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# Christian Evangelism and the Preschool Child

Ralph Wilde

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following

faculty committee:

First reader: F. C. Munnell Approved May 21, 1953

Second reader: Kenneth P. Weseke Approved May 21, 1953

Form reader: Her Byrme Approved May 21, 1953

CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM  
AND THE PRESCHOOL CHILD

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Western Evangelical Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
Ralph W. Wilde  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

The Problem. Preschool children are admittedly immature. They have a lot to learn concerning the world in which they live. They are necessarily very busy becoming acquainted with themselves and with the environment in which they have been placed. They express themselves very crudely and have little experience upon which to base their judgments. Many adults have regarded them as beings to be seen and not heard. The Church itself has seldom given much attention to their spiritual problems. That attention which the Church has given has pertained more to their readiness for death than to their readiness for life. In the light of these factors, the following problem has confronted evangelical Christianity: Should preschool children be approached in terms of evangelism?

The Thesis. The underlying thesis or proposition of this dissertation has been that preschool children should be approached in terms of evangelism.

Definition of Terms. "Preschool" children are those too young to be enrolled in public school. Particular consideration has been given in these pages to children in the first five years of life.

"Evangelism" and "Christian evangelism" have been used interchangeably to indicate all of the controllable factors which lead to a personal choice of Jesus Christ as Savior.

Churchmen herein quoted have commonly employed the term "infant" to specify children who have not reached the "age of accountability",



who have not attained "moral responsibility", or who have not had occasion to "sin willfully". Defined in these various ways, infancy has been thought to normally terminate as early as two and as late as twenty-one years of age.

The terms "regeneration", "new birth", "rebirth", "born again", and "born from above" have been used interchangeably in the development of this thesis to designate that evangelical experience with Divine Life whereby those who believe become new creatures in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17).

Basic Assumption and Limitations. The assumption has been made in this dissertation that the Church can best promote preschool evangelism by fostering Christian training in the home. Sunday School work among preschool children is largely dependent upon home cooperation and exemplification. Furthermore, many aides have been provided for teachers, whereas parents have been left for the most part to shift for themselves. Particular attention has been given in this writing, therefore, to the evangelical influence of parents, and to the techniques they may employ. The related problem of how to reach disinterested parents was considered beyond the scope of this discussion.

Objectives. The following objectives have guided this study: (1) What attitudes has the Church taken with reference to preschool children? (2) What reasons may be presented as to why preschool children should be approached in terms of evangelism? (3) How may parents best face their opportunities in this connection?

Tools and Techniques. Books, booklets, magazines, tracts, letters,

class notes, and interviews were utilized in the development of this thesis. Documentary research was conducted in various libraries of Portland, Oregon. Class notes from Cascade College, Western Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Seventh Annual Convention of the National Sunday School Association were also included. Much assistance in gaining the "feel" of the problem was afforded through personal interviews with Drs. Lois and Mary LeBar. Personal correspondence reaped rich testimonials of preschool "rebirth".

Statement of Organization. Following these introductory statements, the second chapter deals with the dominant attitudes which the Church has taken with reference to preschool salvation. The third chapter presents significant reasons why preschool children should be approached in terms of evangelism. The fourth chapter suggests how preschool children, particularly through the agency of their parents, may be trained for Christ and led to accept Him as their personal Savior. A summary is appended to the second, third, and fourth chapters, and the general summary with conclusions and recommendations contained in the fifth chapter completes the dissertation.



## CHAPTER II

### ATTITUDES OF THE CHURCH TOWARD PRESCHOOL SALVATION

Baptismal Regeneration. Scriptures relating to the salvation of little children have been variously interpreted. The idea that regeneration or the "new birth" is effected through water baptism was first championed in the Western Church by Augustine (354-430 A.D.). He taught that God grants little children real forgiveness and power for real heart conversion upon two conditions: (1) The Church must present the children to God in water baptism, making a confession of faith in their stead. (2) Those baptised must be predestined of God to be saved.<sup>1</sup> Augustine also taught that little children who die without baptism are eternally damned, though the sufferings they incur are mild.<sup>2</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church, including the eminent Thomas Aquinas (1225-74 A.D.), has perpetuated the Augustinian view of baptismal regeneration. The more recent Roman scholars have not all accepted the idea of infant damnation as Augustine taught it, however. The influential Council of Trent (1545-63 A.D.), for example, while declaring baptism necessary to salvation, made no reference to the eternal punishment of infants dying without the sacrament.<sup>3</sup> Early in this present

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1. Ferdinand Kattenbusch, "Baptism: Church Doctrine," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1908), I, 437-38.

2. Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., "Infant Salvation," Ibid. (1909), V, 490.

3. Ibid.



century, the Roman approach was generalized as follows:

Perrone represents, probably, the prevalent view when he says that they (infants dying without baptism) suffer only the lack of the beatific vision; they are in "a condition of pure nature." And, further, Roman Catholic theologians teach that the desire for baptism, even on the part of unborn children, is accepted for the baptism itself; therefore, there need be no fears for the children of Christians who die in infancy.<sup>4</sup>

The Catholic Encyclopedia declares:

Unbaptised Infants. The Catholic teaching is uncompromising on this point, that all who depart this life without baptism, be it of water, or blood, or desire, are perpetually excluded from the vision of God.<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that the Roman Catholic teaching has compromised, the foregoing quotation notwithstanding, in at least two particulars:

(1) The suffering has been removed from infant damnation. (2) The meaning of the word "baptism" has been expanded and accomodated.

The Eastern Church has persistently agreed to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. "Baptism to them is not merely the forgiveness, but the abolition, the extinction of sin."<sup>6</sup> They teach that children dying without baptism cannot be saved, though their penalty will be light.

Martin Luther (1483-1546 A.D.) also considered baptism necessary for salvation.<sup>7</sup> Article IX, "Of Baptism," in the Augsburg Confession (1530 A.D.), has been considered worthy of all acceptance in Lutheran

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4. Ibid.

5. Charles G. Herbermann, ed., "Infant Baptism," The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, Robert Appleton Co., 1907), II, 266.

6. Kattenbusch, op. cit., I, 438.

7. Ibid.



Churches to this day. It reads as follows:

Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God; and that children are to be baptized, who, being offered to God through Baptism, are received into God's grace.<sup>8</sup>

The Scriptures most commonly used to support the doctrine of baptismal regeneration are Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38. The former contains the command of Jesus to baptize all nations. The latter, in the A.S.V., reads as follows:

And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible does not teach that water baptism necessarily results in salvation. The Apostle Paul (Acts 9:1-18) and the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48) were both converted and filled with the Holy Spirit before experiencing water baptism. The Apostle Paul wrote:

I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanus: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. (I Corinthians 1:14-17a, A.S.V.)

This passage reveals that Paul did not consider water baptism to be an essential part of the Gospel. His attitude would certainly have been different had Jesus taught baptismal regeneration.

Election of Infants. In the face of these truths, John Calvin (1509-64 A.D.) denied the teaching of baptismal regeneration. He thought it wiser to leave the matter of child salvation in the hands of

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8. Book of Concord (St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House, 1922), Part II, p. 13.



God, and expanded Augustine's doctrine of predestination and election as follows:

As to infants, they seem to perish, not by their own fault, but by the fault of another. But there is a double solution. Though sin does not yet appear in them, yet it is latent; for they bear corruption shut up in the soul, so that before God they are damnable... That infants who are to be saved (as certainly, out of that age some are saved) must be previously regenerated by the Lord is clear.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Calvin taught that all "elect" infants, baptized or otherwise, are both in a state of salvation and regenerated, irrespective of their own will. This view has been expressed more clearly in the Westminster Confession, which reads:

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, where, and how He pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.<sup>10</sup>

As for the idea that some infants are "damnable" before God, it is now discarded by the followers of Calvin. It was Charles Hodge, the eminent Presbyterian theologian of the past century, who first saw fit to remove the "iron" from Calvinism in this regard. He taught emphatically that all who die in infancy are saved.<sup>11</sup> He even asserted that his view was the "common doctrine of evangelical Protestants."<sup>12</sup> The American Presbyterians later, in 1903 A.D., reinterpreted the Westminster Confession by adding the following "declaratory statement":

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9. Jackson, Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, V, 491.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (New York, Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1874), I, 26.



It is not to be regarded as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost. We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how He pleases.<sup>13</sup>

The Scripture used as foundation for John Calvin's idea that some infants are "elected" of God unto damnation is suggested in the following excerpt from the proceedings of the Synod of Dort (1619 A.D.):

That there is an election and reprobation of infants no less than of adults, we cannot deny in the face of God, who loves and hates unborn children.<sup>14</sup>

This line of argument clearly stems from Malachi 1:2, and more particularly from Romans 9:13. In these verses it is stated that God hated Esau, and the assumption was made from Romans 9:13 that this hatred began before Esau was born. It is clear that Esau was predetermined to serve Jacob, but Romans 9:13 does not require the belief that God arbitrarily hated Esau before he was born. The "hatred" of Malachi 1:2 clearly pertains to Esau's adult life. The whole tenor of Scripture argues rather that "God is love", and that He is "not willing (either wishing or purposing) that any should perish."<sup>15</sup>

Covenant Promise. Thriving particularly in Calvinistic circles, there developed a third approach to the problem of child salvation. This third approach was expressed even within the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619 A.D.):

Since we are to judge of the will of God from his word (which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of

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13. Jackson, op. cit., V, 491.

14. Ibid.

15. I John 4:8; II Peter 3:9, A.V.



grace, in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended), godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.<sup>16</sup>

According to Williston Walker, this hope was transplanted to America in the days of the pilgrim fathers. He wrote:

Original New England Congregationalism, like the thought of the church universal, had abundantly emphasized the significance of Christian childhood. The founders of New England had made much of the covenant relation existing between God and all members of the Christian household.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas this idea persisted among Calvinists in Europe, it lost ground in America under the foot of careless individualism.<sup>18</sup> Even during the Great Awakening (1740-42 A.D.), the emphasis was placed upon the conversion of adults; and the idea of a "covenant promise" with reference to the children of Christian parentage was viewed as heterodox.<sup>19</sup>

The two great champions of this doctrine of "covenant promise" among the "individualists" of America during the nineteenth century were Andrew Murray and Horace Bushnell. Horace Bushnell did not press the point of "covenant promise" itself, but his contentions served to further the teachings of those who did. His concern was to focus the attention of the American Church of his day upon its miserable failure to meet the spiritual needs of its children. He abhorred the practice

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16. Jackson, Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, V, 491.

17. Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture, intro. by Williston Walker (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. xxvii.

18. Ibid., p. 17.

19. Ibid., p. xxvii.



then prevalent of waiting until people became adults before seeking to claim them for Christ. He appreciated, as few did, the strategic importance of early impressions and training.

In some ways Bushnell's concept of regeneration seems to have been inadequate. He wrote, for example:

It is implied in all our religious philosophy, that if a child ever does anything in a right spirit, ever loves anything because it is good and right, it involves the dawn of a new life.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand he recognized that all good proceeds from the "Quickening Spirit", and he declared that

...there is no so unreasonable assumption, none so wide of all just philosophy, as that which proposes to form a child to virtue, by simply educating or drawing out what is in him.<sup>21</sup>

The fundamental proposition penned by Horace Bushnell was this: "That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise."<sup>22</sup> That the assumption of "covenant promise" rather than that of universalism was in his mind when he framed this proposition is evidenced by another of his affirmations:

It is the only true idea of Christian education that the child is to grow up in the life of the parent and to be a Christian in principle from his earliest years.<sup>23</sup>

Bushnell treated the problems of infant baptism and of moral agency in the same spirit of "covenant promise" as follows:

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20. Bushnell, op. cit., p. 16.

21. Ibid., p. 15. See also p. 17.

22. Ibid., p. 4.

23. Ibid., p. 23.



Infant or household baptism--a rite which supposes the fact of an organic connection of character between the parent and the child; a seal of faith in the parent, applied over to the child on the ground of a presumption that his faith is wrapped up in the parent's faith; so that he is accounted a believer from the beginning.<sup>24</sup> (Notice that he did not say, "from the time of baptism.")

We have much to say about the beginning of moral agency, and we seem to fancy that there is some definite moment when a child becomes a moral agent, passing out of a condition where he is a moral nullity, and where no moral agency touches his being. Whereas he is rather to be regarded, at the first, as lying within the moral agency of the parent, and passing out, by degrees, through a course of mixed agency, to a proper independency and self-possession. The supposition that he becomes, at some certain moment, a complete moral agent, which a moment before he was not, is clumsy and has no agreement with observation.<sup>25</sup>

The man who most thoroughly expounded the Scriptures on the doctrine of "covenant promise" was Andrew Murray. His book, The Children for Christ, was first published in 1887, just one year before Christian Nurture by Horace Bushnell appeared, and still remains the classic on the doctrine. In recent years it was distributed in abridged, mimeograph form by John Birch, director of the Child for Christ Crusade in Portland, Oregon. In 1952 it was reprinted, unabridged, by Moody Press.

Andrew Murray's unabridged book contains fifty-two sermons, with as many texts, on the one theme of "covenant promise" in relation to the children of godly parentage. For example, he quoted Genesis 7:1 (A.V.): "And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou, and all thy house into the ark: for thee have I seen righteous before me in this

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24. Ibid., p. 30.

25. Ibid., p. 21.



generation." Murray believed that this account represents "the family as grace restores it." The following was taken from his exposition:

By faith Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his house, and was made a witness to future ages that the faith of a believing, righteous parent obtains a blessing, not for himself only, but for his children too... Even Ham, who, as far as personal character was concerned, manifestly deserved to perish with the ungodly world, was saved from the flood for his father's sake and by his father's faith...

Beloved parents! let it no longer be enough to pray and hope that your child may be saved, but accept in faith the assurance that he can be, and act out in obedience the command that you are to bring him in! Go in and live in the ark; bring up and train thy little children there, as one wholly separated from the world and dwelling there; God's blessing will use thy training for their salvation.<sup>26</sup>

Another significant Old Testament portion of Scripture presented by Andrew Murray was Exodus 12:3,23 (A.V.):

Take every man a lamb, according to their father's houses, a lamb for an house... When He seeth the blood, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to enter your houses.

Murray's exposition of this account contains the following:

It has often escaped observation how the whole institution of the Paschal Lamb aimed at deliverance, not of the individuals, but of families--the houses of God's people. What else is the meaning of the expression, "a lamb for an house"? Or (as in verse 21), "Take you lambs according to your families"? And of the blood sprinkled upon the house?

Christ, our Passover, is slain for us. We love to trace how, in every, even to the most minute particular, the foreshadowings of the Paschal Feast were fulfilled in Him. Have we any warrant in God's Word for excepting this so important feature, and allowing the type to hold good in every respect but this? God forbid! Christ, the Lamb of God is still "a lamb for an house"! His blood may still be sprinkled upon the door, that the destroyer enter not in. In the new covenant, and with

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26. Andrew Murray, The Children for Christ, abr. by John Birch (Portland, Oregon, n.d.), pp. 5,6.



the precious blood of Christ, the principle still holds good. It is the believing father's right and duty in faith to appropriate the blood for his whole house. His faith has the Divine warrant, and will be rewarded with the Divine blessing.<sup>27</sup>

Horace Bushnell declared, with reference to Bible times:

It was taken for granted, as a matter of common understanding, that, in a change of religion, the children went with the parents; if they became Jews, that their children would be Jews; if Christian believers, that their children would be Christians.<sup>28</sup>

With this same outlook, Andrew Murray found further bases for his "covenant promise" convictions in his study of the New Testament:

"Cornelius feared God with all his house." "Lydia was baptized, and her household." To the jailor of Philippi Paul said, "Believe, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house", and "he was baptized, and all his, immediately"; and "he rejoiced greatly with all his house, having believed in God." "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue at Corinth, believed in the Lord with all his house." In the Epistles of Paul we find that he four times uses the expression, "the church in thy house"; he does not say the church assembling in thy house, but the church which is in thy house, referring evidently to the circle of believers constituting the family.<sup>29</sup>

The covenant promise approach to child evangelism may be summarized, then, as follows: Godly parents may foreknow that all of their children will be saved, providing they as parents really believe God's "promise" and act accordingly. The verse which perhaps most clearly suggests this promise is Proverbs 22:6 (A.V.): "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." In expositing this verse, Andrew Murray gave his answer to the question

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27. Ibid., p. 17.

28. Bushnell, Christian Nurture, p. 31.

29. Murray, op. cit., p. 82.



most likely to arise in opposition to the "promise":

There have been so many failures in religious training, that a spirit of doubt has grown up as to whether a principle like this can be regarded as holding universally good. With such doubt we undermine God's covenant. Let us rather believe that the failure was owing to man's fault: "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Either the parent did not make "the way in which he should go" his one aim in the child's training, or the training in that way was not what God's Word had ordered it to be.<sup>30</sup>

It is evident that there is much to commend the doctrine of "covenant promise", and no refutation has been forthcoming. It may be objected that the "covenant" rests largely upon Old Testament promises and upon Old Testament history allegorically interpreted. The responsibilities of Christian parenthood which have been set forth by the teachers of "covenant promise", however, are vital to preschool evangelism.

Universal Salvation of Infants. While Christian training in the home is ideal, many children do not have Christian parents. Often only one of the parents knows the Lord. Innocent children in these circumstances are not provided for in the doctrine of "covenant promise".

Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531 A.D.) was the first Protestant leader to oppose the theory that infant salvation is dependent upon water baptism, and to declare that all who die in infancy are "elect", and therefore saved. His position was resumed in the seventeenth century by the early followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609 A.D.) in Holland, and it has been accepted by Arminian groups to this day.<sup>31</sup> John Wesley

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30. Ibid., p. 35.

31. Jackson, Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, V, 491.



(1703-93 A.D.) and his followers have widely disseminated the teaching, both through popular sentiment and theological reasoning.

M'Clintock and Strong quoted the eminent Methodist theologian Richard Watson (1781-1833 A.D.) as saying, "The great consideration which leads to a solution of the case of persons dying in infancy is found in Romans 5:18."<sup>32</sup> This verse, upon which he built his argument, reads as follows (A.V.):

As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

Professor R. J. Cooke quoted "Bishop Merrill" as saying:

We are therefore led to conclude that, without the formal powers of regeneration, and without any appreciable exercise of active spiritual agency, they (infants) are, by virtue of the unconditional benefits of the atonement, placed in such a state of gracious acceptance as answers to the gracious state reached by adults only through justifying faith.<sup>33</sup>

John Miley, the Methodist theologian who developed the governmental theory of the atonement, concluded that "Infants dying in infancy are saved in Christ. This we fully and gratefully believe."<sup>34</sup>

H. Orton Wiley, theologian in the Church of the Nazarene, presented two more verses in support of the doctrine that all infants are unconditionally provided for in the atonement: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom

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32. John M'Clintock and James Strong, Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1894), IV, 578.

33. R. J. Cooke, Christianity and Childhood (Cincinnati, Cranston and Stowe, 1891), p. 108.

34. John Miley, The Atonement In Christ (New York, Hunt and Eaton, 1879), p. 265.



of heaven" (Matthew 18:3, A.V.), and "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14, A.V.). He joined with "Dr. Raymond" in asserting that there is unconditional provision in the atonement not only for the justification of infants, but also for their sanctification; since "no unclean thing or unholy person can be admitted into the presence of God and to the society of holy angels and glorified saints."<sup>35</sup>

H. H. Fout, while serving as a bishop in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, considered this universal provision to be a sound basis for the rite of infant baptism. He declared:

Infant baptism does not represent a cure, nor does it represent a prophecy, it rather represents a fact, a very blessed fact; all children are members of the kingdom of God, and, therefore, are graciously entitled to baptism and all the rights and privileges of the church.<sup>36</sup>

Bypassing Regeneration. It is a short step for some from the thought that dying infants are secure in Christ to the thought that those who live need not, necessarily, be "born again". The teaching of Count Zinzendorf (1700-60 A.D.) tended in this direction. He wrote:

What, then, is child nurture? It is a sacred, priestly method whereby souls are brought up from infancy so as not to think otherwise than that they belong to Christ and so that blessedness for them shall consist in knowing and serving him, and their greatest

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35. H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology (Kansas City, Missouri, Beacon Hill Press, 1947), II, 297-99.

36. H. H. Fout, The Child and the Church (Dayton, Ohio, The Otterbein Press, 1913), p. 46.



misfortune in becoming separated from him in any way whatsoever.<sup>37</sup>

Children should be treated lovingly, but they should also be taught to recognize sin. Forms of sin are encountered in the very first year of life, and children are capable of sinning willfully long before they go to school. While all infants may be secure in Christ, they are also all depraved in Adam. Their condition is like that of the Apostle Paul who wrote, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18, A.V.). Unless children die in infancy and are cared for as such, they will need to be "born from above" as much as any adult; for "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:3,6, A.V.). Children may be trained morally, but they cannot "grow" spiritually until they have been so "born". Regeneration must not be confused with the educational processes which precede or follow it.<sup>38</sup>

While little children stand in need of "rebirth", the "born again" experience of a little child will have different characteristics than that of a sin-hardened adult. In the tract, "Conversion--What Constitutes a Convert?" by the Board of Bishops of the former Evangelical Church, these differences have been likened to crossing a stream.<sup>39</sup> Relatively little effort is required to cross near the source, but if one waits until the stream has become a raging river, his crossing will

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37. Henry H. Meyer, Child Nature and Nurture According to Nicolaus Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (New York, The Abingdon Press, 1928), p. 123.

38. John D. Folsom, Religious Education in the Home (New York, The Methodist Book Concern, 1917), p. 122.

39. (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, The Evangelical Press, n.d.)



be quite different.

The Age of Accountability. The children to whom the benefits of the atonement accrue unconditionally have been termed "infants" by most authors. In seeking to locate the "age of accountability" before God, however, the unfortunate discovery is made that the word "infant" has seldom been clearly defined. At the present time it has two meanings according to the dictionary:

INFANT: 1. A child in the first period of life; a babe. 2. Law: A person not of full age; a minor; at the common law, any person under the age of 21; the age varies in some States.<sup>40</sup>

Fout used the terms "infant" and "child" interchangeably.<sup>41</sup> Koons referred to infancy as pertaining to the first five years of life; but he also wrote that moral obligation does not reach a working maturity before the age of twelve.<sup>42</sup> Bushnell, as has been noted, emphasized the fact that moral agency undergoes a gradual development.<sup>43</sup> J. Irvin Overholtzer, Director Emeritus of the International Child Evangelism Fellowship, worked on the assumption that little children may be responsible before God for their sins as early as the age of two.<sup>44</sup> He wrote:

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40. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (5th ed.; Springfield, Massachusetts, G. and C. Merriam Co., 1947), p. 514.

41. Fout, The Child and the Church, ch. 1.

42. William George Koons, The Child's Religious Life (New York, Eaton and Mains, 1903), pp. 32, 24.

43. Bushnell, Christian Nurture, p. 21.

44. J. Irvin Overholtzer, Parent and Child (Santa Monica, California, 1946), p. 11.



While "Ye must be born again" was spoken by our Lord to a man (John 3:7), the statement is potentially true of every child. The lostness of little children is emphatically declared by Jesus (Matt. 18:10,14). This was not said of infants, but it was said of little children. While it is generally believed that infants who die are saved, Scripture is not as clear about this as that little children are lost and must savingly believe in order to be kept from perishing.<sup>45</sup>

Whether Matthew 18:10-14 actually teaches that "little children" are doomed may be questioned. The age of accountability is difficult to establish, and likely varies considerably with individuals. Testimonies indicate, however, that many preschool children have recognized personal responsibility before God for their own sins. Children as young as two and one half years of age, understanding their personal need, have of their own volition accepted Christ as their Savior.<sup>46</sup> Regardless of any security they may have in their parents faith or in the unconditional provisions of the atonement, it is of supreme importance that children receive Life from above as soon as they are ready, and that they maintain a good conscience before God. Parents should exercise care not to be guilty of thwarting their little child's conscience when it cries out for a personal experience of saving grace--for the dawn of a personal walk with God. Jesus said:

Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Matthew 18:6, A.V.).

Child Evangelism Movements. At least four substantial child evangelism movements have arisen in North America in recent years. Each of

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45. Ibid.

46. See Ch. III.



these movements is fundamental in doctrine, undenominational in affiliation, and dedicated to the proposition that children need to be "born again". The most exclusive is "Children for Christ, Inc.", with national headquarters in St. Louis, which is closely associated with the American Council of Christian Churches. The "Bible Club Movement", with headquarters in Philadelphia, specializes in home Bible clubs. The "Child for Christ Crusade", which had its beginning in Western Canada, has the added feature of evangelistic meetings for the children. The "International Child Evangelism Fellowship", with headquarters in southern California, has a third operation which is called "open-air child evangelism". While all four groups concentrate primarily upon grade school children, they have each had conversions also at the preschool level.

Lest preschool evangelists run ahead of God in their endeavors, Dr. Mary E. LeBar, author of Patty goes to the Nursery Class, has written the following words of caution:

Since a certain intellectual maturity must precede grasp of the essentials of salvation, to push the process is similar to requiring intellectual precocity. Real and enduring danger enters when a child--who at preschool age quickly picks up correct verbalizations to please adults--goes through the process of accepting Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit who alone can effect the new birth. What should be words of eternal significance become robbed of their true import for him and may constitute a hardening process to block acceptance of the vital message later.

If no intellectual maturity is necessary for salvation, we can as well extract a "yes" from the child as soon as he can lisp the word and call it salvation. The relationship between physical growth and the work of the Holy Spirit is a problem akin to that which has always faced the Church: what is God's part and man's part? Most evangelicals believe that man has real choice, and that God has limited Himself to some extent in His dealings with man. So, too, time and the physical process



of growth place limits upon the time of accountability.<sup>47</sup>

Summary. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration taught in eastern orthodox churches was championed in the west by Augustine (354-430 A.D.) and has been accepted by Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and certain Anglicans.<sup>48</sup> The early implication of this doctrine, now modified in some quarters, was that all unbaptized children go to hell. John Calvin (1509-64 A.D.) taught that some children are predestined for heaven and others for hell, irrespective of baptism. Present-day Calvinists consider all infants predestined for heaven, providing they die in infancy. Andrew Murray, a Calvinist who wrote in 1887 A.D., championed the doctrine that Christian parents may be assured of their own children's salvation even beyond infancy, if they will conscientiously train them in the Way. Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531 A.D.) was the first Reformer to teach the universal salvation of infants. His position was resumed by the Remonstrants and has been popularized by Wesleyans. More recently the teaching has arisen that children properly trained will not need to be "born again" in the evangelical sense. On the other hand, four substantial child evangelism movements now flourishing represent the conviction that all children do stand in need of "rebirth". Dr. Mary E. LeBar has warned against forcing preschool children to go through the motions of regeneration before they are able to grasp its significance. Horace Bushnell taught that a degree of moral maturity must exist before a child becomes personally accountable for sin. Contrary to Bushnell's

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47. Mary E. LeBar, from a letter dated February 25, 1953.

48. Jackson, Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, V, 491.



view, J. Irvin Overholtzer has written that accountability arises as soon as willful wrong is committed. Testimonies presented in chapter two of this thesis indicate that conviction for willful sin has been experienced as young as two and one half years of age, though there is no sure basis for affirming that eternal judgment rests upon premature souls who have so transgressed.

### CHAPTER III

#### REASONS FOR AN EVANGELICAL APPROACH TO PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Scriptural Reasons. This chapter presents Scriptural, psychological, practical, and experiential reasons why preschool children should be approached in terms of evangelism. First of all, consider four strong evidences contained in the Word of God:

1. The Bible contains outstanding examples of preschool evangelism. Moses, the great Law-giver of Israel, was sufficiently grounded in the faith by his godly mother before he attended the schools of Egypt that no teaching of that highly developed educational system was able to shake his faith (Exodus 2:7-10). In the case of Samuel, Israel's great judge, it is difficult to adequately evaluate the strong impressions made upon him by his devoted parents before they left him in the temple with the relatively careless Eli (I Samuel 1:1-2:21). The Bible reveals that Samuel was still but a child when he replaced the high priest as spokesman for God (I Samuel 3:1-19). Timothy, one of the early Church's youngest bishops, is declared to have known from a "babe" the holy Scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation (II Timothy 1:5; 3:14,15, A.S.V.).

2. In the Old Testament the command appears that children should be taught diligently from the oracles of God. The Israelites were made to know that the success of their nation depended upon the faithfulness of parents to transmit a vital faith to their children. Deuteronomy 6:5-7 (A.V.) reads:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall



be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

The New Testament offers no substitute for this valid procedure.

Ideally then, vital faith is to be first transmitted in the home through parental instruction that is (1) from the heart, (2) diligent and earnest, and (3) persevering and continuous; even as this commandment in Deuteronomy indicates.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Proverbs 22:6 has been understood to teach that vital faith can be successfully transmitted to children by parents who will make their children's salvation a matter of primary concern.<sup>2</sup> These Scriptures do not necessarily teach the possibility of saving faith at the preschool age, but they do indicate the evangelistic culture which will best precipitate such faith.

How refreshing is the importance attached to children's faith in the Bible! Other "bibles" pay little or no attention to children:

The Christian religion is unique in the emphasis it places upon childhood. Other religions ignore or forget the child. Mohammed seems to know nothing about children. Ancient literature, except the Old Testament, is quite barren in allusions to children. In the Bible is found the only appreciation. In mythology the gods are not born as children; they come upon the stage full grown... There is not a child in all Shakespeare.<sup>3</sup>

3. Jesus exalted the faith of little children. His words as recorded in Matthew 18:1-10; 19:13,14 (A.V.) provide an impressive

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1. Andrew Murray, The Children For Christ, abr. by John Birch (Portland, Oregon, n.d.), p. 23.
  2. Thomas E. Pool, "The Conversion of Children," The Free Methodist, reprinted by the Child Evangelism Fellowship, n.d.
  3. H. H. Fout, The Child and the Church (Dayton, Ohio, The Otterbein Press, 1913), p. 17.



"Gospel of Childhood":<sup>4</sup>

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he drowned in the depth of the sea... Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Bishop Fout deduced that "As childlikeness is a state necessary to entrance into the kingdom, childhood is the surest and best time for that entrance."<sup>5</sup> He also observed that the same quality of humility which fits a child for entering the kingdom is also required for exaltation in it.<sup>6</sup> The command to receive little children in Christ's name was interpreted to mean that they should be cared for "as Christ would have them cared for."<sup>7</sup>

In this "gospel" Jesus indicated that little children are capable of exerting faith in Him, and that not a single expression of such faith is to be despised; for the angels of these children stand in the

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4. Ibid., ch. 1.

5. Ibid., p. 24.

6. Ibid., p. 25.

7. Ibid., p. 28.



very presence of the Father. To despise the faith of a little child is presented to be not only a great mistake, but also a dangerous offence.

With reference to the angels, Bishop Fout declared:

If Christ so cares for the children, if the highest angels guard them with loving care, then the church should give its most loving attention, its best gifts, its most earnest endeavor in their behalf.<sup>8</sup>

That this priority has not been properly appreciated by the Church was also indicated by the bishop:

By a policy of neglect, by the almost exclusive expenditure of its energies upon efforts at adult conversion and culture, by omitting from the architecture of its houses of worship, and in its sermons all consideration of a place for the children, by a failure to provide any well-adapted system of instruction, until very recent years, and only partially so now, and above all by a failure to use the family, in accord with the divine intent, for the training of children in the nurture of a spiritual life, the church is, like the disciples in the incident, forbidding the children to come to Jesus; and the Christ of to-day, like the Christ in that incident, is rebuking his remiss and short-sighted followers for such an attitude.<sup>9</sup>

The word "suffer" is better translated in present-day English as "let", or "allow". Concerning Jesus' exhortation to let the children come unto Him, Lois E. LeBar has penned the following exposition:

All three Synoptic Gospels record Jesus' invitation, "Let the little children come unto me, and forbid them not" (Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). This statement is a contrast to the command which the man who prepared the great supper gave to his servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23). Whereas many adults must be compelled to come to Christ, the children are eager to come if only we adults get out of their way and let them come. Much more readily than adults, children feel the need of the Saviour, and gladly come when they hear that

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8. Ibid., p. 57.

9. Ibid., pp. 44, 45.



He is near, if only the parents and teachers are willing to take the time to lead them gently to Him.<sup>10</sup>

Significant to the cause of preschool evangelism is the fact that the little children of Matthew 19:13,14, who were brought to Jesus, were mere "babes" ("brephe" in the Greek). This is ascertained by comparing the parallel passage in Luke 18:15-17.

4. A fourth Scriptural reason for employing an evangelical approach to preschool children is found by implication in the teachings of the apostles. Their gospel invitations were never addressed to whosoever is mature, but always to whosoever will believe. Their appeals were not limited to the adults of a home, but embraced the entire household.

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" was Peter's message on Pentecost, and he indicated in the same sermon that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for children as well as for adults; though "children" may be interpreted to refer to future generations (Acts 2:21,39, A.V.).

When the convicted Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?", Paul and Silas gave this child-honoring reply: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house." (Acts 16:31, A.V.).

The Apostle John, whose writings are rich in "whosoever", declared: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake"; and again, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father" (I John 2:12,13, A.V.).

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10. Lois E. LeBar, Children in the Bible School (Westwood, New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1952), p. 20.



Psychological Reasons. Does a study of preschool children themselves confirm the Scriptural injunctions that they should be approached in terms of evangelism? At least three strong arguments are available from the field of psychology to support this thesis:

1. Preschool children are highly receptive. They have not become hardened by sin. Their consciences are relatively tender, their hearts are open, their minds are impressionable, their wills are relatively pliable, and their faith is simple. They can become keenly alive to Jesus' love. They can learn to cast their cares upon Him. E. W. Thornton has made some helpful generalizations concerning them, particularly children two through five years of age. He wrote:

The key word to the period known as early childhood is receptivity. The child mind is eagerly open to impressions. Impressions are its food--and its poison. Little children, because of their lack of experience, their general immaturity and helplessness, must depend upon their seniors for everything... Confidence in grownups is natural to childhood and is destroyed only by deception.<sup>11</sup>

Bishop E. W. Praetorius considers freedom from side issues to be a strong factor in little children's receptivity. He wrote:

Conversions occurring in childhood are apt to be quite easily and quickly made. They arise out of a sense of loyalty to parents and teachers and out of a keen desire to do what is manifestly right... Adults have so many side issues and while they are still trying to get all the straggling interests of life in line under Christ's control, the child has already entered the Kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Lois E. LeBar has warned, however:

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11. E. W. Thornton, How To Teach (Cincinnati, Ohio, The Standard Publishing Co., 1943), pp. 66, 67.

12. E. W. Praetorius, Seasons of the Soul (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, The Evangelical Press, n.d.), pp. 11, 12.



Early childhood's natural faith and dependency are soon outgrown. Faith is natural to a child, for complete physical dependence is accompanied by absolute emotional confidence. Faith is unnatural to one as soon as he has learned to rely largely on himself and not wholly on others for the supplying of his needs.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the high degree of receptivity characteristic of the preschool years is soon outgrown substantiates the need to begin early.

Lois LeBar also wrote:

The most favorable soil for sowing the seed of the Word is the plastic heart of a child. In Christ's parable of the sower (Matt. 13:11-23) the dry, stony ground which prevents the seed from taking root is a picture of the hearts of most adults, who are increasingly worldly, skeptical, and materialistic.<sup>14</sup>

2. Preschool influences are highly indelible. Horace Bushnell is quoted as having said:

Let every father and mother realize that when their child is three years of age, they have done more than half they will ever do for it's character.<sup>15</sup>

According to Clarence H. Benson:

By the time a child is seven he has received three-fourths of his education. Upon this foundation the subsequent physical, intellectual, and spiritual structure will be built.<sup>16</sup>

Lois LeBar wrote, in this connection:

Habits of the first seven years are indelibly established. Educators concur with the Bible that an individual's essential character is formed very early. God says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and

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13. Lois LeBar, Children in the Bible School, p. 23.

14. Ibid., p. 21.

15. Valerie Patee Seger, Teaching Twos and Threes (Glendale, California, The Sunday School House, 1951), intro.

16. Clarence H. Benson, An Introduction to Child Study (Chicago, The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1927), p. 91.



when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). If a child does depart from his early teaching, the conclusion must be that he may have been told a great deal, but he may not have been trained to feel and do according to the truth... A child first makes his habits, then his habits turn about and make him. Nursery thinking lies at the back of much adult thinking.<sup>17</sup>

John H. Vincent made a similar evaluation back in 1887 A.D. He stated it this way:

The four years of a college course are scarcely more effective in the life of a man than the four years in the nursery, during which he begins to live--and all this before the Sunday School reaches him.<sup>18</sup>

One reason why many parents and teachers are so slow to appreciate the indelibility of preschool influences is because so many of these influences are wrought without recognition or intent on the part of the adults. Nevertheless, strong carry-overs are found, particularly from parents, of faith and unbelief, of hopes and despairs, of purposes and shiftlessness, of likes and dislikes, of good habits and bad habits.<sup>19</sup>

3. Finally, the preschool environment is most easily controlled. Preschool children are conditioned less than any other age group by past experiences, and their present experiences are highly centralized at home. Consequently, a recent book concludes with this unqualified question: "Your child and God. Between the two stands the parent--a separating wall or a connecting link. What are you?"<sup>20</sup>

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17. Lois LeBar, op. cit., pp. 25, 26.

18. John H. Vincent, The Modern Sunday School (New York, Hunt and Eaton, 1887), p. 25.

19. Class notes, "Christian Education and the Home" (Portland, Oregon, Western Baptist Theological Seminary, 1952).

20. Robbie Trent, Your Child and God (Chicago, Willett, Clark, and Co., 1941), p. 145.



Practical Reasons. Further reasons are found when the advisability of preschool evangelism is tested pragmatically:

1. Children "born again" during preschool years are thereby preserved from the scars of a multitude of sins. Early converts have temptations to face, of course, but many will not arise if they learn early to fix their eyes upon Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

2. Children "born again" during preschool years have the greatest possible opportunity to develop Christian character, and the fullest possible period to live to the glory of God.<sup>22</sup>

The great advantage of leading your child to Jesus now (preferably before he starts to school), is that he can give his whole life to Him. The Sunday School Times once printed in its Illustration Corner a little story of Mr. Moody. Someone asked him how many had been saved at his preaching the night before. "Just  $2\frac{1}{2}$ ," he said. "Indeed!--two adults and one child." "No, no," he replied, "Two children and one adult; the children had all their lives to give Him. The man had only half of his left."<sup>23</sup>

3. It is relatively easy to reach preschool children for Christ. They require training, spiritual perception, and heart conviction, as do others, but they are free from the bonds of habit and of doubt which characterize older persons. Bishop Praetorius, who was "born again" at the age of four himself, illustrated this point by saying that the "Gate" opens easier if we don't wait until the latch and hinges become rusty.<sup>24</sup> According to Lois LeBar:

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21. Class notes, "Christian Evangelism," (Portland, Oregon, Cascade College, 1944).

22. Lois E. LeBar, Children in the Bible School, p. 27.

23. Edith M. Gunderson, Training Your Child for Christ (Chicago, Alexander Press, Inc., 1945), p. 31.

24. Sermon (Jennings Lodge, Oregon, 1947).



Formerly the Junior and Junior High departments of the Bible school were considered the ages at which children should decide for Christ. But the many problems that arose with these ages brought the church face to face with the only remedy--begin earlier.<sup>25</sup>

Testimonials. The Scriptural, psychological, and practical reasons for preschool evangelism find rich supplement in the testimonies of experience. Charles H. Spurgeon wrote that "A child of five, if properly instructed, can as truly believe and be regenerated as an adult."<sup>26</sup> It was this statement which prompted the founding of the Child Evangelism Fellowship, and it has been proven many times over.<sup>27</sup> In fact, cases can be cited of children as young as two and one half years of age being "born again". For example, Mrs. Herbert Olson of Pasadena, California, wrote:

When our little girl Carolyn was two, I was teaching a child evangelism class on the lessons about "David". The plan of salvation was explained to the children several times.

One evening as we were coming home from my sister-in-laws, I was holding Carolyn in my lap and I thought that she was asleep. All at once she looked up at me and said: "I prayed and Jesus came into my heart." She was 2½ years old at that time. Salvation was very real to her and it was so easy to train and teach her as I could explain to her that a person who loved Jesus didn't do those things...

At the age of two, as soon as we came home from the child evangelism class, Carolyn would have to have a flannelgraph board and tell the story to her daddy. During the day time she'd line up her dolls on the davenport and they'd be her class and she'd teach them.

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25. Lois LeBar, op. cit., p. 26.

26. Quoted by J. Irvin Overholtzer, A Handbook on Child Evangelism (Pacific Palisades, California, International Child Evangelism Fellowship, Inc., 1942), p. 18.

27. J. Irvin Overholtzer, "Five Years Old," Child Evangelism, September, 1950, vol. IX, no. 9, p. 3.



She would give the invitation and ask if someone wanted to accept Jesus as their Saviour, and then she'd pray with her dollies.

She has attended Sunday School since eighteen months of age, child evangelism classes, and daily vacation Bible School. She is now seven and I've asked her sometimes, when she tells about someone accepting Jesus as their Saviour in Junior Church or elsewhere, if she did too. She'll always say, "I've already accepted him so I don't have to again."<sup>28</sup>

In one of his booklets, J. Irvin Overholtzer noted three specific cases of children "reborn" at the age of three:

Rev. Charles A. Porter, Asst. Pastor of the Moody Church, Chicago, Ill., told me of the conversion of his little daughter at the age of three. She is now eleven, a member of the church, and has given evidence of regeneration through the years.

I have just been in the home of a pastor in Alhambra, California. Here a little boy of five is one of the brightest believers I have ever met, child or adult. He has been saved two years. His mother told me that he was convicted by the message in John 3:16, and that the night of his conviction he prayed this prayer, "Jesus come into my heart right now." His mother says he was a changed child from that day.

The writer led one of his own children to Christ at the age of three and a half. Fifteen years have passed and the evidence is overwhelming that this child was regenerated that day in my study.<sup>29</sup>

The monthly Child Evangelism magazine has presented ten clear-cut cases of preschool regeneration in the past three years. One striking testimonial was written by J. D. London, missionary of the Central American Mission in San Marcos, Guatemala:

One afternoon almost three years ago several children were in our home for a class. There were two new children present, and as Mrs. London was closing the lesson she was explaining very carefully and clearly just what every child should know and do to be saved. These two

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28. Mrs. Herbert Olson, 169 N. Halstead, Pasadena 8, California, from a letter dated October 29, 1952.

29. Overholtzer, A Handbook on Child Evangelism, pp. 24, 25.



children accepted Jesus as their Saviour, and then in English Joyce said to her mother, "Why don't you talk to me like that about Jesus?" Well, we were both almost speechless, as all the conversation had been in Spanish, and at that time, Joyce, who was only about three and a half years old, understood and spoke very little Spanish. She then and there accepted Christ as her Saviour. She still talks about that time, and now she wants to be baptized. We thank God for this experience, for it certainly taught us that we are not to judge as to when a child is old enough to be saved or to need the Saviour.<sup>30</sup>

Count Zinzendorf, leader of the Moravian Church, accepted Christ at the age of four. At that time he composed and signed the following covenant: "Dear Saviour, do Thou be mine, and I will be Thine."<sup>31</sup> George Davis, editor and representative for the National Sunday School Department of the Assemblies of God, "was saved when only four years old and felt a call to the ministry a few years later."<sup>32</sup> The following testimonial comes from the ranks of Children for Christ, Inc.:

A child of four years, who had been taught the gospel truths, was sitting in church on Sunday when the hymn, "The Ninty and Nine" was sung. She reached over to her mother and with tears on her face said, "Does that little lost sheep mean me? Did the Lord Jesus do that for me?" At that time she was led to receive Jesus Christ as her Saviour. Now a young mother herself, she has given evidence all along the way of the reality of her conversion. She has been active in church, Sunday School, and young people's work, has taught in the Summer Bible School, and now is teaching a Children for Christ Class herself.<sup>33</sup>

Roy Campbell reported the conversion of his four year old grandson

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30. J. D. London, "Conversion of Joyce Diane," Child Evangelism, August, 1951, vol. X, no. 8, p. 24.

31. Quoted by Overholtzer, A Handbook on Child Evangelism, p. 25.

32. George H. Davis, from a letter dated November 11, 1952.

33. Related by Bernice G. Killam, from a letter dated November 17, 1952.



as follows:

When my little grandson Larry was slightly over four years of age, he took the Lord Jesus as his personal Saviour. For about a year or so before that, he had shown a terrible dislike for radio broadcasts of a religious nature. When he heard a hymn over the radio he would shout "Shut that thing off!" One day when he was convalescing from an illness, he reluctantly agreed to his grandfather's reading a gospel story to him. The story told of a little girl, about Larry's age, who had accepted Christ as her personal Saviour. The grandfather realizing the appropriateness of the occasion stopped reading and said with bated breath, "Larry." Larry looked up. "When I reach out my hand to you, will you take it, showing that you here and now receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour? Larry hesitated only a split second and then reached out his hand to his grandfather and said, "Yes, I do." Four years have passed and Larry has never once shown any dislike of hymns or religious programs to this day. He prays his own prayers, remembering always his little brother and the others in the family. Although he is still young, it is noticeable how he leans toward God and his Saviour...

Larry and his little brother Hal, who is two and a half, were out playing in the yard. Their mother, noting the unusual silence, went out to investigate and found them both on their knees on the floor of the garden swing, heads bowed and eyes closed. As the mother approached Larry looked up and said, "Mother, Hal's a Christian. He just gave his heart to Christ. I asked him if he would and he said, 'Um-hm.'"<sup>34</sup>

The pressure exerted by "grandfather" Campbell in reaching four year old Larry, while perhaps not a good general policy, did prove effective in this case. It may be that "grandfather" alone could have made such an approach successfully. Available testimonials of pre-school "rebirth" evidence the fact that there is no stereotype approach even at this age level.

Four year old Teddy, son of missionaries in China, had gathered

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34. Quoted by Norman V. Williams, The Christian Home (Chicago, Moody Press, 1952), pp. 92, 93.



the idea that a "teensy weensy Lord Jesus" wanted to live in his heart. This difficulty was discovered by a child evangelist, as the two were convalescing together in a hospital in Shanghai. Once the problem was overcome, the evangelist was able to lead the boy to Christ. She afterwards wrote:

Although I told him to thank the Lord for coming into his heart, yet my faith was weak. He was so young that I wondered if he really understood what he had done. Soon he left the hospital, and then one day his mother came to see me. She told me, "Hilda, I know this will interest you. One evening we were singing 'Come into my heart, Lord Jesus' at evening devotions, and Teddy said to me, 'Mother, I won't sing that song any more.' I asked, 'Why?' and he said, 'Because Jesus came into my heart when I was sick and in Miss. Riffel's room.'"

How I did rejoice that Teddy did understand. Now, seven months later, his mother tells me that Teddy often reminds her that Jesus lives in his heart.<sup>35</sup>

Four year old Mike, of Superior, Nebraska, was saved in a child evangelism class. The first two times he attended he raised his hand for prayer, but felt no guilt for sin. He declared it was his three year old sister Charlotte who did all the things mentioned. One day, however, Mike and his mother visited the teacher, and the mother told how Mike had kept his sister crying all morning.

Then came the next meeting. A little seven-year-old boy was taken into another room and dealt with first. When the teacher came out, Mike went to her and put his hand in hers, saying, "Take me." The teacher asked him what he wanted. In reply he said, "I want Jesus to come into my heart." In answer to the teacher's question as to why he wanted Jesus, Mike said, "Cause I did all dos nausie tings" (those naughty things).<sup>36</sup>

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35. Hilda Riffel, "A Heart Where Jesus Lives," Child Evangelism, May, 1950, vol. IX, no. 5, p. 13.

36. Child Evangelism, April, 1952, vol. XI, no. 4, p. 25.



The daughter of a New York pastor, Mary Rosalyn, was born again at the age of four. She had regularly attended church services and Bible school, and her parents talked freely of salvation in the home, answering her questions as they arose.

On this particular day Mary Rosalyn and her mother were in the living room when the radio in the kitchen carried the news of more bombings and more deaths. The child came running to her mother, looked into her face, and asked what happened to the people who were bombed and killed. Her mother explained that those who knew Jesus would go to be with Him in heaven, but the others to the "fire lake", as the child called the place of punishment.

The little girl looked most thoughtful. After pondering a minute, she asked from the depth of her being, "Mother, what would happen to me if I were bombed and killed?" Mother replied that it wasn't likely that she would be harmed, but if she was saved and was a child of God, she would go to heaven.

Up went her arms about her mother, who says, "I will never forget her searching look as she said, 'Mother, how can I be saved?'" Believing that it was time for an explanation when of her own volition she had understanding enough to ask the question, her mother proceeded to explain in simple terms the essential truths of God's plan of salvation. To make sure she comprehended, she told and retold it from different angles, pausing for the child's comments and questions. Mary Rosalyn's remarks showed she understood.

On the question of her own sin, she cried out, "Oh, mother, I want to be saved today!"

She knelt with her mother there by the davenport. Without any prompting, she told Jesus that she needed Him and asked Him to save her. The mother also prayed, thanking Jesus for saving her.<sup>37</sup>

With face aglow, Mary Rosalyn rejoiced that her name was written in God's Book, and immediately sought her father, that she might testify to him.

That evening when she went to bed the witness of the Spirit was most evident. She had prayed since she was a baby. Her regular prayer always included a great deal

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37. Lois E. LeBar, from a letter dated February 25, 1953.



of "Bless so- and so-." This night it was different. She asked, "Mother, is Uncle Junior a Christian?" When she was told that he was not, she answered, "I'll ask Jesus to save him too, so that he will be a Christian." Then she asked about others.

The next morning her next door playmate, an older girl came after milk. Mary Rosalyn went to her and asked, "Jean, are you saved?" Jean replied, "Well, I pray." "But that isn't enough to pray, Jean. I prayed too, but I wasn't a Christian. You have to ask Jesus to save you."<sup>38</sup>

At the age of eight Mary Rosalyn was still rejoicing in salvation and growing in grace, attesting the reality of her conversion. The impulse that led her to question her relationship to God was the fear of death, but her acceptance of salvation rested also upon the firm foundation of Christian training.

Another testimony was written by Miss. Eleanor Peterson, Child Evangelism Fellowship Director for Greeley, Colorado. Sherril, an invalid niece of the writer, was saved at the age of four and a half while listening to a children's radio program:

When the invitation was given she said to her mother, "You stop doing those dishes. I want to let Jesus come into my heart. That man said for us to stop whatever we were doing and ask Jesus to come in."

So mother and daughter prayed, and Jesus did come into her little heart.

Now at the age of nine she puts us older Christians to shame. Although confined to her wheel chair, she is a radiant testimony to her schoolmates and friends.

After attending some of my children's classes she wanted to start some of her own, so she invited her playmates to come in to hear her tell them about Jesus. Each week now for several months she has been a witness to her friends.<sup>39</sup>

Dan and Tim Arensmeier of Roseburg, Oregon, were both saved in

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38. Ibid.

39. Eleanor Peterson, "Sherril," Child Evangelism, February, 1951, vol. X, no. 2, p. 13.



their fourth year, three years apart, at the Arensmeier family altar. Mrs. Arensmeier's concern for her children's spiritual welfare can only be compared with that manifest by Susannah Wesley for her children; and Mr. Arensmeier is a man of like passion. The Arensmeier practice of Bible reading, singing, and prayer at every breakfast, and the reading of selections from Hurlbut's Story of the Bible, singing, and prayer every evening, together with Mrs. Arensmeier's practice of quoting Scripture and singing gospel songs during the day, all contributed to the boys' early awareness of God. Mrs. Arensmeier relates:

It was during the many months of nursing each of the boys that I memorized whole portions of the Word and said them over and over in their baby ears--convinced in my soul that even that would do them good, for "My Word will not return unto Me void" was very real to me.<sup>40</sup>

When the boys were two, they also were trained to memorize Scripture. The rule was, "No Bible--no breakfast." It took Dan three weeks to master John 3:16 to begin with, but he began the day he was two. As a result of this careful, enthusiastic training, Dan responded to an altar call at church before he was three years old. The parents, however, retrieved him from the aisle, telling him he was too young. After four such experiences, Dan got the idea his parents didn't really want him to be saved. Mrs. Arensmeier reports further:

Now he was 4 years and 1 month old. He was casually looking thru a Life Magazine as I was practicing on the organ in our Eugene E. U. B. Church. Mrs. Earl Peden, a wonderful Christian young lady---praise the Lord!--was on hand (and may I state here we have made it a habit to have only Christian baby sitters and how grateful we were for this one!). Dan looked up and rather brazenly stated: "Well I guess this is just what I'm going to be like when I grow up!"

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40. Mrs. Ralph Arensmeier, from a letter dated February 25, 1953.



Mrs. Peden glanced at the picture of a fine appearing gentleman smoking a pipe and on the table liquor and playing cards; quickly she answered: "Oh no, Dan, not you, honey--you're a Christian and you won't grow up to do things like that!"

"Oh yes I will," Dan said. "You see, Elnora, I'm not a Christian--I'm a child of the Devil!"

Horried, Mrs. Peden remarked: "Dan, no honey, you're a Christian and so are Mommie and Daddy--you know that!"

Dan said: "No, Elnora, I am not a Christian. No one is a Christian till saved, and Mommie and Daddy won't let me be saved; they think I'm too young--so I guess I'll just have to grow up to be an old sinner like most everybody else!"

Stunned, Mrs. Peden said: "Dan, boy, Elnora feels you are a sweet Christian boy already."

Quick as a wink Dan came back with: "Oh no I'm not; cause as soon as a person is old enough to know right from wrong, he's old enough to be saved--and I know right from wrong, but the folks, Elnora, won't--let--me--be--saved!" And herewith (he) broke down and sobbed!<sup>41</sup>

It was nine months later before Dan Arensmeier was actually "born again". It was evening family altar time and the story of Achan's disobedience had been read. Dan was impressed by God's judgment on Achan and began to contemplate his own disobediences. In his prayer, Dan said: "And dear Jesus help me to hurry up and get saved one of these days--please!"<sup>42</sup> When Mr. Arensmeier prayed that night, he happened to quote I John 1:9, and its promise took on meaning to Dan. After the prayer he said to his father, "But Daddy, you've never said anything to me about confessing my sins."<sup>43</sup> Here Mrs. Arensmeier notes:

Oh how faithful is the Word. We had exhorted him to let Jesus come in, or become a Christian, or get saved, but it had completely slipped our thinking to

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41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.



talk to him about his sins and confessing them.

Daddy quietly said: "Dan, would you like to confess your sins tonight and get that hurt out of your heart?"

"Yes, Daddy, tonight!!" And around his Daddy and down on his knees he went, with one of us on each side and began crying and praying and confessing--all of himself--out loud and fast and just poured out his heart!!

I thought I'd explain I John 1:9 so he'd understand, but I didn't get a chance to say a word. "Dear Jesus, please forgive all my sins. Please wash them away with thy precious blood, please come into my heart and make me a Christian. Oh, forgive me for telling Grandma Brown I could stay an hour when Mommie only said I could stay 45 minutes--forgive me for lying to her! Forgive me for teasing Timmy when Daddy and Mommie aren't around. Forgive me for stealing those two cookies out of the cookie jar. Oh forgive me for being so naughty. Forgive me for just everything; but forgive me most of all for not being saved all these years!!!

He realized at the tender age of 4 years and 10 months he'd been neglecting this great salvation!--or had we, the parents!!

We'd not said one word up to now, only of prayer and praising, and when Dan got to that last statement, Daddy quietly said: "Dan: Jesus said, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out!'"

Again I thought I'd explain, but instantly Dan said: "Oh dear Jesus I'm coming to you and you won't fro me away, will you!"

And then came peace, bless God.<sup>44</sup>

Dan gave God thanks as soon as his assurance came, and testified to a salesman, asking him if he was a Christian, before going to bed. Within three days he had witnessed to all of his loved ones in the neighborhood. Now fifteen years of age, he still dates his regeneration to this eventful night at the family altar.

The second son, Tim, seemed to be more the "hoodlum" type; was apparently not as religiously inclined as Dan. Under the influence of family prayers, however, he too became convicted, and was saved at the family altar at the age of four years, three months. Now twelve years

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44. Ibid.



old, Tim has never doubted his salvation and has rejoiced in his Christian privileges from that day to this.<sup>45</sup>

All of the testimonials thus far given pertain to children who were "born again" before the age of five! Perhaps as many have been "reborn" at five as have been "reborn" at all the other preschool ages combined.

Dr. R. P. Shuler, the great militant preacher of Los Angeles, California, says that he was saved when he was nine years old and that all of his seven brothers and sisters were led to Christ before they were six years of age.<sup>46</sup>

The Child Evangelism Fellowship finds the "Wordless Book" to be a very efficient means of presenting the gospel to children. This book contains a gold page, representing heaven, a black page, representing sin, a red page, representing salvation through the Blood, and a white page, representing the purification of the heart. It may be adapted to any age group and interpreted in any language.

L. A. Hartman, a member of the Fellowship staff, was doubtful as to whether the "Wordless Book" could be used effectively with a pre-school child until five year old Paula led the evangelist to test it:

Little Paula and I shared the back seat of her grandfather's car on a 300-mile trip. It was a splendid opportunity to present the gospel to her, but I was neglecting that opportunity until she herself took a hand in the matter. About the middle of the afternoon, in search of something to do, she investigated the contents of my shirt pocket, found the Wordless Book which is always there, and asked me to tell her about it. I did not refuse such a direct request, but told her the meaning of the various colored pages in the usual order.

The first indication that there was more than mere

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45. Ibid.

46. Noted by Overholtzer, A Handbook on Child Evangelism, p. 24.



childish curiosity involved came when I was explaining the black page, and she remarked, "I don't want to go down to be with the devil." I was amazed! I had not mentioned the punishment of sin at all, although I had mentioned that God will not permit any sin to enter heaven. After I had completed the story, she took the Wordless Book into her own hands and turned to the different pages at random with the request, "Tell me this one again," "Tell me this one again."

When I first asked her whether she was willing to have her sins washed away, she said, "Not yet." Wondering if she thought she was too young, I questioned her about this statement, and she explained that since we are not going yet, it is not necessary to get ready yet. It was just the devil's ancient lie, "There's plenty of time," voiced by a five-year-old! After I explained that none of us know when we may have to go, and we should be ready, she expressed her willingness to receive the Saviour immediately.<sup>47</sup>

Summary. Clear-cut reasons why preschool children should be approached in terms of evangelism are found in Scripture, in psychology, in practical consideration, and in testimonials of preschool "rebirth". The Old Testament Hebrews were commanded to train their children in the Word. The New Testament apostles were taught to respect the faith of little children. Psychology teaches that the preschool years are the most impressionable and formative in all of life. Common sense urges that the earlier children are led into fellowship with God, the richer their lives will be in personal satisfaction, in godly character, and in spiritual usefulness. The manifold cases of genuine preschool "rebirth" conclusively establish the claims of these young souls to the prayers and evangelistic passion of God's people.

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47. L. A. Hartman, "Can a Five-Year-Old Understand?," Child Evangelism, October, 1952, vol. XI, no. 10, p. 25.



## CHAPTER IV

### TRAINING AND REACHING PRESCHOOL CHILDREN FOR CHRIST

Importance of the Home. The first persons to have custody of a child are it's parents, or those who provide it's home. Home is the small child's world and first impressions are received there. Since these early impressions are highly indelible and formative, it follows that the home is the place of primary importance to preschool evangelism. Paul Vieth wrote, "Nowhere else may religion be taught so easily and with such abiding results as in the home."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, those who have made Christian education curricula for the churches have not fully grasped this priority of the home:

Curricula are planned for use within the Church, and suggestions and supplemental materials for the home are largely in the nature of making the church curriculum more effective.<sup>2</sup>

With this fact in mind, Wesner Fallow wrote:

Until the home becomes as purposeful a teaching arm of the church as the church school tries to be, we are not likely to find much satisfaction in our programs of religious education.<sup>3</sup>

The Eakins, going one step further, advocated "a restoration to the home of a leadership in religious nurture of the child which the church school has unsuccessfully tried to take over."<sup>4</sup> Many parents,

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1. Paul Vieth, The Church and Christian Education (St. Louis, Missouri, The Bethany Press, 1947), p. 168.

2. Ibid., p. 181.

3. Wesner Fallow, The Modern Parent and the Teaching Church (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1948), p. 24.

4. Mildred Moody Eakin and Frank Eakin, The Church-School Teacher's Job (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 179.



of course, fail to recognize or to fulfill their responsibilities in religious leadership, and even the exceptions look to the Church for guidance. Nevertheless, the large extent to which the Church and Church school are dependent upon the home in their efforts to reach preschool children for Christ is evident. Eva B. McCallum has written, for example:

It is not the purpose (of the nursery class) to take the place of the home in any way. Even when the home fails to make any attempt to discover and meet the religious needs of little children, the church cannot take the place of the home. It can only supplement good influences or counteract, to some extent, harmful ones. Any serious attempt of the church to aid the religious development of little children must include a program for parents.<sup>5</sup>

W. W. Faris wrote of the home as the "nursery of piety":

More and more, the emphasis of Christian propagandism is to be thrown on the Christian home and parental rearing. In the entire perspective of our churchly affairs let this loom largest: the parent the first and most effective preacher to the child, the home the real nucleus of the church and nursery of piety.<sup>6</sup>

The Haywards look to the home for the development of character:

Because it touches life creatively in its early and, therefore, its formative years; because it ministers by the inevitable laws of unconscious influence; because it sets the conditions under which a growing life meets successive experiences for the first time, the home becomes the central agency in the development of Christian character.<sup>7</sup>

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5. Eva B. McCallum, Guiding Nursery Children In Home And Church (St. Louis, Missouri, The Bethany Press, 1934), p. 23.
  6. William Wallace Faris, The Christian Home (Philadelphia, The Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1920), p. 131.
  7. Percy R. Hayward and Myrtle Harmon Hayward, The Home and Christian Living (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1931), p. 26.



Eva B. McCallum has given four reasons why the home should have precedence in our approach to the preschool child:

1. There is more time. 2. The child's spontaneous interest and questions about a present experience provide a natural teaching situation. 3. The close relationship between parents and children makes the parents' influence greater. 4. The individual attention that is necessary in guiding little children is more difficult to give when a group of children are together.<sup>8</sup>

John Wesley's mother is said to have appreciated this importance of individual attention in the home:

Her family was large, but every day she found time for a heart-to-heart talk with one or more of her children... Not one was overlooked, and each had his talk when the week ended.<sup>9</sup>

E. S. Whitehouse has rendered further confirmation to the importance of the home in preschool evangelism as follows:

The home is the small child's school. Here he receives the most help as he takes his first steps in Christian living. Mother and Daddy are the teachers whose influence means more to him than all the others who touch his life. He looks to his parents for the love and care that keep him secure, comfortable, and happy. In the everyday experiences he shares with his mother he learns to know the meaning of love, even though he may use that word in a very narrow sense. The standards of the home, the example of the adults within his home, the answers he receives there to his countless questions exert a profound influence upon him. This the church has come to see more and more clearly; and it has come to see that to serve the child it must serve and work with and through the parents. There is no other way by which the church's youngest children can be reached effectively.<sup>10</sup>

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8. McCallum, op. cit., pp. 22, 23.

9. John D. Folsom, Religious Education in the Home (New York, The Methodist Book Concern, 1917), pp. 80, 81.

10. Elizabeth S. Whitehouse, The Nursery Department At Work (Philadelphia, The Judson Press, 1945), p. 15.



Early Impressions. Evangelism should begin at home, but when?

The Odells first became concerned when their boy was nearly a year old:

It was about that time when he taught us two things: first, that he would point the way to us if we were alert enough to understand; and second, that certain experiences which we were having together were the beginning of religious training.<sup>11</sup>

Actually, the experiences or impressions even of the first year have a bearing upon a child's religious perspective. As Harry C. Munro wrote, "parents are teachers" from the time their children are born, whether they intend to be or not.<sup>12</sup> To the question, "Shall I teach my child of God?", Robbie Trent gave the reply: "I am answering that question every day. For good or ill, positively or negatively, for faith or for fear, I am teaching my child of God."<sup>13</sup> According to W. G. Koons,

The emotions and mental attitudes of parents are immediately and unconsciously produced in the infant. If the parents are tranquil and calm these characteristics will naturally grow in the child. If they be reverent and worshipful the child will unconsciously inbreathe the same. So far, then, from being careless during this early period parents ought to be weighed down with the thought that the children are unconsciously and of necessity inbreathing and ingrafting every parental emotion and mental characteristic.<sup>14</sup>

Similar words were penned by Horace Bushnell, though he included

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11. Mary Clemens Odell, Our Little Child Faces Life (New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), p. 1.
  12. Harry C. Munro, Parents Are Teachers (New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 46 pp.
  13. Robbie Trent, Your Child and God (Chicago, Willett, Clark, and Co., 1941), p. 14.
  14. William George Koons, The Child's Religious Life (New York, Eaton and Mains, 1903), p. 43.



"manners" as also being impressionable:

The spirit of the house is breathed into his (the child's) nature, day by day. The anger and gentleness, the fretfulness and patience--the appetites, passions, and manners--all the variant moods of feeling exhibited round him, pass into him as impressions, and become seeds of character in him, not because the parents will, but because it must be so whether they will or not.<sup>15</sup>

Horace Bushnell wrote further that all language presupposes impressions. Parents do not wait until children can talk intelligibly to teach them, for the very first words of their vocabulary arise out of early impressions:

All language supposes impressions first made. The word light does not signify anything, till the eye has taken the impression of light. The word love is unmeaning to one who has not loved and received love. The word God raises no conception of God, till the idea of such a being has been somehow generated and associated with that particular sound.<sup>16</sup>

Edwina Pollock stresses that a little child should be impressed with the meaning of God by associating "God" with his present apprehensive mass. For example, he may learn that God is like father, and that God made the flowers.<sup>17</sup> This process of association has been further elucidated by Noel E. Nicholl as follows:

He can, for example, only learn the meaning of "courage" through seeing people being brave; the idea of "wisdom" through living with a Mother and Father, who are wise in managing, in knowing what is good and what is bad for him, in answering his needs and questions; he comes to grasp the idea of "love" not only by experiencing the affection and enjoying the gifts of his parents,

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15. 15. Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 82.

16. Ibid., p. 204.

17. Class notes, "Beginner's Department," National Sunday School Association Convention (Portland, Oregon, 1952).



but also through knowing their sympathy, patience and understanding, through finding them slow to anger and plenteous in mercy... By far the most important people in a little child's life are his parents, and from them he will absorb his first ideas and ideals.<sup>18</sup>

The Bible declares that "the fruit of the Light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians 5:9, A.S.V.). Nicholl saw in these expressions points of approach to the small child's soul:

Some children are specially sensitive to the appeal of beauty, and the lovely things of creation stir them to wonder and worship... Many children to-day show at an early age a feeling after truth, and eagerness to puzzle things out, to be exact and orderly in the things which interest them... Some children seem to be specially given to "think with their hands" and are energetic and busy about the affairs of their small world.<sup>19</sup>

Even secular writers state that "A child's character depends upon the judgments he builds up out of his experience", and exhort parents to "Provide the experiences which will build desirable judgments."<sup>20</sup> The following warning gives added reason for attention to early impressions:

"Never let the watchfulness to check the buddings of evil and cherish the first tenderness of right feeling be relaxed. The ceaseless activity of the great enemy teaches the value of early training. Be beforehand with him. Preoccupy the ground with good seed, as the most effectual exclusion of his evil tares. Be at the very beginning of the way with wholesome food, ere Satan has the opportunity of pouring in his 'bread of deceit' ere nature is hardened by the habits of sin--brutalized by familiarity with vice."<sup>21</sup>

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18. Noel E. Nicholl, A Child's Personal Religion ( New York, The Macmillan Co., 1944), p. 10.
  19. Ibid., pp. 14, 17, 26.
  20. Childcraft (Chicago, Field Enterprises, Inc., 1949), XII, 33.
  21. Quoted by Norman V. Williams, The Christian Home (Chicago, Moody Press, 1952), p. 102.



Guiding Experiences. Early experiences can be guided. "Voltaire said that the foundations of his infidelity were laid before he was five years old."<sup>22</sup> The testimony of Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, on the other hand, reveals the opposite possibility. Dr. Morgan dedicated one of his books as follows:

To my father and mother, who forty years ago gave me to Christ, and who, never doubting the acceptance by him of their child, did from infancy and through youth train me as his; from whom I received my first knowledge of him, so that when the necessity came for my personal choosing, so did I recognize the claims of his love, that without revulsion, and hardly knowing when, I yielded to him my allegiance and my love, devoting spirit, soul, and body to his sweet will and glad service.<sup>23</sup>

One very important factor in the guidance of a small child is parental example. This truth has been presented quite forceably by John D. Folsom:

The beliefs, the character, dispositions, daily life, and conversation of father and mother tell on the child's forming life and character more than do all other things combined. The writer knows whereof he speaks, since the beginnings of his own Christian life were under the silent influences of a Christian home, where nothing was said to him directly to persuade him to such a life, no special religious instruction given, but where both father and mother truly lived every day the religious life they espoused. The religious atmosphere of that home was simply irresistible to the sensitive little souls that breathed it continuously. All of us followed the faith of our parents. It would have been almost a miracle if we had not.<sup>24</sup>

Herman J. Sweet, through his experience in dealing with children at summer camps and elsewhere, found the following parental qualities

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22. Quoted by Folsom, Religious Education in the Home, p. 156

23. Ibid., p. 124.

24. Folsom, p. 31.



essential to sound influence:

Among these I place first an unfailing love and a genuine affection, a stern regard for truth and a loyalty to a few basic moral absolutes, a deep sincerity, some worthy goals for living, and the ability to treat children as persons in their own right and not as subjects, or possessions, or ways to personal gratification.<sup>25</sup>

C. B. Eavey has listed the following parental traits as being particularly detrimental to children:

A few common traits and qualities in parents that have particularly harmful effects on childhood personality are: neurotic and introverted tendencies, emotional instability, attitudes of intolerance, lack of social adaptability, unwillingness to make new adjustments to family situations, overemphasis on the sacrifices incidental to parental care, extreme love of power, exaggeration of the values of submission and obedience, oversolicitude and overprotection, and unsatisfactory adjustment to the personal problems in their own lives.<sup>26</sup>

Even the example of a vital Christian faith will be stripped of its effectiveness if contorted by an abnormal personality, but God is able to help parents be "whole" and wholesome even in this regard.

A second important factor in child guidance is education. Alfred L. Murray summarized the preschool opportunities for Christian education as follows:

The normal child aged three, four, or five, is essentially preoccupied with four activities. All are necessary to the development of his life. He will spend the greater part of his time sleeping, eating, playing, and questioning...

If you succeed in weaving into a child's games the

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25. Herman J. Sweet, Opening the Door for God (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1943), p.7.

26. C. B. Eavey, Principles of Personality Building for Christian Parents (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1952), p. 37.



great message of the Bible, and if you are successful in prompting him to ask questions about God, in answering them intelligently, you have made a lasting contribution to the development of the child's spiritual life.<sup>27</sup>

According to John D. Folsom,

Religious instruction may be given incidentally, as occasion suggests or as circumstances seem to require; or it may be given systematically by appointed lessons, courses of reading, or by...talks and telling of stories... Well-timed advice, brief and to the point, is often of inestimable benefit, but a constant dribble of advice is a desolation.<sup>28</sup>

The classic Bible portion on religious instruction, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, declares that parents are to instruct their children in the Word of God because they love Him. This instruction is interpreted to include not only regular reading, but also the ordering of everyday conversation and the outfitting of the home itself. Certainly if God has first place in the parents' hearts they will, even inadvertently, talk about Him and with Him before their children, and such talk will neither be a "dribble" nor a "desolation". They will also prefer Christian magazines and books for their tables; Christian pictures and mottos for their walls.

John R. Church tells of the strong influence a picture of Christ hanging on the cross had upon his life. It was so placed in his bedroom that it was the last thing he saw each night and the first thing he saw every morning.<sup>29</sup> Psychologists call such experience "indirect

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27. Alfred L. Murray, Psychology for Christian Teachers (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1943), pp. 35, 54.

28. Folsom, Religious Education in the Home, pp. 74, 77.

29. John R. Church, Religion in the Home (Louisville, Kentucky, Pentecostal Publishing Co., n.d.), pp. 55, 56.



suggestion". John D. Folsom wrote, in this connection, as follows:

Great is parental authority, but ten times greater is the art of indirect suggestion. The one bears heavily on the will for a time, the other touches the very springs of life and abides.<sup>30</sup>

The same author set forth five rules for parents, to govern their use of suggestion with their children:

First, never give the child a suggestion that will do him harm. Secondly, keep the child away from evil suggestion. Thirdly, rescue the child from any evil suggestion he may have received by suggesting something else that will counteract the evil. Fourthly, study to put right suggestion into the child's mind, at the right time and in the right way. Finally, encourage in the child habits of quick, right, and wholesome auto-suggestion.<sup>31</sup>

These rules sound elementary but are worthy of study. The encouragement of "wholesome auto-suggestion" involves the development of good habits and the maintenance of a good disposition on the part of the child. For these purposes, Ada Hart Arlitt wrote:

(There are) two ways of making a child...set up good habits: The first of these is putting the child in a situation in which he is bound to do the thing one wishes him to do. The second is making pleasant what one wishes him to do...

A child tends to do over and over again, and therefore to make habits of, those acts which he finds interesting and pleasant. There are four main classes of things that make children like their tasks or that make their occupations pleasant: (1) the sense of achievement, that is, having accomplished something by themselves; (2) being the center of attention or the cause of excitement; (3) praise; (4) some sort of reward, such as a trip to the zoo or an extra privilege of some kind...

In looking for a good disposition, that is an even-tempered disposition on the part of the child, four things are necessary: obtain for your child excellent physical

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30. Folsom, op. cit., p. 51

31. Ibid., p. 40.



condition; secure for him a home in which he has every confidence in authority because that authority knows its own mind, because it is respected by other people, and because it, too, has emotional control; train the child to take responsibility for his own acts; and, finally, give him a habit of using initiative and energy in being busy and creating things instead of in getting his own way.<sup>32</sup>

If children are helped to develop good habits and a good disposition in their earliest years, it will be that much easier for them to exert saving faith in the Source of all good later on.

When your child has a bad habit, ask yourself these questions: 1. Is this thing that my child is doing meeting some need which I have failed to meet?.. 2. Am I rewarding this child for keeping on with this habit?.. 3. Is he being rewarded as often as he is being punished for the same act? 4. Have I tried to find something else which he can do in place of this habit, and is that something else of equal interest? 5. Am I making it almost impossible for him to escape doing the undesirable act?<sup>33</sup>

A third important factor in the guidance of preschool children is discipline.<sup>34</sup> The problem of maintaining discipline has been helpfully analyzed by Ada Hart Arlitt, particularly as it issues in punishment:

Punishment is like medicine. It should be reserved only for crises. If punishments are administered too frequently, they, like medicine, lose all their force... Very few children do well when spanking is used as a stock punishment... The last age for spanking, except in extreme conditions and with unusual children, is three and a half years...

One should never punish in anger... One should never threaten a punishment and then not carry it out... Punish, then let the matter drop. Too much talking takes away the force of the punishment... Punishment

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32. Ada Hart Arlitt, The Child from One to Twelve (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1931), pp. 52-54, 130-31.

33. Ibid., p. 52.

34. M. R. DeHann, Child-Training or Parental Responsibility (Grand Rapids, Michigan, The Radio Bible Class, n.d.), p. 4.



should be closely associated with the bad activity... Be careful not to attach the idea of punishment to things which you wish the child to like...

Again, one must always keep in mind that if one has five children, one may have to find five different ways to give punishment, for the chances are that the five children in one's own family will react very differently to the same punishment.<sup>35</sup>

Steps to Decision. Edith M. Gunderson, in her booklet Training Your Child For Christ, has set forth the definite steps which she successively employed in successfully leading her own five children to accept Christ as their personal Savior. Her procedure was to train the children in (1) obedience, (2) reverence, and (3) truthfulness as specific preparation for "rebirth".<sup>36</sup>

1. The first step to decision is to elicit willing obedience.

Mrs. Gunderson wrote:

Bringing up a family may be likened to climbing a staircase: It is best to attempt one step at a time. And the first step is to teach the child, gently but firmly, to submit his will to yours; for without obedience all other efforts are in vain.<sup>37</sup>

To assist parents in mastering this step, Mrs. Gunderson has given three basic rules:

You must teach him then, to submit at once to the parental authority, not just yield at last to persuasion or argument... The second rule is, when you do give a command invariably enforce its obedience... The third rule is, give as few commands as possible, and ignore or avoid minor issues.<sup>38</sup>

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35. Arlitt, op. cit., pp. 26-35.

36. Edith M. Gunderson, Training Your Child For Christ (Chicago, Alexander Press, Inc., 1945), 64pp.

37. Ibid., p. 16.

38. Ibid., pp. 17-19.



Mark Fakkema, Educational Director of the National Association of Christian Schools, recommends teaching obedience by God-given authority. His rules are as follows:

Rule One--Teach your children to fear God. Rule Two--Teach your children to respect God-given authority. Rule Three--Be sure that your commands to your children are expressive of God's will.<sup>39</sup>

Lest the idea of God-given authority be overworked, C. B. Eavey Has provided the following reminder:

The sensible parent considers his task to be that of a leader, not a boss. The leader depends upon the loyalty of others; the boss depends upon his power of authority. The leader arouses enthusiasm for co-operative effort; the boss drives the individual by fear. The leader says "we"; the boss uses the perpendicular pronoun. The leader makes effort enjoyable; the boss makes everything distasteful. No one--the child no less than anyone else--likes to be bossed. Any child can be led if only we take the pains to lead him. Typically, the child is bossed too much; everyone is constantly telling him what to do and what not to do. Like anyone else who is subjected to bossing, he naturally tries to get away from authority.<sup>40</sup>

Eavey warned further that no demonstration of authority should be allowed to obscure affection:

Never should one cut a child off from affection because of his disobedience. Its occasion may place him more in the need of our love than ever. Nor should we make disobedience a cause for future exercise of more rigid authority on our part. Whatever manner of treatment is given an act of disobedience, once it has been handled, bygones should ever after be bygones. If it is handled properly, both we and the child will advance in growth and understanding of each other.<sup>41</sup>

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39. Mark Fakkema, How To Teach Obedience (Wheaton, Illinois, Van Kampen Press, 1949), p. 22.

40. Eavey, Principles of Personality Building, p. 175.

41. Ibid., pp. 181, 182.



Ada Hart Arlitt's view concerning obedience is as follows:

In spite of the emphasis placed on freedom for children, the modern mother is still aware of the fact that the best freedom comes when the child has learned obedience to all reasonable commands. The purpose of obedience is both to protect the child and to give him self-control. It is not merely to make the child the least possible amount of trouble to the adults in the family. Such parental attitudes as come from the certainty in the mind of the parent that the child should obey, simply because he is a child and the parent wishes him to, result in crushing out the child's initiative or in developing a resistance to all kinds of commands--no matter how wise these commands are.<sup>42</sup>

Psychologist Arlitt has given many helpful suggestions to parents who would train their children in willing obedience. Among other things she has recommended a regular schedule, consistency in correction, making tasks interesting, avoiding unnecessary conflicts, maintaining consistent honesty as a basis for confidence, rejecting ridicule, bribery, fear, and comparison with brothers and sisters as means of gaining obedience, and the exercise of restraint in the use of the word "don't":

"Don't has no force for children under school age. To say to the child, "Don't step in the water," is equivalent to saying, "Step in the water."

Children need fewer "don'ts" if they have plenty of outlet for activity, and toys that encourage constructive play. It is a child's nature to be active and no amount of commanding will keep him still.<sup>43</sup>

2. The second step to decision is to develop reverence. The possessions, attitudes, interests, and conversations of the home should be conducive to reverence. Personal awe and private devotions will perhaps be best expedited through family worship:

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42. Arlitt, The Child from One to Twelve, p. 1.

43. Ibid., pp. 16-20.



Because family worship puts God at the center of life and recognizes him as an integral part of normal, happy living, it does much to help the child to build his concept and grow in his relationship to God.<sup>44</sup>

The simplest forms of family worship are grace at meals and bedside prayers. Children may participate in these devotions before they are a year old. Further prayer habits should follow:

Prayer habits should be formed very early. It is important that the child pray regularly--all by himself, at least when he goes to bed and when he awakes. But more important is that he be taught to go to God instantly, anywhere, any time, in time of need. Especially should he confess his sin to God without delay, when he sins, ask forgiveness. Then he should learn to praise God and thank Him for every blessing.<sup>45</sup>

The Bible should also be used in family worship. It's message may be revered long before it is understood. It's reading should be graded to the perception of the child, however, inasmuch as possible. Edna Dean Baker wrote:

For leading the child to his God, there are no stories like the Bible stories. They are literally saturated with God and the consciousness of his presence is as inevitably impressed upon the listener as the sunlight on his vision.<sup>46</sup>

There are many lessons in life, too, that are of value in developing reverence in preschool children. Clarence H. Benson wrote:

If God is pictured to the child as the loving Heavenly Father who cares for him just as his own father with whom he is familiar, provides food to eat and water to drink and clothing to wear, the Heavenly Father who

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44. Robbie Trent, Your Child and God (Chicago, Willett, Clark and Co., 1941), p. 103.

45. J. Irvin Overholtzer, Parent and Child (Santa Monica, California, International Child Evangelism Fellowship, 1946), p. 20.

46. Quoted by Trent, p. 66.



made the beautiful world and all the things in it; the heart of the little child will go out in love and trust to Him.<sup>47</sup>

Not all training in reverence needs to be formal. Mrs. Gunderson has suggested:

In your daily conversation, refer to the Bible as "God's Book," with reverent intonation of the Holy Name. Point out the sun and the moon as "God's lights," the flowers he admires as "God's" work. At the same time that you represent God as kind and good, giving him everything that he enjoys, mention that God is so great that we must be careful to do what pleases Him. The writer has used this word instead of "reverent" in teaching...because it is the word most generally used by mothers to teach care of clothing, furniture, etc., so it is readily understood by tiny tots. So show your babe that you are careful with God's Book, careful to bow your head, and to keep quiet when you speak to God, and so must he be.<sup>48</sup>

Church and Sunday School attendance also serve a vital function in developing reverence. Corporate worship tends to strengthen the children's sense of God's importance. Jessie B. Carlson wrote:

It is primarily through fellowship in family and church groups where God is known in worship and revealed in Christian living that little children come into a sense of his reality.<sup>49</sup>

3. The third step to decision, according to Mrs. Gunderson, is truthfulness. Once children have learned obedience to parents and reverence toward God, they should be taught to love truth. This is basic in their relations to other persons and to their appreciation of God's Word. For developing truthfulness, Mrs. Gunderson advised:

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47. Clarence H. Benson, An Introduction to Child Study (Chicago, The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1927), p. 118.

48. Gunderson, Training Your Child For Christ, pp. 24, 25.

49. Jessie B. Carlson, Guiding Children in the Nursery Class (Philadelphia, The Judson Press, 1948), p. 7.



Never deceive your child, never utter a falsehood in his presence, even if it be only what society calls a little, white lie... Though you cannot prevent all the false promises your child may encounter, you must not make one yourself.<sup>50</sup>

It is also important to recognize that not all children's "stories" are really lies. Imagination is natural to them, and can be very helpful if kept in bounds. Ada Hart Arlitt gives two methods for checking an overworked imagination:

In the first place, you may say to the child when he has told a story which you know has not happened, "That's just a play story, isn't it? Now, I'll tell you a play story," or "Of course, those things didn't really happen, did they? It is just a story like the ones I read to you from your books." This helps the child to know that both you and he are aware that these things which he is telling you cannot have happened, without putting him in the position of feeling that he has told a lie... A second way in which one may help the child to appreciate reality is by showing him that what he has imagined cannot possibly have happened.<sup>51</sup>

The Crucial Moment. When the Christian home is what it should be, children will find it natural to turn to their parents for the answers to their spiritual problems:

Christ is the center of the Christian family. The atmosphere of the home is Christian: the Bible is read daily; prayer is made daily; love prevails. Regular church attendance is the rule; conversation about the things of the kingdom of God is common practice; and the teachings of Christ are the standard for everyday living. In such a home, it is natural and normal for children to talk to parents about their spiritual life and problems... The person who should normally lead a child to Christ is a parent. Those who should be most interested in the fashioning of full and complete Christian personality in children are their parents.<sup>52</sup>

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50. Gunderson, op. cit., pp. 27, 28.

51. Arlitt, The Child From One to Twelve, pp. 139, 140.

52. Eavey, Principles of Personality Building, pp. 33, 34.



There may be many decisions for Christ in the life of the preschool child, before and after his actual regeneration. These decisions are important. Lois E. LeBar has written the following statement concerning "opportunities for decision", from the standpoint of the children's division of the Bible School:

If we provide small children frequent opportunities to say "Yes" to Christ in accordance with their limited comprehension of Him, we shall never err by hindering them from coming to the Savior, nor by being responsible for their making a mere profession before the Spirit has prepared the heart. We shall never be guilty of going to either extreme if we give our groups of children numerous occasions to confess their love of Christ, and then deal individually with those who seek salvation.<sup>53</sup>

Lois LeBar opposes the practice of forcing a decision during the tender preschool years, yet she recognizes that these little ones are not incapable of coming to grips with sin:

Even small children can understand that all of us get dirty as we work and play, but the disgrace is failure to wash and make ourselves clean. Just so, all have sinned--the very best of people, the ones we love best--and they do not hesitate to confess it. Neither are they overtly strict when the children sin, but simply face the fact frankly, call departure from any known law by its rightful name, and inculcate the habit of doing something about it.<sup>54</sup>

J. Irvin Overholtzer warned:

Those parents who make the sad mistake of thinking that their children are so good that they do not need to confess their sins and trust in the crucified Redeemer are headed for a rude awakening. May it come early! Sin is sin whether it manifests itself in the cultured sins of pride and anger or the vulgar sins of lying and

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53. Lois E. LeBar, Children in the Bible School (Westwood, New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1952), p. 171.

54. Ibid., p. 165.



theft.<sup>55</sup>

Some might question whether all of the inordinate acts and disobediences of preschool children labeled "sin" by Mr. Overholtzer are truly Godward and culpable, but they certainly prepare the way for culpable sin unless they are checked. It was a prominent Arminian who made this statement:

Parents who fail to get their children converted early in life, before they reach the age when the enemy makes them ashamed to take a stand for Christ before their schoolmates and young friends, may see them drift away into awful sin and be forever lost!<sup>56</sup>

Since sin is possible and perilous even to preschool children, parents should know what is involved in actually leading a soul to Christ. The promises of such verses as I John 1:9 and John 5:24 should be memorized. The need to confess, forsake, and repent of sin should be appreciated, as should the Bible appeal to trust, love, and obey God. The parents of a preschool child should know his peculiarities, problems, and plans better than any outsider, and this advantage is important, since no two children are alike. Mrs. Gunderson wrote:

The writer has seen every one of her children saved, and a great many others, and it is always a little different, for it is an individual transaction. But the heart and conscience must be reached, for the believing is in the heart, not mere mental assent, when the Savior enters in. Rom. 10:9. James 2:19.<sup>57</sup>

Sunday School and Church. The central agency in preschool

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55. Overholtzer, Parent and Child, p. 11.

56. Thomas E. Pool, "The Conversion of Children," The Free Methodist (reprinted by the Child Evangelism Fellowship, n.d.).

57. Gunderson, Training Your Child For Christ, p. 32.



evangelism is the home, but the home depends upon the Sunday School and Church for its instruction and inspiration in spiritual enterprises. Adolescents need to be taught the meaning of marriage from God's standpoint. Pastors need to provide pre-marital counsel. Expectant parents are usually anxious for guidance and appreciate the interest of the Church. When babies are born they should be enrolled on the cradle roll and be followed-up with such monthly literature as that provided by Scripture Press.<sup>58</sup> Both Scripture Press and The Sunday School House provide excellent materials for "twos and threes" who are able to attend the Church nursery classes.<sup>59</sup> Many presses print helpful literature for beginners. Sermons on the responsibilities and privileges of Christian parenthood, family-centered expressional activities and calling, and public prayer for God's blessing when babies are born--all will contribute to effective preschool evangelism in the home.<sup>60</sup>

Wesner Fallow fostered the idea of having a family registration in the Sunday School.<sup>61</sup> The success of this plan in one church has been reported by Gerald B. Harvey.<sup>62</sup> Harry B. Hampton prepared a condensed four-point parental agreement in this connection as follows:

1. We desire to have our children enrolled and receive the new books and other material.
2. Unless providentially hindered we will make every effort to have our children attend regularly and be on time.

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58. Scripture Press, Chicago, Illinois.

59. The Sunday School House, Glendale, California.

60. Class notes, "Christian Education and the Home," op. cit.

61. Fallow, The Modern Parent and the Teaching Church, p. 18.

62. Quoted by Eakin, The Church-School Teacher's Job, p. 131.



3. We will study and make dilligent use of the Teacher-parent magazine.

4. Unless prevented by reasons beyond our control, we will attend the parent-teacher conferences which will be held four times each year.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps a Sunday School covenant for parents of preschool children would be even more valuable. The following form is suggested:<sup>64</sup>

#### PARENT'S COVENANT

Desiring that my children be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and realizing that my example and influence are of first importance to the realization of this desire, I hereby covenant with God for the twelve months beginning June 14, 1953, to cooperate with the minister, officers and teachers of the Sunday School of the Collins View Evangelical United Brethren Church (who are also deeply interested in the spiritual and eternal welfare of my children), as follows:\*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I will show my appreciation of the work of the Sunday School before my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I will express my misgivings and criticisms concerning the Sunday School to the Sunday School leaders, and not before my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I will help my children to see the ways in which they benefit from the Sunday School.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I will help my children to be regular and punctual in their Sunday School attendance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I will assist my children with their Sunday School lessons when necessary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I will attend Sunday School myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I will feel free to speak with the Sunday School teachers of my children in the interest of mutual understanding and helpfulness.

\*My covenant includes  
all of the items "checked" above.

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63. Harry B. Hampton, A Program of Christian Education for the Church and Home (Portland, Oregon, The Western Baptist Theological Seminary, 1949), p. 22.

64. Adapted from John H. Vincent, The Modern Sunday School (New York, Phillip and Hunt, 1887), pp. 29-31.



Summary. The work of preschool evangelism is largely dependent upon the home. At home children receive their first impressions, learn their first works, and form their first habits. The home also suggests their first interests and provides the first answers to their questions. Preschool children spend most of their time at home, and their parents enjoy their deepest confidence. Parents may actively prepare their children for the experience of personal salvation by training them in willing obedience, reverence, and truthfulness. Parents are also in the most favorable position to actually lead their own children into the experience of regeneration, and should be prepared to do so whenever the opportunity presents itself. The local Church should make it a matter of primary concern to see that Christian parents have adequate assistance in this, their foremost responsibility.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Summary. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration taught in eastern orthodox Churches was championed in the west by Augustine (354-430 A.D.) and has been accepted by Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and certain Anglicans. The early implication of this doctrine, now modified in some quarters, was that all unbaptized children go to hell. John Calvin (1509-64 A.D.) taught that some children are predestined for heaven and others for hell, irrespective of baptism. Present-day Calvinists consider all infants predestined for heaven, providing they die in infancy. Andrew Murray, a Calvinist who wrote in 1887 A.D., championed the doctrine that Christian parents may be assured of their own children's salvation even beyond infancy, if they will conscientiously train them in the Way. Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531 A.D.) was the first Reformer to teach the universal salvation of infants. His position was resumed by the Remonstrants and has been popularized by Wesleyans. More recently the teaching has arisen that children properly trained will not need to be "born again" in the evangelical sense. On the other hand, four substantial child evangelism movements now flourishing believe not only that little children need to be "born again" but also that early childhood is the ideal time for the experience. The LeBar sisters warn against forcing preschool Children to go through the motions of "rebirth" before they are able to grasp its significance. Horace Bushnell taught that a degree of moral maturity must exist before the child becomes personally accountable for sin. Contrary to Bushnell's view, J. Irvin Overholtzer believes that



accountability arises as soon as willful wrong is committed. Testimonies presented in chapter three indicate that conviction for willful sin has been experienced as young as two and one half years of age, though there is no sure basis for affirming that eternal judgment has rested upon those premature souls who have so "transgressed".

Clear-cut reasons why preschool children should be approached in terms of evangelism are found in Scripture, in psychology, in practical consideration, and in testimonials of preschool "rebirth". The Old Testament Hebrews were commanded to train their children in the Word. The New Testament apostles were taught to respect the faith of little children. Psychology teaches that the preschool years are the most impressionable and formative in all of life. Common sense urges that the earlier children are led into fellowship with God, the richer their lives will be in personal satisfaction, in godly character, and in spiritual usefulness. The manifold cases of genuine preschool "rebirth" conclusively establish the claims of these young souls to the prayers and evangelistic passion of God's people.

The work of preschool evangelism is largely dependent upon the home. At home children receive their first impressions, learn their first words, and form their first habits. The home also suggests their first interests and provides the first answers to their questions. Preschool children spend most of their time at home, and their parents enjoy their deepest confidence. Parents may substantially limit the planting of "evil tares" by providing godly example and environment and by promoting wholesome activities. Parents may actively prepare their children for the experience of personal salvation by training them in willing obedience, reverence, and truthfulness. Parents are also in



the most favorable position to actually lead their children into the experience of regeneration, and should be prepared to do so whenever the opportunity presents itself. The local Church should make it a matter of primary concern to see that Christian parents have adequate assistance in this, their foremost responsibility.

Doctrinal Conclusions. The following conclusions have been drawn concerning the major doctrines which have been propogated in the Church with reference to children:

1. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration, although it has had widespread acceptance in the Church, is without sure foundation in Scripture.

2. The doctrine of election, wherein it indicates that some infants are predestined of God for hell, is likewise based upon misappropriated proof-texts.

3. The doctrine of covenant promise, maintaining that faithful parents may see all of their children "reborn", has real merit but rests too fully upon allegory and does not give adequate allowance for the exercise of personal choice.

4. The doctrine of universal infant salvation, currently accepted by evangelicals and liberals, has strong evidence in its favor. The usual age when the "unconditional benefits of the Atonement" cease to apply is not stated in Scripture. The age of personal, moral accountability before God seems to vary with individuals. Sensitivity to personal, moral responsibility before God seems to arise much earlier under positive, Christian training.

5. The doctrine that children properly trained will not need to



be "born again" in the evangelical sense is in direct opposition to the clear teachings of the Bible.

6. The doctrine that a child of five, if properly instructed, can as truly believe and be regenerated as an adult, has been proven many times over in tested experience.

7. The doctrine that preschool children should be approached in terms of evangelism has strong warrant in both Scripture and experience.

Reasons for Evangelism. The following reasons have been given for an evangelical approach to preschool children:

1. The Bible contains outstanding examples of preschool evangelism; i.e., Moses, Samuel, and Timothy.
2. The Old Testament commands that children are to be carefully trained concerning God and His claims upon them.
3. Jesus exalted the faith of little children, encouraged parents to bring their children unto Him, and blessed those little ones who were brought.
4. The apostles addressed their Gospel invitations to whomsoever would believe, and to entire households; not merely to the mature.
5. Preschool children are highly receptive, of good or evil.
6. Preschool influences are very indelible.
7. The preschool environment is most easily controlled.
8. Children "born again" during preschool years are thereby spared many scars of sin.
9. Many children may be eternally damned unless they are reached by Divine Grace before they go to school.
10. Children "born again" during preschool years have the greatest



possible opportunity to develop Christian character and to live to the glory of God.

11. It is relatively easy to reach preschool children for Christ, as many added hindrances arise after they go to school.

12. Children have been genuinely regenerated as young as two and one half years of age.

The Parental Approach. The following statements suggest how preschool children may best be approached in terms of evangelism:

1. Preschool evangelism should be home-centered.

2. There is no substitute for parental example. A child's earliest impressions should be conducive to confidence in his parents and to the worship of God.

3. A child's early experiences should be guided in the light of desired dispositions, judgments, and habits.

4. Training preparatory to regeneration may well focus upon willing obedience, reverence, and truthfulness.

5. Early instruction in worship should include grace at meals, family devotions, and family participation in the stated services of the local Church. The local Church should encourage, assist, and supplement the parents' evangelistic endeavors in every possible way.

6. Children should be informed concerning the goodness of God and the awfulness of sin as soon as they are able to receive it; yet they should not be pressed to accept Christ as their personal Savior before they personally recognize their need of Him.

7. Parents should be prepared to lead their children into a saving relationship with God whenever the opportunity presents itself.



Recommendations for Further Research. This dissertation has touched upon many doctrines which have been much more fully developed elsewhere. The following areas, however, could well bear further treatment:

1. A further study could be made of the responsibilities of the local Church toward preschool children. Particular attention could be given to the work of the Sunday School in its cradle roll, nursery, and beginners departments.
2. The problem of reaching disinterested parents for Christ has received sparse treatment. The easiest approach to many homes is through preschool children. Most parents are concerned for the best interests of their children.
3. A fresh treatment of the doctrine of regeneration would also be helpful, especially in the light of the still prevalent doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The Bible affords abundant material for research in this area.



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