

First Penang Consultation on Child Theology

24 –28 June 2002



**Child
Theology**
MOVEMENT

Jesus and the Children: Luc Tchong—China

Report for Cutting Edge IV

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**Report of the
First Penang Consultation on Child Theology**

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by: Dr John Collier

20 September 2002

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Introduction

For five days in June 2002, 18 adults gathered in Penang to discuss ‘Child Theology’. By means of this summary of our discussions, we invite you join us in this venture. If you are expecting to find *answers* here, you need to know right now that we left feeling that we were only just beginning to see what some of the right *questions* might be. Although we didn’t define ‘Child Theology’, we drew an analogy with the development of feminist theology. We understood our task to be the rethinking of theology taking account of what Jesus might have meant when he took a child and placed it (him or her) ‘in the midst’ of the disciples. Why might we need Child Theology? Not simply because there is so much that is child-unfriendly in the world but, closer to home, it may be that we have not fully allowed the child friendliness of Jesus to inform and transform our own theology and practice.

We came from several parts of the world – Asia, Europe, Africa, South and North America – but we recognised there were some significant cultural streams not represented. We contributed insights from a variety of different professional and occupational backgrounds, though we were aware of limitations here too. Most of all, though all of us have some involvement with children, through Christian ministry, theological reflection and family life, we were profoundly aware that we as adults could only imperfectly enter into the experience of a child.¹

And yet, that is perhaps what Jesus calls us to do. The perspective of childhood not only encompasses profound mystery, a sense of what is unknown, perhaps unknowable, but also, to the surprise of some, special insights into the spiritual world.

Why a brainstorm? We wanted to be open to all contributions and not allow some to be overly prescriptive in the group. This format allowed us to recognise the issue to be complex and difficult and that we needed to make and receive new ideas in the group to do justice to it. It also allowed us to test and develop ideas to some extent. The storm metaphor was appropriate as it was sometimes exhausting, often confusing and always stimulating. Like the storm experienced by the disciples, it sometimes seemed as if the Master were asleep at the back of the boat! Yet our ‘brain storm’ was in his hands, we experienced calm and we left in peace. Now we just have to get the boat ashore!

In order to proceed, we used a variety of resources to help us: our own childhoods; other children we have known; a potential book on ‘Child Theology’; projects and papers involving or produced by others or ourselves; reflection and prayer over Bible readings illuminating the place of children in the Kingdom of God.

The rules of ‘brainstorming’² require that the participants suspend critical evaluation in order to get many ideas and issues onto the table. We proceeded in this manner as well as we could and therefore this report contains raw expressions of opinion, some quite strong and simple assertions, that are often controversial. We invite the reader to read it in that light and use it to prompt questions: is this so? How far is this true in my experience? etc. Brainstorming is like sowing mixed seed and letting it grow to harvest when we can best discern the wheat from the tares. We also agreed to ‘Chatham House’ rules so that contributions would not be attributed to particular persons.

Many organisations made the meeting possible and we are grateful to all. Particular thanks are due to our hosts at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary and to Compassion International and Viva Network who provided administrative and other resources to support the meeting.

Background: Cutting Edge III

There was a concern after the first two Cutting Edge conferences that systematic Biblical work and theological reflection had been missing in the programmes. In response, Keith White was invited to read a paper entitled “A little child shall lead them.” at Cutting Edge III (2001) This produced an immediate impact and the conference schedule was adapted to enable participants to reflect further on Biblical material. Participants were invited to contribute their insights and questions arising from their work with children at risk: not only Biblical passages that had inspired them but also burning questions they would like to ask God.

¹ We did our best, taking time to recall our own childhood experiences and even taking time out to play!

² At least, as I have learned them! (ed.)

There was discussion and prayer in small groups and questions were collected in baskets in a plenary session. These were brought forward as an offering to God.

Keith White and Ken Harder were asked to take the process forward. They met and corresponded and with the help of funding from Compassion International, were able to commission work on a bibliography and convene the Penang brainstorm, with a view to feeding back to Cutting Edge IV.

Brainstorm Participants

Many participants contributed photos of themselves as children along with brief details of their life stories. We include these here, as it may help you to assess our discussion if you know who we are. But if you want to get straight into the action, go to 'Day 1' which starts on page eight!

Hannah Anandaraj



In the country of many splendours, colours and contrasts that is India, I was born. My family consisted of my father, a lawyer and my mother, the principal of a school and five children of whom I am the youngest. Life is filled with miracles – In fact just six months before I born my mother 'died' during surgery. The surgeon quickly cut open her chest and pumped her heart. Life returned to her and I was saved!

As a child I enjoyed every bit of growing up. Sisters, brothers and parents filled my days with love and learning, amusement and amazement. Something significant took place when I was in seventh grade – I received the Lord Jesus to come into my life and from then on I started to give more attention to pleasing Him.

I love playing with children and making friends with them. I now teach in the College of Social Work at graduate and doctoral levels. I do just about anything – speaking, writing, researching, and sitting in committees to make things easy and enjoyable for children. My husband is a professor of biochemistry and we have two adult children. They have been terrific and supportive.

Ela Balog



I am a Christian educator in Croatia and have an MA in education. I am married to Antal and we have two teenage children. My early years were very unhappy and I am grateful to my grandmother through whom I came to know Jesus. After University, I was the teacher and principal of a preschool in Croatia. Since the homeland war of 1993, I have been involved as a teacher and supervisor in a summer programme of children's Christian camps. During the war, I organized and coordinated a rehabilitation program for war-affected Croatian children and in 1994 I became editor-in-chief of a Christian magazine for children. This is sent to all schools, kindergartens, churches and libraries in Croatia.

In 1994, I established the Institute of Christian Pedagogy for the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia, to train students to be teachers of religious education in primary and high schools. Since 1996, I have been involved in organizing seminars and workshops for secular teachers, caregivers, child minders and teachers of religious education in continuing education. These are recognized by the Minister of Education and Social Care for the Republic of Croatia.

Gil Beers

Childhood for me was a world of cows and crows, cornfields and wildflowers along the roadside, a world of delight, though a world of poverty. Our Midwestern, post-depression grain farm barely produced enough to feed and clothe us. To consider buying a child's book during my childhood was unthinkable. I never owned one as a child. Now flash forward a few years and here I am writing books and curricula for children.

From the one-room country school, I moved on to earn two doctorates - a PhD from Northwestern University and a ThD from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. Why would a country kid do a thing like that? To make me a better steward of God's assignment to reach the children of the world for Jesus. It's true! I believe we need better preparation to reach children than we do to reach

university students. My current work is President of Scripture Press Ministries, where we are developing a “character building from the Life of Jesus” programme called Kidbuilders.

Ieda Bochio



I am 41 years old, I live in São Paulo, Brazil, and I am married to Rev. Fernando Bochio. We have three children: Diogo, 22 years old, Heidi, 20 and Miriam, 17. We are each other's best of friends and we mutually support each other in our lives and ministries.

I became a Christian when I was 7 years old. Although my family was very poor and we had to walk many miles to go to church, we were very committed to the Lord and our pleasure was to serve in the church. I was nearly killed by a fire accident when I was only twelve years old and had had to spend many months in hospital but I kept my devotion to the Lord and He restored my health and my joy in life. Later, I trained as a nurse and now I am a University Lecturer, an independent consultant for Tearfund, UK, and the coordinator of Philadelphia House, a Christian NGO that supports children and adolescents with HIV/AIDS.

I enjoy working among children so much! Through my work with children and adolescents at Philadelphia House, Abiah-Oasis and at my church, I share the reality of their lives - both the passion for fun and adventure and the heavy burden of poverty, rejection and lack of self-esteem.

Dan Brewster

I was born in a very small farming town in south-eastern Colorado called La Junta. I am told that my father carried me (and my twin sister) in his arms the day we were born, just like he had my older siblings, and prayed that we would someday be missionaries. God answered his prayer in that all six of us eventually found their way into Christian ministries, with three of us in some overseas work.

For some 25 years, I have worked in overseas ministries in one way or another connected with children's ministries, in many countries around the world. I received a doctorate in Missiology from Fuller Seminary. As a missiologist, I have been convinced that children's work, apart from meeting the needs of those on whom the burdens and stresses of poverty fall most heavily, is also the most promising way to further the Kingdom. I have widely promoted the idea of “The 4/14 Window”, convinced as I am that children and youth are the most productive approaches to missions, even in the “10-40 Window”.

My wife Alice and I have three grown children, all of whom view the world as a place in which to wander around. In my spare time, I enjoy playing squash, chess, reading, and messing about with my computer.

Tri Budiardjo

I was born as the third child into a family of four children, in 1952. My father died when I was about 4 years old and my mother had to work to take care of the four of us. We often moved from one place to another so that I missed out on a community with close friends.

At school I tried to excel at all sorts of sports. I was in school team for soccer, volleyball and a traditional ball game, called kasti. I joined a brass band and I could play all sorts of instruments. But I knew, deep down in my heart that I was lacking something more important. It was purpose and meaning in life. This quest drove me to find God in Jesus Christ. I made commitment to Christ when I was in my last year in high school. It was the greatest discovery I had in my life.

There were other major turning points in my life too - I made commitment to the Great Commission in 1972, for the cause of the poor in 1982 and in 1992 for the most vulnerable groups among the poor. They are women, children and HIV infected persons. Since 1998, I have focused on working with the Christian Children's Fund in Indonesia and serving as Chairperson of the Board of Indonesia Children At Risk Network.

John Collier

When I became a Christian as a teenager in the London suburbs, I became concerned to help people in need. So I trained as a doctor. Shortly after qualifying, I spent some



time in a hospital serving Palestinian people. I am involved in Christian social action for homeless single mothers in the city where I live. For many years, I managed clinical research programmes for a multinational pharmaceutical company. This gave me useful insights into the way organisations work. I also learned the importance of time, cost and quality in project management and how to help people to work in teams.

I retired at the earliest possible opportunity, when my children were independent, to pursue my original vision full time. I have been able to work on short-term projects in Honduras and Jamaica and for a longer time in Brazil. I am a consultant to Viva Network. While in Brazil, I was able to help local Christians start a magazine called *Mãos Dadas* that trains and encourages those working with children at risk.

In my spare time, I am working towards a Masters in Applied Theology at Spurgeon's College, London. I am a keen gardener and recycler and spend more time than I like to admit fixing my computers.

Pine Gutierrez

My name is Josefina C. Gutierrez but everyone calls me Pine. I was born in Pinamalayan, in the beautiful island province of Mindoro in the south of the Philippines. My family was among the first converts of OMF missionaries when they began to do church planting in my hometown.

I am single but I have served as some kind of a mother for so many street children in the 15 years that I have been in street children ministry that I am auntie to 6 nephews and a niece. They enjoy my pasta recipes and desserts! One experience I will never forget was when I stood between a street boy and a slightly drunk policeman during a late evening outreach. The boy had offended the man who took out his gun, acting as if he would shoot him. I shielded the boy and faced the man pleading not to shoot. I felt so brave but when he left, I was shaking all over!

I trained and worked as a nurse for some years. After I quit hospital work, I joined a development project in a tribal community for a year. The next 2 years were spent in a medical outreach, feeding and pre-school education program for malnourished urban children. I spent fourteen months as staff with MV Logos and fifteen years in street children and urban poor families ministry. Since 1999, I have been serving as the national coordinator of the Philippine Children's Ministries Network.

Jeni Smith

I was born in Cape Town, one of four sisters. My older two sisters and my mother died by the time I was seven, leaving my father to bring up my younger sister and me. He was a Christian and he never remarried. We did not have a large extended family nearby to help and life was very difficult. Still, he managed to put us both through High School and University. I studied social work and went on to work for the social services in Cape Town. For 14 years, I witnessed the whole range of social problems of that city and saw many suffering children and adolescents. I am married and have two children aged 13 and 8 years.

About a year ago, I started to work for the Cape Town City Mission where I am responsible for the Child and Youth Department. We run two children's homes and three community projects where we feed poor children and run after school clubs etc. Children's lives are so often wasted by the mistakes of adults. My vision is to see children reach their full potential.

Paul Stockley



I am nearly 37 years of age and enjoying life. I care deeply about three things: God-talk & theology, children & childhood, peace-building & non-violence. I work freelance in development issues relating to children, and have spent three years facilitating a partnership of international agencies publishing training resources for the front-line child-care worker.

Apart from God, the most important person in my life is my 13-year-old godson Maicol, who lives half way around the world in a place where there is a war going on.

I grew up in Croydon, a city on the edge of London, where I still have lots of friends aged from 6 to 96 years. Since the age of seven I've loved kiting, climbing and biking. In my life I've flown aircraft

(at age 13), sailed boats (at 17) and driven lorries (at 23), but now I usually walk to places or catch the bus! I live in Oxford where I am part of the community of St. Clements, my local Anglican church. I am pursuing 'Child Studies' at King's College School of Law, London.

Wendy Strachan



I can't remember a time in my life when I didn't enjoy teaching. From our long-suffering younger neighbours, to 24 pre-schoolers in Sunday School when I was aged 15. (My only other more vivid childhood memory was when I broke my arm go-karting with my brother around the fig tree at the age of 5!) Eleven great years in special Education in Queensland preceded 2 years at a mission school in Papua New Guinea and then with Scripture Union (SU) in Queensland.

I've worked with SU in Kenya since 1991, now as Children's Ministry Coordinator for Scripture Union Africa and International. Most of my everyday experiences would seem unusual for an Australian but not for an African. Perhaps it's hard to beat hot-air ballooning over Brisbane on a winter morning but I just wish I could afford it in a Kenyan game park to make sure!

Sunny Tan



I am the eldest of 6 children, 4 boys and 2 girls. My parents are Chinese Christians and I was allowed to spend a lot of time in church with my brothers and sisters. It was a very sheltered childhood though there were clashes between the traditional Chinese outlook on family life and the more individualistic philosophy I received from the church education. The church was greatly influenced by the American missionaries serving there.

I married Rosalind and we have two children, Sarah and Asher. My wife is involved in early childhood education. I graduated with Bachelor of Theology from Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary and received a Master of Theology from Regent College, Vancouver. I was a pastor for 10 years before I joined the Baptist Seminary. My current position is Academic Dean of the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary.

Pracha Thaiwatcharamas

I am the first born in the family of four children. My dad has already gone to be with the Lord. My mum is about 70 years old. I was told that I was burnt by hot water three times when I was still very young. When I was four years old, I ran away from school to my home the very first day after my dad sent me to the school in the morning. I thank God that I was not lost and became an orphan.

When I was about 9 years old my dad became a Christian. He had been physically ill and was unable to be healed except by the great physician, the living Lord Jesus himself. When I look back to my childhood, I am so grateful to the Lord for his protection and care in my life, even before I knew Him. After my dad became a believer, our family became very active in the church. My dad was a very faithful Christian. He even dedicated me to serve the Lord, as the first-born belongs to the Lord. This was the beginning of my ministry but when I first heard it, I refused! However, the Lord has been so great that He still leads me to serve Him even to this day.

I am so proud and so grateful that the Lord has chosen me to serve Him even though I do not deserve to do so. I am presently serving as the national director of International Bible Society, Thailand as well as the pastor of Sajathum Baptist Church in Udonrthani province, northeast of Thailand.

M A Thomas

I was born and brought up in a poor Christian family in South India. I tried to get to heaven by being good but, by my teen years, I knew I'd lost hope to be in heaven. While I was in college, the death of a good friend of mine brought great fear of death and hell to me. Then I cried to God for mercy and I found the joy of forgiveness that I had been seeking. I gave myself to sharing this good news to others, especially the poor and needy.

I used to walk to college, 5 miles one way with a half empty stomach. Several times I gave my lunch rice packet to those who came and asked me for it. Later I studied at the Hindustan Bible Institute and I used to give away my evening food to the poor and hungry outside the gate. I gathered the poor street children and started a Sunday School. I had 66 children in my Sunday School under that tree! Every one of them cried when I left the Bible College to go to Kota.

In 1967 in Kota, I again gathered the street children and started a Sunday School class with 8 children. It has now 140 branches with 75,000 students. In 1977, I started an orphanage with 8 orphans which now has 76 branches and 6,000 children. In 1978 I went to a poor leper colony in Faridabad. I had no money with me to show my friendship with these lepers so I shook hands with them and started collecting money for them through my school children.

In 2001, leaders of the Dalits and gypsy people, untouchable castes, invited me and other Christian leaders to come and help them. There are over 800 million such people who live in great deprivation. We were invited to go to any village, tribal colony or gypsy village, and start a church as long as we start an elementary school with one teacher and a clinic with a nurse. Now we have schools and churches in 35 such places. Our dream is to start 100,000 such churches, some of them with orphanages and Bible Institutes.

Ian de Villiers



I grew up in Yorkshire with twin calls to steam engines, from which I was regularly seen emerging covered in black soot from head to steel-capped toe and nature - particularly colourful beetles and newts. Having grown up with wonderful (at least, most of the time!) Christian parents, I made a decision to follow Christ at a Billy Graham rally when I was 14. Instead of confirming my call to zoology at university, God moved me to work with children in a poor area of Bangalore, South India. After that there was no doubt, so I completed a Masters in Social Work before joining Viva Network's Facilitation Team as the Asia Coordinator.

My desire is that Christians can be trained, resourced and personally supported so that they may work effectively with children where they are because, for all the professional interventions around, it still seems that the best way of loving a child is through someone who is there, who will stay there, and who demonstrably cares.

Keith White



I and my wife, Ruth, have four children. Two are married and one is still at school. We live at Mill Grove, our family home for four generations and a place open to children in need. Over 1,200 such children have lived as part of the family since 1899. I am a lecturer at Spurgeon's College, and also preach and write. For the past three years my thinking has focussed on children and their place in the world from what we know of God's intentions. A lot of this reflection has been shaped by my experience of living in a Christian residential community in India and studying the life and work of Pandita Ramabai. I love games and playing, whether on the mountains, seas, the piano or the chess board, and am grateful that Mill Grove provides endless opportunities for this.

Haddon Willmer



I retired in 1998 as Professor of Theology at the University of Leeds. I divide my time between teaching at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, enjoying life with my wife Hilary (newly-retired from the directorship of Leeds Church Institute but still charitably hyperactive) and our grandson, Nathaniel.

I also write (simple truths in complex sentences) on Barth, Bonhoeffer, politics and forgiveness, the decline of Christianity in England and (now) child theology. I enjoy having holidays in a camper van and painting pictures. Hilary and I have three children and four grandchildren, including Nathaniel.

Menchit Wong

I distinctly remember how as an eight-year-old kid, I wrote a letter to God. I asked, "Can you be a friend?" "What is life about?" Then I rushed to our backyard. I threw the letter up into the air. Of course the letter came flying down back to me!

I came from a family of eight children. Sadly, there was no laughter at home – just the constant sense of having to do things right. The only time I felt a sense of my father's affection when he gave me two storybooks as a reward for good grades. As



I moved on into high school, the hope of seeing God as more than just a statue in church haunted me. So, when I graduated with the highest honours in high school, I still felt quite empty inside, until I came to know the Lord as my personal Lord and Saviour in 1975.

I have been a professional social worker for the last 22 years. I am now working for Compassion Philippines. I will never forget the day when I visited a home for abandoned children and observed a little girl who was rowdier than the others. I asked the social worker about her. She replied, “She is better now than she was. From the time she was born until she was rescued, she was locked up in a dark hospital basement and was fed like a dog.” One of the greatest joys of my life is to see children who used to be assisted and cared for serving as children’s workers and “returning the blessing” that they received. This is the answer to my letter. God handed the reply through a little girl from a home.

Day 1

A child’s story

When I was 2 my parents divorced. My stepfather was an evil man but my mother never stood up for me against him. I remember he always had an angry face. I felt confused, lost and unwelcome. I thought I was a burden. I wasn’t allowed to eat with the family but had a place of my own in the kitchen. They called me names and falsely accused me of stealing. I was forced to confess but when the stolen stuff was found they never apologized.

I ran away when I was 7 yrs old. It was wintertime and I had no shoes. So I lived first with my aunt and later with my grandmother. She was a Christian and because of her I went to Sunday school. I liked to listen to the songs, see the pictures, and hear the Bible stories. All of the people there were friendly and kind to me. Then I had to go back to live with mother. She forbade me to go to Sunday school but I went anyway, even though I was punished for it. I couldn’t understand why, since Sunday school was so good to me.

When I was 11 years old my parents moved to Australia. I said I would come later but I knew I never would. Instead, I stayed with my grandma. She was a poor and simple person but she loved me. Material things were not so important, but relationships were.

I simply believed what I was taught in Sunday school and I knew that I could pray to God whenever I wanted. The church was my refuge. Jesus was my friend when all others rejected me. Putting my trust in Christ broke the cycle of evil in my life. My husband has a similar story and God helps us through our difficulties. Through God and prayer, now I can be who I really am.

Devotional 1: The Upside-down Kingdom

Led by Dan Brewster

We are here to discuss how children fit into our missiology, theology, and ecclesiology. There are over 8000 Bible references to family relationships, children, etc. yet little or no reference to children in standard theology books. They’re there, but they’re not. 1 Cor 1:18ff reminds us that: “God has chosen, the lowly things...and the things that are not to nullify the things that are.” Our children are invisible. God uses the weak to confound the strong, the foolish to shame the wise. Mother Teresa shamed presidents and kings.

We see the same dynamic in Luke 3:4-5. What a wonderful irony! After the list of secular and religious rulers, the Word of the Lord instead came to John in the desert. That this was no accident but central to God’s plan is clear from the quotation of Isaiah’s prophecy: “make clear the way for the Lord.” We have to ask ourselves: Is this prophecy true for children? Are mountains and hills being made low (wise things confounded) and crooked roads made straight (abuse of children confronted)? Donald Kraybill³ wrote about “mountains being made low for children”. Children are powerless, on the lowest rung of society. What is more, children don’t play society’s games. They play by different rules. They don’t discriminate by colour or status. Jesus calls us to baby status in all these areas -

³ The Upside down Kingdom (Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA 1978)

regarding all as equals, being dependent. That's what a disciple is. This week we will discuss the model of the child, and the kingdom of God in that light. Even we ourselves this week can be and probably will be confounded and brought low. "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." Bob Pierce

Session 1: Focus on the Child in the Midst

Led by Keith White

Before we started this first session, we took time to identify the key questions that we had brought with us, such as:

- why are Christians not concerned with children outside the church?
- what can child theology contribute to Bible translation?
- why do great social evils (AIDS, genocide, abject poverty, etc.) persist in spite of the massive missions efforts of the 19th and 20th centuries?
- children ('4/14 window') are the most receptive people group and make up nigh on 50% of the population, so why have most missiologists and theologians ignored them?
- what range of children is available? Are we looking for the child within all children, the typical or average child, or each individual child?

We also took time to try to identify pitfalls that might hinder our work:

- that we circle around the issues and do not get to the heart of them;
- that we allow our pet ideas of child development to control our discussion;
- that we forget teenagers when we speak of children;
- that we continue to be controlled by the notion that children should not be involved in church affairs;
- that we come to this meeting as professionals rather than as children;
- that we deal with the issues by making children a tag-on rather than a natural part of the programme.

Childhood is most commonly contrasted with adulthood. This has a number of undesirable outcomes. For example:

- children are seen, not as individuals in their own right, but as a pre-adults, a human becoming (not yet human), "an adult-in-waiting";
- it sets up opposites: dependent/independent; mature/immature; etc. in which children come off worse;
- it is assumed that children should become adults as quickly as possible;
- it is assumed that the real world is the adult world;
- we talk of "Youth and community" but what is community if we've taken the youth out? Isn't the world composed of children *and* adults?

Working from such presuppositions, children's Bibles are produced that take for granted that children could not possibly understand the Bible as given – as if adults can! Authorities look for "normal development" and monitor families to impose received standards of normality. (The UK may soon have laws that monitor smacking/spanking, as some European countries already have.)

Every society has a legitimate desire to ensure that its norms and values are transmitted to the next generation. This has Old Testament endorsement. Liberal notions that values acquisition should be a process of discovery rather than education (in this context often characterised as 'indoctrination') pay scant attention to the commercial pressures of capitalism/materialism, rampant in children's TV, books, films (with associated money-spinning merchandising) etc. From a Christian perspective, this also is abuse of children.

Western Education Systems

The state's control of the socialisation of the child is most powerfully seen in formal education systems. The primary purpose of education is to move from child to adulthood. 'Kindergartens' have become 'Nursery Schools' where social workers ask: what is the purpose of this activity? (motor

skills, social skills?) *Could we not let them play for the sake of playing?* This western model is perceived as universally desirable and we heard of 18 month old babies in Nigeria already in school uniform!

Education reflects the values of society, not only in how the system works, but also in the course material and the standards that are set. Children who can't pass the formal tests are marginalized even if they're gifted in other areas. We heard of a child who was abandoned ten times in one year and, not surprisingly, when he went to school he had major difficulties. He was excluded and diagnosed as having 'Attention Deficit Disorder'. In fact he was not only extremely intelligent but also very resilient. Despite the odds he discovered his gift and became an excellent chef. Clearly, it does no service to a child to grow up without skills that will enable him or her to make a way in society but the system is profoundly ambivalent. It is not a wholly good thing.

There are alternatives available. Keith White reported on an excellent rural education model in India and told us of an extremely informal approach to education in Rousseau's novel 'Emile' which proposed delaying the teaching of academic subjects and restricting reading to 'Robinson Crusoe' (of value because of its focus on the activities of daily living). Fröbel said "only as last resort, bring children into a classroom." See also Vanstone *'Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense'* for a Christian approach to this issue.

Changing the system

Before we seek to challenge secular authorities, we must look at our own ministries. Are we pressuring children to be transformed into adults? Much Christian children's work has the aim of producing sound, committed, Christian adults. What about allowing them to be children? (sound and committed!)

There are several challenges for us in the above:

- Consider how we may change the environment of children by incorporating community development into Christian child development;
- Rethink how adult activities and desires shape worldviews, for example the impact of capitalism on children's lives, where leisure is something you buy (the Gameboy vs. playing on beach);
- Ask ourselves if children's rights are an extension of adult control;
- Consider how we relate to gender issues and to children with special gifts and needs (*not* handicapped);
- Ask ourselves why we push children out of adult services. How could we work with children as Jesus would? For example, how do children fit into the communion service?⁴;
- Be vulnerable enough to explore the world with children and allow them to question our way of doing things;
- Be interested in what children are doing. Or, if it is impossible to be interested, perhaps at least notice the child;
- Consider whether we might stop talking about the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. Even the disciples had difficulty dealing with the institutional aspects of the notion of 'Kingdom' (Who will sit at your right hand?). The verbal alternative 'Reign of God' is less rigid and offers scope for movement, for change, but still has awkward power connotations. Perhaps a better alternative might be: "God's way of doing things."
- Discuss how to reorganize our theology, ecclesiology, and missiology so that children are always included.
- How can we pursue the intrinsic value of children as Jesus saw it?

⁴ Participation in communion is a sensitive issue but **John Krenmore** asks when was the last time a minister refused communion to a pregnant woman?

- How can we preserve the qualities that children have: unconditional love, honesty, needing good role models, etc.? What programmes would help this?
- How do we do this without romanticizing childhood?
- How do we ensure that our Child Theology embraces all children, not just children at risk - children not just in physical danger, but also in spiritual danger?

Discussion and Reflection

Led by Haddon Willmer

On the question of the institutional

The organisations we represent that work with children are not only ministries but to some extent are inevitably institutions, in the sense that they have structures, practices, values, and permanence beyond that of the individuals currently staffing them. Whereas institutionalising is a human possibility – we can do it – and it has its uses in an imperfect world, uniqueness has to be respected rather than managed. Each child simultaneously is unique and susceptible to institutionalisation, because they can fit into certain pigeonholes. Over-institutionalised children are those where the pigeonhole obliterates the uniqueness; but under-institutionalised children are vulnerable, friendless and disordered.

On uniqueness

Nowadays, the uniqueness of each person is axiomatic and politically correct. Theologically it is taken to be grounded in the will of God, – the knower of the fall of the sparrow. That is true, and in many contexts, it is a truth not to be watered down. Nevertheless, we may ask: is it healthy or natural for children (or ourselves) to make too much of uniqueness, as given in creation? There is a danger of fostering individualistic self-centredness, even narcissism. Moreover, such a view tends to focus too much on origins, on what we are because of where we come from, whereas the child exists in growing towards the future. The child who does not find a way of moving on is in a bad way. So the question of uniqueness and of identity in the child is constantly present, but is held, to a degree, in suspense; the answer is to be looked for in the *future*. The uniqueness of the child implies s/he is irreplaceable – and so, the child must be respected and its time and place protected, even when it is hard to see that it is significantly different from many other children. Given time, its uniqueness will be shown, because it will be realised in life.

Experiment and protection

An outcome of this future orientation is that the child needs *room* for experiment. But also needs *protection* - not from experiment but to ensure that experiments are kept within limits so that they remain *experiments* and do not turn into *experience*, which defines and confines. Since adulthood consists in large measure in being defined and confined (e.g. the promise of marriage, or commitments to certain kinds of work, or projects or causes), the child cannot be permanently saved from it but s/he needs to be *protected* from premature commitments, from being defined and confined by experience when there should still be experiments. Premature experience arising out of reckless experiment is of course the special problem of adolescence. Experiments can be abandoned and left behind without great costs, whereas experience that is wrong in some way carries real moral personal and social costs for the person concerned: it leaves its mark. This distinction between experiment and experience justifies the difference in legal treatment of crime in children and adults.

Experiment and justification by faith

Some Christian theological views of life support not only the experimental approach (“*we do not know what we shall be...*” 1 John 3.1f, “*leaving things behind, I press on...*” Phil 3) but also postponing the *definition* of experience to the end, i.e. to God. If we are justified by faith, not by works, then our way of living can be profoundly experimental rather than experiential (in the above sense) to the end. We are judged, not by standards we fully command or have defined out of our knowledge and understanding, but by God who is love, who creates and redeems the whole creation. We live looking forward to the Judgement believing it is not in the end an adverse

judgment of condemnation, but justification and peace with God, though it will come as extraordinary surprise.

Protecting children from premature adulthood

That the child is experimental is the reason why the child should not be the teacher or the leader, as sometimes seems to be suggested. The child teaches only by not teaching, leads by not leading. There is a deep gulf between respecting children as children and giving children adult roles and duties, (which involves adult abdication of responsibility). It is not a way of respecting children to give them adult duties or powers. The abuse of child soldiers who get power they are not ready for (if anyone ever is) is an extreme example. Milder examples, more extensively damaging, are to be found in the market exploitation of children, where their power as consumers makes them the victims of corrupting cultural forces and of the loss which follows from the weakening of good adult models (pop stars stand high while teachers are despised). Respect for the child preserves the freedom for the child to be conducting experiments for their own growing (this is different from using them in social experiments).

Why do people often remember their childhoods as so different from their later life? We might give a Wordsworthian explanation – they were nearer to God then. But do we want to believe the longer we live the more life takes us away from that good source and that divine Companion? It is however clear that we do lose something. I do not think we can avoid this loss, as though we could remain children all our lives. I would prefer to understand the tendency to regard our childhood as we remember it as distinctive from later life, by saying that, seen from the vantage point of age and experience, childhood was as a time of experiment.

The transcendence of the child: romantic and theological understandings

Each child has to be respected as a transcendent reality. But what does respecting a transcendent reality mean? Does it mean having an ideal vision of the child, which we insist is the reality, despite appearances and experiences? Or is the transcendent not something above or within the appearance, but something rooted in the *whence and whither* of life in time? Transcendence is not the possession, or the quality, of a child. It is given to the child by God who transcendently hides the life of the child in Christ, beyond all that is done by human agency. Children are vulnerable to being despised or scandalised by others, but their angels always are in the Father's presence, gazing on his face (Matthew 18.10)

Session 2: Concepts and Practices that label children

The participants formed small groups for a three stage reflection:

1. to consider concepts and practices that place and label children; this includes secular and religious words, practices and institutions
2. to let the child be set in our midst, where Jesus placed him/her and to let our minds and imaginations be moved by attending to what God places before us. It seemed to us that the Gospel story (Matthew 18.2) deliberately omits mention of any defining characteristics of the child, so that it could be any child – like the 'Unknown Soldier' it might have been you, me, my child, her child etc.
3. to find the matches and mismatches between our answers to 1 and 2. we expected to find that the ordinary cultural practice of the world is sometimes closer to and sometimes further from Jesus' teaching and that any particular practice includes both match and mismatch. Such is the complexity and ambiguity of life.

The point of this method was to avoid simply opposing the 'Kingdom of the World' with the 'Kingdom of God'. It would have been relatively easy to identify ways in which the secular adult world shapes vulnerable children and contrast it with a more compassionate child centred approach taught by Jesus. We wanted to open ourselves, as Christians and participants in a variety of religious and non-religious cultures, to whatever it was Jesus had in mind. We are also aware that once we have discerned the differences, the results are only provisional and our brainstorming must continue.

The method was, in practice, quite difficult to follow as many areas overlapped and interacted with each other in complex ways. For example, a culture in which children do not do more than deliver

newspapers before the age of 12 is closer to Jesus than one in which they are sent up chimneys when they are five or six. But a culture where children do not work at all may be one where they are kept out of the adult world of reality and quickly corrupted into consumerist indulgence. As one participant commented: “The reason this topic is so difficult is that it’s so profound!”

The results with the various interconnections are impossible to display simply in two dimensions. The following is a combined summary of the results posted by the groups, with an attempt at categorisation to help the reader make cross-links. We realise that the following assertions are often generalisations that are only valid in part. However, we believe they represent widely held preconceptions and prejudices that affect our practice and of which we should be aware.

1. Concepts that place and label children

A place in a society

- In capitalist democratic societies persons are valued as economic entities: producers, consumers or burdens
 - education is a function of the economic system.
 - children are cogs in the system who must be prepared for a productive role in the economy
 - children are targeted to develop ‘brand loyalty’, the better to be exploited as adults
 - peer pressure: group identity among children is exploited to sell goods
- Adults need to have answers all the time! But they don’t have all the answers! The world is changing so fast. So parents abdicate responsibility to governments.
 - Emphasis on cognitive development. Social, emotional and relational development, are neglected, never mind spiritual development.
 - Mechanistic approach to learning - like computers where consistent input leads to predictable output but GIGO⁵!
 - Prolongation of education:
 - creates hideously early nursery education
 - defers adulthood and creates adolescence.⁶
- The concept of children as objects rather than relational beings:
 - soldiers. “Because they don’t feel things as adults do - you can train them to do things.”
 - sponges: empty vessels needing our input to become someone; spiritually passive, recipients as opposed to actors in the church.
- The enculturation of values and prejudices.
 - even or especially in our churches: if you are Croat, you are a Catholic; if not Catholic, not a good Croat.

A place of his/her own

- The view of the world as a dangerous place:
 - children are helpless, vulnerable and ignorant:
 - children need protection;
 - children are recipients rather than givers;
 - children and their play and their worlds are not important.
- The prevailing individualism of western culture
 - place the child on a pedestal
 - every child is unique
 - but children share common characteristics.
 - Children have rights
 - children must challenge the adult world (even when adults are scared to!)

⁵ Garbage In = Garbage Out

⁶ Editor: my father left school and entered the ‘adult world’ of work at age 14 years, about the time of puberty. Now puberty comes earlier and leaving school happens later, creating the ‘not-child, not-adult’ world of adolescence.

- “Children should be seen and not heard.” Is talk of questioning the adult world simply a politicization of childhood?
- Transition to Adulthood
 - Mental development may be the key
 - even in their twenties, adults with learning difficulties are treated as children
 - Financial independence may be the key
 - frequently (Philippines; Indonesia) children marry and have children but are still helped financially by the parents so they are still considered children.
 - street children often support themselves
 - Place of residence may be the key:
 - while living at home with parents, considered a child;
 - includes divorced people who return to live with their parents;
 - includes married couple unable to afford a home of their own;
 - Biological development may be the key:
 - puberty finishes childhood;

A place in the church

- The way in which the church uses the concept of an “Age of accountability” before which the child is not responsible before God
- Labelling children as ‘converted’, ‘not converted’ etc.
- A Christian vision statement: “Enable them to become fulfilled Christian adults.” (not fulfilled Christian children?)

2. Characteristics of the ‘Child in the Midst’

Thinking and Reflection

- Children watch and observe (and return the gaze)
- Children know more about some things than their parents
 - eg computers
- Children like stories.
 - What if the child knows the meaning in ways that adults can’t understand?
 - able to accept mystery;
- How do children define themselves?
 - Children have different levels of articulation, etc.
 - Children do not necessarily see themselves as being in any way incomplete
- Children are incredibly resilient and adaptable.
 - They find ways of coping with appalling adversity.

Relationships

- need attention, acknowledgement as a person
 - rejection and neglect are disabling
- trusting, uncomplicated,
 - it’s especially harmful when their trust is broken;
 - often excluded for no good reason
- need a safe place physically and socially
 - naughty, like to test the limits
- sincere, speak frankly, without pretence “you look ugly today!”;
- take responsibility for things that go wrong, even inappropriately
 - life often seems unfair
- The way children relate to each other is, in some ways a model for adults. Across cultures and languages without difficulty.
- is innocence a characteristic of childhood?
 - a nine year old child from a Sao Paulo favela differs greatly from a nine year old from an Amazonian tribal group;
 - children from the favela are less dependent, less trusting, are they less children?

Faith

- Maybe God is speaking to us through the child, challenging adults to take responsibility.
- The ‘child in the midst’ has a relationship with Jesus.
 - are the matters of faith beyond the child?
 - they are willing to ask God for the impossible;
- Express their feelings honestly to God
- Children are often better dealing with grace:
 - while adults are analysing it, children are simply happy to accept unconditional love
- Do “handicapped” children represent most accurately how adults are to God? God’s patience.

Activity

- Children like (and need) to play.
 - life is a game,
 - often act out adult roles;
- unstructured, not following rules
 - curious and like to explore
 - can make sense out of something simple or unfamiliar
 - quickly make their own rules and expect them to be followed!

3. Match and Mismatch

These were some of the things brought out as matches and mismatches:

(Note: ☺= match; ☹ mismatch)

Education

- ☺ In India, schools give solid religious teaching (albeit usually Muslim or Hindu)
- ☹ Western education often leaves no space for religious instruction.
- ☺ In the west, Christians develop alternatives, e.g. home schooling
- ☹ Opting for the easier short-term solution of making the child fit the system.
- ☹ Adults assume they know the meaning but offer children a hopeless world.
- ☹ Problem of the child growing up who is unable to fit into the system (i.e. educated outside of the culture)

Childhood

- ☺ We encourage and recognise creativity and curiosity, empowering children to flourish.
- ☹ Play squeezed out of children’s life with the quest for success in education
- ☹ We label the same intrinsic drive as ‘naughty’ etc. and prefer children who are passive, harmless, and not disruptive
- ☺ Family conference – youngest girl the chairperson – empowerment of the weakest!
- ☹ Empowerment becomes abandonment when we insist that children question the system rather than we adults
- ☺ Indonesian traditional societies have definite rituals for the transition to adulthood, usually around puberty (12-14yrs),
- ☹ In westernised groups, adulthood follows education and is not clear – at end of high school or University? lack of clarity breeds insecurity and rebellion.
- ☺ We need to try to identify the values that underlie ‘needs’ and ‘rights’ language.
- ☹ How can this be done without oppressively denying freedom?

Economics

- ☹ Play and articles of play are commodified, and need to be bought
- ☹ Women in Sierra Leone need children if they are to beg successfully on the streets. They can’t afford to allow the children to go to school.
- ☹ Children’s fashion. Children are made into little adults. They have their childhood taken from them. Toddler girls wearing bikinis – is this innocent imitation of mother or pressure to be adult
- ☹ Parental guilt that leads to buying things for children.

Spirituality

- ☺ “The children I work with throw their fish curry and they lie and cheat.”
- ☹ The romanticised view of children as innocent ‘angels’
- ☺ In the Old Testament, the child was viewed as part of the community of faith simply by virtue of having been born into the “household of faith.”
- ☹ Within evangelism children can be seen primarily as souls needing salvation, making more of human choices than the reality of the love of God.
- ☹ Ideas of Original Sin and the need to make a personal decision, etc.
- ☺ Emphasise a growing faith relationship to God
- ☺ Childhood as a journey. Guides are useful on journeys. Presupposes that the guide knows where the traveller is and should be going.
- ☹ We are so concerned with reaching the destination that we don’t enjoy the scenery on the way.
- ☹ We are not necessarily conscious of failing to respect and notice the ‘intrinsic life’ of the child.
- ☺ Respecting the ‘life in itself’ that the child has which cannot be organized and defined from outside.
- ☹ Assuming that children are irresponsible.
- ☺ Look at child headed households. We say that childhood is taken away, but at the same time the child is demonstrating that children are not irresponsible.

Relationships

- ☹ The cult of individualism takes children out of the family context, emphasising children’s rights against those of parents.
- ☺ Remember the family context, which is prominent in both Old and New Testaments.
- ☹ Churches seen as places of judgement where there is little grace. (See Yancey.)
- ☺ Churches seen as places of safety
- ☹ Organizations that are oppressive and a ‘power thing’, where the focus is on escaping misery not finding freedom.
- ☺ Organizations that are liberating and humanizing; whose aim is to put children into community, because freedom is in relationships.
- ☺ Where there is freedom not to conform to the system.
- ☹ Unrealistic expectations of parents – the ‘perfect parents’ required by church and state
- ☹ Tokenistic presence of children in the church.

Day 2

A child’s story

We held a number of children’s camps in Africa. One girl, Kathy, had been to all four camps. She knew all the right answers and could have told the gospel story backwards but she never made any visible response. As the camps were drawing to a close, one of the leaders asked her if she wouldn’t like to be a Christian. She seemed surprised and said she was a Christian already. The leader was concerned to know if she had really made a commitment to Jesus and so asked, “If God said, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven,’ what would you say?” She stared back blankly and didn’t answer the question or say anything about forgiveness and repentance, the answers that were expected. The leader asked again. Still no response. Finally, one more time: “If God said, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven,’ what would you say?” She seemed quite distressed to be asked again and blurted out: “Why should I have to say anything? He’ll recognise me. I’ll just run into his arms!”

Kathy had seen something that the leader, for all his training, had not seen. She understood what it means to be a disciple. Though only in her twenties, Kathy died last year. I know she didn’t have to answer silly questions, she would have run straight into his arms.

Devotional 2: Encounters with the Blind

Led by Wendy Strachan

We are looking at Mark chapter 10 for this devotional. You might expect that we shall look at the passage where Jesus welcomes children “if you want to be in the kingdom of God, be like these.” But I want us instead to look at the three encounters Jesus had after this.

Firstly, Jesus encounters the rich young ruler. v17 “good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Surely the ideal question for someone in ministry! What would you say if someone asked you? Jesus instead looks deeper and ponders: What is the man really asking? v21 “Jesus looked at him and loved him” and went on to outline cost of discipleship.

In the second encounter, James and John ask to sit at the right hand of Jesus and again Jesus resists a straight answer. Rather, he homes in on what it would cost.

The third person we meet as we travel this road with Jesus is a blind man, Bartimaeus. We can imagine a man blind, poor, desperate, marginalized. What did he expect when he said “have mercy on me”? What sort of mercy was he expecting? Why was he not intimidated by the rebukes of the people? What was in the heart of people that tell him to be quiet? What happened to his cloak? - he threw it aside, just to get to Jesus. Why did Jesus ask, “What do you want me to do for you?” Wasn’t that obvious? What was it like for Bart to follow Jesus? Was he a lifetime disciple? How long did he follow?

This chapter is about blind men and disciples. Who were the blind? Who were the disciples? The blind man really understood discipleship. It’s a challenge for us disciples to deal with our blind spots. Children can help us through the questions they ask.

Session 3: Review of theological articles

The conference split into pairs to consider a number of theological articles, books etc. that had been pre-circulated. They were to review them from the point of view of the contribution of the material to Child Theology. Summaries of these materials are provided in the Appendix where full source references are given. The following gives a brief review of the comments made by participants.

The article by DeVries provides a good starting point for our reflections, with useful contributions on Christian hope through the eyes of a child and the comment drawn from Schleiermacher that childhood and adulthood are spiritual perspectives that can coexist. However, we felt the need to put the child’s view in the context of the biblical view.

We had further thoughts on the concept of ‘intrinsic worth’ which is mentioned by DeVries and several other authors we reviewed. *Intrinsic* worth would mean ‘I am in my own image’ and somehow or other this makes me valuable. But a more Biblical view would be to say that our worth and the worth of the child are relational. Calvin says that being in the image of God is like a person standing in front of a mirror: the image is only there when in front of the mirror. If a human being turns away from God then there is no image of God in him or her. It is only as we are in a face-to-face relationship with God that we reflect him. It stresses that the image of God is a relational image⁷ but tends to deny or diminish the image of God, and therefore the worth, of non-Christians.

A short paper by Marjorie Menaul offers sermon notes on the narrative of the birth of Samuel and draws out the importance of the mundane work of bearing and raising children in accomplishing God’s purpose.

If asked what a child’s longing is, we never would have said ‘homeland’ before we read Moltmann. This could be a helpful insight but it led to a long discussion on the use of the word ‘homeland’. The word has negative connotations: of nationalism, enemies who do not belong, tendency to be territorial. Adults tend to be preoccupied by land but children may not think about land at all, only about a home created by relationships - a ‘safe haven’. All children need a safe place to play and be secure and our theology needs to reflect this. But it is not only about safety. Children at risk often want to go home

⁷ See also Douglas Hall: ‘Imaging God.’

rather than stay at the safe facility we provide for them. Even when ‘home’ is a dangerous place, lacking any kind of security. In the Indonesian language ‘kampong haliman’ (village, area near your house) signifies a place where you belong, where you have roots. So a sense of belonging is also an important factor.

For all its breadth and depth, Moltmann’s article has some limits. It assumes a context of ‘normal middle class childhood’ and therefore to some extent romanticizes childhood. Most of us work with children at risk, who don’t have abundant life. We felt a need to take Moltmann’s insights and make them more inclusive of children on the margins. Despite these criticisms, most of us found the article to be inspirational, especially for the three perspectives from which he suggests we should look at childhood:

1. as concerned adults and teachers
2. how children see and experience childhood
3. how an adult looking back sees childhood.

In our view, Gundry-Volf provides a good exegesis of her chosen material in the Gospels but this limited scope on scripture is a weakness for our purposes. It is not only that she omits relevant material in the Old Testament and the epistles but also she only focuses on the positive sayings of Jesus in regard to children. There are other passages where Jesus appears to say negative things about children and we need to include these⁸ as well as the Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament in our analysis. We were impressed by her description of the special spiritual insights given to children and remembered the promise in Joel 2 of Holy Spirit poured on young and old. We need to include this in our churches! But how?

Mary Ann Hinsdale discusses an essay by Rahner in which there is much useful material for our reflection. We were particularly impressed by the critique of capitalism and the application of the principle of subsidiarity in the care of children: care should be delivered by the agency most proximal to the client, i.e. first by the family, only then by the community or state. That childhood is something we carry on through life, not just the first stage, is both reassuring and a challenge to us in the task we have set ourselves. It is the basic condition of our humanity - as we become children of God, we move into the fullness of our identity as children of God. Clearly, children are already human. Moreover, they have a spiritual maturity, being naturally open to God, able to give and receive without prejudice. This may mean rebalancing a doctrine of Original Sin with the idea of ‘original redemption’ i.e. that they are already under the power of Christ’s redeeming love.

It was perhaps inevitable, given the background to the consultation that we should find the paper by Keith J White presented at Cutting Edge III to be very useful for our task, not only in its content but also in its passion. Our work also needs to be passionate. It has a well-developed international range and brings majestic themes to street level. It focuses on serious problems. It is not purely theoretical, but is written with the reality of children’s situation in mind. The article points toward possible practical action that we may take.

We valued the practical, and not too philosophical approach of the ‘Kid Builders’ material. It is simple, comprehensive and easy to understand. We liked the consistent focus on the need to help children grow the way God intended, using age-appropriate materials and methods. Although the material is excellent in its focus on spiritual growth, it doesn’t deal with emotional growth very thoroughly. For example, as the aim is to build character it inevitably focuses on positive characteristics. Thus, the themes are relentlessly upbeat. There is no specific teaching on how to deal with sadness, loneliness, failure, anger, abuse, bullying etc. i.e. the problems that children face. These may be implied from their positive counterparts but this could lead to a sense of inadequacy in the child, parent or teacher using the material. It may give the impression of a Christian world completely alien to the dysfunctional world in which the children live.

The material divides relationships into three basic categories – with God, with self and with others. This is useful and should feature in our theology while recognising that in the real world these do not always work in harmony. Children at risk know all about this. Does the material equip them to deal

⁸ she refers to Mk 10:29-30; 13:12; Lk 9:59-62; 12:51-53; 14:26 where Jesus speaks of leaving family members for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

with an oppressive world where these relationships are in conflict? In addition, is it enough just to ‘know’ God, self, others? This is a traditional evangelical approach but lacks, for example, teaching on the need also to love oneself. Perhaps this is seldom an issue for happy, loved children but it often is for the oppressed and abused. Full Christian teaching on relationships should also include the relationship with creation (environment).

The material betrays its origins in a culture where Jesus is readily accepted as the prime model. This is not a universal norm. Jesus of course is the ultimate and best example but we queried whether there needs to be a contemporary model in society. This would be difficult for material intended for use around the world. If the assumption were that it would be used only with the children of Christians, then this criticism would be unfounded. Even so, it could usefully be developed for children of other or no religion.

Session 4: A book on ‘Child Theology’

As an aid to reflection, we considered how we might write a book on ‘Child theology’. A proposal was brought to the group and this was then modified by discussion. There was considerable flux, with comments and suggestions being made throughout the week.

- Who do we envision the reader to be?
The market audience is adults but perhaps not only or primarily? a book for Christian parents?
- How do we want to move or change the reader?
Presumably we want the reader to be stirred and change the agenda in part of his life.
- What actions should the person take because of the book?
- How will this book be different than what has been done?
One stated view was that it should be ‘plain and simple’, with stories interspersed with statement. But others thought it needed weight and profoundness, convincing argument rather than simplicity that ducks issues. Whether simple or not, it would be a theological book. It was clear, however, that we should avoid mistakes made in some similar ventures, that are very focused and diving straight into specific issues: When do you take children to church? When should they be baptized? Such approaches lose the universal in a welter of detail. There was no consensus over to what extent we should allow context into the book and how it should feature.

The structure of the book would depend greatly on our conception of the ‘child in the midst’. If she were the “normal” family child it suggests something different from the abused child.

Introduction and Background

- Discuss the issue that we are adults and the ‘conversion’ we needed to be able to write the book.
- Why are we discussing children now, but not before? The fact that children are invisible or idolised. Child Theology is intended to make them visible and appreciated for what they are.
- Describe the new contexts faced by children: war; rights; relationship breakdown; environmental damage; how do these things threaten children?
- Thoughts on other theologies (feminist; black; liberation) and how they have developed. The way theology has been done by adults. (Used to be done by males).
- Give historical background. How were children in the middle ages? Is it the same now?

Chapter 1: What is ‘Child’?

- Unpack that question: are we talking about any child? Or a particular child?
- Address the vast differences of experience: happy and sad; rich and poor; gender and cultural differences.

- Use the three perspectives from Moltmann: the child experiencing childhood; the child care worker; the adult looking back at their own childhood;
- How do Child development theories affect our ideas of what a child is?

Chapter 2: Children in the Bible

- Do the exegesis!
- Old Testament
- New Testament: Jesus and the epistles; address the tensions
- Cultural background issues.
- What happens when we look at the children in the midst?

Chapter 3: Re-thinking “Adulthood”

- “The reign of God is a children’s world” where children are the measure and call the adult world into question.
- There is a tension: that adults need both to shape children and to be shaped by them.
- Include Whitmore’s critiques on market capitalism.
- Respond to children’s profound questions as good theology and do not just give adult answers.

Chapter 4: Re-thinking Theology

- Place of narrative and story as it relates to children. Rethink Lausanne papers. Engage this with mainstream theology. It isn’t a separate world. All theology is related, but find a way in. Look at existing theology.
- Question of world religions.
- What is the purpose of theology?
- Keep it mainstream, while considering who the reader is.
- What happens when theology is done with children in the midst?

Chapter 5: Re-shaping church/family/school/community

- Several felt that we need a chapter on re-shaping the family and community as well as church.

Chapter 6: A New Vision for Society

Child and contemporary society

- How does society need to change? Can it change? How have children been affected by developments e.g. the rights of the child?
- Righteous use of technology. What are the positives? Should Christians be creating Christian computer games? Losing relationships and gaining electronic toys
- Methods of education.
- Need to attend to the influence of media on children
- Environment – the vision of children for the environment is important. In Isaiah, a child is playing with animals. A vision for the planet?
- Children as a clue to political wisdom – the political significance of child theology
- Children’s literature talks about different worlds (of Winnie the Pooh, of Narnia). It’s always a symbol for something more.

Chapter 7: Children and the Gospel

- How much do children know? How much do they need to know? see Ron Buckland's book "Children and the Gospel".

Chapter 8: Spirituality

Chapter 9: ?

The above outline captures a view at a moment in time; it continued to change through the week and no doubt will continue to do so, up to the point it is sent to the printer! It reveals the issues that we had come to think were important at that particular moment.

Day 3

This day was structured differently, to allow more time for worship and for relaxation and informal reflection i.e. we had a service in the chapel in the morning and went fishing in the afternoon! However, one formal session is reported in the following section.⁹

Session 5: A review of a draft statement on the Theology of Childhood

Led by Haddon Willmer

We were provided with a statement produced by an evangelical agency that works with children. As it was in draft it is not appropriate to further identify the source. It was used as a means of sharpening our reflection of the issues.

The document contained a major focus on original sin. On the positive side, in affirming children's sinfulness it shows that they are significant and that their actions matter. However, in starting out with the doctrine of original sin and not with God, it skews the perspective - what is greater, God or sin? This is partly why evangelicalism tends to be such an unaesthetic religion. It is such a solemn, forbidding thing, perhaps especially for a child. Surely our theology must start with God! What if we start with a God who is willing and happy to forgive, who delights to forgive and welcome the sinner?

A strength of the document is that it grapples with significant questions. It discusses several problems of child evangelism. For example, when a child of three says "I have just accepted Jesus", how does that make him different from the day before? Conversion is only one expression of theology. Children can grow up with Jesus, just like they can grow with people. We heard the story of the child's response to the question "why should they let you into heaven?" and she said, "I won't have to say anything. He will know me, and I will just run into his arms." Does this pass the heresy test? This is a better starting point for our theology.

Traditionally, we have been strong on substitutionary views of the atonement. This may be a hard concept for street children and others who are thought to be disposable. Substitution involves doing away with one and putting another in its place. Representation rather than substitution would be a better metaphor. Representation implies advocacy and practical action to hold the place open for the one who is represented, to open up his future.

The document provides only a cursory overview of child development without sufficient depth and this doesn't help.

Frances Young in 'Face to Face' tells the story of her life with her totally disabled son. She writes as a theologian. In the midst of dry spell in her life, God spoke to her saying "It doesn't matter whether you believe in me or not." It was a very liberating understanding, which freed her up to be able to speak and think freely. In a similar vein, Barth said, "Don't take the atheism of the atheist too seriously." They may have the political power and ability to influence society but they are no threat to God.

⁹ exaggerated reports of the fishing trip may be obtained from individual participants

Day 4

A child's story

I was born into poverty. It was during the depression in the mid-west of the USA. We lived in a railroad boxcar, with the dining room in the garage. We had food because we lived on a farm but there was absolutely no money. My mother made the dresses she wore from feed sacks. My father was not a Christian but was a very honourable man.

There was plenty of family time as there was no money to go out anywhere. We always had 3 meals a day and, what was more important, we always shared them together. Mother would read poetry to us but I never owned a child's book, which is interesting because I've now written more than 150 children's books!

My childhood was filled with interaction with nature. Every day I walked a mile to the one room school and one mile back. Perhaps I learnt as much interacting on the way with the hedgerows, birds, etc. I went to Sunday school every Sunday and at age 16 became a Christian.

I got married, had children, and became busy writing and publishing age-appropriate books for children. It was a busy life and we never had any time for ourselves but we wouldn't trade the time we had with our kids for anything. This was an advantage of working at home for 20 years, to be at home for kids both before and after school. Now I have 11 grandkids and all have a deep commitment to Christ.

Devotional 3

Led by Tri Budiardjo

In the last two days we have been grappling with the issue of the child in the midst and the invisibility of the child. When the adults were arguing over an 'adult' matter, that is "power," who is the greatest, Jesus set the child in the midst (Mat 18:2-3). We are intrigued as to who that child was and perplexed with the invisibility of the child in that discourse between Jesus and the disciples.

The child is invisible not only in that particular episode. In fact it is so common that we no longer stop to ponder it. We take it as normal that children are neglected, sidelined and marginalized. In some communities in the eastern part of Indonesia, the children do not eat their dinner with their parents. They only eat after their father, uncles, grandfather and older men have enjoyed themselves. Some are luckier, as they eat before the women. Many of them literally eat the last. Do they fare any better in church? They are often given second-class attention in our fellowship and worship. Sunday School class or other activities are run so that they do not disturb adult worship. We adults unconsciously tend to put the children last.

I want to suggest two ways to help us break this routine and to start thinking about children more directly. The first is to remind ourselves of some statistics about children.

- 6.8 million babies are malnourished *Jakarta Post Apr 11, 2000*
- Every 2 minutes, one child under five dies *Kompas Aug 12, 1999*
- 11.7 million children drop out from school *NCCP*
- Only 24% of children will complete High School *Kompas Jun 28, 2000*
- 70% of primary school children suffer from anaemia *Kompas Jan 10, 2001*
- Street children number 150,000 - 200,000 *ICAR Network, Jul 2000*
- Child labour is increasing *ILO Aug 2000 & BPS 2001*
- Every 35 minutes one pregnant mother dies *Suara Pembaruan Jan 31, 2000*
- 30% of girls are married by the age of 16 *UNICEF Mar 1999*
- One in 5 women have their first baby before 20 years of age *UNICEF Mar 1999*
- 40,000 girls have been sexually exploited and there are 80,000 child prostitutes *Kompas Dec 1, 2000 & ICAR Network, Jul 2000*

Secondly, we need to look at the forces pushing children aside and victimizing them. These forces are so important to adults that they are willing to sacrifice children to get them:

- **POWER:** children in conflict and crisis situations
e.g. Cambodia, Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor, Indonesia, etc.
- **PROFIT:** child labour, bonded labour, domestic helpers
e.g. South Asian Countries, Indonesia
- **PLEASURE:** Trafficked and sexually exploited children, AIDS orphans
e.g. South East Asian Countries, etc.

Children are pushed to the back, sidelined and marginalized in our communities because we often are too preoccupied with ‘adult matters’. Sadly, this happens in our Christian fellowships too. Jesus put a child in the middle of a group of disciples arguing about power. He wants us also to become conscious of a child among us and put aside our ‘adult matters’ for the sake of children.

Session 6: Analysis and reflection on questions from Cutting Edge III

The participants at Cutting Edge III in 2001 were asked to offer questions concerning children. Several hundred were received covering a wide variety of topics. Many issues were raised repeatedly. To aid our discussion, Haddon Willmer provided a categorisation which formed the basis for the following table.

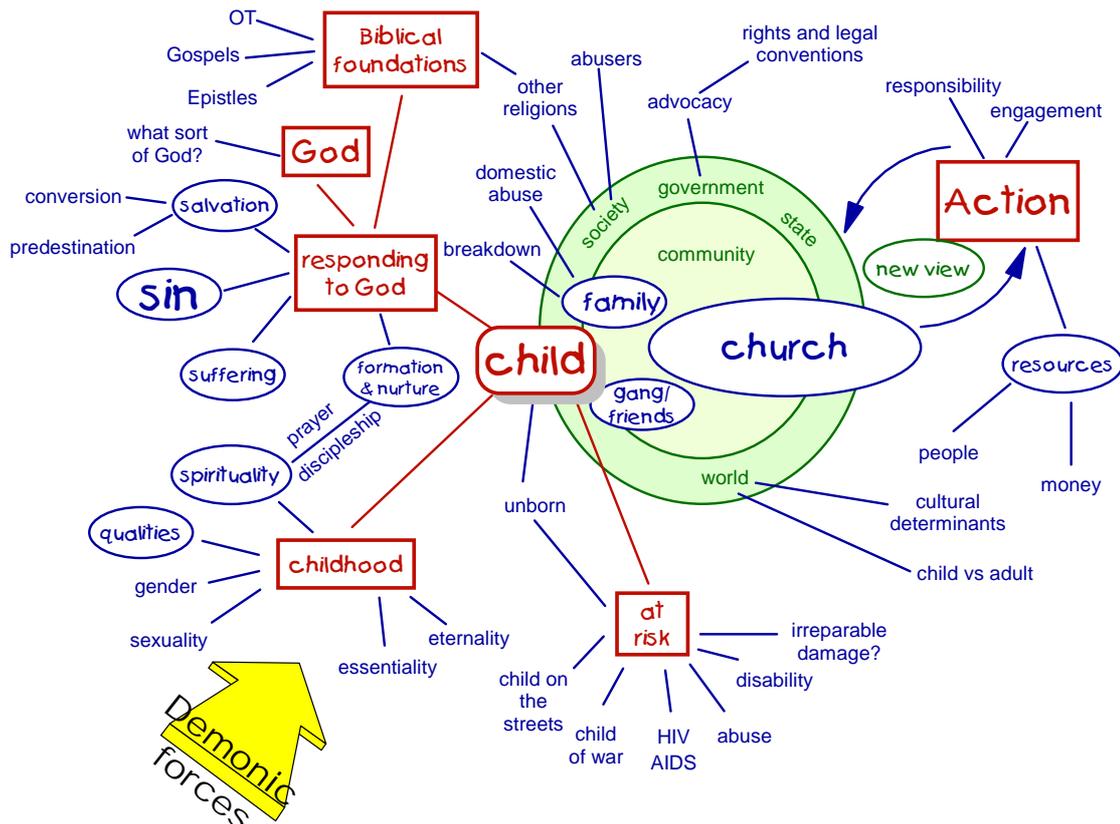
Categorisation of Questions from Cutting Edge III

God	
1.	God – who? What is God like? God as model
Childhood	
2.	The childhood of Jesus
3.	Why do we lose touch with our childhood innocence?
Sin and salvation	
4.	Sin and children
5.	Predestination and choice: children deciding for Christ: responsibility
6.	Terms and conditions of salvation for children – do they need to ‘know Jesus’?
7.	Writing off damaged/unhealable children – or reintegrating?
Suffering	
8.	Child soldiers
9.	Street children
10.	Dealing with abusers (castrate them?)
11.	Suffering (Why is it allowed? Absence of God/Jesus)
12.	Demonic forces round children
Standards for action - Biblical and secular	
13.	Legitimacy of political action for children
14.	Culture or Gospel, in relation to men, women and children
15.	Church indifference to children
16.	What does the Bible mandate?
17.	The Bible and the Rights of the child
18.	Lack of resources for children – is this a Bible question?
Children and church	
19.	Religious education of children
20.	Involving children better in whole life of church
21.	Church indifference to children
Children and family and society	
22.	Children and humanity/adults – balancing care between them
23.	The unborn child
24.	Family and breakdown of family (removing children, father abandoning)

- **God:** What sort of God is there?
- **The Child:** the context, unborn, the church, community, family, society, state, cultural determinants, gang and friends. etc.
- **Childhood:** Gender, sexuality, worth, spirituality, eternity, and other qualities.

- **Responding to God:** sin, predestination, conversion, salvation, silence of God, miracles, suffering, transformation, formation, nurture.
- **At risk.** Definition, abuse, disability, war, streets, irreparable damage?, etc.
- **Action:** Responsibility, engagement, resources, people, money rights, legal conventions, advocacy, political.
- **Biblical foundations:** Old Testament, Gospels, epistles, other religions, etc.

There are many issues, made more complex by their overlapping and interacting relationships. An analysis provided the following visual representation of some of the links.



Session 7: Silence from the North: cultural perspectives

In this session, participants from Europe and North America were obliged to be silent (with some difficulty!) in order to ensure that we heard a non-Western viewpoint. The expectation was that the process would reveal theological material from other cultures. However, the outcome was rather different. The discussion exposed particular difficulties and challenges of children in these cultures, and it became clear that, in some cases, children are not just ‘at risk’ but are nearly overwhelmed by all the risks. This session was effective not only in sounding non-western voices but also in giving impetus to the non-western participants to get together to work out how they wanted to forward child-theology in their own regions and continents.

Rites of passage

In South Africa young boys are initiated from the age of 12. After circumcision they become men. Human rights organizations are outraged by some of these things, but they are part of the culture. When a girl becomes a woman in India, it is highly celebrated but her status is still low. When Brazilian girls reach 15yrs of age, they have a special party indicating coming out into the world as an adult, or nearly-adult.

Status of children

In East Africa children are loved but ignored, particularly in the church. Children are important for security in old age and continuation of the family name. The number of children is a status issue. Women are known as “momma Kara” i.e. the mother of the child. School is not to educate children but to protect them - learning the taboos, the dos and the don'ts, (most of them are don'ts). Girls may be taken out of school to be married to an older person and many never even make it to school. Gender discrimination is common. The bride price custom gives girls some status. Most girls would be insulted if there was no bride price or if it was little. Child or temple slavery is common. Children are often sold for a family's debt and some never escape. It is very common to take a child into the extended family but taking in an unknown child is almost unheard of.

In Southern Africa children are expected to be silent. Ancestor worship is still common, so the elders and the dead are consulted about everything, but children have no role.

In the Philippines, daughters as young as 6 are given responsibilities at home: housework, looking after younger siblings etc. Sons have more freedom. Age discrimination is common: the children are given the chicken feet, wing, or head; the best parts are for grandfather, father, or other adult. In India, discrimination is more gender based: the boys eat and the girls remove their plates. The boys wouldn't even know how to hold a broom! If the household has only one egg it will always be given to the boys or men. Similarly, parents ask “Why should we send the girls to school?”

In Indonesia, children have more freedom to speak and may express their feelings but the child and adult worlds are vastly different. Javanese culture is dualistic, not between good and bad, but between smooth and refined, between coarse and rough. The spirit world belongs to the refined world, the physical to the coarse and rough. The objective is to move from the coarse world to the more refined world. The culture recognizes the 3 aspects of being: physical, spiritual, and soul. For the soul, one must discipline oneself to have a more refined soul, reflected in art and dancing. Asceticism is practiced to refine the spirit. Children are born into the unrefined world and are expected to move into the other world. This covers every area of life, for example, children use one language with each other and a different language to adults.

In Thailand, children are generally very welcome today. The parents own their children who are highly valued but gender discrimination is prevalent: “Having a baby girl is like having a toilet in front of your house.” But baby boys traditionally provide a path to heaven.

The main concern of Malaysian Chinese is always survival as they cannot go back to China. Their Children are part of the means: a lot of children means the family will survive. They are very westernized with a great desire for materialistic success. The Christian parents of a man wanting to go into Christian ministry told him: “you have to think about your stomach first.” The first born is very important. He is expected to inherit the business of the family. Parents have to be very brave to allow children to pursue the Christian ministry.

Brazil is an ethnic melting pot and the country is still trying to find it's own identity. So there is no “representative” child. The blacks are the poorest. Black children dream of going to the Samba school and families save during the year to allow their children to participate in Carnival and other festivals. The middle class are of European descent and some think of themselves as more European than Brazilian. Boys are more important than girls as girls will not make much financial contribution to the family. Large families are valued as a sign of fertility.

Children are important in Brazil but also not important. Parenting is viewed theoretically as a joint responsibility but, in fact, fathers have very little role. The mothers are with the children all the time. Even in the church, children's ministry is mostly women's work and they hurry the children out, for the important matters are for the adults, not for the children.

Children play a great part in Indian mythology and this is reflected in an important role in families and society. Parents accumulate wealth for generations to improve the lot of their children. Parents are especially keen to have their children receive assistance. But parents from lower castes see no value to education. Their attitude is very pragmatic. Large families are not viewed as more mouths to feed, but as double the sets of hands to bring in money.

Rituals concerning children

The dualistic way of thinking in Indonesia manifests itself in ceremonies for childbirth and the naming of children. Names reflect the expectations of the parents. If the adults feel the given name turns out to be too ambitious or optimistic, the child's name may be changed. Sickly children may be sold to relatives in order to change their luck; birthdays are celebrated every 40th day (in conjunction with the solar and lunar cycles). The hopes that parents sometimes have for their children often cause them to "sacrifice" them: they go to the mountains where there are spiritual influences and perform certain rituals, making agreements with the demonic powers e.g. family wealth in exchange for one of the children. The child may become mentally handicapped or otherwise exploited for the benefit of the parents.

In India, every child has a "history" and a story, kept by the Brahmins. There are other practices whose aim is to protect the child by confusing evil spirits: e.g. naming the child "garbage" or "rubbish". So the god comes to take the child and thinks, "Oh this child is only rubbish" and leaves without him or her. On the other hand, naming children after people in the Bible can be very powerful.

In South Africa, certain parts of the child's body are used for medicinal purposes: arms, brains, private parts, etc. Body parts are actually sold perhaps to put in front of the door for prosperity or success. Having sex with a virgin, even a one-month-old girl, is thought to prevent AIDS.

In Indonesia there is preference for the good-looking child and discrimination against the plain child. Mothers avoid looking at things that are ugly as this might make the baby ugly. Children born with disabilities are viewed in a very bad light; families are understood to have done something wrong. This causes a challenge of self-acceptance for children, especially those not so good looking. This is true for poor as well as wealthy families. Large families understood as protection, preservers of family wealth, and providers for parents in old age - even if they cannot be properly supported.

Exploitation

In East Africa, there are daily stories in the papers of children being "defiled." The child is sent home, the teacher is transferred.

In Indonesia the use of boys for homosexual sex is thought to confer more power on the man. Homosexuality is increasing in the Philippines and is being linked up with men not having active role in raising their children. It is ironic: we say children are important, but we don't really mean it.

In Thailand, many families sell their daughters to the sex trade, even when very young. Girls may even sell themselves because of materialistic desires, mobile phones, make up, etc.

Every Indian is part of a caste (except Christians) and several castes are designated to be prostitutes. So they are *expected* to be prostitutes. Conditions are unspeakable but the government is not bothered. There are no sanctions or stigma and the police are part of it. Parents who cannot afford a dowry may sell girls to the temple for prostitution.

Race groupings shaped all thinking in South Africa until 1994 and the different race groups still have their own cultures. Gangs are very common in Cape Town and the result is that adult prisons are full of children. The Government is pumping a lot of money into street kid programmes etc. but not with passion or commitment. Children are heading families because of AIDS. They have no education and no future. There is a generation of illiterate children.

There are almost no controls on Brazilian TV programmes. The content is very sexually explicit and is shown all day. So children are exposed to sexual situations very early and start sexual activity very young. Parents even provide beds and condoms for their children in their own homes, thinking they are providing a safe place for their children to have sexual encounters. Brazilians feel it is one of their cultural features – they are sexual "somethings"!

Materialism

Philippine culture is a mix of those who have colonized the country. In times past, children had playmates and played lots of games, helping in the socialization process. Now, many children have no friends at all. Their 'playmates' are electronic toys. Before, they would play together and would

go as far as one kilometre from home without the parents worrying. Now, the parents are afraid of kidnapping, etc, so they keep the kids in the house with the television and their electronic toys.

Session 8: Review of current projects for children

Children's Bible Task Force

The Committee for Bible Translations within the International Bible Society observed that there are two tiers of Bible translations: one for adults, and another for children's Bibles and materials. For the former, there are hundreds of people advising and consulting; for children's Bible materials, there is very little consultation, almost anything goes. The Children's Bible Task Force (CBTF) is a response to this, to set standards for and raise the standard worldwide of Bible material for children.

A Narrative Bible

Keith White has had the experience of opening the Scriptures to teenagers across all types of culture. Dissatisfied with the currently available children's Bibles, he set himself the task of creating a new Bible with the help of a noted graphic designer. The key difference in the project is that the narrative parts of the Bible are printed in single columns, rather like a story book, while the non-narrative parts are in double columns or poetic form. There are copious marginal notes to aid understanding. The notes for the narrative portions are written for 8 year olds. The non-narrative notes are written for adults. Thus, the hope is to provide "a Bible that grows up with you." The illustrations are intended to be cross cultural and not child specific, or like "normal" child's book illustrations. The Bible will be launched along with an exhibition of the original artwork.

Understanding God's Heart for Children: An International Process of Reflection¹⁰

Led by Ian de Villiers

After the CLADE IV conference of church leaders in Latin America in 2000, Viva Network staff at the local, regional and international level recognised the need for an international process of Bible-based reflection and consultation to enable Christians to hear and understand God's heart and will for children. This led to a programme that would start at Cutting Edge IV and report to Cutting Edge V.

The aim is to inspire, increase and guide our action in influencing the public debate about children and to develop a Christian approach to processes such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This is a key time for action on behalf of children, with nations globally signing up to the 'World Fit for Children' outcomes document at the UN Special Session in May 2002.

To achieve the aims we propose a process where groups from Churches and Christian organisations worldwide take part in Bible-based reflection on a series of questions and connect their outcomes internationally. Participation in the reflective process should have immediate benefit for the participant's work with children, as well as contributing to the bigger international picture. Although it is envisaged that this process could span several years, with cycles of increasing participation, we propose an initial cycle of consultation and feedback which will last approximately 18 months.

Participation in this initial cycle will be invited at Cutting Edge IV (14-18 October 2002).

Participants will be asked to organise a group to reflect Biblically on questions based on those listed below. In all, we hope to see at least 50-100 consultations at local national and regional levels. Viva Network will provide resources to aid the process. The findings will be evaluated by a central group and compiled into a report which will be presented at Cutting Edge V (April / May 2004).

Process Questions

Part One

Through our understanding of Scripture and our knowledge and experience of children:

¹⁰ a current project co-ordinated by Viva Network

- What does God reveal to us about children, and His vision and intentions for them, and a child-friendly world?
- What does God reveal to us about the role of Christians in making this a reality?
- In the light of this what guiding principles can we identify for our work with children?

Part Two (where relevant)

- Can we identify ongoing work which demonstrates these guiding principles?
- How do the understanding and guiding principles we have developed inform the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and help us engage with it and critique it?

The report

The report of the outcomes to be presented at Cutting Edge V will include:

- A summary of what God's vision and intentions for children and the role of Christians in making this a reality;
- Some initial guiding principles for ministry with children;
- Some Christian perspectives on the CRC;
- Documented models of work with children which demonstrate the guiding principles;
- Recommendations for continuation of the process.

Session 9: Specific issues affecting children

Participants formed small groups, each of which discussed one concrete issue that affects children. The task was to define the issue and explore how the emerging child theology might be designed to address the issue. There were many more issues than there were groups, so this is just a sample of the work to be done.

Issue 1: Child labour

This has become a prominent issue as a result of campaigns against globalisation and capitalism. But it is more than an international economic problem. For many families trapped in poverty, the ability to gain an income from their children is a matter of survival. However, it is at best only short-term solution as children lose out on an education that could enable them to become more prosperous.

The issue is exacerbated by companies, governments and families that view children as mere commodities or units of production. At its worst, it encompasses heavy or dangerous work that endangers health, causes stunted growth or even risks the life of the children it exploits. Local systems of bonded labour and slavery commonly connive with Western companies seeking cheap labour for competitive advantage.

The issue is complex because children like to imitate parents in their play. This includes the work that their parents do, perhaps in the house or on the family farm. This is part of their preparation for adulthood. Most adults get much of their sense of self worth from the work that they do. So, why deny children the same benefit? In a society of subsistence farming, where there are no other employment opportunities, work alongside the family on the family farm makes sense for most children. If 'development' is seen as a universal good, then an education that prepares for 'more productive' employment is a benefit only so long as such employment actually is available. The adult coming out of school or university with no employer needing his or her new skills and unable or unwilling to be productive on the land becomes a burden. He or she might migrate to the 'First World' to make up some of the skills shortages there!

Children working is not wrong *per se*. But they should not be expected to carry adult responsibility or to undertake work that puts their present or future life at risk. This implies, among other things, that it should not impair an appropriate education for them.

A project for street children trains the children for a lifetime of employment as part of a full education programme. They do real work: carpentry, metalwork, bakery etc. However, the (progressive!) law of the country forbids that they sell the children's produce. This would be seen as exploitation. Yet this devalues the work of the children. It would be much more 'progressive' if the

money that each child earned were put into an account and given to him when he leaves the project. In most cases, they have no family to help them get started in life.

Issue 2: The response of the church, how children respond to God, and the implications on child evangelism.

These are important issues because Jesus made them a key issue. We need to bring into the process pastors, denominational leaders, seminary professors, etc. There may be things they have not seen yet, such as children being instruments of God, not just recipients. Students are not orientated to children's ministries and theologies. When we talk about children's issues in the churches, the pastors say, "Go to the children's pastor." It will be necessary to influence the curriculum in seminaries, as most seminaries don't bring child theology into their programmes.

How children respond to God. This has challenged our normal expectations as children respond to the gospel differently. This theology may challenge the paradigms of the evangelistic agencies working among children.

Issue 3: Children at Risk

This issue is much broader than we think. A choice may be: a child on the street or placed with a homosexual couple?

Question: Is intervention or rescue always the best option? What if the child doesn't want the hand of help?

Implication for theologies? Does this make any difference? Does the school come any closer to God's ideal than the street? Faced with this choice, or if God's ideal is something better than the average school, how does that affect our choices, and our theology? Or, if the police abuse children, does the church get into the position of not supporting the police?

Issue 4: Children in missiology

When we put the child in the midst, this is a way into the heart of a society, but also to the heart of God.

The child in the midst has a story. Every child has a story. Ramabai, says that she never has any thing to say to a child until she has listened to the child's story. There is no way to move on until the story is listened to.

In mainstream missiology, children are invisible (Bosch, Lausanne, etc.). When the child is in the midst, we see extending the Kingdom in a different light. We see children both as objects and instruments. When we think of the instrumentality of the children in furthering the kingdom, we must be careful that we don't use them as *our* instruments (human bombs in Jerusalem). They must be instruments in God's hands, and not ours.

Day 5

A child's story

The memory of my childhood life is not a pleasant one, as my father passed away when I was about 4 years old. For years I saw life as unfair: if it were a running race, I had the disadvantage of a late start. To make up the gap, I strove to be an all-rounder, to excel in sports and music. This was a kind of survival, I had to be able to perform anything. But it did not answer my deep quest for fairness.

I grew up in a family that adhered to Javanese mysticism. In this system of belief, God is unknowable, transcendent and lives far beyond any human experience. He is far and hidden, yet so almighty that nothing, great or small could happen without His will. So it was with my father's death - God decided it without communicating His reasons. In such an inner struggle, I heard about the Christian God, who loves all people. In trusting Him, when I was still a "child", my view of life completely changed. Life is a grace not a tragedy. Life is full of purpose and is meaningful.

I saw my culture in a different way too. I owe so much to my grandmother, who in her simplicity taught me so much about life and virtues through simple folk stories. In Eastern culture, an extended family system is the environment where a child grows up. Grandparents, uncles and aunts contribute so much for the growth of a child for good and for bad. Thank God, my grandmother taught me so much about my cultural values. And they too are redeemed and sanctified in the Lord Jesus.

Session 10: Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

We are aware of the CRC, and that it is having an impact. All but two countries have signed up to it. Its presence is being felt in child policy, in families, the rights of the unborn child, the right to education, etc. Some have complained that middle class do-gooders are foisting Western views on other cultures, and it is further abuse of the poor.

We considered whether our reflections threw any light on the discussion about rights? e.g. the notion of relationships. How do “rights” relate?

The historical context of the CRC is important. When Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children, first drafted a set of ‘Rights of the Child’, in 1924 she was informed by her sincere Christian faith and spurred to action by the horrors she had seen in Europe in the period before and after the 1914-18 war. The League of Nations took up her ideas and many nations signed up in agreement:

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1923)

By the present Declaration of the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the “Declaration of Geneva”, men and women of all nations, recognising that Mankind owes to the Child the best that it has to give, declare and accept it as their duty that, beyond and above all considerations of race, nationality, or creed:

1. *THE CHILD must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually.*
2. *THE CHILD that is hungry must be fed; the child that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succoured.*
3. *THE CHILD must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.*
4. *THE CHILD must be in a position to earn a livelihood and must be protected against every form of exploitation.*
5. *THE CHILD must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of its fellow-men.*

However, little was done to ensure implementation and the 1939-45 war only served to emphasise the need for some sort of binding international agreement. The idea was taken up by the United Nations and an agency was formed to oversee implementation.

Unfortunately, in recent times, Christians have not taken the lead in the development of strategies and interventions. If we have not got anything better, then we can affirm much in the CRC. Just because it does not come from a Christian source, does not mean we must despise it. The challenge to the church is to maintain Christian input. The original five principles clearly betray their Christian origin. In fact, they were not written as ‘Rights’ so much as adult responsibilities regarding the child. They included the need to teach the importance of serving others. The redrafting by the United Nations has replaced this Christian emphasis with something more humanistic. Now it is common to talk of four groupings of rights: survival, protection, development, and participation. These are, in a sense, all Biblical and they should be interpreted in this light. However, we must not use the Rights as the sole or primary basis for our ministries or interventions.

CRC is gaining ground in many Christian organizations. This may be because Christians do not have an explicitly Christian alternative - still grappling with the theology of the child – and, in the absence of a better model, they resort to the CRC as a primary rationale or basis for their work. Therefore, this consultation is very strategic.

However, the conception or model of the child in the CRC is very narrow and, as noted above, when couched in the language of Rights, may not be very compatible with a Biblical view of relationships. Another concern is that although almost all nation states have signed up to it, has it made any difference? We still have horrifying statistics about the mistreatment of children that all this rights-oriented activity has not stopped. Even so, many organisations have found it to be a useful lever, perhaps the only one, by which they can bring pressure to bear on their governments to do something good for oppressed children. But what can be said about the vindication of all the children who still suffer? Is God there for them, even when father and mother, and the CRC, fail them?

In summary: the CRC is a useful tool for Christian organisations making practical, material interventions in the lives of children. However, when it comes to the profound spiritual problems of the children of the world, the CRC is seriously lacking. For the spiritual, more profound needs of the child in the midst, the theology of the child is crucial.

Session 11: Actual and desired outcomes

In the final session, we discussed the question: What challenges to, and inspirations for, my life, my work, my church, my society, and the world have I encountered this week? We also attempted to identify other outcomes and processes that we would like to see develop because of our time together.

It is difficult fully to sum up the responses but perhaps the following comments give a flavour:

- The challenges are that we might develop in the essence of who we are, childlike qualities, such as humility, sincerity and joyful celebration in order to transform our relationships (looking, listening, learning), with others we encounter in our work, in the world, especially children.
- The child IS the language!
- Rediscover the joy and creativity in our work: sense the joy and the wonder. Play. Enjoy. Laugh. Become like a child and engage others in that creativity.
- We affirm that we are moving in the right direction, in our own context and not just in a worldwide perspective.

Here is our 'wish list' of potential outcomes:

- to provide children's workers with a child theology that equips them in their own work and helps change the church.
- to define theological principles, or tools for theological reflection, that assist localized theological reflection on 'the child in the midst'.
- to produce a book on ordinary children's activities and experiences, linked to the principles, that will inspire the church to focus on children.
- to continue the process in more specific contexts, through electronic means, through follow up conferences on particular issues, etc.
- for this group to reconvene at Cutting Edge to review process and to present a workshop.
- to develop and maintain a website to facilitate theological thinking about children.
- to include non-English speakers in future consultations
- to feed the process back into our organisations.
- to prepare a report of this meeting, including people, events, method and style, discoveries, learning and conversions, opening to future, seeds and links.
- to develop the bibliography prepared for this consultation. It needs further compiling, perhaps ownership, and a plan of use. We need to see what we can acquire and begin a database perhaps at the MBTS. It should also link with other libraries with similar collections.

Summary

We were challenged afresh by the words and actions of Jesus. Although most of us consider ourselves 'child friendly' and working in child focused organisations, it was shocking to realise how far we and the organisations we work for fall short of Jesus' radical vision. We call upon the delegates at Cutting Edge IV to join with us in reviewing our attitudes and practice.

Key Themes

Why Child Theology? We asked this question many times. Implied is another question: Is theology necessary? Does it add anything to CRC ideology and practice? We believe it does and will help Christians to treat children better, as our theology and practice become more true to Jesus. We must beware of being seduced by child-friendly activism. Jesus calls us to a more radical stance.

What is Child Theology? Is it simply a section of theology, applied to children, especially to children in need, or to children being evangelised and educated? Is child theology the collation of what the Bible says about children, or the children of the Bible? We did not have enough discussion of how Bible relates to theology though it is a major need which we should address in future. Is it theology reoriented around the significance of the child as 'of the Kingdom' according to Jesus? We believe so and this was the perspective we tried to attain.

What child are we talking about and why? We discussed the child within, the child we thought we remembered ourselves to have been, and the child Rahner tells us we will be eternally. We were encouraged to do this by some parts of the process. But should the child actually be the child in need? Is it the child who especially needs help or is susceptible to the kinds of help our agencies can offer? The child who is starving can be fed, secular agencies can see that; the religiously uninstructed child can be evangelised, evangelicals can see that, but is that the child who simply runs into Jesus' arms?

We began by letting the child be set in the midst – the child without a name, without a face, age, colour, etc. - simply the child who is put there by Jesus. It had to be the child, not ourselves. This focus ran through the brainstorm and proved significant to many. We wish to emphasise this as a practice, method and spirit that needs to be more widely taken up. Not as something never before known or practised but as an unexhausted potential. Repeatedly, it meets us in life, children being everywhere, and we need to work at it even if it perplexes us and we hardly know what to make of it.

What does the Bible say? Setting the child in the midst is taken from one of the stories of Jesus, which is why it is authoritative for us, even if we cannot see its natural wisdom. We did read bits of the Bible and we did consider several texts but there were limits to our exegetical work. We believe more exegetical biblical and theological work is necessary from the perspectives we have outlined and we call on those skilled to do so to undertake this task.

Key Outcomes

Although only a short time has elapsed from the consultation, already some initiatives have been taken as a direct outcome of our discussion. We expect that implementation of several more items on our 'wish list' (see above) will be started soon. We hope this report of our brainstorm will inspire many more initiatives and encourage those already started.

- Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary has taken up the course on Holistic Child Development that was started through Compassion and is planning a one-day retreat for 20 selected key persons involved in children's work. It will be called "Through the Eyes of the Child." The aim is to have a dialogue session on the possibility of doing child theology in the Malaysian context.
- The Philippine Children's Ministries Network is planning small-group consultations to pursue a theology for children that will guide our work with children. It will start later this year and involve Christian ministry leaders, theologians and denominational leaders. The PCMN national coordinator has already conducted initial brainstorming sessions with the General Secretary of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches and with other heads of large children's ministries in the country.

Appendix: Summaries of Documents reviewed in Session 3

“Toward a Theology of Childhood” by Dawn DeVries¹¹

In her paper, DeVries states: “Theology that values the perspectives of children will address quite different questions from the ones that have dominated the Christian tradition.” In the article, she draws a parallel with the initial challenges faced by feminist theologians when trying to change the theological perspective. She finds that the resources needed to accomplish this work are scarce and views her contribution as being an initial exploration, focussing on three questions:

- What is a child?
- How should we conceive of the redemption or reconciliation of children?
- What does the Christian hope look like through the eyes of a child?

Although the answer to the first question seems uncontroversial: a child is an immature human being requiring nurture and protection by adults, she points out that immaturity can be valued differently, in ways that have important practical outcomes. She defines two principle approaches:

- childhood is valued for its potential
- childhood is intrinsically valuable, irrespective of what the future may hold.

There have been many theories of childhood but all tend to distance children from adults, as if they were not yet fully human, with deficits needing to be overcome or emptiness to be filled. Hardly any better is the currently predominant evaluation of children as consumers.

Jesus was strikingly different: not only welcoming children but even setting them up as models! He made four distinct emphases regarding children (as suggested by Gundry-Volf¹²):

- Children are primary objects of care and service by his disciples;
- Children are co-recipients and model entrants into the kingdom of God;
- Children are the ones with the best insight into spiritual things;
- Children represent Jesus, so that those who receive children receive Jesus.

DeVries quotes Schleiermacher who said that ‘children play and adults practice’. Play is of value in its own right but practice only finds value in some future product or process. Preoccupation with play leads to irresponsibility but preoccupation with practice leads to rigidity. He preferred to see childhood and adulthood as distinct spiritual perspectives that could co-exist in any human being at the same time. Karl Rahner had a different emphasis but also thought that childhood was not a state to be superseded.

Coming to doctrines of salvation, DeVries points out that the classic doctrines reflect the felt needs of sinful adult human beings. Few young children wrestle with such issues. They do have existential questions, although there is little documentation of them. One useful source has been Jonathan Kozol¹³ who writes from the experience of poor children in New York. Themes that arise in his work include: the need for a safe place; the need for sufficient food; hopelessness; the importance of a community where everyone has a place. For these children, salvation is less about forgiveness of sin and more about resting in the goodness of divine providence. One boy was asked about modern day plagues and said: “Sadness is one plague today. Desperate would be a plague. Drugs are a plague also....”

One young boy responds to Kozol's question, “How long would you like to live?” with a provocative answer: “I would like to live to see the human race grow up.” Later, he shares with Kozol a “report” on the nature of the kingdom of God:

¹¹ Interpretation; April 2001; pp161- 173

¹² J M Gundry-Volf, “The least and the Greatest: Children in the New testament”, in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. M J Bunge, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; 2001; pp29-60

¹³ J Kozol; *Amazing Grace: The lives of children and the conscience of a nation*; New York, Crown Books; 1995

“God will be there. He’ll be happy that we have arrived. People shall come hand-in-hand. It will be bright, not dim and glooming like on earth. All friendly animals will be there, but no mean ones. As for television, forget it! If you want vision, you can use your eyes to see the people that you love. No one will look at you from the outside. People will see you from the inside. All the people from the street will be there. My uncle will be there and he will be healed. You won’t see him buying drugs, because there won’t be money. Mr. Mongo(a drug addict) will be there too. You might see him happy for a change. The prophets will be there, and Adam and Eve, and all of the disciples except Judas. No violence will there be in heaven. There will be no guns or drugs or IRS. You won’t have to pay taxes. You’ll recognize all the children who have died when they were little. Jesus will be good to them and play with them. At night he’ll come and visit at your house. God will be fond of you. How will you know that you are there? Something will tell you, “This is it! Eureka!” If you still feel lonely in your heart, or bitterness, you’ll know that you’re not there.”

“Between Text and a Sermon” by Marjorie Menaul¹⁴

In this short paper, Menaul draws themes from the narrative of the birth of Samuel¹⁵ and describes parallels in Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus. Both passages describe the dawning of a new order in Israel and the overturning of existing authority structures. Eli is cast down, Hannah is raised.

The article offers sermon notes and is not meant to be a paper on theology. It simply tells a story to draw out lessons. Its usefulness in our quest for a Child Theology lies in the way that the story of Samuel illustrates a larger truth: that the apparently mundane work of bearing and raising children is a means that God uses for his purpose. The story of baby being chosen by God is repeated throughout the Bible, at times for the salvation of a nation, or sometimes for something that isn’t seen as great. Further research might clarify this:

1. More case studies of babies in the Bible: the circumstances and what happened in their life. Many that were chosen were born of barren women (e.g. Samson, Hannah, Rachel)
2. Look further into whole matter of parenting. Child Theology always has a connection with parents/adults.

“Child and Childhood As Metaphors of Hope” by Jürgen Moltmann¹⁶

In this inspiring article, Moltmann offers three reasons why children are metaphors of hope:

1. With every child, a new life begins, original, unique, incomparable
2. Each new life offers a new chance for the reign of the Messiah. “The hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight.”
3. Children are not only metaphors of what we hope for, but also metaphors of God’s hope for us. “Humanity is God’s dream for God’s earthly world.” Our hope for the child is same as God’s for us.

The essay explores the intrinsic value of children and discusses the issue of already/not yet for children. He refers to Janusz Korczak’s three basic rights of children:

1. a right to his or her death;
2. a right to the present day;
3. a right to integrity, to be the way he or she is.

He quotes Peter Handke, who pointed out that “When the child was a child, she did not know that she was a child.” This means that how children view childhood is an almost impossible mystery for adults.

From the promise of God, given in Isaiah chapters 9 and 11, Moltmann concludes that: “The God of promise is a God of children.” Though the child of promise was fulfilled in the gift of the Son,

¹⁴ Interpretation; April 2001; pp 174- 176

¹⁵ 1 Sam 1-2

¹⁶ Moltmann, J; Theology Today; pp592-603

Moltmann draws attention to the parallel promise of a female child, Sophia in Prov 8:27-31, who is described as playing in God's world. Christ is 'Son of God' and 'Wisdom of God' (1Cor 1:24). This insight addresses cross-cultural issues such as matriarchy, patriarchy, ancestor worship and the devaluation of female children.

Promise, like children, orientates our thoughts towards the future. The Messianic child replaces ancestor worship. If we force children into the mould of the adult world, we lose our own future. To be part of God's future, we do not have to imitate children but to be in solidarity with them, "respecting their intimate proximity to God's future." They are not closer to the Kingdom of God because of childlike qualities but the Kingdom of God is closer to them because of the special way God embraces them.

He gives four implications for the treatment of children:

1. we do not have to be given a son any more; daughters and sons equally carry the hopes of humanity;
2. marriage does not need to be justified by procreation; children are a gift;
3. marriage itself is no longer necessary;
4. "the light of hope shines on every newborn child... The child is the eternal messiah..."

Moltmann discusses briefly Ernst Bloch's 'The Principle of Hope' in which he says there is a principle that "shines into the childhood of all". This principle he calls 'Homeland'. By this Bloch means "feeling at home in existence" and he associates it with messianism. Moltmann sees therefore a link with the messianic (every) child.

"To such as these belongs the reign of God: Jesus and children" by Judith Gundry-Volf¹⁷

Gundry-Volf explores the significance of children in Jesus' teaching, focussing on the synoptic Gospels and giving a brief overview of references in the wider Biblical tradition.

She makes several excellent points:

1. Children are recipients of God's reign
2. Children are models of entering God's reign
Which childlike quality Jesus was referring to in Mark ch10 is open to debate but she points out that children were not *required* to keep the Law and she takes this to be the key quality: those solely dependent on God's favour.
3. Children also model humility
In Mt 18:1-5 Jesus highlights the humility of children as the quality to emulate. In Hellenistic times only women cared for children but Jesus actually picked up a child (doing women's work!). In so doing, he makes it gender non-specific. In churches today, the pastor's wife teaches Sunday school! Gundry-Volf asserts that the word Jesus used to "welcome" children in this passage was generally used in the New Testament for offering hospitality to guests, which implies serving them. Caring for children was a low status activity and, we might say, still is! But such activity is necessary for disciples who want high status in the Kingdom of God. In John's Gospel, Jesus makes a similar point by washing the disciples' feet.
4. Children model the suffering Jesus
Jesus says that receiving a child is tantamount to receiving himself. So, the child represents Jesus - but not in power, rather in weakness and suffering. Gundry-Volf draws an analogy of the role of women in caring for children and their role in caring for the dead body of Jesus.
5. Children have special insights into God's reign
In the temple, of all places, the children were shouting praise to Jesus. He takes the opportunity to remind the 'high ups' of the promise of revelation to children.

¹⁷ Theology Today; pp469-479

“Infinite Openness to the Infinite: Karl Rahner’s Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child.” by Mary Ann Hinsdale¹⁸

In this article, Hinsdale discusses an essay by Rahner entitled: “Ideas for a theology of Childhood”. To prepare the ground, she first reviews articles by Whitmore concerning the neglect of children in Roman Catholic theology. Whitmore argued that there was an assumption that everyone knew who and what children are and why they should be cared for. In this vacuum, he argues, the children’s rights movement and the ‘market logic of unrestrained capitalism’ have been the agencies pushing the children’s agenda. These view children as automotons, commodities, consumers or burdens. In response, Whitmore offers three significant insights developed from the Thomistic principle that all things come from and return to God:

1. children are gifts of creation in the image of God;
2. children are signs of a future that extends beyond the self-interested desires of others;
3. children are ours only in trust.

Thus children are not ‘burdens’ but ‘blessing’ that call for our wise stewardship. To do this effectively, Whitmore calls for the RC church to move from its focus on ‘natalism’, i.e. a predominant concern with procreation, to consideration of the blessing of children at other stages in life.

Hinsdale next discusses the Neo-scholastic context of Rahner’s theology. Children were offered a place of passive obedience, in both church and family until, about the age of seven, they reached an ‘age of reason’. At this point, they were treated as mini-adults, learning the faith by means of a catechism. Rahner was unhappy with this indoctrination method because learning what faith means must come from one’s own experience. He was also concerned not just with “what a child *is* in the sight of God, but how God, as mystery, is revealed in the experience of childhood”. He was a Jesuit and was greatly influenced by the Ignatian emphasis on “finding God in all things”.

Finally, Hinsdale comes to Rahner’s essay on children. He is unhappy with the modern idea of time as a linear process, which he believes to be particularly prevalent among Christians. This leads to viewing life as a succession of stages, each preparing for the next. In such a scheme, childhood suffers from being the most provisional phase of all. Rahner thinks this is an inadequate view because the past is retained as one moves towards the future. Therefore, childhood is an abiding reality: “human beings move *toward* the eternity of this childhood; we become the children we *were* as we gather up time into our eternity.” Thus, childhood is something that we never leave behind completely. Moreover, the child is completely human from the beginning and, as for Rahner being human implies an absolute immediacy to God, the child is already a partner of God. But what is present still has to be realised in experience.

Rahner believes that a truly Christian view of childhood would be both realistic and idealistic. He thinks Matthew and Paul see the child as immature and weak.¹⁹ But Jesus still uses them as an example because of their lack of false ambition; not seeking dignity or honours; modesty; lack of artificiality; open and carefree in relation to God and, most of all, because while knowing that they have nothing for which to claim God’s help yet trust in his kindness and protection.

“Paradoxically, none of us know what childhood means at the beginning of our lives. It is only at the end of a lifetime of God-given repentance and conversion that we will be able to realise that childhood in which we ... become God’s children.” Thus, childhood is a basic condition appropriate to every stage of life: “despite the experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves” we should continue with attitudes “of trust, of openness, of expectation, of readiness to be controlled by another ... manifested as freedom ... as receptivity, as hope which is still not disillusioned....” Biological childhood is only the foretaste and promise of this other childhood, which we experience as children of God “remaining a child forever, becoming a child to an ever-increasing extent”. This is what it means to be mature.

Rahner’s essay continues, reviewing the doctrines of Original Sin and Infant Baptism and the Roman Catholic catechetical approach to the religious education of children, which are of less interest for us.

¹⁸ The Child in Christian Thought, ed. M J Bunge, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; 2001; pp406 - 445

¹⁹ see, for example, 1Cor 3:1;13:11;14:28; Gal 4:1-3; Ep 4:14; Hb 5:13; Mt 11:16ff

In assessing the impact of Rahner's theology, Hinsdale mentions the work of David Hay and colleagues on the spirituality of children. They are concerned that the dominant cognitive developmental theories "come close to dissolving religion into reason, and childhood religion into a form of deficit or inadequacy." They believe this is because developmentalists focus on language, in which the child is deficient, and ignore children's awareness of and responsiveness to moments of transcendence.

Hinsdale summarises the key points of Rahner's contribution as follows:

1. a twofold view of childhood:
 - a. definition of child as 'infinite openness to the infinite';
 - b. childhood is the quality of human life that enables our participation in the life of God;
2. a child has value in its own right, not as a pre-adult;
3. childhood is a basic condition that remains throughout life;
4. children have an innate spirituality that needs to be nurtured by the cultivation of a sense of wonder at the world and the transcendent experiences of life, not submerged in rational abstractions;
5. each of us is obliged not only to nurture the children entrusted to us but also the child within us

"A little child will lead them: rediscovering children at the heart of mission" by Keith J White²⁰

This paper set out to review the Biblical material relating to children and to suggest a theological framework for our work with children at risk. White started with a roll call of children who played significant parts in the Old Testament story and reviewed the significance of childhood. He went on to draw out the key Old Testament themes:

1. *children are designed to praise God* (Ps 8:2). As worship was visual and dramatic, it was readily accessible to children and they were given key roles. Children took part in worship;
2. *children have a special role in silencing the enemies of God* (see Ps 68) David and Samuel readily spring to mind in this context;
3. *children are at the heart of the Kingdom of God* (Is 11) appropriately so, as they are a sign of God's blessing and are usually the first to suffer the consequences of sin;
4. *a child is the sign God gives of his future reign* (Is 7:14)

Moving to the New Testament, there are many incidents involving children in the ministry of Jesus. Children seem to have been drawn to him. There are four aspects of the Gospel narratives that demand particular attention:

1. The birth of Jesus. The Incarnation, the fullness of the Godhead contracted to the span of a baby
2. Children provide a linking thread as Jesus moves from the Mount of Transfiguration to Temple Mount after the triumphal entry of Jerusalem (Mt ch17-21).
3. Children are a sign of the paradoxical Kingdom of God: the Kingdom is for the weak; like children, the kingdom is 'now' but 'not yet'
4. Children are models for those who would enter God's Kingdom: we must be 'born again' to become like children.

After reviewing a number of past errors, White began the development of a Christ-centred model for mission, taking key events from the life of Christ to form a framework:

1. **The Incarnation:** there is no Gospel without solidarity and we seek to live our lives alongside children at risk. But we need to grasp at a deeper level that Jesus did not become a man but he became a child.

²⁰ paper delivered to *Cutting Edge* conference 2001

2. **The Cross:** there is no following Jesus without scars. It reminds us of the depth and seriousness of human suffering and degradation, which we see most generously loaded onto silent children.
3. **The Resurrection:** there is no winter without spring. Children in our world are Easter signs like green shoots of hope. Any situation can be transformed by the power of the risen Lord.
4. **The Ascension:** there is no Kingdom without revolution. A new King is reigning now. His kingdom demands the upset of the status quo in our lives and communities. By putting a child in the centre, Jesus reminds us of this inversion.
5. **Pentecost:** there is no Christianity without the Holy Spirit. The spirit working in God's people is creating a community which is distinctive in that it exists for others. Children often remind us of this in their uncomplicated openness to others.
6. **The Second Coming:** there is no future without hope. We are people who belong to another place, another rule, and another way of being. We live in expectation and hope of the realisation of God's kingdom on earth and children remind us that we have a future.

“Kid Builders” by Gil Beers

“Kid Builders” is a new development by Scripture Press Ministries which aims to equip teachers around the world to build godly Christian character in children by the use of 50 stories from the life of Jesus. It is framed around a simple three-stage process of character formation: believe; become; behave. A variety of teaching resources are being developed and made available as kits for children, parents, teachers and trainers.

Kidbuilders assumes:

- Building the child's whole life biblically is our basic work.
- Winning a child to Christ is only the first step, followed by character building and leadership building.
- The Bible is the sourcebook for all life building and leadership building.
- That kids must be *won* to Christ, not *driven* to Christ. Thus Bible teaching must be delightful, winsome and age-appropriate.
- That we cannot physically reach 1.9 billion children directly, but we must reach as many as possible through teachers and leaders.
- That we should work toward building the whole child, and thus will find it beneficial to team up with compassionate ministries which provide relief work for children.

Kidbuilders includes 4 kits:

- Kids Kit: A simple, colourful story book, which builds godly character from the Life of Jesus:
- Parents Kit: A small easy-to-follow guide for parents to help them use the Kids Kit at home.
- Teachers Kit: A guidebook with lesson helps that can be used in Sunday School etc.
- Training Kit: to help those who train others to use the Kidbuilders system.



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