity and emotional valence, respectively. The intensity scale ranged from 1 to 7, for example: 1 = unemotional, 4 = moderately emotional, 7 = very strongly emotional. The valence scale also ranged from 1 to 7 but was bidirectional, for example: 1 = strongly negative, 4 = of equal balance, 7 = strongly positive. Extensive discussions with two artists⁵ and the research team, using additional drawings extracted from the original dataset,

⁴More data were available in the initial sample but some drawings were removed from the dataset in order to construct both scales measuring emotionality, to train the two expert-artists in their use of the scales, and to ascertain good inter-rater agreement prior to the test phase.

⁵Both artists had already taken part in previous studies addressing emotional expression in children's drawings as expert judges. Therefore, they were familiar to the process and the tasks.

enabled a detailed description of each of the 7 labelled points on each scale. These descriptions were driven by the three techniques of literal, content, and abstract expression. Further drawings from the original dataset were used to ascertain and establish good reliability on the artists' independent application of each scale. The two artists were then given the 407 drawings to allocate to a specific point along both scales. This exercise was carried out twice: once to determine valence and once to determine intensity.

Potential predictors accounted for were age, gender, religious schooling, religious affiliation, and prayer practice. Multiple regression analyses were carried out separately for each of those two emotional dimensions. Gender and religious schooling were systematically found to be statistically significant predictors. Being female and receiving religious schooling were associated with greater intensity and more positive valence. Age was also a weak significant predictor for valence: the older the child the more positive the rating of the drawing.

These findings are important at several levels. First, they tone down to some extent the developmental hegemony typically found in past research on children's drawings of God, by showing that age was not a primary contributor. Second, they indicate that age-dependency for emotional expression in children's drawings might be specific to tasks that directly request "mood" drawings. In drawing tasks where expression may be relevant—but not explicitly requested—other factors may be more influential in the emotional expression deployed. In that respect, topic-related education (e.g., religious schooling) may play an important role, beyond the possible influence of more technical, aesthetic teaching. Third, they show consistency between girls producing more emotionality (in strength and positivity) and female superiority in expressive drawing tasks (Picard & Boulhais, 2011; Picard & Gauthier, 2012). Finally, we note that despite the weak positive association between age and positive valence, it nevertheless suggests that a positive association to God (either through attribution or experientially) does develop with age. Even though representations of Christ can be very poignant for the amount of suffering that is exhibited, for example, it can be argued that most depictions of the Christian God manifest positive valence of emotions.

Whereas the above investigation provided important insights into the valence and intensity of emotional expression in children's drawings of God, the analysis of these dimensions did not inform us of the range of themes in the drawings, nor how the expressive techniques were used to support the emotional expression of those themes. Therefore, we will now offer a new descriptive analysis of the main concepts of God and related theological themes in the same Swiss sample used by Dessart et al. (Chap. 4, this volume). In particular, we shall refer to the emotional expression in these themes, and the specific devices of literal, content, and abstract expression.

Narrative Account of God and Theological Themes

For the purposes of this narrative account, all of the drawings from the original dataset were used (i.e. including those drawings that had been removed for the intensity/valence analysis, see Footnote 3). Using this dataset of over 500 drawings the first author inspected each drawing to note down what message it appeared to be communicating, in terms of how God was depicted, but also considering any further subject matter. In addition, the first author noted what expressive devices (using the three broad categories of literal, content, and abstract) had been used for that purpose. The first author then generated themes to which the majority of the drawings could be attributed. This bottom-up process of theme generation was supplemented by two strands of top-down processing. First, a theme had to resonate with Judaeo-Christian theology, and be supported by biblical references. This theological perspective was chosen to be the most appropriate for this task, as Christianity (including its Jewish historical underpinnings) is the predominant religious belief system in Switzerland, further underpinned by approximately half of the sample attending religious schools. Second, consideration was given to the multidimensional concept of God from previous published research. The first author drew upon over 25 years' experience of analysing and publishing children's drawings, with a particular expertise in their expressive drawing, in addition to his personal study of both the Old and New Testaments over a number of decades. These themes were then presented to the second author for the purposes of verification. The second author had already gained intimate knowledge of the drawings as they represented the main dataset of his PhD work (Dessart, 2019), as well being very familiar with published research on children's understanding (including visual representations) of God. The second author confirmed the themes, and both authors worked together to source drawings from the dataset that illustrated most clearly the themes.

It became apparent that these themes not only told their own narrative story, but could be collated in such an order to tell a wider narrative story. This may be described as the story of the Bible, or more specifically the Christian gospel story (which includes its Jewish historical underpinnings). Therefore, the order in which we present the themes reflects that wider narrative:

- God is sovereign and ineffable;
- God the creator;
- God is love, peace, watching over us;
- God is angry and punishing;
- Jesus' crucifixion and/or sacrifice;
- God is our friend, our guide;
- Heaven and hell.

Finally, as each child was encouraged to make a written description of their drawing, we have provided an English translation in cases where the child's text supports our interpretation of the drawing.

God is Sovereign and Ineffable

In this theme God is shown as holy, other-worldly, somewhat impersonal, but nevertheless connected to our world and to us. God is frequently shown as an ethereal and heavenly Being, placed against a formless background of colourful shapes that emphasised His otherness from humanity (see Figs. 10.2 and 10.3). In some drawings the body of God is shown without colour (Fig. 10.2), the whiteness communicating his holiness (without blemish), or through a bright single colour (Fig. 10.3). Although God is frequently depicted in anthropomorphic form, facial features are often absent. Instead, the space where the head would be is filled in with a block of colour, or a question mark instead of a head (Fig. 10.2). As was the case when God presented Himself to Moses by the burning bush (Exodus 3: 1–6), the children who produced these drawings were seemingly unwilling to engage with God's face. The combination of a faceless God, suspended against a formless background, emphasise the distinctness and separateness of God. The typical posture of arms lifted or outstretched, indicates his supremacy and authority (i.e., God as sovereign). The colour yellow is a frequent feature of drawings in this theme, perhaps reflecting God as both the creator of light (Genesis 1:3) and bringing light to His people (John 1: 9). However, for a small handful of children, God was too ineffable to draw, they left the page as blank as it was when they were given it! In children's written descriptions this was differentially justified as either because no one knows what God looks like, or that they themselves were unable to grasp what God could look like.

The expressive techniques used in this theme, therefore, were largely content and abstract expression, with literal expression notably absent. Children drew a large God figure, often centrally placed, with uplifted arms, against a colourful but formless background. Yellow featured strongly in the drawings, perhaps symbolising the frequent theme of the light of God in the Bible.

God the Creator

The variety of elements in God's creative story is very evident in these drawings. For example, in content-strewn Fig. 10.4 we see many examples of nature as described in the first chapter of Genesis. A meteorological theme is communicated through a blazing red sun in the top left-hand corner, offset by raining clouds and (fittingly) a rainbow. On the Earth itself, we see water, terrain, and vegetation. Furthermore, the terrain is replete with life, perhaps most clearly seen in the blossom of the tree, but there is a vibrancy and dynamism in the red flowers and uplifting angles of the grass shapes that fill out the terrain. The creative story is extended in Fig. 10.5 to include both flighted and walking animals, as well as humans. While the drawing in Fig. 10.6 lacks the colour and range of creative content of some of the other drawings in this theme, it nevertheless illustrates nature and life through the beautifully adorned tree. It reminds us of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden



Fig. 10.2 Example drawing from the God-is-sovereign-and-ineffable theme. Note the faceless God, with a question mark in its place, a colourless body suspended against a formless background. This picture indicates the indescribability and separateness of God (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/Qch7bwMpT2e2bd1RnP=10A6.20180702T162653761Z>)

(Genesis 2:9), and the girl who drew it commented that she drew a tree because she saw God in nature and life.

In Fig. 10.7, we see directly the creative process, denoted through the analogy of God completing a jigsaw puzzle of the world, an ingenious and creative picture in itself. Finally, in Fig. 10.8, there is the indication of God's continual creative power



Fig. 10.3 Example drawing from the God-is-sovereign-and-ineffable theme. Note that God is presented with outstretched arms and yellow-blocked face against a formless background. This picture indicates the holy, ethereal and separateness of God (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/CITTjDU4QvGMqt6zkRbkvgc.20180702T162914268Z>)

in the sun, beaming down on earth from the sky, or God's light as the child commented (cf. theme above).

A plethora of content expression drives this theme of God's creation, with many examples of nature from the sky (heavens) and on earth depicted by the children. Bright colours are often used extensively, as is the whole page, indicating the

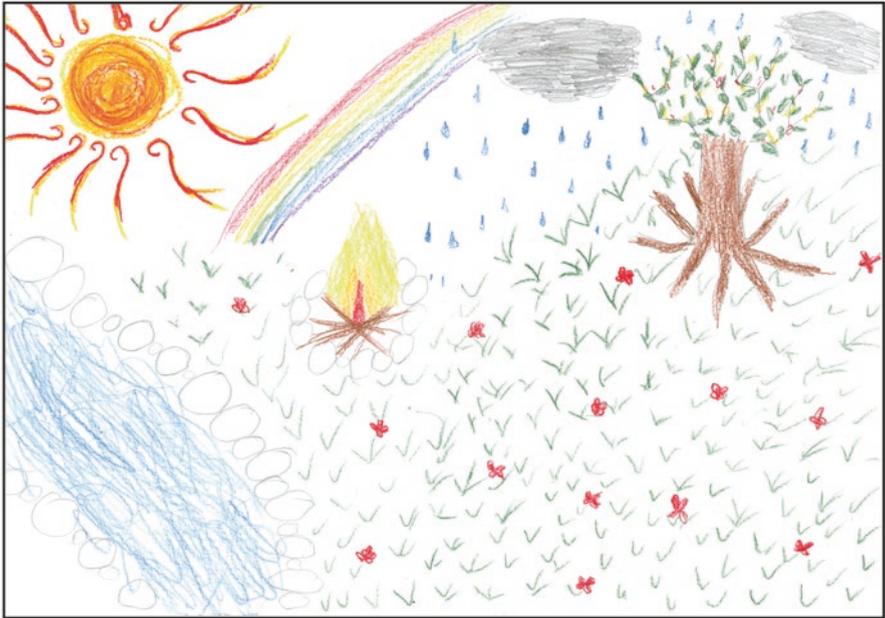


Fig. 10.4 Example drawing from the God-the-creator theme. In this content-rich drawing we see both meteorological aspects as well as an earth replete with life and colour (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/XR5EDuDXQ9OnQqmg5wLE3Qv.20180702T162528552Z>)

expansiveness of creation. If literal expression is used, either in God himself or in life that He has created, happiness is exclusively shown. At times literal expression is used on nonhuman topics, and is an example of children using personification (see Fig. 10.5).

God Is Love, Peace, Watching over Us

Whereas the children who produced drawings in the God-is-sovereign-and-ineffable theme may have been reluctant to express God's nature and character, drawings in the theme of God is love, peace, and watching over us showed no such reticence. Furthermore, drawings expressing these themes were plentiful. This theme was often expressed very directly, none more so in drawings in which these characteristics were stated in words just in case we miss the point (see Figs. 10.9 and 10.10)! Usually, God is depicted in these drawings, with outstretched arms, smiling face, coloured in yellow (Fig. 10.10), all of which facilitated the expression of an embracing warmth. Nevertheless, He is not usually presented on earth, but in the sky, heaven or against a formless background such as commonly seen in drawings in the God-is-sovereign-and-ineffable theme. In such cases the children often drew



Fig. 10.5 Example drawing from the God-the-creator theme. Many forms of life are illustrated including humans, flighted and walking animals, vegetation, with a God figure suspended in the air (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/vgvr=9XER6ObOzdeLlvHIAS.20180702T162741826Z>)

dazzling rays emanating from God, or even God himself emblazed with colour. As was typical of many of the drawings of God from the data set, yellow, orange, and red were prominent colours. Heart symbols were very common in drawings of this theme (see Figs. 10.9 and 10.10), utilising this ideograph that is conventionally used to express the centre of emotion, including affection and love.



Fig. 10.6 Example drawing from the God-the-creator theme. The beautifully adorned tree reminds us of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/=oTu3YEaTf=Ra13ofXXhkqw.20180702T162557122Z>)

Although many of the drawings in these themes either placed God in an ethereal setting, or did not depict Him at all, it was not always the case that God was presented as distant from those for whom His love was intended. For example, in Fig. 10.11, we see God watching over the Earth, even seemingly praying for it.

In summary, the children presenting this theme in their drawings primarily depicted a bright yellow God, with smiling face and outstretched arms, and sometimes with blazing rays emanating from Him suggestive of the power of God's love. Text and a heart ideograph further underlined the clarity of this theme.

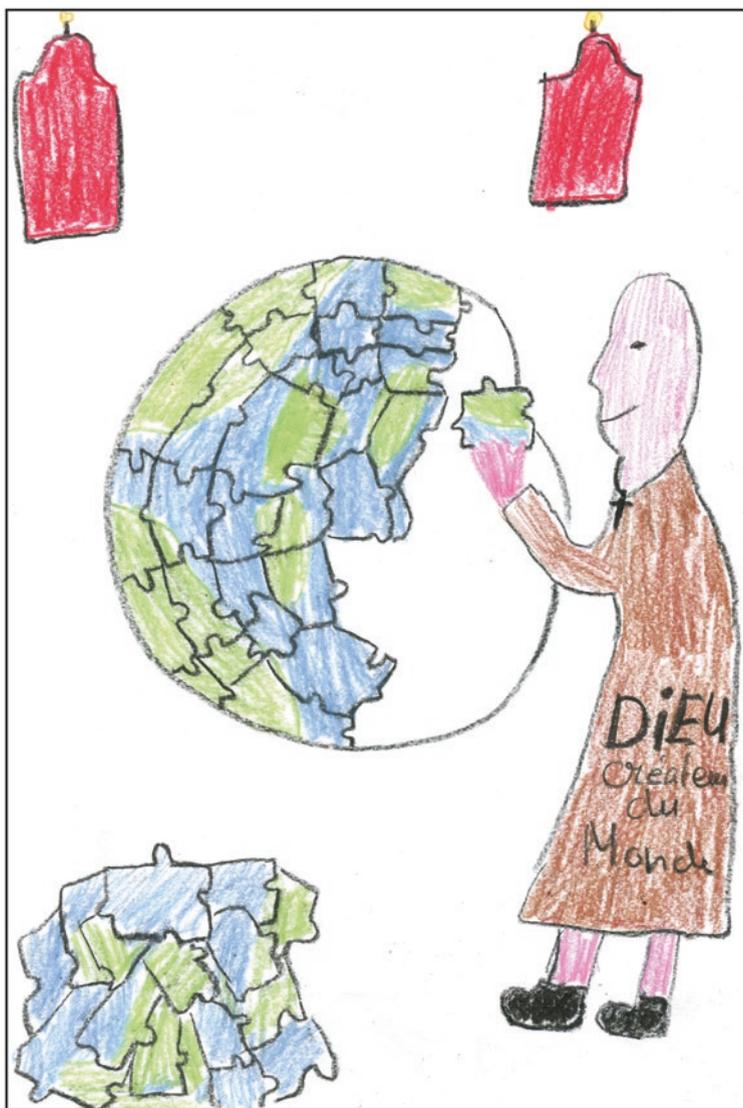


Fig. 10.7 Example drawing from the God-the-creator theme. The drawing expresses the process of creation through the analogy of God creating a jigsaw of the world (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/iiiJou2GVTMyQqjRS4X9BrAj.20201007T121639183078Z>)

God Is Angry and Punishing⁶

⁶For some of the drawings described here, permission was not granted to show them publicly, thus they are not provided in the figures reproduced in this work. In fact, the child and their parents were



Fig. 10.8 Example drawing from the God-the-creator theme. God’s continual creative power and light is presented through the sun beaming down on earth (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/cQzHI6bhQGS9eCQeSMHTQgN.20201101T140657203708Z>)

In contrast to the theme of God as love and peace, drawings in this theme appear to show the opposite side of God’s nature—his anger, judgement, and punishment. This is more than hinted at in one drawing in which God is presented in martial arts attire and stern expression, with a halo depicted over the head confirming that these characteristics are being assigned to God. In other drawings within this theme, God was shown acting out his anger on people. For instance, in one drawing the child presents God as holding two men in combat, apparently over the theft of money. The God figure has jagged teeth and slanting eyes, leaving the viewer in no doubt of His anger. In other drawings God was placed in the heavens overseeing bad weather (such as lightning) falling upon the earth. Although such drawings could be interpreted as God “watching the weather”, either an angry literal expression on God or the weather appearing to inflict itself on the earth, were suggestive of something more sinister than merely observing the weather. Indeed, the literal expression in Fig. 10.12, and particularly the slanting eyes, more than hint at an angry God.

The apparent negative connotations of God’s character in these drawings need some theological explanation. In the bible God is sometimes portrayed as angry and punishing, particularly in the Old Testament. However, Christian doctrine explains

given the choice, prior to the drawing activity as to whether or not they would permit the child’s drawing to be shown outside the group of researchers involved in the project.

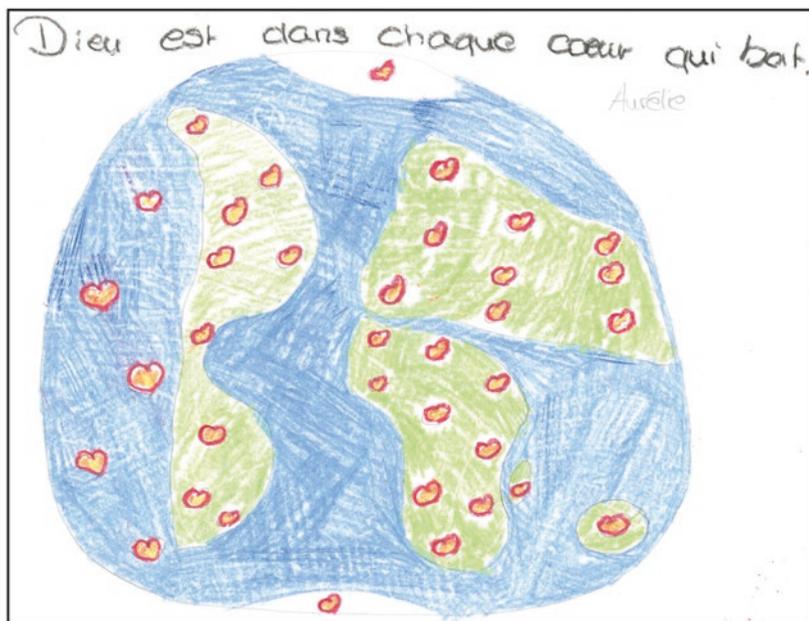


Fig. 10.9 Example drawing from the God-is-love-peace-watching-over-us theme. The loving nature of God is directly expressed in the words above the world, "God is in every heart that beats", emphasised further by the numerous heart-shaped ideographs placed within the world (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/bSqmQyMCTbOo31G5BTYn0wa.20201101T135405244484Z>)

that this is because of mankind's rebellion and wanting to be independent from God, which separates us from Him (Isaiah 59:2). The Bible tells us that God does not overlook this, and because he is a just God (Hebrews 10:30) there has to be a punishment. Therefore, drawings in this theme could be interpreted as God's judgement on mankind for its sin (Romans 3:23), which is said to apply to everyone (Romans 3: 10–12). The balance between angry versus loving concepts of God may be somewhat differently placed between Catholicism and Protestant Christianity, where the latter perhaps places more emphasis on justification by faith. It would be interesting for future research to examine any variability in themes between Catholic and non-Catholic samples of children. Nevertheless, we should not assume that all children who produced drawings in this theme were considering this theological complexity. Some may simply have conceived of God as an angry Being, derived from their knowledge of an all-powerful entity that is sometimes angry, as communicated in their cultural environment.

The expression of God as an angry judge in the drawings was very much communicated through literal (facial) expression, body posture, bold lines or fillings, and actions affecting people or the world.

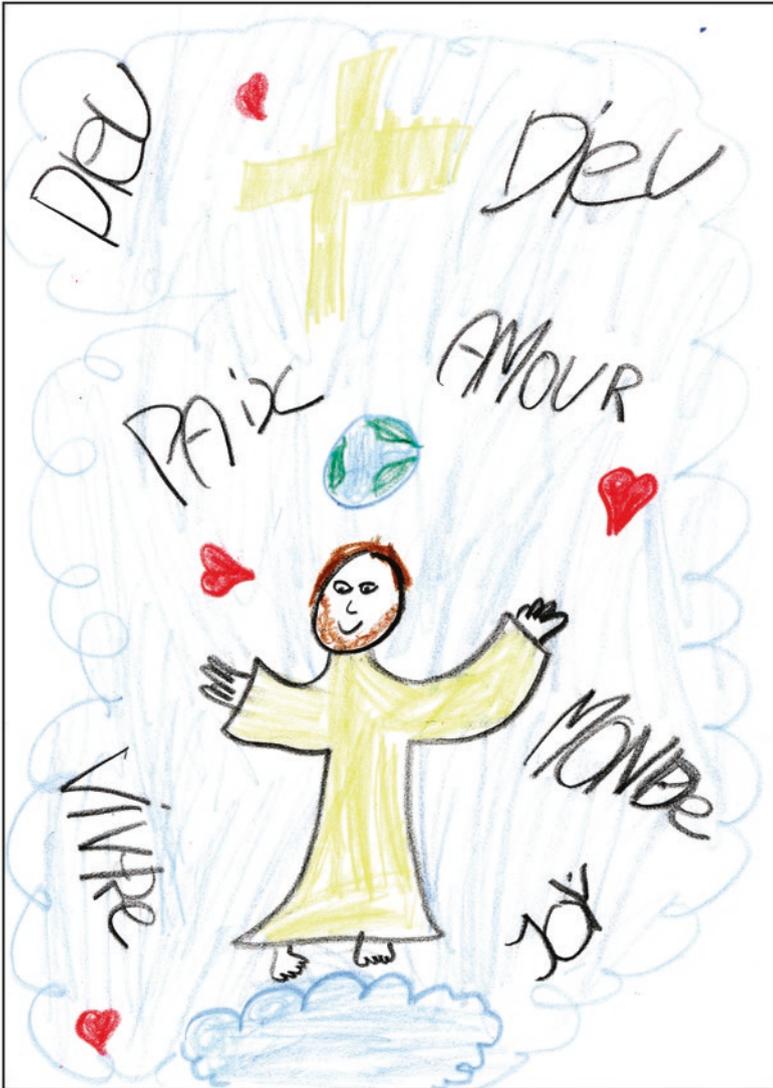


Fig. 10.10 Example drawing from the God-is-love-peace-watching-over-us theme. God is displayed with outstretched arms, coloured in yellow, embracing the warmth for the world further emphasised by the text “God, peace, love, living, the world”(<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/Evv4BQPtRtq9jPz6L8OJ3QU.20201007T112010167072Z>)

Jesus’ Crucifixion and/or Sacrifice

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God’s son, was a notable theme in the children’s drawings. More than in any other theme the content was restricted in its subject

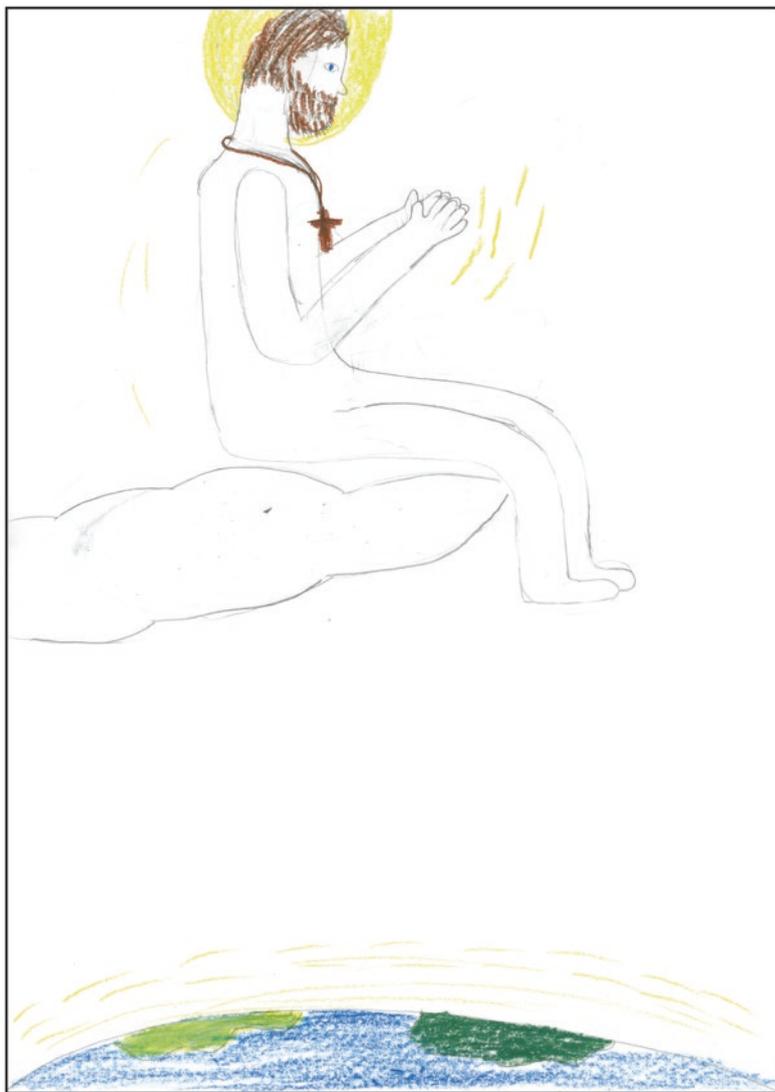


Fig. 10.11 Example drawing from the God-is-love-peace-watching-over-us theme. God is presented watching over the earth, seemingly praying for it (<https://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/L1uzboLRrCkBEafrEeiNQG.20220602T043346838228322Z>)

matter: Jesus Christ being crucified on the cross (see Figs. 10.13, 10.14, 10.15, 10.16, and 10.17). However, this restricted subject matter in no way undermined the stark expressiveness of the pictures, as all three expressive techniques are used effectively. In respect of content expression, the crucifix in itself, with Jesus outstretched arms attached against the patibulum (horizontal element), served as a reminder that this was no ordinary death, and that it was public (Fig. 10.14). A sad

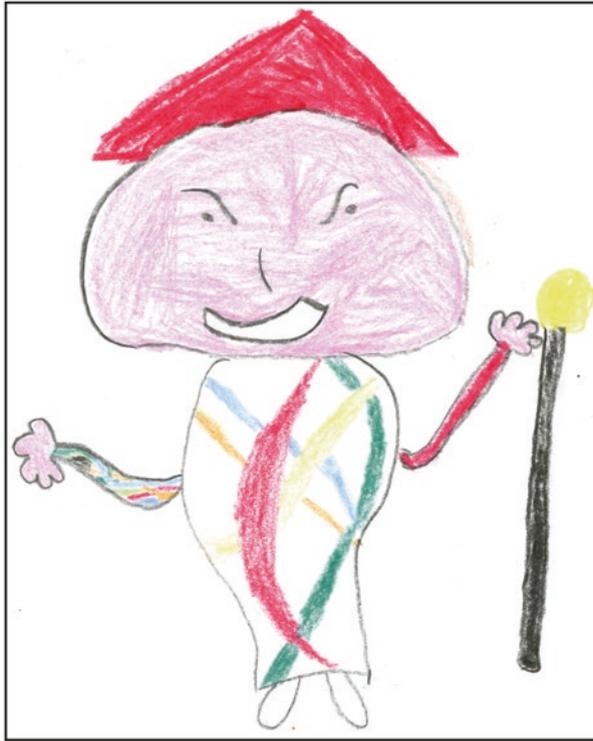
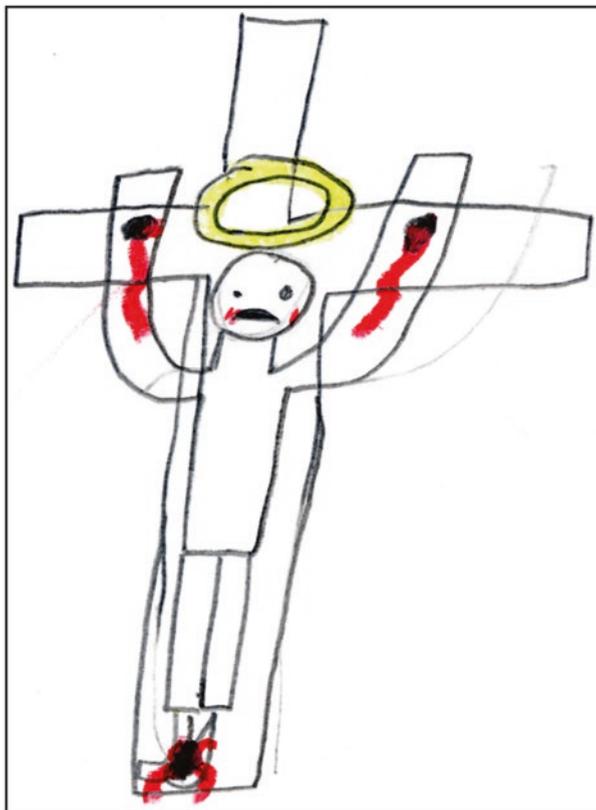


Fig. 10.12 Example drawing from the God-is-angry-and-punishing theme. While holding a stick, the literal expression (note the slanting eyes) suggest an angry God (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/pqkhNjFIRu6DMIURW61pQw=.20201108T09340303442Z>)

or expressionless face was typical, sometimes accompanied by tears (Figs. 10.13, 10.15, and 10.17). Red was a frequent colour employed on the body of Jesus (Figs. 10.13, 10.15, and 10.16), literally depicting blood and scars expressing the physical pain he endured. In some drawings, the horror of the crucifixion was exemplified further by the use of dark colours (see Figs. 10.14 and 10.16). Although the sky was not shown dark in itself, such drawings nevertheless act as a reminder of that 3 h of darkness that immediately enveloped the sky after the death of Jesus, described in at least two of the Gospels (Mark 15:33; Matthew 27:45). In respect of composition, the figure of Jesus on the cross was often centrally placed (Figs. 10.15, 10.16, and 10.17), emphasising the significance of the event. Finally, the human pain Jesus suffered was offset in some pictures by symbolism of his holiness. For instance, the halo in Fig. 10.13 and the crown (as described by the child) in Fig. 10.15, express the Christian doctrine of Jesus being fully human and fully God.

In biblical terms we see very poignantly in these drawings the physical outcome of God sending his son Jesus to reconcile mankind to Him. But rather than a pointless death, it is explained in both the Old and New Testaments that Jesus is paying the debts of mankind's rebellion against God (Isaiah 53: 4–5; Mark 10:45) because

Fig. 10.13 Example drawing from the Jesus'-crucifixion-sacrifice theme. The sad and tearful face, bloodstained arms and feet, but with the Halo, exemplify the Christian doctrine of the devastating death of Jesus being fully human and fully God (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/5JQmFR7OQreOzNclhbQHOAJ.20201008T082615144928Z>)



the judgement of rebellion (mankind's sin) is death (Romans 6:23). According to this biblical interpretation, therefore, the drawings in this theme provide a resolution for the problem expressed in the drawings of the previous theme. However, it is not out of God's anger that his son died for mankind, but out of His love for mankind and to provide a means of reconciliation (John 3:16); which leads us to the next theme.

As with our commentary on all of the themes, we would not want to assume the children held or intended to demonstrate the biblical details and deeper meanings behind the crucifixion event. One plausible and simpler explanation is that children are exposed to pictorial cultural artefacts that they merely mimicked.

God Is Our Friend, Our Guide

The drawings in this theme communicate a relational message between God and people, particularly friendship and guidance. To this effect, roads and pathways were frequently drawn, in which a person was being led benevolently. In some of

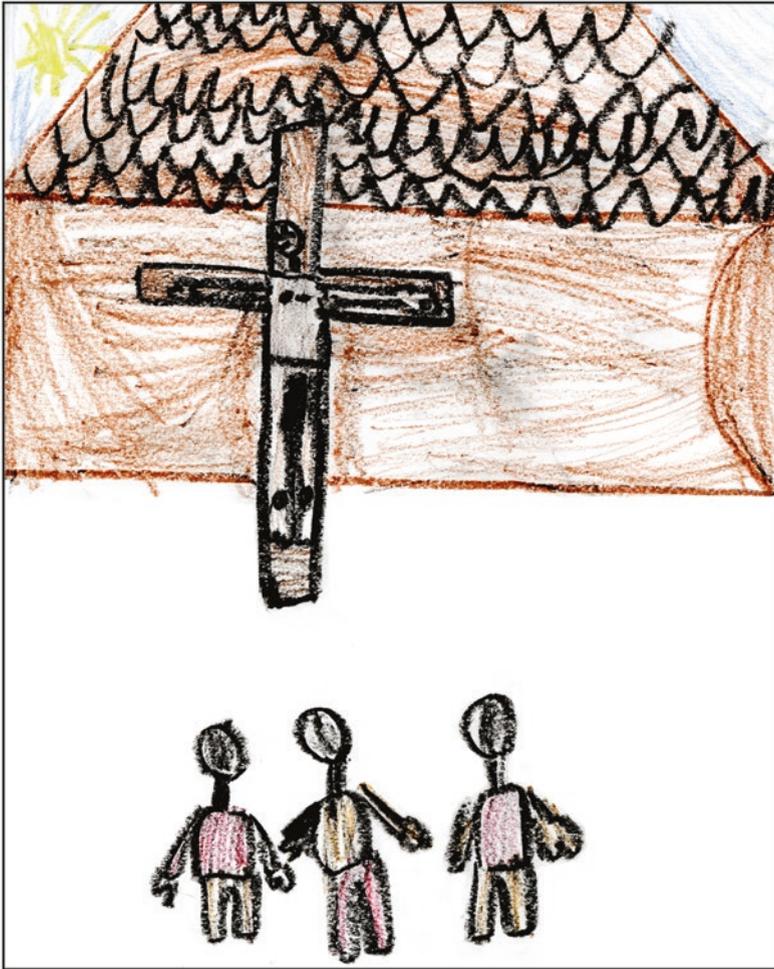


Fig. 10.14 Example drawing from the Jesus'-crucifixion-sacrifice theme. Jesus' death on a crucifix is a reminder that His was no ordinary death. According to Christian doctrine Jesus' death encapsulated the death of human sin (amplified by the dark colours), so people may live (the characters in the foreground act as if a reminder) (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/DjclREx3QrmFpSMfMXBE1gs.20201007T111507869393Z>)

these drawings God's guidance was evident. For instance, in Fig. 10.18, the child commented that a star (light) produces light to show the way. In contrast, Fig. 10.19 shows a more personal image of God's friendship and guidance, with the two figures labelled as God and us (humanity), respectively. The child described his drawing by referring to the forthcoming fork in the path, saying that the two paths go in different directions and that we (mankind) do not know where each goes. The boy further adds that the only person who does know is God, who shows us the way (further underlined in the drawing by the text "Jesus is the way"). This idea

Fig. 10.15 Example drawing from the Jesus'-crucifixion-sacrifice theme. Like many drawings in this theme red has been drawn on Jesus body, exemplifying the blood and scars from the physical pain He endured. As in Fig. 10.13, the humanness of the death is set against the Godliness of Jesus (see the halo). The prominent tears could stand not only for human pain but Jesus' crying for humanity (http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/HmSD8_OBRVC1YzFS7S GqDQP.2020101 8T101116154334Z)



resonates with Jesus own claims about Himself, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12) and “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). According to Christian theology, Christ’s resurrection from death on the cross presents to mankind an invitation to accept His offer to pay our debts (see previous theme), and the acceptance of Jesus’ offer by an individual then allows that person to grow in his/her relationship with God, which includes guidance and direction. In respect of abstract expression, colours tend to be used to functionally to reflect the actual colours of their referents in the world (perhaps because many of the pictures in this theme include terrain and paths). However, as we have seen throughout other themes, the colour yellow is used for God’s presence and His actions.

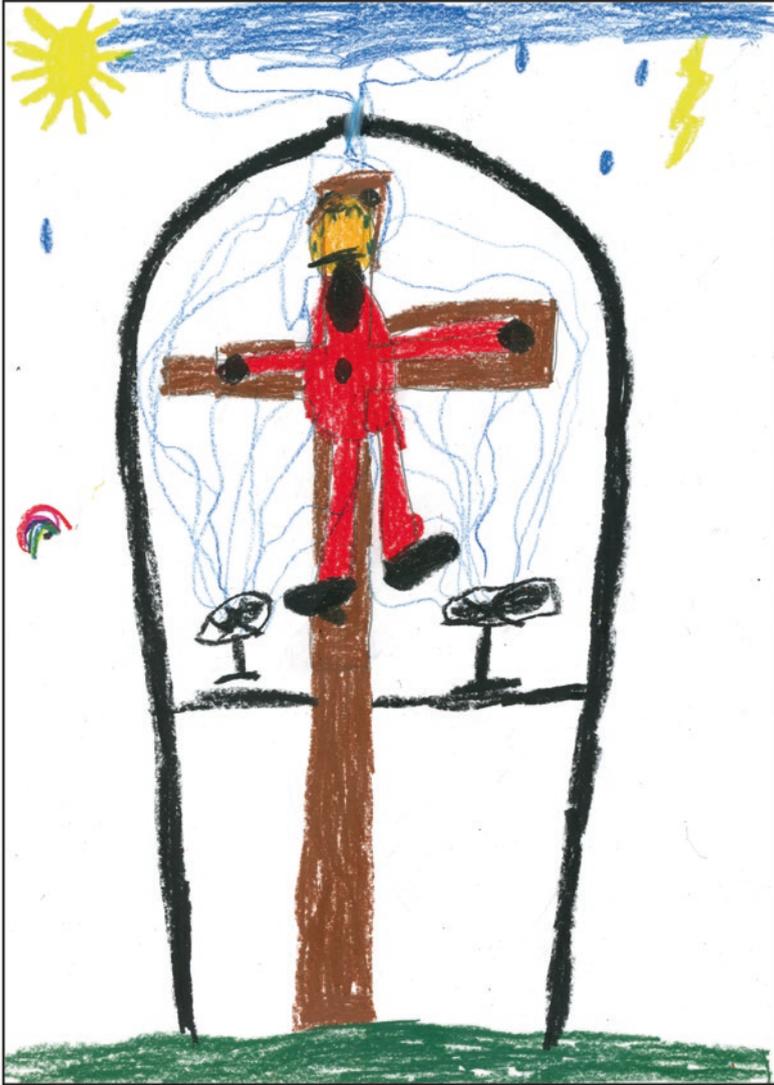


Fig. 10.16 Example drawing from the Jesus'-crucifixion-sacrifice theme. In this drawing red is prominently displayed throughout Jesus' body, perhaps emphasising the bloodshed, with the dark black boundary surrounding Jesus' crucifixion helping to focus our eyes upon it (http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/_hGXCE70QaZliOHn8Ni1A6.20190115T095629257Z)

Heaven and Hell

Although not a common theme in the dataset a few drawings depicted heaven (or paradise) and hell. For instance, in Fig. 10.20, the child explicitly referred to heaven and the clouds (see top of drawing), where God resides, and to earth and hell at the

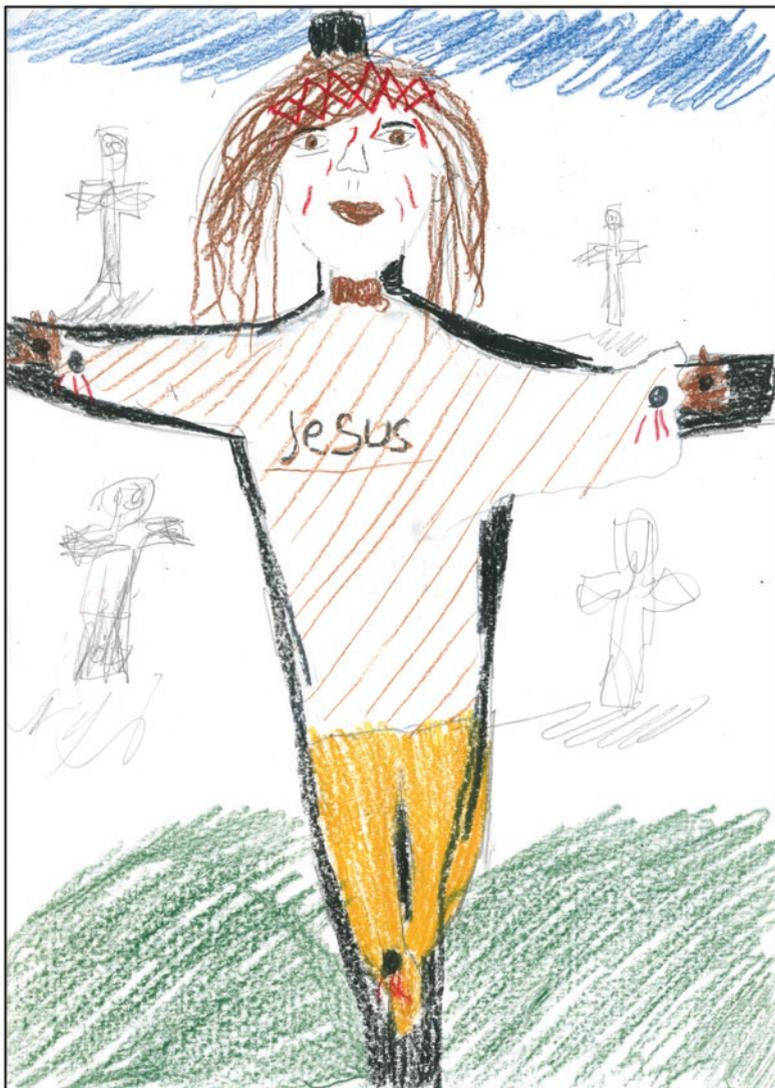


Fig. 10.17 Example drawing from the Jesus'-crucifixion-sacrifice theme. As in the composition of many drawings from this theme Jesus is drawn large and centrally placed emphasising the significance of the event, with red around his crown, wrists and ankles illustrating the places blood would have been shed (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/ORC5pQGASqqY=mzEfXoN7Ac.20180702T163940325Z>)

bottom of the drawing. This top/bottom composition of such pictures in this theme reflect the biblical interpretation of the clear and stark separation between the two (e.g., see Revelation 20:15).



Fig. 10.18 Example drawing from the God-is-our-friend-our-guide theme. As with many drawings in this theme a road is drawn to denote the path God is guiding us on, and in this picture the way is further enhanced by a light (the star) (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/YonUAYwwSAKV0gyZlsxuA3.20201025T131345597412Z>)

In other drawings only heaven is presented, or alternatively paradise (either written on the drawing or referred to in the children's written text supporting the drawing). Often these drawings filled out the whole page, and were replete with colour. This is best exemplified by the girl who drew Fig. 10.21, who said in her own words, "my drawing is the door of paradise; there is God and His faithful angel, birds, a tree, flower, and a mini rainbow". Many pictures in this theme displayed similar content as was represented in the God-the-creator theme. However, drawings of heaven or paradise were distinct in their ethereal background in that they gave a clear impression of an otherworldly place (or the new earth, see Revelation 21:1), rather than evidence of creation in our contemporary earth. Facial expressions, whether on God, angels or people, are always happy in this theme. Unsurprisingly,



Fig. 10.19 Example drawing from the God-is-our-friend-our-guide. The forked road illustrates the two different paths humans are faced with, a life full of sin or life in heaven, and Jesus is guiding and pointing the way to life (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/tTwJnR2kR2yGIwyPU1ZGQQc.20180702T163248651Z>)

the colours are bright, with blue as the predominant background colour (perhaps in some reference to a sky). Above all other themes, drawings showing heaven or paradise were perhaps the most beautiful and joyful in the data set.

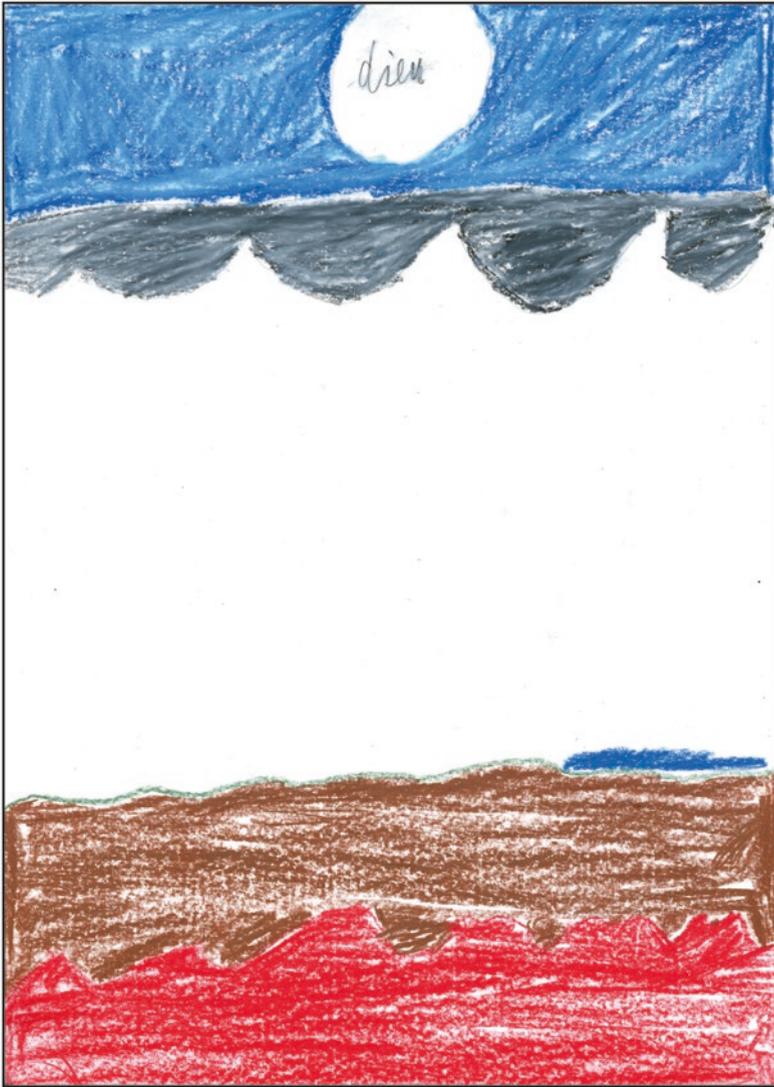


Fig. 10.20 Example drawing from the heaven-and-hell theme. In this drawing the child explicitly denotes heaven (at the top) where God resides, and to earth and hell (coloured in red) at the bottom (<http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/=FW9=OOKTYCXy=M4h97GvwQ.20180702T163423324Z>)

Discussion

In this chapter we present what we believe is the first direct investigation for evidence of emotionality in children's drawings of God. We are able to make a number of important and clear conclusions. First, the drawings frequently displayed



Fig. 10.21 Example drawing from the heaven-and-hell theme. Only heaven (paradise) is presented in this drawing. The picture clearly demonstrates an ethereal and otherworldly place (showing God and his angel), but also presents subject matter of the biblical “new earth” once the current earth has passed away (http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/_BiJTMcGQAOG97ZI=cgGmQm.20201025T133709338444Z)

expression of both emotions and concepts. This is noteworthy, because the task instructions did not explicitly refer to expression, they merely requested that the children “draw God”. Second, children not only used a range of emotions and other affective reactions, but used the same expressive techniques (i.e., literal expression, subject matter, formal properties) found in the expressive drawing literature that employed more specific mood-based drawing tasks. Furthermore, these are the same aesthetic techniques used by professional artists, suggesting that individuals develop these graphic techniques throughout childhood into adulthood to communicate expressively both affective and cognitive messages. Third, despite instructions requesting only a drawing of God, the resulting drawing set communicated a wide range of religious themes beyond that simply depicted by the God figure. Consistent with the largely Christian background of the sample, the drawings reflected a wide range of Judaeo-Christian theological themes. The breadth (and indeed depth in many of the drawings) of these messages not only is a testament for the children’s awareness of these themes, but also a creative willingness to address them in a task even when instructions did not require them to do so. Furthermore, the resulting themes presented themselves very easily within a biblical narrative, and more specifically a Christian narrative, of God’s gospel story.

As these themes were often communicated with a diverse and rich array of subject matter, it is not surprising that content expression was the predominant expressive technique employed by the children. It is interesting to note that content rich and scene-based drawings were found across the entire developmental range. In contrast, in the expressive drawing literature where children are specifically instructed to draw moods (e.g. happy, sad, angry, etc) a developmental shift has been noted from younger children primarily using literal expression (e.g. a person with a smiling face), to older children using more varied subject matter to communicate scenes and events that invoke moods (see Jolley, 2010). It is possible that specific mood-laden tasks encourage younger children to focus more on literal depiction of human subject matter to meet what they perceive to be the demands of the task. In contrast, drawing tasks on emotionally relevant topics but ones that do not refer to emotion in the instructions may actually liberate children of all ages to use their range of expressive techniques through wider subject matter and themes.

In addition to expressive content other aesthetic techniques, based on literal expression (including posture) and formal properties (e.g., colours), were used frequently. In respect of literal expression, a happy expression was depicted predominantly, not only on God but also where people were depicted, and even on other animal life (i.e. personification). This was confirmed by the valence data showing an overwhelming bias of scores towards the positive end of the dimension. Consistent with this, the postural position of the God figure, often with outstretched arms which usually communicated a welcoming and giving God. Finally, a range of formal properties were employed to serve abstract expression. Red, orange, and yellow—notably one end of the colour spectrum—were commonly found in the drawings. These served a variety of positive messages in the themes, but perhaps the most frequently displayed in both the creation pictures and of heaven or paradise. In addition, specific colours seem to be used for specific purposes. The most clear example of this was the use of yellow for God, either within the depiction of a God form or symbolically (non-anthropomorphically) to denote the light of God. In contrast, dark colours were most likely featured in drawings showing the crucifixion scene. Here, these abstract expressive qualities were additionally contributed by a heavy use of line, particularly in the crucifixion pictures, perhaps for symbolic purposes. In other instances, colour was used more literally and/or functionally to denote the subject matter depicted. This was particularly notable in drawings with roads or pathways, pictures of God's guidance, where the intention of the child may have been on representational clarity of the subject matter as a foundation upon which to communicate the expressive concept of friendship and guidance. Finally, composition (the arrangement of elements on the page) was also at times used expressively. For instance, a large centrally placed God being, or Jesus in the crucifixion, emphasised their importance. Somewhat differently in other drawings, God was presented against a formless background, serving to communicate His distinctness from us (His otherworldliness).

We now make some brief conclusions to the quantitative element to this project: the valence and intensity data. First, a positive valence was the overwhelming dimension of emotion communicated in the dataset. God was clearly perceived as a

positive Being and force. This was particularly so for girls and those attending religious education schools who portrayed a positive message with increasing intensity. Where gender differences have been examined, drawings made by girls have consistently rated higher in terms of expressive quality (Picard & Boulhais, 2011; Picard & Gauthier, 2012). It is unclear whether this can be attributed specifically to a female advantage in artistry, or to the general thought that girls are more expressive. It is not surprising that we found religious schooling a strong predictor in emotionality associated with God, both with its association to high levels of positive valence and intensity. This may be for a number of reasons. Children attending faith schools may have a more developed faith, through both school and parental education, which is likely to express itself both positively and intensely in their drawings. In addition, the greater emphasis on religious education in the faith schools is likely to promote more knowledge of God characteristics, and events surrounding God. They may also be more exposed to cultural representations of God and theological themes. This may include not only biblical stories, but also concepts such as God being our friend and guide, as well as more complex ideas of destiny associated with heaven and hell. In turn, such knowledge provides a foundation for creativity in which they can utilise known religious themes to communicate their own imagination and self-expression. Indeed, it was striking to see the level of creativity and imagination being applied to theological and cultural religious themes. Clearly some of these explanations also may apply to the narrative themes of the drawings, and it would be interesting for future research to compare narrative themes between religious and mainstream (regular) schools.

Challenges are often present in any research, but when one combines analysis of children's drawings, visual aesthetics and theology there is inevitably a question of interpretation. These apply to all three disciplines, but is particularly noticeable in research that attempts to draw upon all three. One particular scenario the research team on this project needed to address was how to interpret the valence in drawings depicting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Namely, while this scene exhibits much suffering (which was sometimes emphasized by children with the depiction of a sad face supplemented by blood and tears), it can also be construed as the ultimate sign of salvation and atonement for the humankind—hence a stunningly positive message. Drawings do not only show short-lived actions but also timeless and complex properties that enter the conversation of interpretation and rating, most notably in this research in respect of perceived emotional valence. This particular conundrum raises the wider issue in such research of the extent to which researchers decide to focus more on the *emic* or on the *etic* sides of interpretation. That is, the child's point of view or the researcher's own understanding of the data using a more top-down approach. In our commentary of the narrative themes this question applies itself particularly to our discussion of the narrative themes, principally to what extent was Judeo-Christian theology in the minds of the children who drew the pictures? Although we have deliberately drawn upon this theology to offer an explanation of the themes presented in drawings—justified on the basis of the particular participant sample—we nevertheless recognise that many of the children may not have known, or considered, while making their drawing, such theological

complexities. For instance, they merely may have been imitating cultural memes and imagery that they have been exposed to in their culture. Although all children were invited to provide a written text about their drawing, not all children chose to do this, while some others offered no more than a description of the content (rather than an interpretation). Replicating the research with semi-structured interviews may encourage children to give more comprehensive descriptive and interpretive comments, which may provide a safer foundation for researchers' commentaries on the drawings.

In conclusion, children utilise all three main expressive techniques (i.e., literal expression, subject matter, and formal properties). In addition, they use these techniques to express a wide range of Judeo-Christian themes beyond the topic of God requested in the drawings. This is likely to reflect the biblical and theological knowledge of the sample, particularly from the religious schools, but may also be a reflection of the religious and cultural symbols they have been exposed and learned. Overall, God and related religious themes were presented positively in the Swiss sample, with many of the drawings showing strong intensity and creativity from the children. The present piece of research points to the necessity to explore God representations for their emotional characteristics. Much of the cognitive science of religion has focused on rather "cold" conceptual qualities of gods and religious entities. This is the case of anthropomorphism (e.g., Barrett & Keil, 1996) and counterintuitiveness (e.g., Boyer & Walker, 2000). The search for ontologies of being in individuals' perceptions of the divine had mainly guided research carried out on children's drawings, and it can be hoped that the present line of investigation will contribute to the development of more *embodied* approaches that focus on emotions and expression.

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