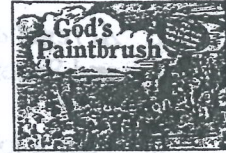


The Theological Foundations of *God's Paintbrush*

Rabbi Jeffrey L. Schein



God's Paintbrush is based on a positive evaluation of a child's image-making capacity. Too often theologians have responded to a child's developmental need for concrete images of God by forbidding those images as anthropomorphic misrepresentations of an imageless God. Religion then becomes a taboo area where we restrain what is otherwise a great source of energy and creativity for children. Rabbi Sasso takes a different tack. I believe she helps us embark on a journey where we come to appreciate the infinite nature of God by extending, not squashing, our image-making capacity.

In order to expand the child's repertoire of images of Godliness, Rabbi Sasso relies on three theological building blocks of Jewish tradition:

1. People are made in God's image—*Betzelem Elohim*. We can begin to think that there is a correspondence between our best actions and God's nature because we believe that there is something of the divine image in each of us. This theological construct invites constant dialogue about the nature of the divine-human resemblance, suggesting from the beginning that the resemblance is non-physical and must reside in our deepest emotional and spiritual human qualities.
2. We are God's partners in the ongoing creation of the world—*Shitufey adonay bema'asey bereshit*. We can ask children, as Rabbi Sasso does in the story, how our actions affect God, and how God affects us, precisely because we are viewed as partners in life.
3. Jewish tradition recognizes that the Torah speaks in the "language of human beings"—*Bilshon b'nai adam*. It is the only language we own and thus becomes a sanctioned tool for exploring our relationship with God. Perhaps the worst theological trick that has ever been played on us is to cause us to think that there is a perfect, abstract language of theological discourse. When this happens, we give up on the poetic and imaginative language so present and accessible for children.

The interaction of these three Jewish concepts about God's nature and relationship to human beings is constant and subtle in the book. By rooting *God's Paintbrush* in such rich theological soil, Rabbi Sasso unleashes the potential for the educator and child to create new pages of the book as they journey through God's world.

Questions for Reflection

(Materials related to *God's Paintbrush*)

1. *Al regel ahat*, try to paraphrase what you believe is the essence of what Rabbis Sasso and Schein are saying.
2. Take a look at the Reconstructionist siddur *Kol Haneshamah*. In what ways does it embody the same approach to creative religious metaphor?
3. At what age would you guess it is important to balance the coining of new religious metaphors with an analysis of the rational content of those metaphors?