

## **In God We Trust**

by Angela Millette

Religion was created to give people comfort in their lives and deaths. Religion is a staple in our country, and dictates others around the world. What happens when people don't believe in religion, or a God, or even a higher power? What causes people to break away from their families' belief systems? "In God We Trust" our dollar bills say. But do we all? *A Children's Bible* is a coming of age novel with a dooming apocalypse thrown into the mix. The apocalypse is the first glimpse of the Bible we get in the novel, "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it" (Isaiah 13: 9). In this story it never explicitly says: Apocalypse. But we can infer that that is what's coming for them. The kids in the novel range from nine to seventeen. They have to navigate through without their parents, and without beliefs, to come out the other side. *A Children's Bible* is about the near coming apocalypse, and how children navigate through it without their aloof parental figures. The children do not have a strong belief system because of the harsh conditions they were raised in. Throughout the novel you see them start to believe in something different, something interpreted by a nine year old boy.

The earth is flooding, just like in Genesis 6:17, "And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein *is* the breath of life, from under heaven; *and* every thing that *is* in the earth shall die". The flooding in the novel is caused by climate change. A very real subject in a very climate change ridden world. Our earth is dying and has been for years. In *A Children's Bible* the kids seem to have tried to educate the parents before the event of this novel and failed. By the end of the book they educate them again and teach them how to live through the apocalypse, but why is it that the older generation doesn't believe in

climate change when they're the ones who caused all the issues? This is a basic question that is asked probably every day in the media. It is my generation's job to fix the mistakes, and take things into our own hands.

The parents in this novel are corrupt and distant. They don't realize that they could've tried to stop this. The kids bring up how the parents shouldn't have had kids. They shouldn't have brought people into this world just to ignore them and cause them harm. Absent parents in a child's life can vastly affect the way the children think. Absent parenting or just bad parenting can cause a child to grow up too fast, or be oddly independent. To explain the absent parent trope that happens in a lot of novels, TV shows, and movies is Dave Eggers from his novel, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, "The hero's parents are more likely to be absent or dead than cruel or incompetent. In fact, it's the removal of the adult's protective presence that kick-starts the story, so the orphan can begin his "triumphant rise" (Eggers). The kids in this story are definitely independent. They also do not "Honor thy mother" or "honor thy father". This is a very well known commandment, but the kids don't have to do this. Parents do wrong. Parents mess up, and these parents definitely have. From Ephesians 6:1 is a quote I don't think anyone should have to live by, for it is completely circumstantial, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right". This gives the parents room for mistakes. It is very naive to think that "the older the wiser" it is clearly not always the truth. Even if we look at our world, the people who run the country are old, but the people who are trying to fix the country are young. The youth are the way to save our world, but nobody will take them seriously. This directly translates to Jack, and his story as a major character in *A Children's Bible*.

All of the kids have experienced great trauma in the novel, but I would like to focus on three characters in particular: Alycia, Eve, and Jack. I find these three characters the most

interesting to analyze. In the Bible, it doesn't say much about kids being independent and strong, but in Proverbs 20:11 it says, "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work *be* pure, and whether *it be* right" (Proverbs 20: 11). This means that the kids are going to do what they want, no matter what people try to tell them. Eve is an overly matured 15 year old who probably had to grow up before she knew it when her mother was neglecting her. Eve made her own path growing up. She raised her little brother and herself in the process. Their mother is an alcoholic feminist who abused Eve's intelligence to raise Jack. From *A Children's Bible*, "I know he's safe with you. Mature beyond your years," Said the Mother. Eve responded, "You're flattering me to avoid responsibility? That's low" (Millet 84). Her mother asks Eve for drinks and Eve does it to avoid an argument. Jack is solely raised by Eve. Eve humors him when he talks about animals and the Bible, but doesn't say she totally believes him. She only starts to help him with his decoding near the end of the novel.

Jack is a stunted 9 year old who acts younger, but has the intelligence of somebody older. He is smart enough to decode the Bible in his own way, but has tendencies to act much younger than he is. He mentions decoding the Bible here, "'So if God stands for nature, then Jesus stands for science. That's why they call Jesus God's son. It doesn't mean his *actual* son'" (Millet 142). For a nine year old boy who loves Frog and Toad and picture books, he sure is adamant about solving the Bible. Jack is seen trying to save as many animals he can from the flood in the beginning of the novel. A study from Michael Stone at Patheos states, "Agnostic and atheist kids were more likely to share than children whose parents were religious, while children who believe in God were more likely to be vengeful"(Stone). We don't have the opportunity to see any super religious kids in the children's Bible, but I thought this was interesting considering Christianity preaches kindness and generosity towards others. Jack makes *A Children's Bible* act as a real life

Bible to follow. In my mind Jack is on the earth for this one reason: to solve the Bible, share it with whom he loves, and leave.

The last character I want to focus on is Alycia. Alycia is a very minor character but I found her very interesting. We get insight on how “she doesn't eat ” and her attraction to older men. Alycia probably does not believe in the higher power if we go back and see what could have caused these issues. I found the addition of Alycia's eating disorder very interesting. Considering it is a known fact that eating disorders can be triggered by poor family dynamics, it makes sense why one should develop one. “The issue of the degree to which eating disorders are genetic is further complicated by the fact that family pressures may be an additional cause of eating disorders, especially in young people who may use not eating as a way to exercise power that they may not feel they have in other aspects of their lives”(Angers). Not only did she have a bad upbringing, but she also has bad parents, as do all the kids in *A Children's Bible*. It is also known that Alycia has a specific taste: older men. This is what we would informally call ‘daddy issues’. Daddy issues are common and for Alycia to develop a taste in older men is a given considering her own father. “Studies suggest that infants form discordant attachment patterns to mothers and fathers, and stress the importance of assessing infants’ parental attachment relationships to evaluate their integrative effects on how they function later in life” (Dagan, Or, and Schwartz). Even if her father wasn't physically absent, he was emotionally absent. You seek the love you never received, so in Alycia's case she wants attention from older men that are her father's age. All of the children in *A Children's Bible* have their personal stories and traumas, but I found these three to be the most interesting. Now we can look at how these traumas might have affected their fate to denounce a higher power.

“The influence of organized religion is decreasing in the West, and trends show a growing number of people abandoning their religious beliefs, or deconverting”(Perez and Vallières). This loss of religion could be caused by many different things. Some people might believe there is enough concrete evidence, some people weren't raised with it, and some people have big life altering events or trauma that caused them to leave their faith behind. In the novel for instance, these kids go through hell. There is no reason for them to have faith in any God at all. The Bible itself talks a lot about non-believers and sinners, but that's what turns me away from it. I don't like the fact that just because someone doesn't believe in the same thing you do, that it's wrong. Here is a line from Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it”? The connotation that you are desperately sick if you are at all questioning the Lord and his religion. People aren't sick for being atheist, or agnostics. Those people who believe in nothing at all probably have a good reason as to why they lost their faith. Another verse I don't agree with is from Second Corinthians 6: 14, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness”? I don't like the idea of believers and nonbelievers not being able to get along. This happens in our real world all the time with Christians who think being Muslim is the same thing as being a terrorist. A loss in a belief system does not mean loss of morals. From Ingrid Storm at Manchester University, “Morality is not rooted in religion, and religion matters less for moral values now than it did thirty years ago, says a researcher. Based on the analysis of European survey data, researchers found that religious decline does not equal moral decline”. That belief of losing all morals once you don't have a religion is very outdated. Many Christians even try to stray from using the word “religion” for it has a negative cultish connotation. In the novel these kids are never said to have a religion, but

the fact that Jack has a little Bible and that the kids know what Jack is talking about is proof that they probably were raised in a church, whether they wanted to be or not. Losing faith is one part, but finding a new one is usually the next step.

In the novel Millet never tells us whether or not the kids find a new religion, or new beliefs. It is all left to interpretation. Alycia is only in the first few chapters, Jack is the one who created the new beliefs and has been doing so the entire book, and in eve's case, we get a little more information. Eve does not say she believes or does not believe in God throughout the novel. She humors Jack and his reading, but does not research herself. The only part we get where she mentions it is here, "So maybe art is the Holy Ghost. Maybe art is the ghost in the machine" (Millet 224). This is one of the last lines in the novel, and it's Eve speaking to Jack. We know that Eve wants to disappear and just be particles in the sky. She never mentions heaven or hell, and neither does Jack. She just believes in dying and being a part of the earth forever, not dead, not alive, just existing. This is a very mature topic for a fifteen year old girl to be thinking about, but with her life experiences, it isn't that far fetched. Finding new religion is very common within young people. That's why we have things like "born again christians" and so many teenagers following Pagan or Wiccan beliefs. We have access to the internet to learn about these new beliefs. Jack created this new belief system and shared it with the kids. Whether they liked it or not, all Jack was saying was turning out to be true, and his religion would catch on to them. A real life example would be bringing it back to Wicca. From CBC News, "Someone who is wiccan follows nature-oriented worship and rituals, and sees it as a religion. And in wicca, they prioritize priestesses and celebrate the Goddess. A nature-oriented religion that's also female-centric? When I think about it like that, there's no wonder why young women gravitate towards this experience in 2021" (Schuck). Teens gravitating towards a new religion or no religion is no

surprise with everything that's going on in the world right now. In the novel these kids are going through hell, so why wouldn't they want to find comfort in something? On the other hand, leave their faith entirely because of the wrongdoings of their past God.

The whole novel is about these kids making it through the hardest part of their lives, but with no real hope in sight. They don't have an ending plan, they just have to focus on what's going on right in front of them. The reason we are seeing more and more non religious people in this world is because of the constant trauma endured by our youth and by our country. This book is a lot like real life. Right now we have no idea what we're doing with COVID-19. We have no real clue when this is going to end and if it will ever go away. We have to live as if this is our new normal. Say goodbye to what we used to have because realistically it will never be like that again. I remember when the pandemic started everyone acted like it was the damn apocalypse. I wish people were still as scared as they were in the beginning. People were scared but people were safe. There weren't any people who were saying it wasn't real. People were doing whatever they could to stay away from this virus, and now people brush it away as it gets worse and worse. We won't know when the real apocalypse is really here, because some people will say it's not. They end up going back to their parents and teaching them how to survive in this world, as they did at the ranch. The parents of our generation are being taught by the younger people every single day. How to not be insensitive, how to use pronouns, how to compost, use green energy, and so much more. The younger generation is always teaching the older, but it never really goes anywhere. I wish that the people in charge of the world and this country cared as much as young people do about the planet. If they did, we could be on a better track than we are right now. In the story Jack is the youngest, but he brings hope to the ranch and to the world essentially. The innocence he holds is only found in youth. A sense of maturity hidden behind picture books and pet owls.

Jack is inferred to die at the end of this novel, and as I mentioned before, this was the best way to do it. Jack is on the earth for this one reason, so solve the Bible, share it with whom he loves, and leave. The end of this story brings peace to Jack, and to the readers. ““The comets and stars will be our eyes,’ I told him" (Millet 224). This last line is so beautiful. It feels like a Bible verse to me. Beautifully constructed to bring hope and to end the novel. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24: 35).



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