**Child Theology: A Log of a 21-Year Theological Journey 2001-2022**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This idea of this paper emerged in discussions with several colleagues who have walked for parts of this journey since 2001. As a log it has modest intentions, attempting neither a history of Child Theology or the Child Theology Movement, nor an attempt to describe or assess in any depth the full range of theological ideas explored and published in the twenty years from 2001 to 2022. Rather it serves as a note for those who are interested to know more about some of the places, spaces, paths and cul-de-sacs encountered on the way.[[1]](#endnote-1)

As far as we know, the term “Child Theology” (CT) was first coined in English at the outset of this theological journey. Most of the ideas described below had been around in one shape or form before then, but the theology was “pre-paradigmatic”.[[2]](#endnote-2) For example, “Childhood and the Kingdom of Heaven”, a paper given in 1999,[[3]](#endnote-3) contains intimations of what is now known as CT, including a celebration of the resonance between the “now and not yet” of both childhood and the Kingdom of Heaven.[[4]](#endnote-4) But there is no attempt at a coherent theology. Shortly after this there was a paper, “Developing a Theology of Childhood”, addressed to the VIVA Network in Oxford. It covered much of the span of CT, but without the term, Child Theology being used, and developing in a way that would now be seen as distinct from how CT has come to be understood.[[5]](#endnote-5)

So it was that the words “Child” and “Theology” had to wait until February 2002 before they were united in a paper given to the UK Christian Child Care Forum, entitled, “Child Theology is Born”.[[6]](#endnote-6) This attempted to identify some of the issues of definition and to imagine the sort of process that would be required for something like Child Theology to be done with any integrity or coherence. Months later, at a meeting of the Children’s Bible Task Force, in Colorado Springs, Matthew 18: 2 was used as a starting point (“Jesus called a little child and had him stand among them…”): “This is the essence and challenge of child theology. Not to teach a little child; not to be taught by the child; not to do anything with words, but to live, to work and to think with a little child in the forefront of our consciousness, planning, and activity.” [[7]](#endnote-7)

Within a couple of weeks there was a consultation in Penang convened by what was to become the “Child Theology Movement”.[[8]](#endnote-8) The report of the consultation has the feel of a brainstorm bursting with energy. It explored what relevant material was known by the participants as a basis for identifying questions and tasks for the future.[[9]](#endnote-9) With hindsight Child Theology can be identified in embryonic form in this, and there are rudimentary attempts to define it.[[10]](#endnote-10)

This report of the first consultation in Penang is a key document for anyone seeking to understand the theological journey described in this log. There is a collage of pictures on the back cover with a real child at the centre.[[11]](#endnote-11) He had travelled with his grandparents from the UK to Penang. The location in Malaysia was no accident. From the outset the intention was that CT would be international in its nature and scope, deliberately avoiding any tendency to be western dominated.

A significant characteristic of the event in Penang, and the subsequent consultations around the world was that most of the participants were Christians engaged in some form of mission or activity that had children as its focus or priority. They were, if you like, child activists, and so one of their reasons for being involved in the theological conversation or journey was to seek inspiration from the Scriptures for themselves and their supporters in their daily engagement with children and young people.[[12]](#endnote-12)

**CONTEXT**

As noted, the first Penang Consultation attempted to assess what “child attentive”[[13]](#endnote-13) theological reflection was already going on around the world. A brief review was undertaken as part of the process of identifying what the core components or dynamics of anything resembling Child Theology might conceivably be.[[14]](#endnote-14) It soon became apparent that there was a range of theological ideas, operating within the individualisms and competing sectarianisms of contemporary Christianity, entrepreneurial mission enterprises, and a variety of cultural and ideological positions and tensions. Perhaps this helps to explain why whether in the small core of CTM (mainly the trustees), or in the wider network of those who attended consultations, the questions of coherent identity and theological priority were never seriously pursued. Various individual contributions were made, and these are named in this log, but they were not adopted as part of the corporate beliefs or identity of CTM.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Nevertheless, there were common threads running through consultations and papers. They included the following:

biblical theology; child; children’s rights; Christian education; Christian mission; Christian parenting, counselling, and childcare; church; discipleship; the Kingdom of God; sin.

Critically important is the fact that CT was born during a period when “child” and “childhood” were being de-constructed, re-imagined and re-experienced in a global context. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was passed in 1989 and marked a watershed in thinking and policy.[[16]](#endnote-16) Despite its title, the convention was not confined to “rights”, but sought to represent a reorientation of thinking and policy in which children were respected, and encouraged to see themselves, as fully human, rather than “adults-in-waiting”. Likewise, children and childhood were distinct subjects of discourse as well as action, rather than treated as subsidiaries or sub-sets of wider discourses such as family, society, education.

A ready-reckoner for charting this process is the discipline of sociology, where such a sea-change is easy to observe.[[17]](#endnote-17) Textbooks have been re-written, books produced aplenty, and the sub-discipline, Sociology of Childhood, is burgeoning. Just as had happened with women, slaves, the poor, ethnic groups, children emerged from the shadows to be listened and related to directly as agents, rather than indirectly through mediators personal or institutional.

There have, of course, been centuries of Christian activity with and for children in home, churches, schools, and rescue missions. But these endeavours took place within existing cultural and theological paradigms, and discourses, and often the urgency of the needs of children, such as rescuing them from dire situations, meant that theological reflection usually took a back seat.

Over the same period, while Contextual or Liberation Theologies with roots in the 1960s had consolidated their focus on specific groups or collectives of human being such as the poor, women, black, etc., there did not seem to be a comparable movement with children at its heart. At this point is should be noted that these liberation or contextual theological movements have often been conspicuous for the absence or invisibility of children whether in their theology and action. Because the initiative that has become known as CT and associated with CTM began with an invitation from Christian groups committed to children’s mission and ministry it is not difficult to see why it might have become conceived as another contextual theology with a preferential option for, or bias to, children.[[18]](#endnote-18) Without anticipating the journey or the log, while CT has consistently supported those engaged in advocacy and action to improve the lives of children, it has seen its ambit as wider than this.

There have, of course, there have been theologians over the centuries who have shown their awareness of children, and some have incorporated them into their thinking and practice. Sometimes a single reflection has been of considerable historical significance in the development of theology and church, for example, Augustine’s *Confessions,[[19]](#endnote-19)* and perhaps to a lesser extentSt John Chrysostom’s *Homilies and Discourses*. Marcia Bunge’s book, *The Child in Christian Thought* has proved to be a timely and accessible resource for those seeking to identify many of these.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Although since 2001 as indicated in the note above, there have been significant publications by contemporary theologians, as well as research on, for example, the theology of, Karl Barth, for the most part, in systematic theology, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, children are marginal, and often all but invisible. Mainstream theological discourse and training continues to proceed, with a few exceptions, as if children were of little or no significance. An example of this is Stanley Grenz’s, *Theology for the Community of God.[[21]](#endnote-21)* Given the title it might be assumed that children would automatically be part of such a study, but they are absent.[[22]](#endnote-22)

**THE LAUNCH OF THE PROCESS THAT RESULTED IN CTM**

Against this background, we turn to the specific setting in which the process of CT associated with the Child Theology Movement arose. There was an international “Cutting Edge” conference at De Bron in Holland in 2001, convened by Viva Network and drawing together Christians and Christian organisations engaged in ministry with children.

A keynote paper, “Rediscovering Children at the Heart of Mission”, was given.[[23]](#endnote-23) It was an attempt to address an awareness on the part of the organisers of the ‘theological thinness’ of the Christianity represented at such gatherings. The first part of this paper summarised the role of children throughout the Bible as a way of refuting the claim that “the Bible had very little to say about children”.[[24]](#endnote-24) The second part attempted a preliminary Christological framework for further theological work, based on that offered by David Bosch.[[25]](#endnote-25) Significantly, the latter section has received little attention then or since. The activists were stirred by the truth that children were often chosen by God to play vital and sometimes unique roles in his mission, Missio Dei. But a more systematic theological reflection was not on the radar screen.[[26]](#endnote-26)

Although many were content or willing to be theology-lite as they responded to the pressing and crying needs of children worldwide as a priority, there was an underlying unmet theological disquiet, evident in 200 written questions following the paper. It was these that prompted the setting up of a process to facilitate more theological reflection. The originals have been kept and treasured by CTM. They resurfaced again and again during consultations, but they have not been systematically worked through.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Seen from a vantage point two decades on, this early paper might now be described as a preliminary attempt at a biblical theology of child and mission (so, although the “triangle” described below had not yet been conceived at that stage, it was a rough and unconscious precursor of that model). It ran the risk of privileging child and childhood at the expense of other forms of human being (adult; women; aged person; those differently enabled; and so on), and therefore was in some ways, whether consciously or not, in competition with those championing, say, the poor or ethnic groups. One of the first theological responses to the first paper was just such a criticism of the way it privileged child and children as a category. It argued that all categories of human being were at the heart of God’s mission, not just children.[[28]](#endnote-28)

Before long an international process was set in motion. This involved the convening of circles (the preferred form of gathering) across the world, where Christians from different cultures and denominations were invited to engage in discussion seeking to deepen their understanding of children and theology (“C” and “T”). There were reports of these meetings, with the intention that each new circle would be given the reports of those that had gone before. The reports are available online as well as in hard copy and so this log does not attempt to list or summarise them, but they constitute one of the most substantial records of the content and process at the heart of this theological journey. There is a map showing the locations of these consultations on the CTM website.

To accompany these reports, a series of booklets was launched, responding to some of the most persistent questions arising. The first was an introduction to CT; followed by the description of a CT experiment that was done at a consultation in South Africa. The third was an invitation to churches in Asia to engage with children in new ways, and the fourth explored aspects of theology with African children in the forefront of the process.

Some theological journals devoted a whole issue to CT.[[29]](#endnote-29) There were also one or two dedicated conferences, notably *Now and Next* in Nairobi,[[30]](#endnote-30) which aimed to deepen theological reflection informed and signed by attentiveness to child and childhood. The American Academy of Religion has a Childhood Studies and Religion Unit to which trustees of CTM including Marcia Bunge and D J Konz have contributed. Increasing numbers of books and papers on child and theology were produced, notably in North America.[[31]](#endnote-31)

Research was instigated including several PhDs. For example, Stuart Christine on Luke and child; Amy Allen: “For Theirs is the Kingdom: (Re)membering Young Children in the Gospel of Luke”; D J Konz on a study of the theology of Karl Barth with a focus on what he wrote, implied and overlooked in relation to child and childhood; Robin Barfield and a comparison of Godly Play and Evangelical theologies and pedagogies as applied to Christian education; Rohan Gideon on the agency of children in Liberation Theologies….

So the strand or strands of CT that CTM were seeking to develop were just a few among many concerned with Child and Theology over the period of this log.

**HOW “CHILD” AND “THEOLOGY” RELATE TO EACH OTHER**

The two non-negotiable elements of Child Theology are of course “child” and “theology”, and so throughout the journey there has been continuous reflection, critical attention devoted to each, and how they relate to each other.

Each word carries weighty baggage, and during the 21-year journey, both have been the subject of analysis and debate. The journey of Child Theology has been undertaken in a contemporary international context, where each word may be understood differently. But there is a challenge common to all Christian theology in this area because it is not obvious how contemporary understandings of “child” might relate to those two thousand or more years ago. The challenge is compounded by the fact that definitions and translations of “little child”, “child”, “little ones”, “young person” in the Bible are often disputed. For such reasons, among many others, the hermeneutics involved in the enterprise are inevitably complex.

Assuming it was possible to find a way of continuing the discourse, despite such difficulties, further challenges lay in wait when the two words, child and theology, were used together. In languages such as English it is possible to place them side by side without defining how they relate to or define the other. In other languages, such as German or Russian, for example, it is not. This means that in a global process involving translation and discussion, different understandings are conveyed simply through the way the words are ordered and spelt.[[32]](#endnote-32)

On the journey that we have been travelling, the “dance” between them has not been prescribed. In fact, CT has been characterised by a deliberate attempt to keep the relationship open, while seeking to be alert to variations of focus and scope.[[33]](#endnote-33) One of the assumptions has been that CT is a living and lived, as distinct from historical or scholastic, way of doing Christian theology.

Running through the journey has been a tension, mostly, but not always creative, between those who have seen CT as a broad category that includes everything that relates to Christianity and children. In practice this has meant for example that children’s spirituality, historical Christian thinking about children, and theology through the eyes of children, were all seen as forms of, or closely related to the concerns of, Child Theology. This has resulted over time in the term “child theologies”: signalling that there is no single way of defining or doing Child Theology. A recent example of this, edited by Marica Bunge, who has been a fellow companion through most of the journey, is *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives.[[34]](#endnote-34)*

A more clearly defined approach is represented by *Entry Point* which seeks to do contemporary, as distinct from historical, theology. It sees Jesus and the Kingdom of God as at the heart of things, with little children chosen as signs of the nature of that Kingdom, the person and calling of Jesus as its King; and the welcoming of a single little child as a means of “entering the Kingdom”. It is open about the fact that in choosing a starting point in the Gospel of Matthew, it is an example of Child Theology, rather than being in any way prescriptive or exclusive.[[35]](#endnote-35)

One of the results of this tension was the idea of a Triangle.[[36]](#endnote-36) It was part of, and helped to shape, the collection, *Theology, Mission and Child.* This suggested that two of the angles in any discussion were given: Child and Theology. In the case of this book, Mission, therefore constituted the third angle. This raised the question of how far such a triangle might assist definitions and boundaries of CT for the purposes of a particular study or debate (say church, climate change, gender, sin…). In such a model there would always be two of the angles given, but the third is open to discussion, and all theological activity would operate within the dynamic tensions between the three angles, and the area defined by the lines joining them.

The concept was developed and discussed using the term, “taxonomy” of Child and Theology (C+T) produced by Haddon Willmer for consultations in London and Melbourne.[[37]](#endnote-37)

One of the values of the Triangle is that it is a reminder that to do any theology is to be thinking and acting in a space, our life-space, which is found within a set of points. These are more than corner boundary points marking out a territory. They can be seen as points of light and power which radiate from them. In an area which has three points, these radiations meet within the triangle. Anyone within the triangle is subjected to the radiation, in varying measures as they are closer to one point rather than another. In navigating a course that observes and responds to all three points, the theological explorer is oriented, and their decisions find meaning.

Without this radiation, tension, calling (that is living and lived theology) a person can take any position in the Triangle as they see fit, standing where they have what they think the right or optimum relation with the three interacting points. In such a reading, the Triangle defines nothing. A person or community within the triangle take positions, which may be meaningful or not. So the Triangle necessitates and aids thinking, because the three points indicate the space in which we are is broad enough for us to be lost.

A space with orientation points (as distinct from say tethering posts) commits us to move and find our place responsibly, get to the point where we say, in a meaningful way, “Here I stand”. And because we are alive, mobile in a mobile world, feeling our way and making a stand, is a constant process. It requires a life of thought, attention and accompanying the world. It is a life of seeking and finding, and a life of *semper reformanda*. So Triangle implies identifying questions, and keeping them open, not closing them down by doctrine, or running from them into dull pseudo-trust.[[38]](#endnote-38)

As the one who offered the triangle for the specific purposes of the book mentioned above, Haddon Willmer was cautious about it being seen as a universally applicable or valid theological tool. But others have found it helpful, not least in helping focus and clarify theological reflection, and deterring stray thought and energy outside the triangle, or allowing attention to focus at one end or section of the triangle.

**SOME OF THE THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS ALONG THE WAY**

With this brief overview of the process in place, here is a log of some of the theological discoveries and ideas that emerged on the journey, challenging and interrupting discourse, together with a note of how they were explored and tested, developed, amended or discarded, and how some of them coalesced.

1. **The marginalisation of little children in Bible translations and commentaries**

We discovered early on that it was necessary to start at the very beginning. How reliable are Bible translations and commentaries when Child Theology is in the making? Those who had gone before us working at contextual theologies knew full well that prevailing assumptions and orthodoxies in theology, as well as contemporary ideologies inevitably and often unconsciously influence translators and translation of, and therefore commentary on, the Scriptures. Three examples will serve to illustrate this in the case of Child Theology.

Psalm 8: 2 refers to God appointing “suckling babes and unweaned infants” as a means of building a fortress against the foe and the avenger. This sounds unlikely, and most commentators understandably refer to syntactical problems with the verse. Calvin is an exception. In his commentary he asserts that the problem is in the minds of the commentators not the text. Does not God choose the least and most unlikely things to achieve His purposes?[[39]](#endnote-39) Those unfamiliar with Calvin will tend to be drawn away from a potentially pivotal text and concept in Child Theology.[[40]](#endnote-40)

In Matthew 18: 4 and 5, the word, *paidion* meaning little child is generally retained in translations, but several commentaries see the child primarily as a representative or symbol of the “little ones” (ordinary followers of Jesus) who make up the embryonic church in this Gospel. It is usually assumed, without the need for any comment, that the child has left the group and is no longer part of the rest of the discourse as Jesus continues to teach his disciples having introduced the little child as a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven. [[41]](#endnote-41)

Earlier in the same Gospel (Matthew 11: 25) there is a more fundamental challenge: the word *nupiois* used by Jesus here means “babies” or “infants”. But the *CEB* translates it as “ordinary people”.

Child Theology has required careful preliminary study and exegesis to ensure appropriate hermeneutics. *The Child in the Bible* has made a significant contribution to CT in this respect.[[42]](#endnote-42)

1. **“Child in the Midst” and the risk of losing Christ**

It was not long before the project of those engaging with Child Theology had begun to be tagged as “Child in the Midst”. This made sense for at least two reasons. First it recognised that the process was serious about having a real child and real children at its heart. Children were not to be seen merely as signs of the Kingdom of Heaven or representatives of little ones and ordinary people generally. They were to be respected as individuals. Second it did justice to the way in which Matthew 18 was becoming one of the primary ways into the study of CT. After all the phrase is taken straight from Matthew’s account: “Jesus placed a little child in the midst”.

Before long it became apparent that the use of this attractive term was putting at least three connections at risk:

the link between child and theology (theology was absent);

the link between the little child placed in the midst, and Christ, who did the calling and placing of the little child in the midst, and gave the reason for his action;

and the link with the context of the action: a conversation or argument about greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven at the very time when Jesus had declared His destiny to his disciples.

It is no exaggeration therefore to argue that the whole purpose of the action and teaching of Jesus in this incident was in danger of becoming lost should “child in the midsts” be seen as an appropriate way of describing CT. The issue runs wider than CT. There is a human tendency to displace and marginalise Jesus Christ in Christian faith and practice. Talking about ourselves (humanity), is easy, since we are so obvious to ourselves, and in so doing, we proceed without Jesus Christ.[[43]](#endnote-43) Jesus and God are easily and commonly not noticed (Isa 53: 1-12). Even when Jesus is raised to glory, he is effectually taken out of our lives and our presence. This calls for sober realistic theological enquiry within and beyond CT. It will not be met by deploring and accusing our fall into secularity. Why does God hide himself?

This stage of the journey was therefore a time when we sought to shed the skin or label, Child in the Midst, and helps to explain why a concept such as “the Triangle”, and terms such as “child-attentive theology” were devised. They helped the process proceed with sufficient clarity and focus on the one hand, and appropriate flexibility on the other. Such clarity and flexibility have been vital in seeking to avoid unchallenged presuppositions and assumptions, whether traditional or contemporary, determining the nature and process of Child Theology.

1. **The questions and contributions of *Entry Point*.**

For much of the journey covered by this log, two of those involved in setting up CTM from the beginning, were engaged in writing a book at the request of the first CT consultation in Penang.[[44]](#endnote-44) It took roughly twelve years to complete and has been translated subsequently into Spanish. In time they were drawn to engage in an extended reflection on Matthew 18: 1-12. As noted already, they were quick to point out that it was not an attempt to construct a normative approach to CT. They saw it as a pioneering attempt to do some practical CT rather than a history of, or reflection on, what others thought.[[45]](#endnote-45)

They argued that receiving or welcoming a little child is:

a call to radical conversion for all followers of Jesus;

a clue to the truth about the kingdom of God;

a means of making connections between both of these, and the call of Jesus to would-be disciples to deny self and take up the cross;

an encouragement to live in the light of the resurrection;

a help in contributing to the universal community with Father, Son and

Holy Spirit.

Among the more controversial discoveries and arguments are that:

Jesus was not only a pioneer of the Kingdom of Heaven, but a seeker or learner, and one who was tempted to compromise or adapt the radical nature of this kingdom;

humility in a little child is not a virtue, and that what Jesus means in this action and teaching breaks new ground;

that “receiving a little child” and “entering the Kingdom” can be one and the same thing;

that the suffering of children worldwide and through history requires honest wrestling with the teaching of Jesus about “their angels always beholding the face of my Father in heaven”.

It remains to be seen whether the study encourages further extension of this specific line of thought, or functions as an inspiration and example to others starting elsewhere as they develop an understanding of what CT is and how it is done. It does not claim to be CT, but wrestles with the theological issues with which any living and practical venture described as CT, the authors believe must engage. One response questioned whether the little child was being “used” by Jesus as an illustration. If so, was the child also by implication being used by the two authors. This critique was rooted in a comparison with contextual theologies in which the subjects (for example, women or the poor) are agents in the whole process for liberation and wholeness. The book does not specifically rebut this, but the authors’ argument leads them suggest examples where little children by their very nature are agents, and their needs require changes in adults seeking to welcome and nurture them. They also see all human beings, including women and the poor as more than simply agents. Adults as well as children live with both agency and passivity, action and receptivity.[[46]](#endnote-46) What is more, simply virtue of being babies or toddlers, little children can and do exert influence on others.

This book remains the most sustained and serious piece of Child Theology undertaken by those at or near the heart of the movement, holding rigorously to child, Jesus, discipleship and Kingdom of God as understood in contemporary contexts.

1. **The Spirituality of Children**

There are those close children who see them as uniquely or specially endowed with or wired for spiritual insights and openness. This includes those committed to researching “child spirituality”, as well as many developing forms of Christian education such as Godly Play.[[47]](#endnote-47) Child Theology by its nature is alert to any research that seeks to understand children and childhood. Real children worldwide are close to its heart. Throughout the journey it has naturally engaged with those for whom childhood represents a unique, and even privileged stage in human development.

In doing so, it has been conscious of the influence of poets such as William Wordsworth on perceptions of childhood as a uniquely privileged stage of human development. A writer and theologian who has been an influential resource to CT is Professor James Loder. CTM co-convened a conference, and co-published a book devoted to his lifetime’s work in this field, drawing as he did both from Christian theology and human development theory.[[48]](#endnote-48)

Loder seeks to understand human life (his preferred term over “development”) as “an unfinished response to God’s act of love in Jesus Christ”, and while aware of the specific opportunities and challenges during childhood, focusses on God’s grace and self-revelation throughout a person’s lifetime. Whatever else is going on in the life and psyche of little children, there is a flawed ego-centric project that attempts to protect them from fear of the Void. This co-exists uneasily with a concept of unadulterated, pure spirituality and infinite openness to the infinite.

One of the students of James Loder, and a contributor to the Princeton conference and book, was Jerome Berryman. He has been a conversation partner on the journey, including a lengthy review of his book, *Children and the Theologians*.[[49]](#endnote-49)

1. **Children and Sin**

At the other end of the theological spectrum from those drawn to the spirituality of children, are Christians engaged in children’s ministry who are concerned with the sinfulness of children. They believe in the importance of encouraging children to make decisions to follow Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, or to put it another way, to teach them to invite Jesus into their hearts and to cleanse them from their sin. The doctrine of “Original Sin” has influenced much Christian theology. Although as we have already noted Augustine makes of much of his own sinfulness as a very young child in his *Confessions*, the Scriptures have relatively little to say about sin that applies directly to young children.

In a CTM consultation in Cape Town in 2004 there was an experiment to test conventional and traditional understandings of sin in the light of the real-life testimonies of participants. Two had been caught up in the dynamics and effects of sin as children: one as a child prostitute, the other as a child soldier. This experiment was published as one of the four booklets produced by CTM. The process was simple, but the effects profound. By the end most of those involved acknowledged that their theology of sin prior to the experiment was inadequate in the light of the testimonies of these two former children.[[50]](#endnote-50)

The experiment remains significant for at least four reasons. First it is a reminder that Child Theology takes children and their experiences and voices seriously as part of a shared endeavour involving every part of the church and human being. Second, that process is integral to the movement: the way things are done is as important as what is done, likewise the way things are said. Third, it presents a way of children being in the midst without inappropriate exposure. The actual children were not physically present during the process, but they had been “brought in thanks to the first-hand experiences and stories of the participants”. And the rest of those present used their imaginations based on the evidence of these eye-witnesses. Finally, it remains a simple and effective working model for those wanting to do some form of CT focussing on practical contemporary questions and issues.[[51]](#endnote-51)

1. **Child Theology and the Academy: From Engagement to Reform**

The experience of 21 years suggests that when the two words “Child” and “Theology” are placed side by side, the default mode is for “child” to be foregrounded thus receiving the attention. “Theology” meanwhile tends to fade into the background. This has meant that to enable a more appropriate and balanced relationship to develop and operate it has been necessary to put a constant emphasis on theology. Meanwhile “the Academy” (US) and “systematic theology” have been largely child-blind until recent years. Where seminaries have departments that train students for “children’s ministry” the core courses that they undertake in doctrine and theology often as not do not take children into account.

A recurring question for CT therefore has been how to initiate conversations with theologians and seminaries. Books such as *The Child in Christian Thought*, and *The Child in the Bible*, served the purpose of alerting the Academy to the fact that childhood and children were subjects in their own right. Before long CTM had coined a phrase that included the aspiration: “Reforming all Christian theology with a child in the midst…”[[52]](#endnote-52)

To this end there have been deliberate attempts to engage with seminaries, including conversations about how best to begin building CT into the curriculum.[[53]](#endnote-53) There was a conference in Nairobi in 2011 where a primary objective was to “open the way for new streams of theological understanding of church and mission”. The book resulting from this event remains one of the clearest outlines of a Child Theology project. It had four themes:

challenging all followers of Jesus with children as signs of the Kingdom of God;

challenging churches;

challenging seminaries;

challenging Christian movements and organisations.[[54]](#endnote-54)

There was also a CT conference in Bucharest with the stated aim of re-imagining Theological Education.[[55]](#endnote-55)

At this point on the journey, this aspiration has remained unfulfilled, and it was Professor Frances Young who observed that such full-blown visions sat uneasily with the humility advocated by Jesus when he placed a little child in the midst of a theological discussion as a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven.[[56]](#endnote-56)

Little children as such have tended to be marginal or invisible to most systematic theologians to date, but it may be that it is in response to pressing issues such as climate change and the future of the planet, that children and young people lead the way of raising consciousness and awareness.[[57]](#endnote-57)

Meanwhile, while serious theological research has been carried out in various degrees of conversation with CTM,[[58]](#endnote-58) barring unforeseen tectonic shifts, it may be that radical change will be slow, possibly glacially slow, in coming.

1. **Experimenting: Aspects of the Process by which Theology was Done**

Considering how CT might relate appropriately to seminaries and systematic theology raised a specific theological question. Given that there is biblical warrant testifying to how the sign of a little child can influence understandings about the Kingdom of Heaven and humility, does it follow that being “child attentive” will be equally relevant and productive throughout biblical and systematic theology? Collections of articles and papers tend to assume that this is so.[[59]](#endnote-59) For several years CTM consultations were held as a way of testing this assumption. In addition to the Kingdom of Heaven, humility and sin, there were discussions and experiments about church, mission, anthropology, eschatology, creation, family, Christian education, and Christology.[[60]](#endnote-60)

One of the methods used was based on the CTM booklet described above, *Experimenting in Child Theology.* It preceded the development of the concept of the Triangle, yet remains an example that can be applied readily to theological questions and subjects other than sin and redemption. It enabled all the people present to talk about God by accepting and attending to the child placed by Jesus in our midst. It would be illuminating to know whether the experiment has bred children and evolved into something more wonderful. This would be a piece of CT history that tells significant truth about what has happened and how fruitful it is.

Theological and hermeneutic modelling is clearly work in progress, but on reflection after 21 years, it may well be that in time child attentive theology will find its way into every part of theological reflection as has happened, for example, with feminist and womanist theology.

But it is possibly the consultations themselves, singly and as a sequence, that offer practical and tried ways of doing theology that are likely to benefit most if not all theological reflection.[[61]](#endnote-61) Among the features that can be studied in the reports available on the CTM website are the following:

every group formed and was seen as a “circle”: there were no hierarchies or back seats;

the groups comprised followers of Jesus drawn from across every imaginable spectrum;

discussions were in local languages and set in cultural context whenever

possible;

reports summarised the whole of each event and listed the participants;

letters were used as a primary way of doing theology in groups, and sharing this theology with others (conscious overtones of the New Testament here);

each new group had available the reports of previous circles, so there was communication over time and across the continents.

The intention was of inclusive, open and sustained conversations within each circle, as part of a wider theological conversation, engaging in time with all engaged in “C” and “T” in whatever shape or form.

1. **Is Child Theology a possible means of reforming Church?**

One of the chronic problems with church and churches worldwide since Pentecost history has been the presence of denominational division and sectarian conflict. This, despite the expressed prayer and command of Jesus that His followers should be one, and his teaching that it was through the love of one for another that the world would know Jesus, the One who sent them.

Over two millennia, there has been a litany of discord, war, persecution and competition, that shows no sign of abating. From the early days of Child Theology, there was a growing hope that perhaps by being child-attentive, denominations might be willing to lay aside traditions and ambitions for the sake of the next generation (s).

It is not as though children represent a group or faction of the church, and the world’s population, as for example the poor, women or ethnic groups. Rather a child is the one stage of human development that every human being experiences from the inside at birth, albeit some children for a tragically short time.

What if little children were welcomed into the heart of church, worship and sacraments?

There are very few, if any signs, of this hope being realised.[[62]](#endnote-62)

But Jesus welcomed a little child as a sign of a new way of being and living, so the hope lingers.

1. **Involving children appropriately in the process**

There is a rise in awareness and reporting of child abuse worldwide, including a tragic amount in churches and Christian-run institutions. This is in the light of international commitment to the rights of children. It follows that scrupulous attention to the safeguarding of the security and well-being of all children connected with CT and CTM is of paramount importance.

The Scriptures bear witness to the suffering of children throughout the history that they cover. Often this suffering occurs because they are part of a community or society, but sometimes they are singled out as in the narratives of Exodus (1 and 2), and Matthew (2). The Scriptures also describe how children have been used as agents of God’s revelation and reformation.

In the example from Matthew 18 a little child was an agent, albeit unconsciously.[[63]](#endnote-63) Liberation/contextual theologies take it as a given that the subjects of praxis should be inspired and enabled to become agents in the process. This may be appropriate in the case of young people, but there will always be a stage in child’s life where such intentional agency is neither desirable nor possible in any meaningful sense.

There have been several consultations in different parts of the world exploring ways in which this might be appropriate.[[64]](#endnote-64) In conversation with Professor Frances Young some of the commonalties with theology relating to those who are differently enabled were explored.[[65]](#endnote-65)

But there are at least two reasons why CT acknowledges that children cannot be equated with other social groups. First, there is the truth that children need to be allowed to be children, rather than be prematurely prompted or expected to become active in a cause (including their own). They are neither “adults-in-waiting”, nor conscious agents of change, but children enjoying nothing more or less than being children, playing and dreaming, at a unique and unrepeatable stage of life. Second, as already noted, children represent the one universal type or stage of human being. This is so by definition, not cultural preference or perspective. Therefore when Jesus takes a little child and places her in the midst, the child is at one and the same time, a unique individual, and also potentially representative of the human race.

Everyone who has been involved in CT either is or way a child. Thus, by the use of imagination it is possible to see things from the perspective of children, if imperfectly.

1. **Is CT possible in advance of other contextual theologies?**

It was during the 2013 consultation in Bucharest that this question arose. Put at its most basic level, some of the participants began to wonder how a person or group that had not taken other forms of contextual theology seriously and to heart, could engage in CT in any meaningful way. For example, where patriarchal ideology and misogyny reign unchallenged, how could a circle comprising women and men, let alone young people, function?

The fact that CT (and the agency of children in general) has arrived on the scene after these other discourses could therefore be seen not as accidental and unfortunate, but as conducive to the process. In addition to anything else, it has meant that CT has been able to learn from the other movements and processes. This is possibly a unique insight into the relationship between CT and contextual theologies.

1. **Alternative Starting Points: Biblical and Historical**

Along the way there have been several conversations exploring what starting points other than say Matthew 18, might be appropriate for CT. Various biblical passages or themes have been suggested and explored in some measure. These include John 1 and John 3: the Incarnation, and the concept of “being born again” respectively, resonate with the words Child and Theology.

Some have studied children and childhood throughout the Bible. There has also been a reconstruction of I Corinthians 13 where “when I was a child” is seen as describing a desirable rather than regressive phase.[[66]](#endnote-66)

But this is to assume that Christian theology starts with biblical narratives and texts. What of the realities of childhood including development, play, learning, Christian education, abuse, substitute care, war, work, and survival. And critically important the deep differences in understanding and ideology relating to girl-the girl child and boy child respectively? In this respect the journey of CT as described here may be said to have been prompted by Christian adults engaging with the social realities of the lives of children.

With the Triangle operative as a taxonomy in such theological discourse it is possible to identify different starting places (sometimes corners), without undue risk of “Child” overshadowing or eclipsing “Theology”. And it might, among other things, provide a way of engaging with the original questions raised at the 2001 Cutting Edge conference.

1. **Child and Mission**

It is inevitable that CT will engage with contentious issues such as proselytization from different perspectives to those focussing on other categories of human being. Although this has not figured prominently in discussion or consultations to date, there have been indications of an awareness of some of the challenges in this area. For example, here is an illustration from *Theology, Child and Mission*: “What is the gospel of Jesus Christ for a girl-child in a Muslim country and context, who is still living with her family, unable legally to go to church, or become a Christian without upsetting her parents, her extended family, and her community? What if anything does the gospel mean, in essence and practice, for this child?... a missiological dynamic that cannot abandon the commission of God in Christ…is therefore determined to discover what Church and Gospel mean to a real child in a specific situation.” [[67]](#endnote-67) D. J. Konz explores this in his contribution to *Child Theology* (Bunge ed. 2021).[[68]](#endnote-68)

There is also the question of how cultural and religious differences should be approached. What is to one family is biblically informed and appropriate to another may be seen as abuse. For much of the journey CT has travelled alongside the initiative or project known as “Holistic Child Development”, and this is where some of the applied theology has been undertaken.[[69]](#endnote-69)

**IDENTIFYING SOME CHALLENGES OF THE PROCESS**

**Coherent Identity and Theological Priority**

It is not clear that in the small core of CTM or in the wider network the questions of coherent identity and theological priority were ever seriously discussed. Various individual contributions were made, for example D.J. Konz’s development of the concept of “child-attentive” theology, but they remained individual moments.

The concept CT, and the associated movement, CTM, if they were to exist and take root, had to find some identity. The term CT was chosen in default of any better label. What was done could not have been ventured, if we had ducked the challenge of the *idea* of Child Theology, and accepted instead that there are many Child Theologies, and they all have prizes. That might be a good way of building a broad church, and of doing capacious historical theology, but the question *What here and now are we to believe and live for?* blows the whistle on academic games and comfortable religiosity.

Theology lives now or not at all; it does not relive past ventures, however much it knows about and learns from them. For past theology lacks one essential component, it evades responsibility, which comes to anyone who hears the call of the living God, and says, *Here* I am, Lord. To take shelter in historical theology is to want to stay up the mountain, with Jesus and Elijah and Moses, how ‘good’ that is, and to refuse to go down with Jesus to the place where faith is called for and tested ruthlessly.

This helps to explain why *Entry Point,* the book commissioned in Penang,was sub-titled *An Essay Toward Child Theology.* It kept some faith with the original commission, to write a Child Theology, but apologises, not so much for a failure to do that, as for the elusiveness of child theology. It might be there, but if it isn’t, the door to the kingdom of God is still open for us, when we become humble as this child, and receive her.

**A Difficulty in establishing Critical Mass**

Buoyed by the way liberation and contextual theologies had over time formed, and gained a hearing, it has been surprising to some engaged in CT how difficult it has been to establish a critical mass. It may be that the Christian activists committed to helping, being alongside and rescuing children, will rarely if ever see time spent on theological reflection as justified.

The absence of children in the process for the reasons outlined above may be a contributory factor in this.

And perhaps critical mass is a temptation…What if the locus standi of CT is on the fringes and margins?

Another possible reason for this is that a critique of prevailing ideologies and assumptions has developed within CT. Human and faith development are examples of this. Both in accounts of human history and personal development there has been for many decades an assumption that a human lifespan or progress can be plotted with say, a pyramid, or a rising curve. There is a reluctance to see that all human life ends with death, and that confronting or reckoning with death is a normal part of life. Likewise, there is a complementary and mutually reinforcing belief in the evolution or progress of humankind in history. Views of faith that see stages of development, such as that proposed by James Fowler, sit well with these. [[70]](#endnote-70) On the other hand, the serious work of his colleague James Loder has been side-lined or shunned. CT is willing to expose unwarranted assumptions of this kind.[[71]](#endnote-71)

**Engaging with Orthodox and Roman Catholic Theologians**

For a range of reasons not explored here, it has proved difficult for the emerging movement committed to CT to engage in serious and sustained conversation with RC and Orthodox theologians. CT has drawn from some of their work, but it was not until 2016 that the first significant volume of Child Theology was published: *Child, Church and Mission: An Orthodox Contribution to Global Christian Exploration of Child, Church and Mission.[[72]](#endnote-72)*

**WHITHER CT?**

The metaphor of a journey such as that underlying this paper implies, if not a destination, at least some waymarks or stages. And CT for reasons that have hopefully become apparent in this theological travelogue continues to reflect on where, how, and even sometimes whether, to proceed further. In this there may be some resonance with the humility that Jesus chose to associate with the little child. Such humility is not to be understood as a personal virtue, whatever that might mean in the case of a little child, but as a lowly status. It is possible that the moderate role of seed-sowing, rather than any form of centrality or dominance, is closest to the calling of CT. But if so, how best is that to be achieved? One of the purposes of this paper is to elicit responses from others as to whether they are prepared to join such a modest process, and to become shapers and agents of the movement. One of the reminders of this Log is how much valuable seed there is, still largely unknown in church and seminaries. Perhaps the single task of sharing or sowing it should form a significant part of the work of CTM for the next stage of the journey.

*20th February 2022*

1. How far others saw their engagement as being part of a movement or pilgrimage is not something I know. If compared to the group portrayed by Chaucer on their way to Canterbury, for example, it has been an even more diverse group. It may be helpful for the reader of this log to know that throughout the journey described I have been living alongside children and young people who have been hurting as a result of a combination of many factors. I was also writing a biography of Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) who established a residential community for such children in India. And producing a Bible for such children and families worldwide. This means that I have always had real children, and the whole of the Scriptures beside me and in my heart and mind all the time I have been working on the project known as Child Theology. Everything has been experienced and processed through this crucible. And the reason I have been so engaged with and committed to the project is that I realised how thin the theology available to the likes of me (parents, carers, teachers) was. I simply had to dig deeper because the questions arising were so deep and real. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This term was used by Prof. Julia Brannen and Margaret O’Brien to describe how the sociology of children and childhood was embedded within existing discourses before it became a subject in its own right. *Sociology* [Vol. 29, No. 4 (November 1995)](https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40108655), pp. 729-737. The concept is used of theology elsewhere in this log. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Childhood and the Kingdom of Heaven, Paper to NELREC (North-East London Religious Education Centre), 9th November 1999 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This resonance or connection is arguably one of the unique elements of Child Theology, and it runs right through the journey, with particular attention and focus in *Entry Point*, by Haddon Willmer and Keith White. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Developing a Theology of Childhood, VIVA, Oxford, 26th October 2001 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Child Theology is Born, Paper to Annual Forum of Christian Child Care Forum, 5th February 2002. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. “Jesus called a little child and had him stand among them” Matthew 18: 2. Paper given at CBTF, The Cactus Rose, Colorado Springs 8th June 2002. The concept of having a child in the forefront of our minds when doing theology has been described in various ways since, including “child-attentive theology” by D. J. Konz (see below). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. First Consultation on Child Theology, Report for Cutting Edge IV, 24th-28th June 2002 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. One of the actions noted was for Haddon Willmer and I to write a book on Child Theology, which eventually saw the light of day as *Entry Point*, in 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. For example, page 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. In time the book, *Entry Point*, would be dedicated to this child, who was by then a teenager. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. As will become apparent in this log, they have tended to identify most with what might now be termed a “theology of children/childhood”. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. The term, “child attentive theology” was coined by D. J. Konz in his research on the theology of Karl Barth, some ten years into the journey described in this log. See, for example, D J Konz, “Child Theology and its Theological Method Past and Future” in *Anvil* Vol 35 Issue 1, pp 21-27 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. See Penang 2002 report pages 17-18, 32-37. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Haddon Willmer was the most prolific writer of serious theology over much of the period, and he confessed to being bewildered and frustrated by what he saw as “variety without pattern”. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. CRC is summarised and discussed in the Penang 2002 report, pages 29-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See Julia Brannen and Margaret O’Brien, above. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. During the course of this theological journey, I gave several papers on the subject of how Child Theology might be compared to or contrasted with contextual theologies. It evolved over time and in reaction to the responses of different audiences and contexts. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Chapter 7 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Marcia was a trustee of CTM for much of the journey described. Among theologians past and present who have been attentive to children in their work are Karl Rahner; Urs Von Balthasar; Cathy Stonehouse; Scottie May; Bonnie Miller-McLemore; Mark Griffiths; Jerome Berryman; Roy Zuck; Horace Bushnell; Friedrich Schleiermacher; David Jensen; Kristin Herzog; Joyce Ann Mercer; John McNeill; Martin Marty; Robin Maas; Judith Gundry-Volf; Jurgen Moltmann; James E. Loder; John Carroll; Dawn DeVries; James A. Murphy (*Kids and the Kingdom: The Precarious Presence of Children in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013)etc. etc [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. *Theology for the Community of God,* Stanley Grenz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. I chose this as the main textbook for the first course I taught on Child Theology assuming children must be present, only to discover their absence, on the flight to Malaysia! Subsequently students and I worked on how the book could be adapted and extended to rectify this omission, but sadly Stanley Grenz died before this could be shared with him. See *Introducing Child Theology*, Keith J. White ((Malaysia: Compassion, 2012) pages 133-139 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Keith J. White, “Rediscovering Children at the Heart of Mission”, G. Miles and J-J Wright ed. *Celebrating Children* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003) 189-200. It has been reprinted in different collections and publications since. For the sake of historical accuracy, the paper was produced at breakneck speed using as its only source the Scriptures. The simple reason was that as the deadline approached, I had influenza and was confined to bed: I was not able to reach any other source material. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. This is something that Roy Zuck had recently proved to the satisfaction of many in his *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1996) [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. On reflection and in the writing of this log, it seems strange that this was not picked up by CTM at some stage on the journey. Is this a task still to be undertaken, or was it of little substance? [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. These are categorised in the first *Penang Consultation Report*, 2002, pages 22-23 (God; Childhood; Sin and Salvation; Suffering; Standards for Action). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. This critique was offered by Haddon Willmer and with hindsight may be seen as a catalyst for the extended conversation that the two of us have engaged in since, one of the results of which was *Entry Point*. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Among them: *Theology Today; Interpretation; Dharma Deepika, Anvil* [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. …*Now and Next* (Penang: Compassion International, 2011) [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. There are bibliographies in Bunge, *The Child in Christian Through; The Child in the Bible and Child Theology;* also on the CTM website. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Examples include “theology by child(ren)”; “theology of child(ren)”. For the record the primary language in which CT in CTM has been conducted is English, although many of the conversations in consultations were in the languages of the participants and then translated. One of the consultation reports, Brazil 2006, is in both Portuguese and English, and *Entry Point* has been translated into Spanish. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. This has not been without difficulty or criticism, but has allowed the development of “taxonomies” such as the Triangle (see below) as a basis for focussed theological discussion and work. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Marcia Bunge, ed. *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (New York: Orbis Books, 2021) [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Haddon Willmer and Keith White *Entry Point…* [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Haddon Willmer, “The Triangle: Theology, Mission and Child” B. Prevette, K. White et al eds (Regnum: Oxford, 2014) 10-20. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Haddon Willmer, “Child and Theology: Position Paper”. Paper given to CT Futures, London July 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. I am grateful to Haddon Willmer for his response to an earlier draft of this log, which forms the basis of the last two paragraphs. He also wrote: “Triangle is a device which is available for all sorts of enquiries and discussions. It is not special to child theology. I found it in some industrial mission theologizing in the 1970s, in those who said then, rather brashly, that the world sets the agenda for theology, in Karl Barth’s recommendation to do theology with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, in R G Collingwood (*Autobiography),* who said that, in archaeology, it was no good digging stuff out of the ground unless you knew beforehand what question you were trying to answer, all of which helped me become a passable teacher. In all these encounters and borrowings, I never hit on the model of the Triangle, but by 2014 it was ready to blossom forth.” [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, Part 1, Psalm 8 (English Translation) [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. This was the subject of a paper, *Missio Dei in Psalm 8* given in Seoul. *Children and Youth as Partners in Mission,* Keith White, (Penang: Compassion International, 2013) pages 15-25) [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. This is discussed in Keith White, “’He Placed a Little Child in the Midst’: Jesus, the Kingdom and Children” in *The Child in the Bible,* M. Bunge (ed.) *(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008),* pages 353-374 [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. *The Child in the Bible*, ed Marcia Bunge…Those of us present at the first meeting of the contributors became accustomed to hear seasoned biblical theologians describe how they had missed important, sometimes pivotal, references and clues, because children had been hidden from them until this point in their areas of specialist knowledge. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Haddon Willmer commented: “A bit of occasional singing and preaching reminds us he is there, but in practice, we get on well enough without him.” [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. *Entry Point: Towards Child Theology with Matthew 18.* Haddon Willmer and Keith White. The outline of such a book as conceived in 2002 is given in the Penang 2002 Report, pages 18-20. It is important reading for those seeking to trace the emerging thinking of the group. Haddon and I began with this outline in mind, but after some time realised that it would result in some form of “Theology of Child”. It did not make the crucial theological connection between Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and the little child placed in the midst by Jesus. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. See *Entry Point* as an Example of Child Theology:A Paper for Addis Tuesday 12th November 2013 by Keith J. White, for a summary of the argument. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. See, for example, Philippians 4: 10-13, and I Cor 4.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Among the main proponents of this approach are Rebecca Nye and David Hay (“The Spirit of the Child”), Jerome Berryman and those engaged in Godly Play. There was a substantive engagement between representatives of Godly Play at two of the 2004 consultation in Houston (May) and Cambridge (September) respectively. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. This event at Princeton Theological Seminary convened in March 2012 was in effect another CTM consultation. The main difference was that participants were invited to give papers, and the outcome was a book of the papers, rather than a report of the consultation. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace*, Jerome Berryman (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2010) See Review on CTM website/Resources Reviews. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. *Experimenting Together: One Way of doing Child Theology*, Haddon Willmer (UK: CTM, 2007) [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Although it predates The Triangle, it operates within the forces and space whose three angles are Child, Theology and Sin (as represented by two children, a 13 year-old girl forced into prostitution, and a 12 year-old boy forced to be a solider). [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. This remains an aspiration as expressed on the CTM website/Vision, Mission and Values at the time of writing this piece. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. There were exploratory conversations with seminaries in Australia and Sri Lanka, and a more detailed discussion with Cliff College in the UK that involved consideration of how a curriculum open to CT might be taught as part of the core syllabus of a Christian seminary. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. *Now and Next*, Keith White, General Editor (Malaysia: Compassion International, 2011) [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. *Re-Imagining Theological Education*, C. Constantineanu et al, ed (Bucharest: Risoprint, Pleroma, 2016) [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Frances Young, “Child Theology: A Response” in *Anvil* Vol 35, Issue 1, page 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. *Children and our Global Future*, Kristin Herzog (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005). See also, Keith White, “Creation” in *Through the Eyes of a Child*, A. Richards and P Privett ed (London: Church House Publishing, 2009) Chapter 2, pages 44-64 [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. For example, PhDs by Stuart Christine, D.J. Konz, Rohan Gideon, David Chronic. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. For example, Bunge ed. *Child Theology*; A. Richards and P Privett ed *Through the Eyes of a Child*, [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. This is the approach of the book, *Through the Eyes of a Child*, although the focus in its case is what might be called “Child’s Theology”; also of *The Child in the Bible*. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. See CTM website/CTM around the World, for a map of many of the consultations. Due to language and administrative challenges there was not a published report for every gathering. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. I was asked after a paper given in Melbourne in 2010 what my hopes for CT were. I responded, off the record, that I dared to dream that is might be a means in God’s hands of bringing love and unity into and across denominations. Surely I argued in my own mind, at least, adults will lay aside their own defensive and competitive desires for the sake of their children and grandchildren. Haddon Willmer shared recently with me that he has had a similar feeling about CT being a possible means of reforming the Church. His practical question was: “There are so many Churches, with so many ways of being Church, what does ‘reforming the church’ mean?” Since then, the way COP events, and the war in Ukraine, are going suggests that, it could take more than a catastrophe to shake churches to their foundations. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. In *Children and the Theologians*, Jerome Berryman explores the different ways in which children are present in the Scriptural narrative, including the “silent” child. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. For example, in Sao Paolo, Brazil, 2006 where children were asked to suggest some questions, and then propose some answers while adults listened actively. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. See for example, “Child Theology: A Response” in *Anvil* Vol 35, Issue 1, pages 8-9 [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Elizabeth Waldron Barnett, “James E. Loder and Paul in Conversation” in *The Logic of the Spirit and in Human Thought and Experience,* D Wright and K. White ed (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014),pages 78-102. A feature of exposition concerns the child/mature adult binary distinction. This has been questioned by several theologians including George Beasley-Murray, and Karl Rahner. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Keith White, *Theology, Child and Mission,* Introduction, page 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. “Reforming mission with child attentive theology”, pp.190-205. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. For example, Keith White, *Childhoods in Cultural Contexts* (Penang: Compassion International, 2011) [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1981) [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Fowler and Loder engaged in theological debate about “stages of faith” and “human development”, and CT has been working for some time on the assumption that Loder’s critique of Fowler is substantially correct. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Valentin Kozhuharov, *Child, Church and Mission: An Orthodox Contribution to Global Christian Exploration of Child, Church and Mission.* (London: WTL 2016) [↑](#endnote-ref-72)