



# Child Theology Futures

High Leigh, 25-29 July 2016





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## Report of the Discussions

Editor: John Collier

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## Programme

	Day 1 Monday 25	Day 2 Tuesday 26	Day 3 Wednesday 27	Day 4 Thursday 28	Day 5 Friday 29
Breakfast 07:30- 08:15					
Prayers 8:30-9:00		Prayers (Valdir)	Prayers (Sally)	Prayers (Victor)	Prayers (Karissa)
Morning I 9:00-10:30	Arrival	Taxonomy paper (Haddon)	Two tracks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does Christian activism with children tend towards being C without T? (<u>Bill</u>, Paul S, David C)</li> <li>The Rights of the Child (<u>Keith</u>, Rune, Maria K S)</li> </ul>	Frances Young responds to CT as she sees it (Haddon)	Brainstorm a document/communique
Coffee 10:30-11:00					
Morning II 11:00-12:30		Reflections on <i>Entry Point</i> (Haddon)	Plenary Feedback and emerging questions	Liberation theology and Gender (Rohan; <u>Maria H</u> ; Nicolas; Valdir)	
Lunch 13:00 – 14:00					
Afternoon I 14:00-15:30	Arrival	Valentin and Vladimir launch their books (Keith)	Two tracks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T without C? – the challenge and opportunity to CT of theology in academy and pulpit. (<u>Victor</u>; Jayakumar)</li> <li>Children and the Bible (<u>Valdir</u>; Stuart C)</li> </ul>	Moving towards outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panel giving reflections</li> <li>Discussion in groups (Bill; <u>John</u>; Karissa)</li> </ul>	Departure
Tea 15:30-16:00					
Afternoon II 16:00-17:30	Arrival	Frances Young – her story and discussion	Plenary feedback and emerging questions ( <u>Bill</u> ; Karissa)	Identify issues for a commune	
Dinner 18:30-20:00					
Evening 20:00-21:30	Coming together: What CT means to me; What I hope from this consultation, What I will offer in discussion ( <u>Keith</u> )	Plenary Discussion to reflect on the day (Keith)	The Child: reality and concepts (plenary and groups) ( <u>Haddon</u> ; Nicolas) Exhibition ( <u>James G</u> )	Plenary: devotional/ spiritual reflection ( <u>Paul Butler</u> ; Maria Klasson Sundin)	



## Participants

### Paul Butler

Bishop in C of E for 12 years. About to start 3 months' study leave exploring child poverty and Christian reaction to it. This meeting should help me. Also has been waiting for a chance to join one of the CT consultations.

### Stuart Christine

Coming to the end of preparing a doctorate in Manchester where he is looking at Luke's record of Jesus and the child. Thinks this event will bring many perspectives which will help him to bring his thoughts together.

### David Chronic

For the past 20 years has been living and working with vulnerable children in Romania. Has been to similar events in the past and found them stimulating

### John Collier

I am a medical doctor, retired 20 years ago to be more active in Christian mission. To assist this I took an MTh degree at Spurgeon's College where I first met Keith, one of the lecturers. Mission trips took me to work with street children and involvement with Viva Network. At one of Viva's conferences I met Keith again and became involved with the start of the Child Theology Movement in which I have served as an administrator and writer. I live alone in Portugal or Dorset.

### Nathaniel Darling

Heard that there is a need for administrative help and volunteered to do that.

### James Gilbert

Works as a minister in Brazil and is involved with many organisations working with children. Has found these meetings help to keep his on track.

### Karissa Glanville

About 11 years came to a similar meeting and is now coming to the end of PhD studies. Thinks it will be useful to revisit the subject.

### Maria Hammarström

7 years ago I started a new job with an organisation in Sweden working with children. No one seemed to know what a theologian would do in this context. Subsequently came across CT. Now her job had disappeared and this is a good opportunity.

### Maria Klasson Sundin

This the first time at a CT conference. Just finished a PhD on the rights of the child and religious freedom. This seems to be a good opportunity to explore these ideas. Works in the national office of the Swedish church and there is an opportunity to bring these ideas into an ecumenical context.

### Valentin Kozhuharov

An Eastern Orthodox theologian who has written extensively, and has spent seven years in Moscow teaching and doing inter-Christian mission. Vice-chair of the Academic Committee of the International Association for Mission Studies, and author of *Child, Church and Mission*, a book launched at High Leigh.

### Victor Nakah

I chair the CT Africa committee which is linking people interested in CT in Africa. So this is a good opportunity to listen and learn. Works with an organisation which helps children and gets an

opportunity to 'do CT on the ground' (sitting on the floor with them!). Wants to learn more about how to do CT. The committee in Africa is interested in methodology.

### **Sally Nash**

Has been working in Christian youth work and has got to know Keith and visited Mill Grove. Works at a theological college and trains students to work with children.

### **Nicolas Panotto**

Representing the 'movimento' in Latin America in which he serves on the theological commission. Has been involved with CT for some years and is interested to discover the recent developments.

### **Mihai Pavel**

Works for World Vision which supports many children. It tends to be moved by other issues than theology. WVI has many initiatives around spirituality and theology but is still seeking input.

### **Bill Prevette**

Has been linked to Keith and Haddon for 17 years or so. Got involved with Haddon when working on his PhD. Now lives and works in Oxford and is on the CTM board. Interested in operative theology and the interface between theology and practice with children.

### **Jess Scott**

Invited by Haddon to give admin support. Has been working with children and is planning to do more theology study.

### **Valdir Steuernagel**

CT requires conversion and is hoping to get converted. Still hopeful that the Gospel will not give up on me.

### **Paul Stockley**

Some while back was at a CT consultation in Penang but went off to do other things. Thought it would be good to join in the process. There are several items on the programme that are very relevant to me.

### **Keith White**

Is chairman of CTM which has arranged this meeting. It's a great joy to be able to serve the process.

### **Haddon Willmer**

Has been involved in this since very early days yet is still puzzled by the idea of CT. The consultation is important as the CTM board has been discussing for some months where to go next and how long it should continue. Had a hand in planning this consultation and that it would be different from previous consultations. Plans to resign as a director after the Melbourne conversation.

### **Frances Young**

[Invited as a speaker.] Formerly Professor of Theology at Birmingham University, Methodist minister, and author of *Face to Face* and *Arthur's Call*.

### **Vladimir Zelinsky**

Originally from Moscow but for 25 years has been teaching in an orthodox seminary. 17 years ago became ordained as an Orthodox priest. Has written a book concerning children which he will present tomorrow.

### **Rune Øystese**

This spring was invited to come by Keith. Has been to two CT conferences before. Also interested in Godly Play.



## Monday 25

### 1. **Coming together: What CT means to me; What I hope from this consultation, What I will offer in discussion (Keith)**

Welcome to everyone in the name of Jesus

Keith was recently in Skara in Sweden and took a day to walk through Matthew's gospel (in Swedish). Was struck by the way Jesus in Matthew 11 says 'I thank you Father...' In Swedish, Jesus says 'Ja!' Likewise he uses the same word in Matthew 21. Perhaps it could be said that we meet within these two utterances of 'Yes' by Jesus.

Everyone was asked to say why they had come to this meeting and to say what they hoped to get from it. Some responses:

- Child poverty and church responses to it.
- Coming to end of thesis comparing Luke Jesus bringing child to midst compared to work in Sao Paulo
- Working with vulnerable children in Romania.
- Admin help, known Haddon for years
- Minister in Brazil, not necessarily with children, but with organizations that do. These CT conferences are stimulating, etc.
- Came to see how CT has matured over the years and if where I am at now in my own journey, I can relate or intersect with where it is. I'm looking for possible intersection points.
- Christian youth theologian position in Sweden.
- From Sweden as well. Just finished a philosophical PhD on rights of child to religious freedom. Looking to see intersection of philosophical and theological.
- Need to learn about this new field. Was in Nairobi 2011 and heard about CT. Produced a book for the event.
- Chaired CT Africa committee, trying to organize those thinking/writing/studying CT in Africa. Good opportunity to learn and listen and to listen to views of CT other than Haddon and Keith. The second reason is he serves with an organization that works with children, he has opportunity to do CT on the ground when he visits hospitals and plays with the children.
- Looking at my roots of studies on children and social studies. Ordained in Church of England. Training Christians to work with children in a variety of settings.
- Works at college and has a Godly play interest.
- Representing the Together for Youth and Children Movement in Latin America ("Movimiento Juntos por la Niñez y la Juventud")
- Part of the theological commission.
- Works with World Vision which has to reconnect with some of these conversations and bring back some of this ethos. It hasn't been able to produce genuine and authentic theology with measurable impact in lives of the children.
- Worked with at risk kids for 33 years. Wants to know where CT is going. What is the future of CT? Personally interested in practitioner work.
- Invited by Haddon as admin. Worked with children and going to be starting work on MPhil theology in October.
- CT is a call to conversion and repentance. Spent many years with WV, but now with a local congregation. The logic of children seems more and more like the logic of Jesus.

- Looking to see where CT has come to over the years. Looking to be provoked on issues he's thinking through.
- Being convened by CTM, not about the movement as an organization. Came because it's a joy to serve the process.
- Been involved from early days, has been a too prominent voice in developing CT, and is by no means satisfied with what have done and puzzled by CT still as whether it's important or makes sense. But this consultation is important because we've had an increasing discussion of where the movement is going.
- Originally from Moscow – been in Italy for last 25 years. 17 years ago became a priest. Wrote a book on children and Jesus.

Three questions on the programme discussed in pairs:

- What CT means to me;
- What I hope from this consultation,
- What I will offer in discussion

Each person gave feedback on their 'pair' to the whole group:

- own experience of abandonment, and restoration of loving Father.
- how the emptying herself as a mother brought her closer to God
- CT is about getting myself out of the way, when Jesus put child in the midst, was He encouraging disciples to get out of the way?
- The questions we hold, are not questions in the abstract, they come from the very earthy existential experiences we have with those we engage through ministry – whether it's a child, the mother of a child, etc. where a question is raised through the experience that we have.
- CT means creating a space for really hard questions. We've learned to become better at asking questions – like doing good contextual theology, always a messy experience.
- We also agreed on the disruption of CT to the status quo. Children usually disrupt things. CT driven by hermeneutic of suspicion, we begin to doubt our own theology as we've always heard him. The Matt 18 passage does that. The more you read, the more you see the act of placing a child is creating an issue. Are we seeing enough?

This session closed by saying the Lord's Prayer together.



## Tuesday 26

### 1. Prayers (Valdir)

We come from many different places and backgrounds. Check the list of participants and look around to see how many you can identify. It always takes me some time to identify people. It's important that we are aware of each other. SO now I invite you to pray for each other as you look around. The name of Jesus was pronounced yesterday and it's that name brings us together. Do you remember when that name came to you?

Reading about the epileptic boy after the Transfiguration. The disciples asked: Why couldn't we throw the devil out? Mark 9

Write a prayer about this passage.

*Lord, why can't we do what you did? Why are we still so powerless like your disciples? Are we really not committed to you? Have the springs of spiritual power become clogged with everyday concerns? What is it that stops us being effective in the battle against Satan? Will your kingdom come in our lifetime? Can you deal with our powerlessness? Please come and change us so that we are like Jesus in character, purpose and effectiveness.*

Shared the prayers in pairs.

One or two read aloud their prayers.

### 2. Taxonomy paper (Haddon)

#### *Abbreviations*

In this paper, C stands for child, children, childhood (derivative concept – only adults think of childhood, children are too busy being children to think of childhood. Children want to be adults), child related activity by adults. It is not a precise term. It has an elasticity about it which is useful, though unavoidably dangerous. It helps us to work better but always requires work of us. Its meaning is always open to interpretation and requires respect for reality, imaginative sympathy and wisdom. It is artificial to try and isolate the being of the child as something on its own (it is as absurd as thinking of an astronaut without his space suit and capsule). This is not to put children down; the child is a reminder to all of us to this dependence. (Dependence not as a virtue, but as a simple reality of mortal, created, limited existence – we depend on support activities around us, and child in this context includes that). The notion of becoming an adult and therefore becoming independent is one of the crowning illusions of our age. C stands for an actual reality. The child here is a real child, not a metaphor for disciples or priests; it is a real child that Jesus placed in the midst.

T stands for Theology, talking and thinking about God. It includes what academics who work under the label of theology do and offer, but that is not the only or primary form of theology, and indeed it does not set the norm for theology. Theology is not to be absorbed and dominated by people who have the name 'theologian' in a university. Theology in the university is a very questionable reality. it is certainly not the norm for theology, it misleads a lot of people because people think if they're not a university theologian or a preacher in a pulpit they are not doing theology. Theology is simply talking and thinking about God. At the beginning of Entry Point (See *Entry Point*, pp7-8, 48).we include the poem 'there are many theologians' which gives some clue to the variety of forms in which theology occurs and is done by people. John Bunyan in Bedford met a group of women in the sunshine talking about the things of God. Theology is any kind of talking or thinking about God by anybody. Theology that doesn't genuinely point to God and seek God doesn't really deserve the name.

#### **C+T**

C and T are quite different realities, and they exist you might say as opposites on a spectrum. There are many who think that children have little to do with theology, and their understanding of children and work with children is quite secular. Work with children is becoming more and more secular in

the UK. On the other hand, there are many people who are very serious about theology, but who have very little to do with children. They are interested in God but not in children.

Each can live without any connection with the other. There are many children and much C-activity which is devoid of theology in any form. In fact many who work with children think of theology as an obstacle to their work. But each lives in the same world as the other, under, before and with one God and Father. Each is alive, curious, outgoing, even aggrandizing – so they encounter each other. They can and do relate to each other.

CT is in the territory that is neither clearly C or clearly T – and that territory is utterly confused. Yet we do bring C and T together because whatever our interest and point of view we live in the same world for and with one father. And within this world we are curious and adventurous and we go out and make connections, and from one side or another, we encounter C and T coming together. These encounters happen variously – they can repel each other; they can produce takeovers or more or less equal mergers – fruitful dialogues and cooperative partnerships. CT belongs to a group of encounters that I label as ‘C + T’ which produce positive engagements with each other (the plus sign is clearly significant).

Encounters work out in many different ways, ranging from repulsion, producing stubborn isolationism, to takeovers and more or less equal mergers and sometimes to fruitful dialogues and cooperative partnerships. CT belongs to the group of encounters (C + T) which aim at producing positive engagements. These positive engagements can and do take many varied forms and have different outcomes accordingly. All three terms of this formula, C+T are variable: the plus-sign as much as C and T – there are different ways of bringing them together.

### ***Examples of C+T Encounters***

Child theology was born and developed within the context of the *Cutting Edge Conferences* (global conferences, mainly evangelical, for people working with children at risk, concerned to come together and make more effective co-operations). When I first encountered it, I couldn't see the way of bringing together C and T coherently.

A key document in these conferences was ‘Celebrating Children’ which had the illuminating subtitle of ‘Equipping people who are working with children or young people in difficult circumstances’ – which is more illuminating than talking about children in risk or need. – And it reveals the way the conference was about equipping people working with children in risk or need.

What I would say is true is that theological element in *Cutting Edge* and *Celebrating Children* is fairly weak and not critically appraised by the people who are practicing it, which is one reason why something like CT is called for.

When you look at the variety of things that are going on in the world of Christian child-related activity it is amazing to see the variety. There is an immense amount of work with children at need and at risk, and then there is engagement of Christian nurture of children who are not in extreme need or risk, and there is an interesting Holistic Child Development programme which applies to all children. There is a lot of interest in catechesis, child evangelism and Godly Play which bring C and T together in different ways with different topics. Helping children to grow up in faith and in love is not looking at children who are in dire distress and thinking about how we can rescue them from their oppressors. These things are different, and they produce different groups of experts and enthusiasts which cluster around these activities.

I was a theologian that never thought about children theologically, only as a parent, not as a theologian. In those days I engaged in some discussions about the theology of education – and in having those conversations you never get near the conversations others have with C and T. James Loader's work is interesting in relation to the nature and growth of children.

There is clearly often a very serious tension between people who are engaging with children in need and people whose primary interest is ‘pietistic’ and ‘churchy’. Bill's thesis explores the difference between the incoming faith-based organisations who were concerned with the terrible need of children in post-revolution Romania, with those of the pietistic churches looking after their church children and bringing them up in the faith.



Another kind of work is displayed in the *Child in Christian Thought* (Marcia Bunge) – a collection of essays by experts on different thinkers in the history of Christianity and what they thought about children. It shows the great variety of resources we have inherited when it comes to thinking about Christianity and children. But the difficulty is: how does this all fit together into anything coherent? If you're like me, quite a post-denominational, historically minded thinker, you look at this and realise that Christians have had immensely different over the ages. There are many in Christian thought who have written interesting things about children. There are experts who can write enthusiastically about particular topics and views from the past. But it is hard to see anything coherent in this.

And it is hard to see the overall questions that history is raising. When we talk together about C and T and we start to do well-grounded informed historical theology, going back to Chrysostom, Augustine and Rainer, we are in danger of our conversation simply commenting on distinctions. All this is going on in the realm of C and T, which is a very rich field but a very confused field.

When CT comes together, it is often a takeover rather than equal merger. Often, it is a takeover by theology – a theologian works from some known theology that they are sure of, and absorbs childhood into it. People are confident of their own personal orthodoxy, others represent the orthodoxy of their own tradition, and they ask what light our existing theology throws on the child – so that the form is really the theology determining the child, and fitting the child into an existing theology.

And there is the counter movement, where it is the child who tells us the basis and norm so that our theology is fitted around this.

An aspiration of CT (at least an aspiration) is to bring C and T together where one side does not take the other over, but where we respect two things held together which are significantly different but actually equal realities.

What has happened with CT as it has developed, especially as it is outlined in Entry Point, is that we haven't simply put C alongside T and T alongside C and tried to work them together, but by following the story in Matthew 18 we have placed the child in an existing form of theology with the purpose of changing theology. It was a discovery for us that traditionally it is understood that Jesus places the child in the midst to teach the disciples humility but what we came to recognise was that Jesus came to place the child in the midst of the disciples *as they were having a theological argument about the kingdom of God*. Jesus expected to change the way that the disciples were thinking, to alter the course of their theological argument. Humility is vitally important and involved in that, but it is not as if it was *just* a moral move that Jesus was making. In fact it was part of a way of changing the theological conversation and this indicates that the act of placing the child was in itself a theological act. So what was it about Jesus that led him to place the child? To see the child as one to be brought in, is itself a theological act. We are seeing how they engage, C and T, in an on-going, often very tense and difficult, argument. I want to use the word argument quite intentionally – it is not a nice merger, it's not like the disciples were docile and welcoming of Jesus' nice words, no, it was tense – Jesus had to argue with the disciples simply to hold onto his own mission. So this is something that is certainly very important to me.

### ***The Kingdom of God***

How important is the difference between 'the child in the midst' and 'the child placed by Jesus in the midst'?

The kingdom of God is promise and temptation. Jesus lived towards, proclaimed and served the Promise, and suffered and resisted through the temptation, which came to him from all sides, including the disciples.

Jesus called and cared for his disciples. To help them he called them to follow him, to witness to the Kingdom of God with him, and to take note of the child he placed in their midst.

Kingdom in its human forms involves and encourages quests for greatness. Why are such quests incompatible with the Kingdom of God? How is the quest for and cultivation of 'greatness' manifest in contemporary life, Christian no less than non-Christian?

How does the child placed by Jesus, the child who is present but says nothing, witness to the Kingdom of God and show us the way to enter the kingdom of God?

Does the child placed by Jesus in the midst point to a spirituality and discipleship which is different from what is indicated by Jesus' call to 'deny oneself, take up one's cross and follow him'? Or are they ultimately one? Is this a live issue in Christianity today?

Humility is the way into and of the Kingdom of God. How does child sign the way of humility? What are the objections to humility? How valid are they? What does humility turn out to be in genuine Christian discipleship and the hope of the promised coming Kingdom of God?

We are charged to 'become as the children'. What does that mean? How is it done? Not by abdicating from our God-given adulthood, but by receiving the child. Where does reception lead us? What is the wide significance of reception as realised by God in Christ? Who receives whom in Christian mission?

In the final chapter, is 'despising' expanded unreasonably and in unevangelical ways? Or does it lead us into the heart of Christian faith and human experience with God?

### ***The ambiguity of CT evident in our history***

CT has to ask about its future because it has been caught in several kinds of ambiguity from its start. The ambiguity has not been recognised, brought into the open, and argued out. It remains unclarified.

CT has preached a simple message based on Matthew 18. It has been presented as foundational in the consultations, held all over the world. *Entry Point* is a large meditation on it.

This reading of Matthew 18 was not there right at the beginning. The text was mentioned then, but not the central focus of attention as it is in *Entry Point*. The phrase 'the child in the midst' was picked from the text and then interpreted without further engagement with it. Only slowly did we come to see that the child in the text is not 'any child, every child', but the child placed by Jesus. Where does that lead in terms of what we think about children and about Jesus?

The tension between 'the child in the midst' and 'the child placed by Jesus' is noted in the book, but not applied critically to contemporary Christian thought and action, on which it has had little or no effect. Is there any serious discussion about this ambiguity?

Another ambiguity is in the kingdom of God itself. This is the subject of the text itself and figures largely in *Entry Point*. It is an abiding central issue in much Christianity. Does God have a kingdom of any kind? Are God and Kingdom in essential contradiction? If God has a kingdom, it is not like any kingdom of the world. If it is so radically unlike, as the Crucified Lord reveals, what is the value of using the language of Kingdom? Can God's Kingdom be seen or realised in this present world? But have we at the moment anywhere else to live and be human than this present world? Does seeking the kingdom of God involve us in living with 'waiting, distance and uncertainty' (p191)?

The disciples, then and now, do not easily seek the *Kingdom of God*. The pursuit of greatness makes sense to them. They do not have patience to stay with God in the hour of his grieving. This can be seen in much of the rhetoric around mission and Christian action for children. Often the kingdom of God is presented as a project of social transformation, which can or will be realised in the near future, because it is God's will, and provided we put in the practical effort, for which we have resources of money and intelligence. This squeezes out any sense that we human beings in the present world, and with all that we are and can make of ourselves (even with 'God's help') are not sufficient to bring about an order on earth which 'realises' and measures up to God's kingdom.

So draw a veil over the ambiguity in the concept of the kingdom of God. And yet it besets us.

These ambiguities come from the *content of the expression of Child Theology found in Entry Point*.

Other ambiguities are to be found in the company of people who are interested in Children *and* Theology. Their interests are diverse. Diversity presents itself in the first instance as divergence, making for distance between people, leading potentially to estrangement. Diversity is then a form of ambiguity which is not managed but rather manages people caught in it. Only when the ambiguities



are faced and worked at can diversity be transformed into the sharing of differences, the discovery of rich pluralism, the building of teamwork and fellowship.

What is the ambiguity in the tradition of CT (only fifteen years old, but really by now a tradition)? It arises from the difference between a movement focused narrowly on a reading of Matt 18, and the wider company of people concerned, in many varied ways, with children *and* theology. This difference has been experienced in all our consultations. A few people are taken with the vision opened up by reading Matt 18, and many go away sympathetic but bemused, not convinced that Matt 18 is a basis for working through the multiple issues which arise for Christians (who have at least a little theology) and children or even that it has a significant contribution to make.

Working in this context can be confusing. There are so many lines of investigation and action. It is easy then to become dilettante, flitting from one to another, never getting to the bottom of anything. Or we may choose to commit ourselves to one area or one way of thought and action, even to the point of secluding ourselves defensively.

It seemed to me, some years ago, that what I needed – and maybe what others would find useful, is some kind of survey of this varied and vibrant field, so that anyone could understand what particular contribution they were making in context and so make their contribution better. Hence what I call a Taxonomy of Child and Theology.

### ***The place of EPCT***

The term, Child Theology, CT was coined by Keith White in the context of the beginnings of the Child Theology Movement. That movement as we have already seen does not have an agreed ideology, a Child Theology orthodoxy. Within the framework of the movement, *Entry Point* has emerged, written by Haddon Willmer and Keith White, who have been key drivers of the movement from its beginning. But their book is not a sponsored or official publication of the movement. Within the movement various ways of relating C and T are represented and actively pursued. So it is helpful to differentiate CT as essayed in *Entry Point*, so as not to obscure the full range of what goes on within and around CTM. Let us then speak precisely of EPCT.

This differentiation gives everyone within CTM freedom from any obligation to EPCT. *Entry Point* and its possible contribution to C+T thought and work can be assessed critically and used selectively or not at all in any future development of CT.

### ***The question of balance between T and C in any form of C+T***

In some encounters, T is dominant. In strong theologies of child/childhood, T shapes C, as child is understood within the terms provided by theological system or church tradition and practice. Sometimes ‘the child in the Bible’ or a biblical doctrine of child prescribes how children are to be understood and brought up.

In other encounters, C takes over and shapes T, so that T is absorbed into, or even made unnecessary by, some kind of ‘child-ideology’ or child-related practice with its accompanying theory. This is very common now, not least in Christian education, holistic child care and nurture and responses to children at risk and in need. After all, children are within our reach and understanding – theology and God not.

**By comparison with these forms of C+T, Child Theology(CT) as essayed in *Entry Point* (EPCT) is rare.** It is not a simple conjunction of C and T. It is a particular view of the process of C and T interacting. *C is placed in the midst of an existing form of T, in order to change T. But the act of placing a child, C, in T is itself T.*

The child in Matthew 18 was inserted into the disciples’ theological discussion about the Kingdom of God in order to help them get free of their mistakes. But because the child was placed by Jesus, the placing must be understood theologically, starting with the question, who is this Man who did this for what reason? According to the Gospel, this question is profoundly, foundationally theological. Jesus proclaimed, signed and sought the kingdom of God. By being taken into the story and action of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the child is part of a process which is the living initiative of God. And if this is taken seriously, Child does not upstage God in Christ in doing Theology or in Church. These questions largely engage CT as represented, for instance, by *Entry Point*.

EPCT aims at more than achieving a balanced both-and. It does not question the both-and by arguing for an either-or (either child or theology). It rather envisions and seeks to live within a constant process.

***EPCT is certainly limited, maybe too specialist***

There are questions *Entry Point* has hardly asked, and certainly has not adequately explored. What is this child, who becomes theological in this particular way? How does this child relate to every child, any child? How does this child relate to the child as seen in other ways, in the perception of societal practices, human sciences, human uses and abuses?

Questions such as these and others require us to work at the relation between theology and other theory and practice, and, more importantly, the relation between the Gospel in Jesus Christ and human secular existence.

There is a lot of expertise in Christian History (Marcia Bunge: *The Child in Christian Thought*) but how can all the various views be brought together in our time? It's too easy just to end up rehearsing the differences.

C + T is not always a merging. It tends to be a takeover of C by T. People work from the Theology with which they are comfortable. So they ask, "What light does our theology shed on the child?"

But the obverse is just as bad. The child is brought along and snippets of theology are pinned to her.

The child is placed into a form of theology with the intent of changing that theology. Is placing the child a theological act in itself?

***Discussion***

In small groups and plenary feedback:

- There's a danger that CT ignores the previous conversations, there's more to the theology of childhood than is discussed, and wouldn't exist if wasn't talked about in 70's-80's children
- Is coherence possible? Being a child is universal, but there are a lot of ways it is not the same for everyone. Look at holistic awareness of what's going on vs. a cohesive view of where are or should be.
- There is no theology without questions, so if there are no questions, there is no theology. What difference does this then make to how I live? What helps me the most?
- Many tensions and sources of tensions could be creative tensions between theologians and practitioners. WV has an understanding of a biblically inspired view of the wellbeing of the child and it's being shaped by theological thinking. We have a theology that it's holistic, but what is the theology that is backing that up? CT is challenging us to rethink policies according to adulthood, etc.
- The political dimension. Whether CT has distanced itself or found itself over and against other political theology. Is that necessarily a good thing? Liberation and feminist theologies have strong political tendencies, and in distancing from that, CT has lost its power.
- When you do inductive Bible Study in Africa, there's a preoccupation with application. The Christian NGO world has basically hijacked "child" with no time for reflection and interpretation. Lots of practitioners drive the consultations because they can fund it. We need to increase number of theologians. The best way to put CT across is as theology disrupted by the child. It's also theology disrupted by Jesus! Have we heard all that Jesus was saying? Why did He do what He did and say what He said?

### 3. **Summary of 'Entry Point' (Keith)**

***Introduction***

This morning's paper serves as an introduction to Child Theology. It is not, as it were, an authorised or King James version of this subject because the Child Theology Movement does not work like that: we are a network of followers of Jesus Christ, not an organisation of paid employees. But it does summarise the heart-searching of two of those followers: Professor Haddon

Willmer and myself. At the very first conference of Child Theology ever (in Penang), we were asked to write a book, and eleven years later it finally appeared.

Before I say anything else I need to ask you all to do something very challenging: would you deliberately clear your minds of what you think Child Theology is, and what you have heard about it? Would you empty your thoughts of everything you know about the Kingdom of God? Would you become humble like little children who are about to hear a story for the first time? This is not an insignificant point: in fact it is possibly the key to *Entry Point*. Once you have tried to clear your minds, and you are sitting comfortably, then I can begin!

Some of you know that the proper place for doing Child Theology is on our knees: near the ground, at the feet of our Master, and at the level of a little child!

### ***How to Begin?***

It took several years of conversation before it became clear to the pair of us, that we needed to base our book on a single passage of Scripture. You will see from the index of biblical references that we draw extensively from both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. But we were not trying to do a survey of references to children in the Bible: that has been done by others. And that is not what we understand Child Theology to be. We needed to find a way in to the subject: a door if you like, an entrance, a window, a crack, a glimmer of light. And we chose Matthew Chapter 18 verses 1-10.

We are quite open about the fact that you can start elsewhere, and we hope that people will do so as Child Theology becomes a serious part of theological study. We chose this passage of Matthew's Gospel because it brings together several strands of biblical theology:

- Jesus is at the centre of the whole incident: and he is the Alpha and Omega of Child Theology.
- It is a theological discussion or argument that sets the event in motion: and whatever else it is, Child Theology is theology.
- The discussion is about something at the heart of the purposes of God in Christ: it is about how the Kingdom of God should be lived on earth.
- Jesus places a child in the midst of the disciples, and in the middle of their theological discussion: and Child Theology takes a little child as a sign or clue to what Jesus wants us to understand about the Kingdom of God, and how to enter it.
- Jesus interprets what he is doing: he does not simply place a child among his disciples, but explains the meaning of his action.
- Jesus calls for his disciples to change: and discipleship is all about being ready to follow the Master, wherever he leads. This change is quite dramatic however: the disciples are invited to start by considering themselves outside the Kingdom of Heaven!
- The child is a sign of humility: Jesus makes that crisply clear.
- And there is a call to welcome (or receive) a little child in the name of Jesus: in so doing we welcome Jesus.
- Finally, having studied the Gospel of Matthew quite carefully we were able to locate this incident within the narrative of Matthew and the life and teaching of Jesus: we were not taking it out of context and trying to give it our own treatment or gloss.

This is not meant to be an impregnable defence of our decision to choose Matthew 18, but it is an attempt to show that there are some pretty good reasons for spending so much time working at this single passage.

The book is dedicated to a little boy who grew up with the two of us meeting regularly to write it. It is a reminder that both of us were welcoming and caring from real live children all through. We had a child in the midst as we engaged in our theological reflection.

On page 12 we give our testimony, and this is important if you are to grasp what the book is really about. It is neither an academic volume, nor a practical manual of how to help children: as we

pondered this passage, we found in our imaginations that Jesus had drawn near to us, or if you like, had drawn us into his company. We were part of his group of followers.

### ***A Journey through Entry Point***

Let me try to lead you through the book.

There are just seven chapters and each has a one-word title,

#### **Chapter One: Child**

The first is “Child”. As you might expect from Child Theology we seek to listen very carefully when our Lord places a child among us. We know that he is seeking to teach us something dear to his heart, crucial to our discipleship. Since we began our work, the phrase, “Child in the Midst” has become quite popular in Christian circles. But we were doing theology, not simply focussing on the child in our midst. So in the first chapter we try to explore what difference it makes that “Jesus places the child”.

Put the other way round, is it enough to notice the child and children like so many others, Christians and non-Christians, who are involved in all sorts of education, care, rescue, of children? We were so determined not to lose sight of this question, that the rest of the book never knowingly lets go of Jesus. For us Child Theology must never lose touch with the relationship between the child and Jesus.

It is the experience of the church throughout history, and across the world, that it is all too easy to lose touch of Jesus, and the rustle of the hem of his garment among us.

Let me give a practical example of this. As some of you know I have long been working on trying to rethink mainstream child development theory and practice in the light of the Christian faith. It is part of the Christian disciple’s mandate to take all thoughts captive for Christ. All truth is God’s truth. Perhaps the best known example of what I tried to do is the book, *The Growth of Love*.

One of my fellow followers of Jesus who helped the process was the Professor of Christina Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, James E. Loder. In his remarkable book *The Logic of the Spirit*, he suggests a complete reformulation of existing theory. It is a stunningly radical contribution to the field that will take years, possibly decades for people to grasp. It has been hugely influential in my own work and CTM has deliberately connected to it. Put simply and briefly for the purposes of this paper, every child is seen in the light of Christ, and every life is seen as touched by the Holy Spirit, deeply and continuously. No longer simply “child”, but “child and Jesus”!

#### **Chapter Two: Kingdom**

The second chapter explores the “Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew’s phrase for Kingdom of God). It is one of the most important theological themes of the Bible. When Jesus teaches us to pray, he gives us the words, “Thy Kingdom come: thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...” That is what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about.

But the disciples had got it wrong: in fact that had got it disastrously wrong. How come that they were so off target? And are we any better? These are two of the questions we wrestled with.

One of the problems we always face as human beings is our tendency to shape things in our own images: if you want to call a spade a spade, it is the problem of idolatry. So the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus says is like a little mustard seed, or yeast in some dough, becomes an extension of our own egos, our longings, ambitions and anxieties. We tend to see it as a heavenly variation of earthly kingdoms with hierarchies and competition.

Then Jesus comes along and challenges our versions of the Kingdom of Heaven by shaking us to the core. He places a little child among us and tells us that we are so off beam that it is as if we are, wait for it...completely outside the Kingdom!

We need to pause for a moment to let that sink in: Peter and the eleven who had left everything to follow Jesus and seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, were actually detached from it! What they were comfortably inside was a figment of their imaginations, rather than the Kingdom that Jesus was revealing to them.



The child is a sign that we must let go of all manipulation of God's kingdom and receive it afresh as a little child.

Please remember that we know nothing about the little child in question, even whether it was a boy or girl: the only thing we do know is that to the disciples the child was a "nobody". For those fearful of competitors in the struggle to get to the top of the greasy pole, the child was completely outside the reckoning: completely outside their trading game!

Child Theology therefore confronts us all with a very uncomfortable probing question: are we willing to allow Jesus to reshape our understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven?

A "health warning" is necessary at this point: this change is potentially so profound that it can shatter our cherished dreams, personal, familiar, churchly and organisational. Perhaps the best example would be a potter at the wheel deciding to crush a faulty, decentred pot, and to start all over again! (Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me... "Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me...")

If we are not ready or willing for such a change, then we will continue to do what we believe to be good work, but the risk is that we will be outside the Kingdom of Heaven. When we utter the Lord's Prayer, we will have done so lightly and without conviction. And we will be continually squeezed into the mould of the world around us: organisational, economic, political, moral, ethical and even spiritual.

### Chapter Three: Temptation

The third chapter may come as a surprise to you: it certainly was to us! Over a period of years it began to become apparent to us that, through reflection on this passage, we were getting to know Jesus better. And one aspect of this was his humanity. Fully divine; fully human. The latter means that he was tempted in every way like us (yet without sin). But it is all too easy to assume that he dealt with the temptations early in his ministry and that after 40 days in the wilderness immediately after his baptism he had done with Satan and could get on unassailed with his ministry. We realised that it was not, and could not have been like that: for no human is ever done with temptation.

So the picture began to become clearer: Jesus himself was tempted all through his life and ministry about the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. He was a pioneer having to find the Father's way through the many challenges. He was, in short, in need of support and companionship along the road to Calvary. He chose twelve disciples but in many respects they failed him again and again. Peter even wanted to stop him going to Calvary, and the whole group tried to subvert the true nature of his calling and the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter was a tempter, so much so, that Jesus said to him, "Get behind me Satan".

And this is where the little child comes in. The child does not offer counsel or advice, but simply stands there at the bidding of Jesus. This is how we put it at the close of this chapter:

"Through the presence of the child, we may suppose Jesus found more than emotional refuge from the loneliness caused by the hardness of the disciples. As the disciples brought Jesus back into fundamental temptation, the child strengthened him as an unspeaking witness against the false kingdom. Placing the child was another way of pursuing his work. What he found in the child was a way of signing the kingdom of God, of reaffirming his vision and commitment to its character, and of pressing the argument upon the disciples. Placing the child was not choosing the child against or instead of the disciples, but of carrying on the argument with them. And since Jesus wanted them to make a communal witness to the kingdom of God, (so that it is more than a refined individual spiritual quest) he had to carry on the argument with them in a social communal way. He could not simply say: "Be like me, as an individual model". It was rather, "Join in the community. I begin making this community with a child.'" (Entry Point, page 101)

The child seems to mean nothing to the disciples (if it does they give no sign of it): but the child is of great significance to Jesus. Here is human solidarity, companionship: without words, and without ambition or contortion. There have been and will be others along the journey to the Cross who amaze or comfort Jesus, but the little child has not been noticed among them.

## Chapter Four: Disciple

We come to the central chapter in the book, and this is something of a fulcrum or hinge. Perhaps it should be called the crux of the whole argument. I stand here today primarily as a disciple of Jesus, and I am speaking with you in this way because you also seek to follow Jesus as his disciples. Now let us be completely open and frank with each other: when Jesus called us he called us to follow him. And that meant and means to take up our cross.

We must not mince words at this point. Jesus has called his disciples, and he is leading them to Calvary where, humanly speaking, everything he has lived for and taught will be shattered into smithereens. And to put it bluntly, they did not like this! They were not up for it. For one thing it did not fit their idea of the Kingdom of God at all: they wanted a kingdom in which they would sit on the thrones and have all the glory and pleasure that supposedly goes with possessing a kingdom. The cross says no to that.

Jesus had sought to teach them about the Cross frankly, naming it plainly, but he was not getting anywhere: they could neither understand, nor bear it. And so we began to see that in putting a child in their midst he was not offering a softer option: something reassuringly cosy; rather he was spelling out the same call to the Cross in a different way. It is such a different way, that most have missed the possibility of a link between Cross and child.

Now this is so surprising that we spend the rest of the book trying to explore this link between a little child placed by Jesus, and the cross of Calvary. At first sight they are complete opposites: the child is full of life, joy, hope, potential, while the Cross represents death, dereliction, and the end of the last shred of a dream...turned into a nightmare.

## Chapter Five: Humble

There is just one thing we know about this child placed by Jesus (despite the fact that many commentators give lists of the qualities that they imagine must have been present in this little girl or boy): the child is lowly, and has no status. He gives the clues to his disciples: if they wish to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (which they do more than anything on earth, if they are true to their calling) then they must become humble. And because as disciples of Jesus we are seeking to follow where he leads we spend a chapter trying to understand what this means.

Of course we can all offer a reflex answer: it is about stooping, and getting near the ground. It is about laying aside pretensions, ambitions, claims, striving to achieve and all the rest of the apparatus of earthly kingdoms, whether nation-states, tribes, households, organisations or denominations. But the more we looked at the matter the more we realised that we had to be very careful: humility in a child is not a straightforward issue.

So it is that we devote a long section to getting rid of the unfortunate associations of the word humility, such as putting down and humiliation, and seeing in genuine childlike humility, what we call “looking up”, and “looking forward”. I do not think I can do justice to this now, but you will find it helpful to think of the child as a seed, full of hope and potential. And this is how Jesus described the Cross in John’s Gospel, Chapter 12.

The child and the cross have in common to the eyes of faith and lit up by the resurrection, a profound sense of hope, openness, and new beginnings. If we come to the cross and cling to it, with the words, “Just as I am” in our hearts, and nothing in our hands, then we resemble little children. God’s amazing grace, revealed supremely on the Cross, where it is received with truth and integrity, results in human humility. As we kneel at the foot of the cross we find ourselves at the same level as a little child.

## Chapter Six: Reception

In Matthew’s Gospel there is another clue that Jesus gives those who seek to follow him: we are to receive or welcome a single little child in the name of Jesus. Now the argument that we offer here, is that becoming like the little children, and receiving a single child in the name of Jesus, go together. They are two sides of the same coin. They should not be separated. How do we become as the children? The implication here is that this happens as we welcome a little child.

So the call of Jesus here is not to spiritual exercises and discipline (however good they may be for discipleship), but to practical action. When we truly welcome a little one in the name of Jesus, we set in motion a process of change. We find that we have welcomed Jesus and the One who sent him into the very core, the nooks and crannies of our lives and beings, and he is changing us. We don't have to worry about making the change happen: God in Christ takes care of this.

This is of potentially huge significance in the everyday life of all disciples of Jesus. Parents who truly welcome a baby into their lives, relationship and household will be changed as they do so. The same is true in every area of social life, including schools, communities and churches. So often the motivation of adults is to change children: to rescue them, to care for them, to train them, to teach them and so on. Jesus is pointing out something else that goes on: we are changed by the presence of a little child in our midst.

So we must be very careful not to squeeze children into our images (as we have already noted that humans are prone to do with all things and ideas), but rather to allow them to be children, and to discover the image of God in Christ in and through them. Those who have children living with us, or who encounter them daily in our lives as teachers or carers, have the immense privilege of offering hospitality. And that always brings blessings to those who offer it.

Some of you will see that once again there is a surprise as we listen to Jesus through little children: we activists are so focussed on trying to help children and to enlist others in our cause, that we can miss a vital strand of what Jesus is teaching us. Child Theology is not the same thing as a Theology of Children: it cares passionately about little children of course, but it is always open to what Jesus is teaching us through them. The two must not become separated: it is through the very practical act of continuous reception that the path to childlikeness and the Kingdom of Heaven lies.

## Chapter Seven: Father

Some of you may have noticed that we have not as yet addressed the severe admonition of Jesus beginning in verse 6. The reason is that we realised that while this was often expounded, verse 10 was comparatively overlooked and marginal in theological thinking. So we were drawn to explore the meaning in the lives of disciples of Jesus of a verse that brings together: despising (child abuse in all its ugly forms), angels, and the face of the Father.

We take verse 6 as applied to would-be disciples rather than to out and out abusers, paedophiles and child traffickers. But then we come to verse 10 in the light of all the despising of children worldwide and ask where the Father is while this continues to go on, generation after generation, continent after continent, community after community. In this chapter we register the darkness of the world as it affects children, their families and communities. We recognise that this brings theology and all our Christian optimism to a juddering halt. We do not pretend that we know what to say or do. We cannot think our way through it coherently so that we arrive even in our imaginations on the other sunlit side. We can do no better than Job's comforters.

We do not mention the darkness in order to mobilise people to yet more action: though there is nothing wrong in that in itself, and certainly for all the inactive or sluggish selfish people, it is good if they can be got to bestir themselves. It is mentioned because it is theologically important. It is the question of God and God's credibility, or maybe better, what God is really about, in all his apparent absence and ineffectiveness.

Now many, if not most, Christians shy away at this point. Some believe they can think themselves through the darkness; some sing with a continuity of unthinking piety; some are active and shut out of their minds the possibility that all their work, which may help some, leaves the world unchanged, untransformed, and unredeemed.

Verse 10 does not speak of God intervening in a saving act, and it does not speak of a direct relationship between child and the Father. There is mediation involving angels and the face of the Father. It is cloaked in mystery, and not open to evidence-based objectives or outcomes, but it is a deep expression of Christian faith.

Who are the angels? Among other things we look for modern-day angels or those people and organisations that function as angels.

And what are we to make of the reference to the face of the Father? Is not this taking us into the deep truth and mystery of the Cross of Christ? There is no answer to the problem of the despising of children that has gone on throughout human history: whatever human hubris might suggest, we cannot put a full-stop to despising and abuse of children. But the message of the Gospel is that God in Christ is present, alongside and within suffering.

And the call is not to others, but consistent with the thrust of the life and teaching of Jesus in this passage as throughout his ministry, it is for would-be disciples: we are called not to despise a single one of these little ones. This comes as a body blow: surely, Lord, we would never do such a thing!

### ***Challenges and Encouragement for this Conference***

I am acutely aware that, for some, this introduction to Child Theology will not be definite enough. It does not give a ringing endorsement of Christian activity with children. It does not promise transformation of children, communities, churches and nations. Some will have been wondering how this helps the children of the world.

We have had the Cutting Edge Questions, and children of the world, both those we have met from continent to continent, and those for whom we have prayed as we have heard of their plight throughout the writing of the book. The children of the Middle East are imprinted on our hearts, minds and souls. No doubt all of us at this conference will be haunted by images of all those people including children who died, betrayed, deserted and thirsty. I have just received pictures taken by my brother of a Syrian refugee camp. They confront us with many questions including: What can make this right? Can a future heaven somehow compensate for it, or smooth it all away? How shall we then live?

But could I end by summarising what it might offer in the longer term, when it is carefully digested with prayer and fasting?

We cannot and dare not proceed at this conference as if we are all completely in step and in line with Jesus Christ; that all that is needed is more resources and activity. God in Christ deals with each of us as individual disciples, and as we stoop down to be alongside children we find that he is already there with an open face where we feared that there was only despising.

Haddon and I are disciples of Jesus. I always confess to students and colleagues that I am a very poor follower of Jesus and that they should never dream of following me, but realise that I am trying to point them to Jesus, their Saviour and Lord.

And this is what Child Theology helps us all to do, if we will only pause, turn, stoop and become humble like the little children. In so doing we will find ourselves approaching the narrow door to the Kingdom of Heaven. And if we then take the step of welcoming a little one in the name of Jesus, we are opening our hearts to Jesus, and the Father who sent him, and entering into the joy of the Kingdom. We too are blessed. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, in giving that we receive, and in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Through the sign of the child we find the Kingdom of Heaven revealed, and God in Christ willing by grace to enter and work in our lives so that we are changed into His likeness. We and all we seek to do in His name are in his hands.

To put it all in a nutshell: in stopping, turning and stooping, we find ourselves brought to the foot of the Cross and to the feet of our Lord and Saviour. He is, of course, not calling us to anything that He has not already done, for He humbled himself and made himself of no reputation. There is no other way, but the little child is a sign that this way is not just about sacrifice, suffering and death. The way of the Cross is the way to life in all its fullness.

So we have been seeking to welcome the Lord Jesus among us as His disciples. And we eagerly seek to hear what he has to say and to reveal to us by His Spirit as we receive the little child he places in our lives.

#### 4. Reflections on '*Entry Point*' (Haddon)

##### *Introduction*

The term and idea of Child Theology has been spread throughout the world, since 2002, through the consultations and networking of CTM, largely by the commitment and activities of Keith White. It has a distinct identity, in the plethora of Christian action and thinking about, with and for children. The identifying marker of this CT has been its sustained attention to Matthew 18.1-5. Reports and publications of CTM from its beginning show this to be so.

*Entry Point* is the work of Haddon Willmer and Keith White. It is not a report of the history and thinking of CTM; it is their joint developed reflection on Matthew 18. It is not authorised by CTM, although it has been enabled and stimulated by participation in the life and work of CTM. It is a contribution to a wide range of discussions and activities, somehow but variously focused by concern with children and theology (or better, God in Christ). It is now available to be used or not used, to be found useful in some way or no way, by anyone who finds it – that is the nature of any book.

We gather as people with some interest in children and theology, which may or may not involve some form of Child Theology. And our task in this consultation is to ask about the future of Child Theology. If CT has a useful future, what precisely is it and how shall we choose and set about making or entering that future? What futures are possible but undesirable? What resources do we have from the past – which stretches to the beginning of all things, and to the foundations of faith, and comes right down to our own rich and troubled times? What kind of resource, help or stimulus is *Entry Point*, this significant fruit of the first fifteen years of work under the explicit heading of Child Theology? Can it help in the future? How do we sift it, to separate the wheat from the chaff? Or should we make a future in deliberate freedom from it? We need a discussion open to a full range of future possibilities.

- What kind of resource, help or stimulus is *Entry Point*, this significant fruit of the first fifteen years of work under the explicit heading of Child Theology?
- Can it help in the future? How do we sift it, to separate the wheat from the chaff?
- Or should we make a future in deliberate freedom from it?

##### *What are the main ideas that we recognise in the book*

###### **a. It introduces the idea of Jesus experimenting.**

Jesus 'trying out' something, Jesus experimenting when he put the child in the midst – if that was Jesus experimenting, we have to decide if his experiment was successful or not – and what does that do to the whole of child theology – if it was an experiment, it could go both ways.

###### **b. It reveals something about the Kingdom of God**

An important part of the book is about the Kingdom of God. The book is a different perspective on Kingdom of God – this book shows that Kingdom of God might be about entering in – rather than implementing or strategizing, but actually something different about entering in. and there is not much in other writings about Kingdom of God in relation to Matthew 18 – so the book offers something to writing about Kingdom of God.

###### **c. The child brings us back to Christ**

The connection between child theology and the cross, the child signifies that Christ is crucified in some ways. Jesus brings the child into the discussion – Jesus needed the child to bring him back to what his calling was all about. Christ on the cross is the ultimate image of god putting himself below everything. The child helped signify the vulnerability of the crucified god – a powerful image.

Is the child a metaphor – no; is the child about the situation of one person – no; it is about Jesus and the cross. It is about Jesus. and that changes the whole game. It doesn't begin with children and the problems they face; it begins with Christ. Whenever we define ourselves as 'us' and 'them' we commit sin and we are outside the Kingdom of God.



**d. It says something important about discipleship**

Belief seen as intellectual attachment to an idea, but here the belief is not to think in a certain way but to follow, and particularly in the way of receiving others, and the excluded.

Faith and theology have to do with gestures and concrete actions, the book points out the way of doing theology in this way.

**e. The book aids us in reflecting on what ‘theology’ means**

The book helps break down the (imagined?) distinction between academics and practitioners. The book is helpful because it has depth without being too theoretical and so helps us reflect on what we think theology is about. Jesus putting the child in the midst was theology.

The book asks ‘what on earth are we doing? Are we just doing what we were doing yesterday, or is there something different we can say?’

**f. It is important because it connects different perspectives**

It does not read as a typical male white theology, it has sensibility to what is happening in different global contexts and brings together different rich experiences in methodology and epistemology. Our theoretical reasoning, and our struggling to understand, must find itself worked out in practice.

***How does this book help and challenge the future of CTM, and what ideas might we add to the book for the future of CTM***

**g. it offers a conversational, experimental, and seeking theology**

It offers a reading strategy – conversational, seeking, looking at practice, but thinking.

The consultation at Cape Town – bringing the child into the conversation about sin changed the conversation.

**h. The book inspires action – a response to the issues we see in our contexts**

It inspires us to join the process of child theology - it says ‘this is a field we have to work on’ – and it is very open about being in the middle of a process and invites people to join the process.

It says that the reception of the stranger is part of the call of Christ.

It invites activism – and connects it with deep theological thinking.

***Discussion***

In small groups with feedback in plenary:

**Group 1**

It’s a resource that can be acted on. It invites comment. Could be developed to help practitioners answer the Cutting Edge questions. The book started with the questions practitioners bring, but never felt went back there, not necessarily answer the questions, but helping the practitioner sit with the questions. I would like a recourse or tool as a practitioner that allows me to do my theological reflection better or know how to better reflect reflectively on my practice. Maybe I came with the wrong questions. The questions came from Cutting Edge, but where are the answers? Not even needing the answers, but how to find the answers. How do we hold them before God and become empowered to do the practice. Most helpful was the chapter on humility.

**Group 2**

It may be that Jesus was experimenting when he put the child in the midst. This invites the question whether or not the question was successful or not. The child brings us back to Christ because we know little about his/her situation. Feminist theology is about the situation of women. CT is not about the child, but the back and forth dialogue in EP about what CT isn’t and is, is it about the child? No, is it about Jesus and the Kingdom? Yes. Is the child brought in? Yes. It helps us to work out what theology means through the tension between theologians and practitioners.

### Group3

The huge strength is its disciplined focus on Matthew 18 but at the same time this is a weakness. There may be other sources to help CT. How focused does it need to remain on Jesus placing the child in the midst, or are there other theological voices, is there an interaction that needs to go on (like with liberation and feminist). Needs more ecumenical dialogue Much theological debate is now done by blogging so who will take ownership of this process.

The more academic CT becomes, the more it leaves the child behind.

## 5. Valentin and Vladimir launch their books (Keith)

### *Introduction by Keith*

The intention of those engaged with CT has been that it should be an inclusive process. Inclusive that is of all who seek to explore Christian theology in the light of the sign of the child placed by Jesus in the midst. Looking back over the consultation reports we seem to have scored reasonably well on gender, culture, background. But one of the nuts that has been difficult to crack is that of denomination or Christian tradition. Nearly all of the discussion has been between Protestants. Roman Catholics and Orthodox have been noticeable by their absence. This is not for want of trying, and wherever possible we have studied and reflected on texts written by those in each of these traditions (e.g. Rahner and Von Balthasar).

So today is historic in that we have three Orthodox theologians among us, one of whom has written a book, the other of whom has had a book translated, specifically for this occasion. And it so happens that Valentine is the author of one, and the translator of the other!

The idea is that each has 20 minutes to offer some of the insights into CT from their respective book. The writers have agreed to provide a brief summary of their book to be circulated at the outset of the session.

Father Mihai will comment on how far these writings represent the Orthodox tradition in general, and how far they are specific to the authors. As this is the first time we have had a substantive input from an Orthodox perspective participants may need to be helped to understand how Orthodox theology functions in general, as well as in these examples.

A brief introduction to each of the writers/speakers: Vladimir, Valentin and Mihai.

### *The Blessing of the Child (Vladimir)*

In some way, the idea of my book, *The Child on the Threshold of the Kingdom*, was born by chance or, better, by Providence. I think that the art of reading the Gospel consists in our capacity to discover every time something new and unexpected. Our familiarity with its content often leads away our attention and we don't notice the essential meanings which are expressed by Jesus in a clearest way. One day my eye dropped on this famous verse of Mat 18:3, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven", and I was struck by this categorical affirmation. To become a child: what does it mean? To turn in what sense? It was not a unique Jesus' utterance on childhood, and all of them, put together, bring a very special, very profound message, and we should meditate on its enigma. The interpretations of the most important spiritual teachers of the Church did not give me much. "Under the name of a child He (Jesus) means the people so open-hearted, humble, rejected or despised by the others", says Saint John Chrysostom in one of his sermons on the Gospel of Matthew. The sense is clear: St John means giving a good moral lesson for adult people. But why not try to understand these words in a direct and immediate sense which can be deeper, more mystical, and more prophetic than any allegorical interpretation? In the same sermon St John affirms that a child has no envy, no vanity, no desire of superiority, in other words – he is not infected by the sin.

In this point we notice the slight (or the substantial: it is up to you to decide) difference between Eastern and Western theology; the latter insists on a good Augustinian tradition in the understanding of the original sin given to us from the beginning, and the Eastern tradition tells us that a human person is created and conceived by God as originally good for the sake of His Kingdom which reveals itself for a moment in the child.

The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has drawn nigh (Mar 1:15): these words marked the beginning of Jesus' preaching. The seed of the Kingdom is in each of us, and the seed is the light which gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:9). I believe also that it reveals itself not only in some good moral prescripts but also in the mystery of creation, which is an act of love.

The theme of my work is the love of God towards man and his attempt to discover and unravel it through the small child. This aim defined the structure of the book which is not to be seen as one more theological treatise, but as a free flow of intuitions, conjectures, loose associations, suppositions, intentions, aphorisms, which try to search of the blessing bestowed unto the child from the beginning. The child is considered here as the bearer of the glory of God which we the adults are called to rediscover again and again in order to obtain the child in our own selves.

For me, the little child is a visible image of the invisible image of God to whom we are called to return. "Return to your own self," affirms St Augustine, "because in your going astray you became alien to yourself. Return to your heart." "Become who you are," Kallistos Ware repeats the words of the Church Fathers. But who you are, we wonder? What we are – and what each of us is – in our essence as created beings? In the moment of creation (without any reference to time), God becomes known to all created things. The child is present in this original plan of God according to which all things are united in recognizing their Creator. To become like children means to become who you are, who you once were and who you still remain in some original state, beginning, plan, project, seed. We must become who we are ("are" refers not as much to present as to some perpetual time) and who we were before sin.

To *turn into* a child means for us to discover the signs of childhood in our living with God, to discern the metaphysical memory of God's plan for the childhood. My bones were not hidden from You *when I was made in secret*, affirms David (cf. Ps 139:15 DBY) as if he whispers these words in God's ear and into our heart. The "imprint" of the gaze of God can sometimes be seen in the eyes of the new-born if we shake off our blindness. This "imprint" is looking for a responsive gaze back – a gaze directed by thankfulness. Being thankful is the deepest foundation of the faith; and faith is "being recognized by God."

The seed of the Word of God, according to the tradition of the Church Fathers, is planted in every human wisdom and in every life. After Christ's Incarnation, we can rightly affirm: in the period of his making in secret in the womb, the child "studies" God's Word; and the adults get to know Him by recalling.

"The logos of all things are in the Word of God" affirms St Maxim the Confessor and first of all in the creation of human being, and the grace of God is present in the created world.

I could even dare say that the child is the revelation of God's words, he is the language turned to people; the child is the revelation of His glory and His love as they penetrate persons and things. We, however, are still to learn the alphabet of this language. If we don't believe the texts, the rituals, the dogmas and the meanings of the signs sent to us, then we could try to trust the revelation of the words and the works of His hands as they are revealed in our own selves and in the intuition of our created being.

*You are a letter from Christ* – Apostle Paul writes to the church of God in 2 Corinthians 3. Every small child is a letter sent by Christ to the church, which is his family, which is humanity as a whole. To be able to read this letter, you must become such a "church" and learn the language in which it was written. The science of Christ's letters is meant mostly to serve the parents (becoming such on purpose but most often not intentionally) as co-workers of God.

But true childhood is not measured by years, it is measured by sanctity. Sanctity, in fact, is the fulfilment of what has been given people from the beginning and of their ability to conquer in themselves the temptation of the serpent promising them to become like god. *Unless you turn and become like children...* – this was announced not to children but to those who ceased to be children. To return to our childhood is to walk the road of the sinner who challenged his fallen nature and became prepared to become a member of the people of God whom God has chosen for Himself. When we receive the child in ourselves and when we see the child in the other people, we will become like children. It is an act of faith.

Faith as love means to know God, even as I am fully known (1 Co 13:12 NIV): these three cannot be separated from each other – they are one. The early childhood, which has not yet died in us, is the event where we can get to know ourselves in our being in God, we can feel the work He has done in us – that is, His love which entered ourselves as a thought, look and flesh and which continues to do its work.

The mystery of childhood is also in the fact that man is a whole person from the very beginning of his creation; although in the initial act of conception he “consists” in only a few “smart” cells. In these cells, however, the mind of Christ (cf. 1 Co 2:16) can be found, who has a plan for us. It is like the prayer through which in only a few moments (these “moments” are not temporal at all) the bread and the wine become true Body and true Blood of Christ – in a similar way the Word of God, that is beyond our human times and periods, makes the germ cells a true human being.

The child Jesus called remains the invisible measure of things and the benchmark of our adult existence; he is even the evangelical mystery of our existence. Each of us is called to participate in the mystery. This mystery is revealed to people to one degree or another: it is revealed to the new-born in one way, and it is revealed to the small child, who has just come out of infancy, in another way; it is unveiled differently to the adult who has walked a long way from childhood and is able to discern the mystery only from a long distance. Tolstoy said in one of his writings: it is only one step separating me in my current life from the five-year old boy I once was but the distance between the five-year-old me and the new-born is huge.

This distance can be covered by our intuition or by our memory when we start seeking ourselves beyond the “boundaries of past days,” beyond the fence of the Kingdom that we left. The road to it is walked only by faith, that is – by love.

By love we turn to the Wisdom through Whom we came into being, turn to the original gift of God which was granted each of us. Jesus does not talk about training senses, He speaks about something much more substantial: about our return to the humanity in which the Creator’s plan can be seen – the plan that is dimly evident in the child. It is this giftedness that reveals to us the child-like, or better – the childhood-like – nature of the Church of Jesus.

What is the essence of the child of the gospel? In it, the warmth of creation can be felt before it begins to cool down. Each of us is created by the Word by Whom man comes into this world as called to life by the Father. Once the Word created man, can He forget about him? The “innocence” we can see in the child is one of the images, or the impresses, of creation; it is such even in its being marred by the sin. Another “impress” is the openness to the perception of creation in amazement, and through this openness – the perception of the face of the Father and the expectation of meeting Him once again. *You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts* (Psa 22:9 NKJ) – this is how David professes what he believes in.

“In creation,” St Basil the Great writes, “the Holy Spirit is inherent to all created things which do not reach perfection by degrees but since the moment of their creation are already perfect, while the Spirit gives them His grace so that everything is perfect and whole.”

By which gifts of the Spirit the soul of man, who have just been born, lives? The fullness of these gifts, according to prophet Isaiah, lies in number seven. Let us briefly consider them.

- The child is a carrier of the love of God which has not been scattered yet, and the love of the Father in him is the pledge of the Spirit.
- The child is essentially endowed with the holiness of creation which has not been marred in him.
- The newness of the world is revealed in every child. *Behold, I make all things new* (Rev 21:5) – the One Who sat on the throne affirmed.
- The truth of creation is revealed to the child not through his rational mind but through his whole existence because *The works of His hands are verity and justice* (Psa 111:7 NKJ).

- The child is given the gift of freedom which has not been predestined by the past fallen state of man because *You led us out to freedom*<sup>1</sup> (Psa 66:12 NAB) from the hearth of the new life.
- The trust connecting the child to the one who is with him and takes care of him is the beginning of the faith.
- The child's life itself is the embodiment of hope because *You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts*.

That is why we can speak of the theophany of the child.

In the beginning of our life, God slightly reveals (as far as people are able to perceive it) the connection between Himself and creation – the one He ordered to come to being. This connection, as the *guarantee of our inheritance* (cf. Eph 1:14, NKJ) is the inheritance which we spend and exhaust even without noticing this. Childhood in Christ is the mystery of our participation in the Logos Who called man out of the non-being. To become like a child means for us to turn to the image of God and to transform ourselves through the art of creation. It means to enter the ineffable goodness of creation even here in this life and to return to the feast of this goodness and holiness.

A saint, a holy man, is not the child but the adult in his full maturity who completely realizes his separation and distance from God but who has accepted the consequences of such separation and distance as he fully understands that he is in the desert and is like a child suddenly left without his Father Who is constantly calling him.

Childhood, however, is not as much the paradise as it is the state of the soul which trusts the voice coming from afar and which surmises that there is a Person behind the voice. Parents tell the child: "Let us pray to God," and he, not knowing who God is and where He lives, obeys without asking further; he seems to respond to some inner trustfulness. Unlike Adam, the small child does not hide when God is there but follows the sound of His steps, their order or their echo.

The early childhood is a continuous dialogue that has not been pushed away by the deafness we would acquire later in life. Perceiving the "news of the things," the child – the little Adam – is amazed and receives everything that touches his sight and hearing. He is amazed not in the way adults get amazed: the child gets amazed by turning to creation in its unity and by being united with it.

The gift of childhood is the invisible connection between the created things and through them the connection with the Word through Whom all created things came to being. Here is the common root of religion and art from which different sprouts will grow and take their own direction.

*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou established praise.* (Ps 8:2 DBY). Can we discover in this praise also the principle of true art? That is, the mouth of babes being an instrument, and while playing this instrument, the author created the Song of Songs – the Song embedded in creation.

In his early age, the child is given the intuition of an author, and he is granted the sense of a motherland of the world. For the child, the things around him (and much more the living things: fish, beast, plants), in his first meeting with them, become his brothers and sisters; and this is how the little one communicates with them and is amazed at the fact that the adults are not able to feel and understand this brotherhood. True art, that is, the very child-like art, is the art of following the distant echo of the Word of the beginning.

Now in the époque of globalization, are we called by Jesus to a new kind of civilization, that of the childhood? It means a choice of a blessed life; a spontaneous trust in the mystery of creation and the beginning of man; a memory about the "visits" of God that each of us keeps in ourselves while deeply hiding them; an originally-given turn to the Father which is in our nature and essence; or a joy from recognizing in the child that which God prepared for those who love Him.

In the centre of this civilization there is also an ethical message: to receive a child means to hear the name of the Lord which has been hidden in him, it means to see in the nature of the child the



first icon of the Son of God not made of human hand. This is the spiritual calling of every family, and of humankind: to receive the child not as precious and nice though restless toy but as a blessed possibility of the Kingdom which has now come near you and me in the child whom we see now and in the child who, by the mercy of God, is still hiding in ourselves and lives in us. Becoming little opens the door – opens it slightly – for the Holy Spirit to enter and to abide in those who have cleared room for Him. The Spirit can help us find in ourselves the “child” to whom the Lord calls us to turn.

Civilization, as the art of cohabitation of people who have put in the centre and uncovered in their heart the child.

A true childhood is the one to which the ability of seeing God will be revealed: seeing Him not in our past but in our present and future. *We shall see Him as He is* because He will be in us His children awaiting the Kingdom of God.

### ***Child, Church, Mission: Inter-Christian Perspectives (Valentin)***

This is an historic moment for us to come and share. I am an Eastern Orthodox. Was quite a conservative believer and teacher. Taught 15 years in Bulgaria in a Christian school and I used to tell kids that only Orthodox Christians are the real Christians. But then I became a missionary with the Church Mission Society which is Anglican and I found it is also Christian. We must follow, not just believe.

Turned from traditional orthodoxy to become more of an ecumenical Christian. I found that an Orthodox teacher from Bulgaria couldn't be sent by Orthodox, so I was sent by an Anglican sending agency and was able to teach on the variety of traditions.

The more we get to know each other we find that we have much more in common than differences.

I tried to see child and the church from a common Christian perspective. Divided the book into 4 parts – Church, her mission, the Bible, the child. Tried to look more from above, not one particular perspective.

Part one affirms that the church is God's: it existed before people and will exist after. We understand it as a gathering of believers of Jesus Christ, but the church is in fact God's and fulfills His purposes. It is those who believe in Him and do his ways. God does not fulfill his will except through people and other things (angels, etc.). Most people cannot be the rock upon which the church is built. Christ is the Rock. The church is the church of child. In someone's book, the pastor called “The Child People”.

(See pdf document)

### ***Comments by Mihai***

I won't be able to do justice to the labour of the books. But from what I heard, I can point to a few things. The “eternal question” of what is orthodoxy and the claim that they hold the whole truth, that's a self-mirrored perspective. Once you get closer, existential depth of being saved, and by God's mercy I will be saved. It's something that has happened and will ultimately happen.

Dared to take out a few topics to address. Both books put some Eastern flavour that comes from a particular hermeneutical perspective. Both bring that. It is the read of the narrative and context that gives life to the community of the faith. That whole experience takes place through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Gnosiological – love is an instrument of knowledge. We know God by experience. Faith is experienced as love because God is love. There are a few theological fundamentals that human nature carries on and bares God's fingerprint. That is the dignity that Adam and Eve lost and left behind, and the dignity that Jesus brought back and restored. That's the lens we look through, the restored lens of Christ.

Incarnation as another Entry Point as the theology of the child. Part of the prophets' promises. Eastern Orthodox is the fulfilled promise and blessing. The image of God, the freedom, the issue of sin. Another theological principle. Maxim said, the answer or reason of everything is Christ. The reason of childhood is Christ. Sacramental and liturgical. Child is mystical.

It connects with some ways of reading the contemporary contexts. The books connect contexts. Both are invitations to rediscover the inner child. Tradition is the experience of the same faith from generation to generation to generation, and ultimately an experience of the Holy Spirit.

Augustine is not viewed well in Eastern churches. He comes with a different framework. He influenced the thinking in the West, but not much in the East.

### **Discussion**

The creation and Adam could generate a lot of discussion. Adam and Eve were immature in paradise, they had to be offered the chance and God had to take the risk of them coming to maturity. It was an act of God's mercy to exclude them from the tree of life, otherwise they would have been condemned forever. The cross becomes the tree of life and offers the fruit of the tree of life and the tree of knowledge to those who've taken a wrong step toward maturity. The notion that Adam and Eve had to be given the chance to risk maturity through gaining knowledge, this is something to look at deeper... creation theology.

What is distinctive is that quality of the child as an icon of Christ. The parents' responsibility to nurture these wonderful icons of the church. We tend to think of other qualities of the child (vulnerability or other dependence or other supposed qualities), but this image of Christ seen in it. The child is an image of God as Christ is an image. Irenaeus saw the child as an allegory of the HS – receiving the child was receiving Christ in the HS

The 'other worldly' nature of child – being other means being not adult and not conformed to this world. Small children. Child is a child before the age of 5, not more than that. Small children live in a special world, their own world. The world of fairy tales, images, house imitating the environment around them. Different from the world and the adults, that's why they're other. When they grow up, we educate them and try to adapt them to the world. Our education system aims to make our children workers, people as we are. It's interesting that the more mature children become, the more worldly they become. We try to preserve this other worldliness as much as possible as long as possible. How can the church do this, helping them to remain "other" bearing in themselves the image of Christ in themselves, though small children don't recognize it themselves as young children. But our whole societies make them worldly vs. other. Jesus wants us to remain in His image.

There are so many points of difference that I find it hard to accept, for example, talking about children in a way that belittles adulthood. That belittles the creatures who God called us to be. We're on the way. This difficulty points to a quite different way of seeing how we're to be. Another difficulty is saying that the child is internalized. We become as children as becoming/going back to the child we originally were. I don't think this is desirable or possible. The solution I found in entry point, may well not be satisfactory, is that we become like children by receiving a child, and the child we receive is not ourselves, it is a child. And that child will become an adult as well. We need to find a way of talking them through, otherwise we'll just go on saying what we say and there won't be any real ecumenical communication.

It may sound strange now, because it is new, but we should talk. We will find that we agree on much more. This needs dialogue. We've only touched the very surface. You will find a lot of evidence of what he is talking about in his book. This is the point, we have differences that we must talk to each other and find the more commonalities than differences.

I started thinking about another strand of thought, about children being, the pre-verbal children, being in a state of grace with the world, experiencing it not through language, but taking something away from that first experience and the connection of that and the mystics gazing upon God in ways that are not communicable through language.

There is a huge difference between the way Protestants and Orthodox treat children – Protestants see them as needing to be converted.

## **6. Frances Young – her story and discussion**

The first book I wrote about my son *Face to Face* was enlarged a few years later. The covers show the author and her son face to face. At that time he was a baby and a toddler but on the cover of the third book *Arthur's Call* he is now 49.

His birth was difficult and he was born in hospital. He was very underweight even though full-term. There were difficulties in breast feeding. He didn't smile. The medical staff realised something was wrong but said nothing until he was 8 months old. His brain had been starved of oxygen in the later stages of pregnancy.

Deep down I was asking how I could continue to believe in a good loving Creator God.

About age 7 when our third son was born, we entered a difficult time. Arthur had periods of distress when he would scream, wouldn't eat or drink. There were sleepless nights. His distress provoked my distress and my doubts. They were wilderness years for me even though I was teaching theology. It was the big theodicy questions – why is there suffering at all? How do I go on praying to a blank wall?

Arthur was the tip of a huge iceberg of doubts. I couldn't believe in a miracle. Most healing takes place because we are programmed to heal, but brains don't heal so we spent many hours getting the brain to compensate using the function that was left. But in the bible it is in the wilderness that God meets his people. I have a number of stories of moments in those wilderness years. I was asked to preach during Mental Handicap Week. This was a great challenge. I came across the passage in John about the healing of the blind man. Jesus said he was made this way so that the power of God could be manifest. This made me angry. Later I realised that the story is pointing to the cross.

I went to Lourdes at Easter time. On Good Friday, I decided to follow the stations of the cross. As I went up, I met Mary. [See poem in the book; p50] Around the corner I met the women bringing their children to Jesus. The setting sun was glaring in my eyes but I lined up the central one of the three crosses with the sun and realised how the cross of Christ is glorious. Christianity is not problem solving but mystery encountering.

Arthur was disruptive and the minister asked me not to take him to the church crèche any more I felt so rejected. I was pushing Arthur to the shops and as passed the Catholic church, limping towards us, obviously had had a stroke. He spoke to Arthur and spoke to me, and I suddenly knew that was God I'd met talking to me. I was sitting in a chair and got up to go into the kitchen and it was as though a voice said: "It doesn't matter to me whether you believe in me or not." God is God and doesn't depend on us.

I was teaching a class about the creed, how it was formed etc. There was one evening where there was a really good session. I was on a bit of a high and there was a particular set of traffic lights and I had a certain thought, "You should get ordained." I don't know how I got home, I don't remember. But I realized that the whole journey I'd been through with Arthur had led up to that call. I slept on it and I was around 40 so I could get up and say it was a midlife crisis. Then on Christmas morning, I told my husband, an agnostic. He said, "It seems a culmination of all you are and have been through." Regularly leads worship in Methodist churches to this day.

At that time I wrote the first book and the climax was my call to be ordained – about my vocation. But this third book is about Arthur's vocation. What if you have a child that can't grow to maturity? How does that affect 'putting a child in the midst'.

There are two significant points of difference between *Face to Face* and *Arthur's Call*:

- *Face to Face* was fundamentally about theodicy – grappling with deep questions. *Arthur's Call* is about feeling like I have privileged access to the deepest truths of christianity.
- *Face to Face* was about my vocation; whereas *Arthur's Call* is about his vocation.

He was 17 by this time but still needed feeding and helping with every aspect of self-care. He never had the balance to walk unaided but he could be walked around. This was the height of his physical achievement. Later, through hip dislocation and scoliosis of the spine, he lost a lot of function.

It's so important to accept our vulnerability and mortality. In Western society we've forgotten that flowers fade. We expect everything to be alright and be kept alive forever. The doctrine of creation was important in early Christianity. It was important in the development of the sense of being God's creature and how important it was as the generator of a way of understanding resurrection. If God

can create us out of nothing, produce things that were not there before, why of course, he can re-create us!

I went back to Lourdes with the “Faith and Light Movement” which was founded in 1971 by Jean Vanier. This time I took Arthur. I had been in conversation with Jean Vanier for more than a decade, and this included the development of a theological group ...to reflect on the L’Arche movement. One of the things I learned through this and through teaching biblical studies to black pastors of black-led churches, is how fundamentally important it is to welcome difference. We prefer to be in our comfort zones, but to step across the boundaries and welcome those who are fundamentally different than ourselves, that’s where the growth points are. This led me to re-evaluate the success values of our society.

Arthur took me back to the basics of what it means to be a human being and this ministered to me at times of stress. I would come in from the university all hassled by pressures and there was Arthur; he could be a stress at times, but he took me back to the very basics of what it meant to be a human being: eating, sleeping, defecating, washing, etc. basic things about being a basic human body.

One evening in one of the foyers at L’Arche, Trosly-Breuil, the original L’Arche community in France, I went to a place where there were people with the most profound disabilities. It was a time when I didn’t get much eye contact with Arthur and wasn’t sure if he really recognized me as distinct from someone else. During the prayer time, a man with Down’s syndrome came down and wrapped his arms around my leg and stared up with love during the whole prayer. His name was Cristoph, which means ‘Christ-bearer’. I was able to receive the love and affirmation I wasn’t able to receive from Arthur. It’s not about being in control and caring but about mutuality. At one of the L’Arche meetings of theologians we collected a list of wise sayings. Here are two: “I need to be loved by somebody with skin on”; “I smile, therefore you are.”

It’s so difficult to ask for help. You feel you have to be capable. We learned the fundamental importance of family – the generations supporting each other. Another wise saying from the L’Arche meeting: “Community means you never suffer alone”.

Arthur has now been in residential care for almost 4 years. I had some difficulties when my husband had some physical problems and I became the sole carer for him. I became totally exhausted. Eventually Social services came up with a satisfactory solution.

Jean Vanier, in his book on John’s Gospel, speculates that Lazarus was someone with learning disabilities. Why was he unmarried and living with two unmarried sisters? This caught my imagination. I met someone from Bulgaria trained as an icon artist and she agreed to try and draw this, Lazarus as having disabilities. The wheelchair was copied from Elijah’s chariot. It includes the Tree of life, a house in the back, and Jesus blessing him.

I was later invited to Sweden and because of Arthur, hadn’t been able to. Finally I managed to go to the meeting in a chateau in the country. Found an icon of the raising of Lazarus. A modern icon in Coptic tradition. I stared at it. The first thing about it was the body language of the women. I completely identified with the pleading of the women. It was during the time I was getting over Arthur leaving home. Lazarus was like an adult baby, with a moustache and wrapped as a baby. The women were oblivious to what Jesus was doing behind their backs. My response was : What is Christ doing with Arthur behind my back?

### ***Comments***

We have the same experience in my family. My youngest brother. My father also wrote a book. It’s amazing to see how many things in common. Also how many things have come from it. I’m in theology because of my reflections on it.

A discussion in Sweden about the reduction in the number of children with Down’s syndrome because of the number being aborted. A family history of how a mother lost her faith through the birth of a child with Down’s syndrome.

What about your other two sons? Our second son was only two years younger than Arthur but overtook him in development at 9 months. It became important to give him enough attention and not generate jealousy. We also used respite care to enable us to give the other children what they needed. We had to learn not to be possessive with Arthur and let go. When I was training for

ordination, I had a placement for those with mental disabilities. They had a chapel I was involved in on Sundays. My youngest came along with me to help with some play in the service. There was somebody who was resident in the hospital whose parent was a close friend of my uncle but he had no language I couldn't make contact with him. But there was my son in contact with this man, finding the place for him in the hymn book and communicating with him in a way I couldn't. This seemed a quite extraordinary aspect of my son that was brought out by Arthur, whether it was innate or not.

Our third son was born when Arthur was 7. He seemed to have a special gift of compassion and caring.

Frances added: When my second son was about 17, I was invited to spend a weekend at the Othona community at Bradwell in Essex. St. Peter's on the Wall is the oldest place of Christian worship in England. There was a summer camp there and German students come over every year. A community of reconciliation. I was asked to lead their study sessions for a week. My two older sons went with us. Every morning and evening, we went to St. Peter's for worship and prayer. They had their own way of singing psalms. There was one evening when the German pastor with the students was going to lead worship. He was going to suggest we just have silence but silence was impossible with Arthur. We created silence by singing psalms, singing one psalm after another. "I am too little Lord to look down on others. I've not chased great affairs beyond me. I've tamed wild desires and settled my soul..." Version of Psalm 131. The soul is the child. As we sang that psalm, I had this uncanny feeling that Arthur was this Christ figure in our community

## **7. Plenary Discussion to reflect on the day (Keith)**

**Aim:** To gauge the quality of understanding of, agreement and disagreement about the core of Child Theology.

**Outline and Process:**

Four Small Groups (self-selecting) with creative form of sharing main insights with the whole group. The groups are given 15 minutes to discuss each of the four sessions of the day.

Then 30 minutes is devoted to sharing and comparing the reflections of the four groups. The task of the final part of the reflection is to identify what is taken forward by way of insight or question into the next part of the conversation.

It is important that notes are taken all through so that points made are not lost, even though they may not be discussed in the plenary at the end.

**Reminder of the purpose of the whole gathering:**

- "Thinking under the banner of Child Theology has been developed since 2002. Child Theology belongs to the wide span of Christian activity which brings children and theology together. It shares with many others a concern to see and value children in the full light of the good news of God in Jesus Christ. It is also specially committed to thinking and talking of God with the child placed by Jesus in the midst. What that aim implies and how it might be achieved are still open questions which are central to this consultation concerned with the future of Child Theology.
- "It is intended to be a participatory, open, and rigorous workshop, focused on key issues: What roads have been travelled in the adventure of Child Theology? Where have they come to? What are we called to make of Child Theology in the future? Who will contribute to this making – and how?
- "The consultation is being convened by the Child Theology Movement, but it should be made clear that it is not at all about the future of the movement as an organisation. Child Theology is not the ideology of a movement. It has worth only if it is a useful aspect of the discipleship to which all Christians are called. It is theological activity, seeking the Kingdom of God with Jesus who, amongst many other things, placed a child in the midst of a crucial theological discussion."



- If we only do CT in classic Western way, we'll kill it. It's an invitation on how to do theology in a new way. It's another way to enter theology and entering. It's a narrative way. If we just do more in a systematic way, we kill CT. If we think about liberation theology, there was a pedagogy that goes with it. We need that as well for CT.
- God made the preferential option for the poor and the child. There are so many different aspects of it. Dependency, the richness of possibilities. So many layers of connectedness we cannot see, we've been trying to frame in concepts and we just can't. That's the messiness. There's more to come.

### ***Session 1: T&C***

Do we want to manage or influence regional networks? This is difficult because the interaction is unclear. Do we let the groups go with it? Need more substantial theological contributions and let the future evolve.

### ***Session 2: Entry Point***

Have been given some good tools but at present it's hard to see what they are useful for – need some appealing applications. It is one point of departure but not the only one.

### ***Session 3: Orthodox books***

Need to clarify what is meant by child. CT can be an ecumenical project – can be used to clarify particular perspectives. We would like to see it develop as an orthodox region, with a network exploring CT in the orthodox context.

### ***Session 4: Frances Young***

Discovery of implicit CT in the narrative and experience. Wish there were more people who can write this way. The need to include those who never grow up – childhood is not always a state you grow out of. Arthur is maturing differently: how does that relate to spiritual maturity, as everyone's maturity will look different? Arthur stimulated Frances's maturity. How does this relate to spiritual maturity?

The light shines in the darkness

## Wednesday 27

### 1. Prayers (Sally)

John 6:1-13

Music and prayers.

### 2. Two tracks:

#### *a) Does Christian activism with children tend towards being C without T? (Bill, Paul S, David C)*

Questions for this session:

Does Christian activism with children tend towards being child-focused without theology? Or is theology tailored and limited by action which is secularly determined? What are the losses and weaknesses when Christians act for children without sufficient theology? Does academic theology need to concern itself with the needs of at-risk children and youth?

The three facilitators will begin this session with personal vignettes from their work in both practice and theological reflection. (8-10 minutes each)

Paul Stockley:

One key project on my portfolio concerns children who are tortured and abused by others (including adult Christians and church pastors) due to beliefs in witchcraft and malevolent spiritual influence. This phenomenon affects at least tens of thousands of children in multiple locations.

A Case Study:

Gilbert is struggling to make a living for his family, wife and three children, having also taken in the two children of his sister after she died of pneumonia. His crops have failed due to pest infestation and one of his few livestock has died. His wife is unwell, and he cannot afford the medicines for her treatment.

What could be the cause of his misfortune in life? Someone has clearly put a curse on him. Gilbert notes that things have got worse since he took in the two extra siblings, and wasn't their mother also ill (much like his wife is now) before she died? He takes all the children to church to pray for release from his troubles, and the prophetess confirms that he has indeed been cursed. It is his sister's two children who have done this; they are practicing sorcery. The evidence is clear: the older of the two, a girl, is very bright and inquisitive for someone her age; and the younger, the boy, wets the bed occasionally. The spirits of sorcery need to be driven out.

Gilbert is instructed to bring them back to church in the morning, with payment for their deliverance, so they can be locked in a room and made to fast for several days before the main ritual. However, when he gets home Gilbert is extremely fearful of the two children. He whips them, then menaces them with a machete, threatening to chop them up. As night falls he makes them sleep outside under a tree. After dark his wife says to burn the spirits out of them. So Gilbert takes some petrol, pours it over the two sleeping siblings and sets them on fire.

This is a tragic story of children accused of witchcraft. All the elements in this story have been experienced by children, and witnessed by others, with their testimony recorded.

Questions re: children & theology:

- What are the theological dynamics behind this account of child abuse?
- How can theology help the practitioner/interventionist (of social work, family welfare, child rights, human psychology) to respond effectively and appropriately? If so, how can theology inform the response?
- The assumption that every misfortune is from a malevolent source. There could be all

sorts of sources.

- The role of the church leader in discerning the source of the problem. Nature and source of the leader.
- Christians living in fear – where is the sense of freedom in Christ, the sense of power of resurrection power?

Feeder to a dialogue:

From my perspective (and that of others who have worked with these issues for the last five years) there is absolutely no doubt at all that there is a theological aspect to the roots of this reality, and that an effective response must also contain an integral theological strand. Interwoven with others (legal, medical, educational), any response that does not include a theological strand will ultimately be lacking.

Questions for: “Child Theology”

- How does “child theology” ensure the practical response maintains an appropriate theological focus? How does “child theology” ensure that any theology informing the response is good theology, hence enhancing the efficacy of the response?
- Has “child theology” any tools to offer that can speed the developing of practical responses to this urgent issue?
- Where is God in Christ in this? How does he treat children and their families when they find themselves in these situations? You have to address these issues to solve. Can’t just look at child rights issues, you have to address theological issues to really bring a resolution.

### Bill Prevette

I have worked professionally with children and youth ‘at risk’ for 37 years. My family and I have lived in urban Los Angeles, Thailand, Cambodia and Romania, with travel to 40+ countries, serving as a faith-based consultant with child focused agencies. I first heard of Child Theology in 2002 at a conference in the Netherlands with Haddon Willmer and Keith White. I currently serve as a research tutor at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and am supervising a number of doctoral students working with children in Asia and Africa.

Between 2002-2007, I conducted a five-year study (part-time PhD) of faith-based agencies working with children in the aftermath of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s failed program of child institutionalisation which put 300,000 children in orphanages. When communism fell, about 3-400 faith based organizations moved in to help. In writing this thesis I developed some original thinking around Child Theology, the thesis was published by Regnum Publications as *Child, Church and Compassion: Towards Child Theology in Romania* (2011). I will discuss in our workshop a few findings, especially those aspects that illuminate how practitioners tend to both operationalise and limit theological reflection in their work.

In 2014, I served as the managing editor on the book: *Theology, Mission and Child: Global Perspectives*. I will make copies of this book available to the workshop participants and explain the process we followed in organizing this volume. We hosted a three-day consultation in Oxford with all contributors (both academics and practitioners) and deliberated the organizational content for the volume.

One of my thesis findings is the ambiguity of it all. Theology helps me with that. God doesn’t often give me a roadmap. We think we can solve a lot of the world’s problems if we can just get our programs set up. This is unrealistic but we can set candles in the darkness.

I would like to learn more in this workshop how the participants have learned to integrate work in both practice and theology. What are the new challenges they see in this area?

### David Chronic

I was first exposed to the idea of Child Theology at the 2002 Viva Conference. Amidst a lot of discussion about the state of children in the world and about Christian activism for children, the theological reflection brought by Haddon Willmer resonated with me. In the

community in which I participate, called Word Made Flesh, we intentionally try to have theological rather than missiological starting points. That is, in the midst of vulnerable families and children, our first question isn't "What do we do?", but rather "Who is God?" Drawing on the thought of folks like Polyani,<sup>2</sup> Gadamer,<sup>3</sup> and Vanhoozer,<sup>4</sup> we understand that humanity essentially interprets and interacts in the world through faith commitments (fiduciary frameworks). People interpret and act through faith; theology is, at least, implicit in the interpretation and action. In this way, we are not asking "Does theology shape practice?", but rather "what theologies are shaping our practice" and "how are our theologies shaping practice?"<sup>5</sup>

Child Theology, as I understand it, is a challenge, critique and disturbance that a child placed in the midst by Jesus brings to our theologies and practices. CT has primarily reflected on Matthew 18 in which the disciples are looking at their understandings of the kingdom of God and Jesus interrupts them by placing a child in their midst. Perhaps the use of this text brings an inherent problem to the conversation between CT and Christian activists for children. Activists for children are not focusing primarily on theological debates about the kingdom of God so as to be disturbed by having their gaze turned to a child. Rather, they are already gazing at the child and most often responding practically to little ones who have been caused to stumble. So, how does the text in which the child is a disturbance speak to activists for which children are the focus?

Activists for children are looking at the children, but don't normally critically examine their theologies of activism, of kingdom, of salvation, of human flourishing, etc. Perhaps CT can inform and shape Christian activism by helping us see the child as a sign for God and for God's kingdom and by allowing that signifier to interrogate the articulated/unarticulated (explicit/tacit) theologies and practices of activists for children. Of course, one can critically evaluate theologies and practices apart from CT. So, the rub of the question is "Can Child Theology particularly shape or inform Christian activism for children?"

Some points for discussion in our workshop:

- Source of new beginning(s) (e.g. born from above)

<sup>2</sup> Polyani uses theological language to describe the 'faith commitment' that presupposes all knowing. Employing Augustine's dictum '*nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*', Polyani says, 'No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework'. (Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, New York: Harper, 1964, pp. 266 and 299-324.)

<sup>3</sup> 'Understanding, for Gadamer, is a primordial mode of our being in the world'. '[W]e are essentially beings constituted by and engaged in interpretive understanding'. For Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics, one of his central theses is the internal relationship between understanding, interpretation and application. He states that 'every act of understanding involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves application'. (Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983, pp. 34, 38 and 137.) Thus, one's hermeneutics presuppose the theology of their faith commitments.

<sup>4</sup> Vanhoozer states, 'All hermeneutics, not simply the special hermeneutics of Scripture, is "theological"'. (Vanhoozer, 'The Spirit of Understanding', 160-61, as cited by Thiselton, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1999, p. 189. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, pp. 29-32.)

<sup>5</sup> We may also employ contributions from Liberation Theology about praxis, not reflection, as the starting point. Drawing on Freire's pedagogy, liberation theologians stress the primacy of praxis. 'Theology is always a second act...First comes liberative practice'. (Clodovis Boff, 'Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation', in Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994, 57-84, p. 73.) For liberation theologians the hermeneutical circle moves from action to reflection. Reflection is not the interpretation of Scripture as a textual object but the interpretation of the interpreter's action in light of the text. The problem for liberation theologians is that praxis becomes the criterion for interpretation. So, Moltmann asks poignantly, 'what is the criterion for praxis?' (Jurgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000, p. 294.) If application is the implementing interpretation of the words of God in Scripture, then God must be the criterion for Christian praxis. Similarly, Volf shows how practices shape theology and how theology shape practice. He describes Christian practice as "resonances" of God's engagement with the world. "[W]e engage in [Christian] practice for the sake of God; we don't construe a picture of God so as to justify engagement in a particular set of practices...Since we identify who God is through beliefs – primarily through the canonical witness to divine self-revelation – adequate beliefs about God cannot be ultimately grounded in a way of life [i.e. practice]; a way of life must be grounded in adequate beliefs about God" (Miroslav Volf, 'Theology for a Way of Life', in *Practicing Theology*, Volf and Bass (eds.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, pp. 245-263).

- Different vision(s) of what it means to be human (e.g. vulnerability)
- Relational nature of God's kingdom (e.g. not only being *for* the child but also being *like* the child)
- Non-competitive/non-violent nature of the kingdom of God (though *Entry Point* may need more explication to be relevant to Paul's work with children oppressed by traditional religion in Africa)

Other ways that Child Theology may shape Christian activism for children are areas such as:

- The child is a subject and has a voice in activism done on their behalf (not an object or simple beneficiary)
- "The child placed in the midst" as an invitation to stop, contemplate and evaluate action on the behalf of children
- Using the method of CT to evaluate the theologies and practices of Christian activists

Or, putting these ideas in the form of questions rather than statements:

- Does CT change the way we see the problem to which Christian activists for children are responding?
- Can CT evaluate our response to the problem

### Discussion

Today I am more concerned theologians at risk, it's the passage of Mark 9 – the encounter with the boy. That's a little bit of the pain and also the salvation I walk with. Pain in that always again you face situations where you ask Jesus, Why can't I? And this means that as I was at church last Sunday and looking at a family who lost a little girl because of a heart disease and both parents are cardiologists. I cry with them.

This mystery and paradox is theology. When I was working on my thesis, I read some liberation theology stuff but when I started working with the kids, I completely changed my thesis. These books come with answers, but when I work with the kids, all theories go all over and I came to the point realizing that theories don't apply for every problem.

Theology is an experience and manifests in many different ways. The risk of life is not always a consequence, but possibly a dynamic of life. How can we see God in all this? Liberation theology says to see God from the oppression, in this mystery of life. I don't like to separate theology and activity. Theology can be manifest in the activity of the practitioner.

Theology is also a thinking process. When I read Frances, it's so easy to read her moves into theology, how she writes and grapples with God, it's theology. But the worry I have is that people are trying to turn CT into a discipline vs. a thinking process. What I'm drawn to, especially in writing, is that people have thought honestly and deeply and are honest with how God is in the world. There's a real honesty that is needed in our work. There are activists who avoid theology.

Are there some avoiding it or having insufficient theology?

I'm very much an activist. I've been interested in politics. I think a lot of the apathy in the UK has come because people despise the tools that are given for US to bring change. The people who believe in tools and use them, they don't need to have theology brought into it or influencing it, we actually need to be open to the discovery of ambiguity that comes through trying to use the tools. They don't achieve what they purport to achieve, but they do produce something. When something goes wrong, the tools don't work. They persuade themselves it will work if we try again slightly differently. That's where the people who are in the tool using process, not the observers and spectators, have to say we're discovering all sorts of ambiguity and shortfall in the tools but they do have all sorts of potential and promise. That's where Frances' story is helpful, she uses every situation she's in to reckon with and think through theology and actions, and see the ambiguity. When we don't think like that, or when

we do think of practice and theology separately, we get into this position where we let the many secularists who believe they have the tools who can do it and we who speak about God shout in a language they don't understand. We need to ask them what they've discovered in their secularity.

There is theology at every level and we have to interact at every level. Our theology wants to help inform and shape the tools, and recognize at the end of the day that tools only go so far. We need other dimensions in our tool kit. It's like a groaning, you know, going back to Matthew, the child is in the midst, but the child is not alone there. Jesus is there. That is my profound theological call, how never to forget, that if Jesus is not in the midst, we are lost. At this point, that is my prayer. And how to do that, not in a magic way. The magic is there in the churches, but to recover, the sense that Jesus is there looking at the child, embracing and looking at the child. As long as this is happening, that is what I am looking for.

A lot of activists have the preconceived notion that they bring Jesus to the child. There is the need to bring some questions where there is bad theology. We have started intentionally not by doing something, but by building relationships with the children and communities. We let the questions come from that. Lots of conversations about if we're building community, is that community a reflection of God? Creating space where we're having these discussions together in prayer, worship, etc. inviting each other to bring reflections daily about what God and the children are saying to us. We're hearing messages from families, children, churches, etc., but that's the text we're working with. That's what brings the questions we then are directed to theologians and other practitioners.

We don't want to see this as static. It's a journey. Not wandering in the wilderness. This place where Jesus is in the midst is toward something. When C and T talking together, we're moving toward something together. The "towards" is very much in our case toward what we're thinking. If people don't change, they won't enter the KOG. When we talk about child in the midst, unless we have that motion of dynamic that we're going somewhere with this, which involves being willing to change how we perceive and see things, then we won't go anywhere.

This has been the best discussion I've been in where we've got free of simple polarizations of activists and theologians. Frances' story was a great example of theology and action woven together was perhaps helpful – seeing how neither lost their integrity. Put on record, some of the initial papers for this group did kind of address CT asking what is CT going to do by way of resources to give us tools to do our job. I concentrated on Mat 18 for a long time developing a particular kind of reading, but I don't believe, I regret if we've implied that Matt 18 is the key of everything. It has great value as a story. Not simply because it has a story, but it's an considerable witness against being obsessed with the child (always a problem). Embraces the centrality of Jesus, the call to follow Jesus to discipleship, encompasses KOG and the child pointing us the way. I want to relativise Matt 18 without losing the benefit of it. Also, want to say, about the subtitle. It's not an essay of CT or even toward CT. I'm more and more sceptical about CT, I probably shan't have the pleasure of calling it CT before knew what might be. It's become a great burden making others thinking it's a particular part of theology. People working with/for children use a lot of tools doing the best they can actually leads them into situations where theological questions emerge. If we're following Jesus, theology is clarified in action.

We have a lot of tensions. We need a lot of discussion on what is practice, theology is a practice. To divide theology and practice, we need to deconstruct it.

We need to be more courageous to talk theology in our practice. In community organizing, sociologists talk all their language, but don't want to hear theology. How do we help ourselves and theologians be more courageous to speak up and share theologically.

Somehow, to go to the basis, theology has a desire to follow Jesus, Jesus brings the child in the midst on the journey. The theologian is at risk of losing the dimension of following Jesus. If we lose that, we lose the child in the midst too. This is why we need each other, it's never solved. Never forget it's about following Jesus.

Looking from our context, it's really not the gap between the activist and the theologian, because that theologian doesn't really exist. The theologian is a pastor, no ivory tower theology. Obviously you have to do theology. But the challenge is not so much the academic theologian, but the church, where it's been abusive or "magic" churches, to make sure they're still following Jesus and not fabricating the magic industry where the child brought by Jesus is no longer at the centre but is just an object. That is a major challenge for us in our context.

There is still possibility of doing theology without paying any attention to child, I did for 40 years. It does make a difference. It's one part, not the whole, but it raises questions. You don't have to be working with children though. In the book 'Experimenting with CT' or whatever it's called, we pioneered trying doing meetings with a "child" in the midst – with our grounded imagination – we all know children. It's always been a struggle for CTM to get people not working with children to get them to our consultations.

There are lots of theologians who ARE working with children who are not changed by the context. Not all practitioners are changed.

After working 2 years with kids, I never got to thinking of faith as liberating. When I started theology, I felt there was a lot I did wrong. I disagree with liberation theology which says that practice is pre-theological. So I changed my approach. I needed theology to make the breakthrough. We need to emphasize dialogue between ways to approach children. For theologians and those in the academy, we need to understand what is the construction of knowledge (epistemology). We need tools to reflect and make questions. We need a space of dialogue where the different parts or experiences are open to one another to the different tools and experiences we have.

The context is important – can't do theology without a context - and how do you position yourself in the context. The gospel helps you do this. You position yourself in the underside of history (liberation theology). A suffering and listening position. The child becomes so important because it's way to enter the context and to see. Not only the child in context, but in Scripture. Important to enter scriptures, but locally as well. But not only for the poor children, but the church I belong to, the middle class, that is where the theology comes in too.

How come the biblical scholars, theologians, etc and academics haven't paid attention to the child and what Jesus said about the child? We got a seminary president and told him what Jesus said to a child. "Unless you change and become like a child, you won't enter the KOG." Theologians at Risk – perhaps they think this isn't true!

### ***The Rights of the Child (Keith, Rune, Maria K S)***

#### **Introduction by Keith**

This is a significant subject in practice worldwide for all engaged with children (which must include churches). A challenge for Christians is that the "rights discourse" does not relate obviously or easily to Christian theology. "Rights" is not a biblical word, and the guiding example of Jesus Christ is that he laid aside that which was rightfully his (e.g. Philippians II: 6-8).

The focus for CT and therefore this workshop, will be on the interaction between children's rights and theology. This should be helped by reference to two theological works:

- (1) Stanley Hauerwas' paper, "How to think theologically about Rights?" (Stanley Hauerwas: The Work of Theology Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015, pages 191-207);
- (2) (ii) Rowan Williams' paper, "Religious Faith and Human Rights" (paper given by Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury on Thursday 1 May 2008, London School of Economics and Political Science).

One of the tasks we face in CT is how to develop and interpret this theological work with specific reference to children and childhood, in the light of the child placed by Jesus in the midst. Rowan Williams makes a comment in passing about unborn children; Stanley



Hauerwas to a previous paper on rights, "Rights, Duties and Experimentation on Children", but otherwise the onus is on us. The 1989 UNCRC document is an important resource for theological work.

Hauerwas sees the language of rights developing after World War II in the absence of unifying political and religious belief systems, and representing "high humanism", and having a value and authority without precedent in the history of the world (Hauerwas, 2015, 194). This language of rights is therefore being asked to do more than it can. For example it may be appropriate between strangers, but not to the relation between parents and children (page 193), where kindness, honesty and gentleness resonate more than big words like right and good (page 196).

Theologically his primary concern (and it is indeed a fundamental one by any standard) is that rights imply human beings have a standing over against God: creatures independent of their Creator (page 198). He draws from Simone Weil who stresses the personal nature of human identity and relationships as distinct from the commercial, legal nature of human rights. The suffering and afflicted cry out for justice, beauty, truth and compassion, not democracy and rights (page 200).

He also refers to Rowan Williams' paper. Williams broadly goes along with this approach. Like Weil he discusses the relation of Christian theology to slavery. Unlike Roman Law, Christian theology contends that it is immoral and sinful to possess another's body. The nature of the meaning of a body as the locus of communication (internal and in relationship) is discussed. The body of every person (whatever their cognitive ability) is related to its maker and saviour before it is related to any human system of power. It is unlikely that the political and legal philosophy that underpin the language of human rights will converge with this theological understanding.

This has yet to be developed in relation to children, parents, households, and education, but the theological ground has been prepared.

So though Christians will applaud some of the insights and practical gains that derive from the UNCRC, they will be aware of the inherent danger that there is when rights are divorced from belonging and recognition.

## Maria K

"Freedom of Religion for Children - A Right on Certain Terms? A philosophical study within the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child".

In my PhD, I did a philosophical study on the right of the child to freedom of religion under the UNCRC. I asked questions about what happens to the concept of rights when it is applied to the child and how different conceptions of what religion is, shape our understanding of freedom of religion and the possibilities of the child to be seen as a holder of this right. I also studied different models of growing maturity and autonomy to clarify their role in the understanding of the relation between parents and child in exercising the freedom of religion. Today I want to relate a few of the philosophical issues more directly to theology than I did in my thesis.

1. The CRC. In the earlier declarations of Children's rights from 1923 and 1959, children are mainly seen as recipients of adult care and protection, but in the UNCRC, they are seen as rights holders with a voice of their own. The child has rights and is given a voice, when the convention states that the child should be listened to in all decisions that affect it and that its views should be given weight according to its evolving capacities, that is to the level of its maturity.

It is a misunderstanding when people believe that the CRC rejects the family or is about setting children up against their parents. On the contrary, the convention protects families from unnecessary interventions from the state and restricts such interventions to the occasions when the development and wellbeing of the child is at serious risk. Children are seen within the context of family and community, but the CRC makes it clear that parent and

community need to be open to the evolving capacities of the child in their guidance and support. They do not own the child. Rune will speak more about this relation.

By insisting on seeing children as subjects, the CRC connects to an important aspect of Christian theology. Children are not humans to be. They are created in the image of God, fully human from the beginning and their lives matter, not only as future adults but in their own lives here and now. When children are brought to Jesus in Matthew 19 and the disciples want to send them away, Jesus doesn't say: let them bring their children. He says let the children come and do not hinder them, thus making the children themselves subjects in the act of coming to him. To me, this indicates that children are to be taken seriously as subjects also in Christian theology. They are not in the text only as examples to or responsibilities of adults, but have their own access and relationship to Jesus, to God.

2. The language of rights. In his introduction, Keith mentioned some of the reasons why some Christian theologians have been reluctant to use the language of rights. It is not seen as appropriate to the relation between parents and children because of its non-personal nature, it is said to imply that human beings have a standing over against God. And While I agree that there may be risks involved in using the language of rights, I think that some of these risks mainly relate to some specific understandings of rights, but not to all of them.

3. The myth of the rational and independent Man. What does it take to be a rights holder? A common figure of thought in rights discourse is the rational and free person, whose rights protect his possibilities to make free choices. In this model, dependence is to be won and the ability to reason and to follow the rules you set up for yourself are essential. To have rights is to be able to make claims. This is an image of the human being that not only disqualifies the child from being a rights holder, but also is far from compatible with most Christian theological understandings of the basic human condition. It is an ideal that disregards the relations of interdependence that we live in and from and that tends to overlook the gap between our ideals and our ability to put them into action.

But I also see another common understanding of rights as problematic. In this model, rights are an expression of interests. To have rights is to have your interests seen to, whether they be food and shelter or education and emotional safety. It is often used to defend children as rights holders without demanding intellectual maturity from them. In my opinion it misses an important thing though, and it is the question of voice. Having rights must be something more than being the object of someone else's generosity. In some ways it is also about being seen as a subject and given the opportunity to have a say, in whatever way is possible, and to be listened to.

Therefore I prefer relational models as a way of understanding rights. The language of rights was never meant to talk about the relation between Creator and Creature. It is about us human beings and our relations to each other. In a more recent paper than the one used by Hauerwas, Rowan Williams is more optimistic when it comes to reconnecting human rights and religious conviction. The clue, he says, and this is what I also found in my study, is to understand rights not against a background of individual claims but of what is involved in mutual recognition between human beings. Rights language should be seen as expressions of the mutual recognition that we owe each other as beings with dignity. It is about ascribing and recognizing dignity and as a society and international community trying to secure means by which this dignity can be upheld and protected. In John Wall's relational, mutuality-oriented model of human right, the circle of those who are recognized as rights holders has widened through the centuries. From free men to former slaves, women, ethnic minorities, children and persons with disabilities, new groups have been included as holders of rights and voices to be listened to. They have been acknowledged as co-creators of life in a relation of mutual dependence. Therefore, I like the passage in Entry Point about standing with the angels as advocates for children. Working together with others for Children's rights is one way of doing that.

4. Law and love. I believe that Christian theology in general and CT in particular needs to reflect more on the relation between law and love. To do this we need to reflect on what it is to live in a society and in a community, on the relation between faith and politics and

between personal relations and societal relations. God gave the people of Israel its law and thereby established them as a community with mutual responsibilities and, since they also had the system of judges, you could say that they were given rights. Those of us living in a protestant tradition have sometimes been told that the main purpose of the law is to make us aware of our need of salvation? This disregards the whole issue of living together as a society and making it work. The law is not only a legal instrument. It also codifies ideals and beliefs about human relations. That is another reason for supporting the notion of Children's rights. These are a way of putting children in the midst of our societies and of listening to their voices.

### Rune

“The tension between the right of children to choose their own faith, and the right of children to be brought up in the faith of their close community”.

### Discussion

We have a Universal declaration, but the context and response will be cultural! Can we as churches, culturally situated somewhere, can we help in the cultural translation of these rights?

Rune talked about the need for culture to transform with the gospel shining on it. But there is a problem with the assumption that all cultures are transforming at the same level and therefore will respond to global issues in the same way at the same time. In Africa, they're all at different levels of what the gospel is doing to the cultures. The church is caught and instead of responding Biblically, it responds culturally or with the status quo, then there is no voice against what is unjust.

The conversations on children's rights in churches mix up love, faith, politics and personal and societal relationships. The language of rights is not good to use between parents and children. 'Rights' is legal language. These conventions and rights have more functions than law. They can be statements about being humans living together in society. The rights discussions have more functions they are also a way of shaping our views of children. I think that those of us who come from a protestant setting need to do more theology on law. We've been told the function of the law is to teach us a way to salvation. We haven't been taught about law being used to keep society together. Rights are a way to express our responsibility to each other. A relationship-based theory of rights fits better with Christianity.

IF there is an urgent work to be done, we need to clarify the questions we're going to try and answer. For example, did you at all ask the question: is the UNCRC right? Is what sense is it right? How much reflection, how far have we reflected on the rights, the observed and the unobserved. All of the UNCRC declarations have some aspects that don't work because they don't observe. There is a basic assumption that we should take the declarations as our norm. I don't think the declarations give us a definition or description of a child. I think it's a very basic legal safety net. You can identify particular things which state what authorities ought to be doing and should be held accountable for. But when you get down to defining relationships by rights, you have eternal litigation! The question of what the actual service of what the rights can actually do, is important. When we see it's more unobserved. I think it's quite wrong to belittle or try to ignore or be non-observers of the rights, but if we go that way or not, we go up against the fact of non-observation. We have to live through and struggle with the non-observation. We could simply say, they're not being observed, so we'll have a more stringent campaign to get more. The much bigger question is: how do we live and what is the right of God that is over and above any declaration of the rights?

We can't discard it just because it came from the West. We need critiques of our cultures/societies. But we need something to critique the conventions – they lack the social aspect of the conventions – we need theology, and the conventions to critique our theology. The right of religion was the one question that almost stopped the convention. Many Islamic countries would not endorse article 14 that gives children the right to religious freedom.

This convention of children's rights is a pain in the neck for practitioners. WV has introduced the convention as a potential place for conversation, but the church leaders have left the table. If that's what you use for children's rights, to back up your children's ministry, then that is not what we want to have. There is no clear statement for the church, no theological understanding of how to relate. It's now nothing but political pressure. The cruel reality is that children are being refused their basic rights, existing states are blind in their own political frameworks, and the church lacks capacity ongoing reflection. We as Christians are always in an uncomfortable position. "What the soul is for the body, the church is for the world." The church has no capacity to respond to this aggressive environment that is advancing through government, media, etc. all of which influence children in a negative way. When we talk about rights with churches, it's like opening a can of worms. If we're at least having a conversation with the government and the church, that would be a cool thing to do.

### Coda

Maria and Keith reflect on the current UNICEF/WCC initiative on Child Friendly Churches where theologians were asked to be engaged with the UNCRC as it related to churches worldwide.

## 1. Plenary Feedback and emerging questions (John)

### *i) Does Christian activism with children tend towards being C without T?*

A lot of confusion around the ambiguity between C and T.

Some of the initial papers addressed CT and asked what CT would offer to help them in their job. Haddon regrets if he has given the impression that Matthew 18 will provide all the answers. The passage puts the child in the centre of the whole Gospel and no CT can hope to encompass all the implications of that. CT is not something to be brought to the action but something that arises from the action.

Those taking care of children need good theology and often this is not provided.

Need to be much more courageous to talk theology in our practice. Sociologists use their language uninhibitedly. In some situations of abuse, theological language is very important.

A challenge is to live a lifestyle that is practical and 'followable'.

We don't want CT to become concretized.

Engagement with children takes us to a place where we have a radically new perspective on theology. But it is possible to do CT without being engaged with children.

In LAM the discovery of the importance of context was key. It was important to position yourself in the underside of society, not in a position of power. The encounter with the child in scripture helps me to be a better grandfather.

How is it that Biblical scholars and theologians following Jesus had systematically ignored the child?

Perhaps the problem is 'theologians at risk'.

### *ii) The Rights of the Child*

A key document is the UN CRC but there is a whole spectrum of ways in which it is observed or unobserved.

Impacting on this are:

- Culture
- Family
- The state
- The church

Can churches help to interpret the Human Rights declaration into particular contexts?

The Gospel needs to shine on each culture. Not all cultures respond equally to these issues.

Theologians need to distinguish more between law and love;

The rights language comes from a legal approach and this is not appropriate in a family situation. Theologians need to reflect more on the function of law in creating a good society.

There is urgent work to be done because these ideas are being developed and implemented in policy. A lot of human rights declarations claim to work but do not. We should not assume that the CRC reflects Bible priorities.

Compare CRC with the Ten Commandments – both address the human condition and aim to help societies live together.

How much does the CRC build from the idea of human perfectability.

We need to be able to critique our culture but don't need to throw it away because many good things came from Europe. But we also need to critique the CRC.

Practical concerns mean that activists have to use 'rights language' rather than theological language but we have to be careful that this doesn't marginalise theology.

What the soul is for the body the church is for the world.

## 2. Two tracks:

*T without C? – the challenge and opportunity to CT of theology in academy and pulpit.*  
(Victor; Jayakumar)

### Child Theology and the Academy

The academy here represents all institutions whose primary purpose is the theological enterprise. This includes to a large extent, seminaries, faculties of theology and Bible colleges. The academy serves the purpose of training leaders for the church and the purpose of theology in the academy is to critically examine the Christian faith, both in terms of what faith itself is and what is contained in our Christian doctrines.

Theology generally has three audiences: church-goers who have been instructed in Christian doctrine and are seeking a deeper intellectual grasp of their faith, the academy of learning (universities, colleges, the arts, intellectual centres) where faith and doctrine are often questioned, and the culture and world as a whole where Christianity has to justify itself intellectually and in terms of relevance. Of the three, the academy is known for stretching the minds of students in order for them to deal with difficult and critical questions, to bring them to a level of maturity within their discipline (faith and doctrine) and to help them to be leaders in their field.

The relationship between Child Theology and the Academy is in that whatever we may say about 'Child Theology' it is 'theology' and therefore belongs to the academy. Child theology brings a perspective to the theological enterprise that will challenge us to take what Jesus said and did about children seriously. One example of this is what Jesus said and did when he placed a little child in the midst of his disciples in Matthew 18.6 Using this text as a starting point, theologians in the area of Child theology have described this theology as theology done with the child in the midst and seeks to understand both the child as placed by Jesus in the midst of a theological discussion and the meaning of his action in doing this. In other words, not only is the discourse and what Jesus said theological but also his action of placing the Child in the midst. Jesus, himself placed the child at the centre of the disciples' theological discussion about the Kingdom of God and this 'placing' must be understood theologically. Haddon Willmar (2015) calls this a positive engagement of theology and child, the kind of engagement that could have implications for how we read the Bible and do theology.

Child theology therefore needs to find space in the academy in order to contribute to the theological enterprise. The impact of such contribution will be tested not only in the academy by the pulpit and market place where graduates from the academy serve. How this can happen is the

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<sup>6</sup> Keith White, "Insights into Child Theology through the Life and Work of Pandita Ramabai" (October, 2006), 2

question but we can learn from how other theologies that are now part of the academy found space.

### **Possible questions for discussion**

1. What are the challenges to do with introducing Child theology in the academy and what is the way forward?
2. Are there any success stories and what can we learn?

### ***Children and the Bible* (Valdir; Stuart C)**

Ezekiel ch 3

We start with Christ who gives us the eyes to see the child. CT is not an isolated experience but comes with a broader perspective, to listen to all the marginalised, which is linked to listening to Christ himself.

### **The Child in the Bible- Introductory notes for seminar discussion**

Thomas Becon, an Augustinian monk, and chaplain to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer wrote in the early 16th century:

*“A child in Scripture is a wicked man, as he is ignorant and not exercised in godliness”.*

Never has it been easier for you to find solid sources of research to challenge that statement.

Since the turn of the millennium there has been an unprecedented increase in literature investigating extent and nature of references to children and childhood in Scripture.

The collections of well researched essays in the Collections overseen by Marcia Bunce in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 2001 and *The Child in the Bible*, 2008, Carter, Marian. Ch 4 of *All God’s Children*. 2007. Berryman, Jerome W. *Children and the Theologians*, 2009. Richards, Anne. *Children in the Bible*, 2013. And perhaps more controversially, Murphy, James A. *Kids and Kingdom: The Precarious Presence of Children in the Synoptic Gospels*. 2013. Betsworth, Sharon. *Children in Early Christian Narratives*. 2015. ...not to mention the continued stream of reflections that have flowed from the international congresses promoted by CTM.

The reasons for this resurgence of scholarly interest in the Child in Scripture is undoubtedly due in large measure to two tidal changes in the landscape of Christian thought:

- the application of the psycho-social sciences to the understanding of child development and to the recognition of the distinctive place of children and childhood within the framework of Universal Human Rights.
- the greater space given to experiential perspective, within the post-modern understanding of what constitutes knowledge and its acquisition, that has underpinned the development of so-called ‘contextual theologies’.

Children have never been so visible within Western society as at present and so it has never been more appropriate for Christians to revisit the foundational texts of our faith to inform our understanding and actions- and as the Biblical studies like those mentioned above make clear, the Scriptures themselves present us with a world -view of humanity and our Creator in which the Child is placed consistently centre-stage within the great sweep of Salvation history. Children are seriously present.

Given this recognition of the seriousness with which children are set within the context of God’s dealings with humanity, it seems all the more necessary that our rediscovery of children in the Bible should be matched by a careful review of the ways in which we deal with their presence and understand their voice in Scripture.

It is our intention to facilitate discussion around the challenges associated with the appropriate interpretation of Scripture’s references to children and childhood. We will focus on three of the ways in which the church has drawn upon biblical references to children and childhood to inform its faith and practice:

### **1. Children and childhood as metaphor for the quality of Christian discipleship.**

The text most commonly interpreted in this way is the Matthew narrative of Jesus setting the child at his side and enjoining his disciples to change and become as little children. This of course leaves it for the reader to understand what little children are like. Typically, qualities such as humility, purity and simple faith, are suggested and commended as proper goals for mature Christian behaviour. However, as societal attitudes towards children have developed so has their metaphorical potential to inform Christian thinking in terms of theological understanding and models of discipleship. Particularly the recognition of the unique and equal value and rights of the child, alongside those of each and every other societal member and grouping, has opened fresh space for the child to be understood and to inform in the context of theological reflection. As an example of this Karl Rahner, in his 'Ideas for a Theology of Childhood' explores this: "*What children and child-like adults have in common is '... a state in which we are open to expect the unexpected, to commit ourselves to the incalculable, a state which endows us with the power still to be able to play, to recognize the powers presiding over existence are greater than our own designs, and to submit to their control as our deepest good'*".

However, the soil of metaphor can grow an endless variety of interpretations. Questions must therefore be asked regarding the how boundaries might be set to legitimize the use of children and childhood as exemplars or standards for Christian behaviour and belief. How might such criteria be established? What weights should be given to the scriptural context or contemporary attitudes towards children in doing so? What of the different perceptions of childhood current in our multi-cultural and multi-faith society?

*Comments:* Why do we need to have boundaries? They may not be limits – they could be for guidance. We need to ask if our attitudes are truthful – for example, are children innocent or corrupt? Even if the metaphor refers to the Nation of Israel or to adults, we still need to ask ourselves why the metaphor of child(ren) was chosen.

## **2. A second approach has been to find in biblical narratives involving real children, pointers to how we can more properly think about God in Christ.**

An example of this is the treatment commonly given to the passages in the Synoptics in which Jesus receives small children brought to him, rebuking the disciples for their dismissive and rejecting attitude. Increased societal sensitivity to the marginalization experienced by children has prompted treatments of these texts that dispense with the metaphorical approach, recognizing instead real children who Jesus is glad to welcome and bless, preferring instead to recognise in them a revelation of Jesus as a 'Friend of Little Children'. Building upon concern for the weak and vulnerable, including orphans repeatedly articulated in the Old Testament, the behaviour of Jesus helps to enlarge our understanding of the nature of God in Christ. Add this to other examples of Jesus 'embracing children' by intervening with Kingdom power on their behalf and above all to the event of his incarnation itself in which he embraces their very childhood, then the potential to gain fresh theological insights becomes evident.

Haddon has written: 'In order to speak of God, the Word of God used many human words and many components of human experience, amongst them, the child.' The image of Jesus as 'Friend of Little Children' has proved to be an enduring and influential incentive to Christian social involvement. The scene became a common theme of religious art from the Reformation onwards and encourages an '*imitatio Christi*' application of the text that has continued to incentivise Christian people to engage in social action on behalf of children in their existential need: Jesus cared for rejected children, so as a follower of Jesus I should as well. An example of this is found in the donation of a painting entitled, 'Suffer the little children to come to me', to the newly established Foundling Hospital for abandoned children in London, by the artist, Revd. James Wills in 1746. To give a more contemporary example, Gustavo Gutierrez in his seminal work, *Option for the Poor*, cites Mtt.19:4 and writes:

*"When the Lord cries, "Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these", we immediately think of docility and trust. We miss the radicality of Jesus' message. In the cultural world of Jesus' time children were regarded as defectives. Together with the poor, the sick, and women, they were relegated to the status of the inconsequential. This shocks our modern sensitivity. To be "such as these" therefore to be as children, means being insignificant, someone who has no value in the eyes of society."*

Questions that we might explore in developing this approach might include to what extent it is appropriate to see in real biblical children representatives of the poor, the sick and other socially deprived groups, and make this the basis of broadening our interpretation of the narratives in which they figure? Or does the tendency to equate children with powerlessness and vulnerability unduly limit the value that we might find in narratives involving children in Scripture? How else has God demonstrated his valuing of children and childhood in Scriptural narratives and in what ways might we allow these texts to interact with what we ourselves have encountered of God in our personal dealings with children.

*Comment:* This may be part of the reason that scholars overlooked children in the past is this attitude – they were seen as a metaphor for the poor.. There has always been this tendency to explain away the more radical words of Jesus. While the children are the marginalised in Luke’s Gospel, by the time you reach Acts, the marginalised are the Gentiles.

*“Every man wants to be a king; every king wants to be God; only God wants to be a child!”*

Why doesn’t Jesus speak to the children? But they were part of the audience.

### **3. A third appreciation of the value of children as we meet them in Scripture, and one that has been hugely influential in my personal ministry, is when we see them, either actively or passively, becoming catalytic agents of events in salvation history.**

Naaman’s Israelite slave girl, the young Samuel speak transformational truth across the boundaries of religion and status. Jairus’ 12 year-old daughter, the son of the widow of Nain and the demon possessed child of a desperate father, all become, albeit passively, the focus of the in-breaking of the Kingdom in Jesus’ ministry as narrated by Luke who also records for us how eschatological hope and joy is rekindled in the hearts of Simeon and Ana as they recognise the Christ of God in the person of the child in the arms of Mary and Joseph. Given the often dismissive attitude in society and church towards the value of children, their ‘missional’ potential has commonly been overlooked.

For those involved in mission, however, this potential has often been noted and valued.

John Wesley wrote in his diaries of the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1784 that from time to time 'revival would begin with children and spread to adults: *"God begins His work in children. Thus it has also been in Cornwall, Manchester and Epworth. Thus the flame spreads to those of riper years, 'til at length they all know Him, and praise Him from the least to the greatest."*

Robert Raikes, a contemporary of the Wesleys and one of the founders of the Sunday School movement offering education to poor children, in a letter in March 1792 commented, *"You would have been agreeably struck with the fixed attention of their little minds. I dare say many went home and told the story (about Joseph) to their parents."*

This was certainly our experience with the PEPE’s, and I have heard mother’s from every type of community from the Andes to the Amazon and from the Favelas of São Paulo to the arid Sertão of the NE of Brazil, make the comment: *"All I know about God, I have learnt from my 5 year old."*

Questions arising from this approach might include reflection on how we can recognize and value this mission potential of children without exploiting them to further a wider mission agenda, and also where the boundaries lie between recognizing the work of the Spirit of God through them whilst continuing to recognise the limitations appropriate to their state of childhood development.

It is our hope that discussion within this framework will make us more able to, ‘present ourselves to God as approved workers, (with children...) who have no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.- 2Tim.2:15

*Comments:* how much can we use children as evangelists?



### 3. Plenary feedback and emerging questions (Bill; Karissa)

#### *T without C? – the challenge and opportunity to CT of theology in academy and pulpit.*

If CT wants to be influential it should take note of what other theologies (Liberation; Feminist etc.) have done. Needs to become involved in more general theological discussions, not just aim to get into the academy. Is the Academy a step to being involved in these general issues? Are we ready to get into the Academy? We recognise the difficulty of inviting seminaries and Universities to take on another subject when there isn't a constituency behind it, as there is with Feminist and Black theology. How then do we package this? can we even package this? How do we bring this to the table? It was good to appreciate where we are in this stage of CT.

There is a big problem about the child's voice being heard. Needs to have adults who are motivated to work in this area. Children are of interest to the academy, but they are taken off into departments of medicine, child development, education, and psychology – there they are understood, managed, and nurtured, but what we are proposing is that the child actually says something in a theological context. There is the whole problem of what the voice of the child actually is. It's no good for adults to say there is a great constituency of children and we have to represent them. There is a big problem about the child's voice, because usually it is the voice of the adult. That is a basic question about getting CT going.

We need to learn from women and liberation theology, proposing a new topic, but now in systematic theology and bible studies, you read about them, because there are theologians working in those matters. You have books on different books of the Bible, and topics, etc. They are pointing out something from their specificity are speaking to their wider area (systematics, place of the poor, gender, family, etc.). CT has a lot of wider things that has a lot to share about, e.g. the concept/doctrine of sin, anthropology, etc. More even than feminist and liberation theology. If we want CT not to be separated, it must be involved in wider areas of theology as fem and lib did.

We're saying that we need to notice the child saying something in a particular context. So long as the children are represented by us... leads to the distinction of CTM to get CT taken up in academic institutions and the necessary way in which if it's going to get anywhere, there have to be academics who get interested and say this is what I want to do and work at, not because I want to be an agent from outside. You can't organize that kind of thing. So it comes back to something simple – what is it that might interest people to do this kind of work? Not a case of organising a movement to pressure academics into studying CT. I get anxious about trying to promote a movement, I think it is much better to recruit people who can write cogently and well and produce good work, and if it is good enough people will read it.

There needs to be enough publications to put together courses. An unbelievably large number of publications are needed to break into the academic world. A lot of work has gone into conference reporting – what if one of the things coming out of these conferences was an anthology – gathering around a specific issue and producing papers around that? Both for theology to grow in the academy and for it to have some impact in church reality there need to be books to read. Perhaps could set up an online journal (two issues a year) to encourage students to write and submit material.

I think we've been trapped from the beginning. We've wanted to influence (prematurely?), we're not hostile to childhood studies, but the work we did with the disciples of James Loder speaks of our interest, and our work with Marcia. But I think we have been so anxious to build a movement and identity, and be trapped with a label from the beginning (no theology without a child in the midst), instead of saying, this is what we have to say and let's just say it and see what happens. Marcia's books have put on the books that there are a lot of children in the history of the church. We can liberate ourselves from saying we're a movement to organize and influence whatever. That liberates us and everyone to do what they want to do. The political power behind kids isn't really behind theology. Children are not speaking for themselves in the seminaries. I'm suspicious of having the children voices, it's what they've been put up to by the adult who's organized it. This is where the child is a human being and is not alone who actually depends upon others for their value and significance to be voiced. The message of children is in their being and their life, which goes beyond what they can see – and this is true of human beings all the way through. The meaning of

human beings, we depend upon other people and the way we're interpreted, but that doesn't have as much power.

It would be helpful if it were clearer what CT is. Looking at the need for definitions – definition of CT for example. We need something more tangible to hold onto and tell people about, through the writing of it we might be able to cut through publications and bring up clarifications and examples.

Child theology has a lot to say, the important of context, as a basic element of doing theology. Child theology needs to develop *more than a methodology* – what about child theology answering to the main questions of theology. And it is not about getting into the academy, it is about getting into wider Christian theology.

We need to be careful that we don't exaggerate the importance of the academy – the church has a part to play too. there is a sense in which child theology can inform a lot of people in need in the church.

### ***Children and the Bible***

Three headings which describe how we find children in the Scripture.

- What does becoming like children look like? Or is it more the inherent qualities – dependency, etc. Are there ways we need to put boundaries on the use of metaphors or can we say the child can be anything?
- Second approach, the Bible presents us with real children who are actively or passively part of bringing the Kingdom – real children being agents of salvation. If God deals with children that way, what does that say about God? Jesus receiving the children, etc.
- Thirdly – where do we see children becoming agents of missional impact, taking the mission of God forward as we've perhaps witnessed them bringing faith to families etc. To what level can we "exploit" children to be vehicles of the kingdom? What are the limits?

The Bible does not speak as much about children as we expect and it doesn't make much distinction between child and adult. Only about 12 children in the Bible speak. The Bible speaks of children not in an explicit way, but implicit. Children are always present among the adults and they don't need to be specifically singled out. But Jesus made a huge difference between adults and children. We should probably not think of any child when thinking Matt 18. The word "children" often refers to all of God's "children." We're all children to God.

We began by recognising that there is now a lot more material available to support research into the place and appearance and role of the child within the narratives of the bible. There is a growing literature. I was interested to see that some of us around the table were unacquainted with much of this literature. How can we make more public the study resources that are available and out there?

What does 'become like children' mean? Does that open the door to investigating possible qualities of childhood – or is it talking about some of the more inherent qualities of being a child?

What does that tell us what God is like if God deals with us in the kind of way that allows children to be agents of salvation? Where do we see children being agents of missional impact?

The bible does not talk about children as much as we might expect – the bible does not make much difference does not make much of the difference between the acts and speech of the children.

We are all children of God – no matter how old we are. To become like a child, not like a real naughty child. When we speak of the children of the bible, we need to ask ourselves what is the bible?

Important question is – who is the child? – we need to give a definition of the person who is called child. From this definition we can see how the adult is (because the adult is opposite to the child).

## **4. The Child: reality and concepts (plenary and groups) (Haddon; Nicolas)**

There are simple issues for example, age, and what age are we referring to? There are also questions about what are the characteristic qualities of the child, and whether they are quite different from the qualities that make up adults, or whether they are just variations in form of the

same characteristics? And there are questions which came up this afternoon about how we understand the relation between childhood and adulthood.

***Who is the child in the midst? Hermeneutics, mystery and play in Child Theology***

*After all, who am I when I do not play? A poor orphan abandoned on the streets of sensations, shivering in corners of Reality, having to sleep on the steps of Sadness and eat the bread given by Fantasy.*

Fernando Pessoa

One day I was walking with Benjamin, my step-son, an eight year old boy, and his brother. I said to him: "You know Benjamin, I'm writing a book on theology and children". He turns, looks at me very seriously in the eye and says: "I guess you have talked to children, right? Because if you talk about God and children, you have to say what they think." I replied, with a fair mixture of surprise, cuteness and embarrassment: "Exactly! That's why I'm telling you." "Okay", he answered immediately, in a forgiving and accepting tone. This was a small gesture that proves once again what child theology (CT) poses: children claim for their place, challenging our intentions and speeches.

One of the distinctive elements of Child Theology Movement (CTM) has been to observe that very child Jesus brought among his disciples as a metaphor of the kingdom (Matthew 18.1-5), an axiological epicenter of theological task. Thus, the CTM is located within a tradition that already existed for decades, and that starts with the so-called "contextual theologies" as liberation theology or feminist theology. These currents question dogmatism that silence and hide the voice of the diversity of subjects that are part of our contexts, and denounce such silencing as a dynamic power by the various structures and hegemonic discourses in the church or theological work. Such silencing is the manifestation of an act of oppression at all levels of life. Just as the poor in liberation theology and women in feminist theology, the child in the midst is empowered through the possibility to speak of God.

Precisely for this reason, the CTM faces the same questions and possible limitations that are reflected in the above proposals. Liberation theology was confronted by questions such as: who are the poor we are talking about? Is that a wide enough concept to cover the various types of oppression in the sectors where it is concentrated? Does such a category describe the complexity of the contexts from which it departs? Like feminist theologies: Which woman are we talking about? Does it refer to a black, white, Asian, rich, poor woman?

The CTM is at the same crossroads, which is not negative: it is a dilemma that is part of the richness of its proposal. Once we put the child in the middle, the question arises: which child are we talking about? Here emerges a hermeneutical problem: Does CTM question the silence around a child within the theological and ecclesial work, but can reach certain reductionism if it does not offer tools to analyze, deconstruct and question the types of concept we put on the table respect to childhood as a category. Thus, beyond good intentions, we could continue to maintain essentialist and adult-centered conceptions of the child.

With that as a background, here are two issues that I am interested in emphasizing: the *place* and *meaning* of children in the work of the CTM.

With respect to place, I notice that many times even though children are put as the subject, they are still *external* to the threads of the theological discussion. What I mean is that the problem occurs not only when it comes to speak from or about children, but even when we refer to them as a metaphor. Is there not the danger to fail in an *a priori* conception when we endorse children as a metaphor? Does not perhaps the same child speak in his/her own corporeality, logic, etc. of the theological; that is, it manifests itself as a place of revelation?

With respect to the second element -*meaning*-, as already mentioned, we are facing the challenge of the plurality of definitions of childhood, but also the need to build a hermeneutical exercise and a solid practice regarding the need to constantly redefine conceptions of childhood. But we speak of a hermeneutics that not only focus on specific conceptions of particular objects but on everything that comes into play within this exercise. Here are some questions: should we have a specific definition on children? Or should we rather open its polyphony meaning? From where

would we place this heterogeneity of meanings? Moreover, what is the theological specificity of this exercise of placing meaning?

Arriving into the problem of meaning and the place of children leads us into the sinuous fields of philosophical and theological speculation regarding hermeneutics that, far from being something abstract, can be the basis to build new experiences and sensitivities regarding the CTM. This also has to do with a personal concern -which I believe many may share- on the fact that the CT is not one more contextual theology, but it has a specificity that has much to contribute to theological exercise, in general, as well to the transformation of social and spiritual worldviews. For this reason, I think one way of doing it is to deepen on the hermeneutical implications that come into play, which can be projected from this particular case to the theological task in general.

### In search of the *meaning* of childhood

In this section I would like to concentrate on the understanding of *meaning*. When we discuss what we understand with regard to children, we are not only referring to the object itself, but also what it means for us *to make sense* about an object. Does it mean to describe its characteristics? Is it to arrive at a definition of universal consensus?

The search for meaning – that is, the identification, interpretation and description of a particular element in our context- has to do with two aspects for those seeking meaning: the *existential* and the *discursive*. The first relates specifically with the *contextual*, *relational* and *bodiless* aspects of both the subject and the object in the process of constructing meaning. The second refers to the discursive mediation involving all kinds of description of the context. The reality -in many ways not only- emerges from the discursive construction that mediates through the symbolic and relational that intervenes to define what it is (for “us”) This reminds the famous heideggerian distinction between the *ontic* (as the world of beings, objects, what is presented in front of us) and the *ontological* (the being, which is what is stated with regard to this particular meeting object)

The classic work of Wilhelm Weischedel (mentioned by Holzapfel, 2003: 17-18) develops four characteristics linked to the construction of meaning:

1. The meaning is always linked to the universal, that is, to the development of an existential statement.
2. The search for meaning evidence and generate a much broader *sense chain* linked to object.
3. The human being exists from and through these chains, so we can conclude that the meaning is a dynamic element.
4. When one wonders where these chains end, the answer is usually a "mystery" (being, God, nature, existence, etc.)

This description shows some important elements to consider. First, the construction of meaning is linked to a complex set of existential and relational elements, which calls into question the still lingering deductive and idealistic modalities on the possibility of describing phenomena “objectively”. Second, the construction of meaning involves a practice of conflict of interpretation between all the elements that come into play in its exercise. Here the dimension of power that always fits any search for meaning in sight. Moreover: this implicates the political dimension of all hermeneutical process. And third, any search for meaning is always projected in, through and to the mystery (the *abyss* as Heidegger would say, or the *excess*, as Lacan would say).

Another philosopher, Ernesto Laclau (1996: 43-68), speaks that the meanings are circulating. He calls them *floating signifiers*. Laclau claims that all significant finds their meaning by articulating various specific demands. For example, the term “nation” can have many meanings – even in antagonistic terms - as it responds to different demands, times, contexts and groups. This, again, raises questions on the essentialist views about the “meaning” of an element across borders and focused only on the object as isolated and tight-frames elements.

In this regard, meaning not only has to do with the content that describes an object but also with what it is exposing on the subject and context for interpretation. This reminds me of what Theodor Adorno (1983: 78) calls *the paradoxical dimension of the artwork*: on one hand, it *reflects* the reality as it is while, on the other, acts as a *negation* of it, as critical instance. What the artwork

depicts in form and content is not only a reflection of reality (by which it legitimates the context, as Adorno recognizes) but also as a performance of what happens in society.

Going back to children, I would like to raise two aspects from what has been said until here (the second aspect will be developed in the next section) First, *speaking of the meaning of that child in the midst refer to the disruptive dimension of their presence*. On the one hand, the meaning of that child evokes not only a definition of itself but a set of elements that come into play, such as the types of worldview around age social hierarchies, social problems and dynamics, etc.

But on the other hand, the child at the midst highlights the *projections* we make in the moment of enunciation; that is, our prejudices, visions, concepts, etc., about life, existence and process. For this reason, I always say that we need to pay attention to the romantic visions and idealizations we place on children. Of course we should be critical of them, but also analyze them carefully as they show our own limitations. Why do we project on children an image of innocence, tenderness and purity? Again, the child in the midst confronts us to our own limitations and desires.

In short, the hermeneutical power of the child in the midst is not only related to the contribution of a specific definition that enters to the theological work but especially in the possibility of its subject to expose and demonstrate a new vision of God from reality and us same. The child becomes a revelation space, which creates a conflict of interpretations about our context, about ourselves and our worldviews, and limitations of our conceptions of the divine.

### Mystery and child theology: towards a playful onto-theo-logy

The second important element is *the mystagogical dimension of the child's place*. We spoke that the characteristics of meaning is to project into the *abyss of existence* (Heidegger, 1999) and the meaning of depth in existence and the question of ultimate concern (Tillich, 1964). In other words, it is an instance of indeterminacy that challenges the established. All meanings *are played* between its specificity and an amount of potential significances, which in turn evokes an amount of possible practices and interpretations.

Here one of the important elements that is the *playful dimension* of hermeneutics. Philosophy, from Heidegger to Agamben, has raised this dimension as a way to question the modern mentality, with its thirst for determination or finding –as Leibniz will say- the “sufficient reason” of all things, evoking a sense of objectivity and putting the reason as epicenter, and overrides the body. Therefore, this *playful reason* (Holzapfel, 2003) means the “jumping game between the foundation and non-foundation”, that is, between the meaning that reminds the specific object and the feeling that it wakes (me) up on its chances of signifying much more.

Two elements on the subject of playfulness and meaning of mystery. First, *playfulness* has to do with enjoyment. Heidegger says (1999: 188), commenting on Heraclitus and his aphorism about the child-king:

*He plays because he plays... The game is not a why... He remains just play: as high and deep... The question that remains is whether we and how we, hearing the breaks of this game, can co-play and insert ourselves in the game.*

This enjoyment of playfulness has to do with bodily dimension of meaning that challenges typical logo-centrism and rationalism of modernity, which after all determines human praxis itself (Alves, 1982; Rivera, 2015). This aesthetic element of meaning is also found in patristic theology, when Thomas Aquinas speaks of play, as a practice that gives satisfaction and that is not directed to other ends but develop itself. Or Gregory the Theologian, that speaks of the *logos* as decoration of the world.

In short, to talk about the meaning from the playful, aesthetic and bodily dimension means valuing and empowering the presence, place and practice of children from its own specificity, and not as something sufficient in its own definition, but as an instance that projects its beauty through play in its hideouts and surprises, movements and gestures that opens up the world we are in. Here the emergence of children against adult normativities, especially when it comes to what is and how theology is signed up. This is aligned on what the CTM says about theology not as an academic and professional discipline but as a practice that involves anyone who reflect on the divine economy.

The second element linked to the mystagogic and playful dimension of meaning has to do with the transcendent projection of the divine that manifests in the child at the midst. This relates to what Haddon Willmer and Keith White mention in *Entry Point*: “the child has become a concrete universal symbol of hope” (Willmer and White, 2013: 29). The disruption of transcendence and the divine otherness doesn't have to do with a metaphysical distinction of the divine but, on the contrary, the fact that through the exhibition produced by the presence of the child manifest the new, the unknown and what exceeds reality, and all that was hidden from our eyes. Here the theological epicenter of the child in the midst: to manifest /reveal God's action from its inherent otherness enrolled in the ways in which history can/needs to be. In the words of Emmanuel Levinas (2014: 10): “It is not certainly about making subjective the transcendence but to wonder of subjectivity... as the same way of the metaphysical.”

Transcendence in the playful dimension of meaning has to do with the denouncement, and exposing the reality as it is and seeks to legitimize itself, but from a transforming instance. The play is a practice done in every place and context, manifesting the possibility that things can have another meaning, whatever their situation (Huizinga, 2012). There, again, an elementary theological element: God is a God who plays (*deus ludens*) in an adverse context as the world is, but showing its beauty by the surprise and beauty inherent to it (Golub, 2004). This is manifested in humans (*homo ludens*) that always transcends reality, playing with it, where spirituality is manifested as a possibility-of-being (*luden sacer*)

Finally, we can say that the act of Jesus to place the child in the midst shows two central elements of theology in its playful and transcendental dimension. First, *that it departs from a concrete gesture of irruption*. It does not imply rational speculation but body movements amid a context of relationships, which mobilizes and deconstructs meanings (whether beliefs, theories, ideologies, etc.). Second, *evidence the various elements involved in the theological work*: the action of God revealed in history (taking the child and putting him/her in the middle) to be known in a disruptive way from the complexity of a particular social subject (the child) and redefine our established theological meanings (the kingdom of God). The mystagogic, historical, ideological, corporal, symbolic and discursive are interlocking in a theological act.

### Conclusion: the child at the midst of theological disruption meaning

What we want to propose in this presentation is that when thinking about who the child in the midst is, we can empower its hermeneutical dimension not only from finding specific definitions (which, of course, are necessary to discuss particular contexts but sometimes can transform children in closed and isolated containers of a priori conceptions, or become victims of positivists vices to find objective and shuttered definitions). Rather, this hermeneutical exercise is enriched by focusing on the child as the epicenter of exposing the plurality of meanings and reality. As said, it is a physical and real presence, which invites us to take the play not as “childish” –as a contemptuous vision- but as a way of taking life, faith and theology forward.

Let us conclude with some methodological and epistemological implications of what has been developed until here. The search for meaning around the child at the midst invites us...

1. To recognize that this process evidence an articulation of signifiers about our history, existence, context, and other elements of our life.
2. To apply a hermeneutics of suspicion about what we project as individuals and communities on our definitions of childhood.
3. To note that this search involves a context of inter-subjectivity, where there is a going and coming dynamic, and a place of disruption and exposure, as in any context of dialogue.
4. To understand theology in its playful dimension, and therefore as inherently existential. This goes beyond the argument of the tension between theory and practice around theological task. Theology is experience, at any way it develops. But the important thing is that it is a ludic experience, which manifests itself in gestures, in the enjoyment of history, in the recognition of the variety of dimensions that are possible.

5. To understand that in the meaning of the child in the midst as something dynamic and complex, means that the CT is a critical and political theology, from its prophetic passion that faces context, social relations and political institutions.
6. To recognize that this inherently hermeneutical process of CT makes this proposal a *public theology* (related to the dynamics within the search for “the common” and the tensions of the public sphere), a *critical theology of liberation* (which questions the established meanings, and thus practical power dynamics) and a *theology of hope* (that assumes history as an open space to divine action, thus defining history as an open instance to transcendence, manifested in the exposure of the child's presence and playfulness as a way of approaching reality).

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### Comments/Discussion

Several questions for clarification.

CTM is planning to publish another booklet to explain how CT is related to other contextual theologies. All theologies are contextual. All things in creation have a context but the contexts are forever changing.

What are we looking for with the meaning of the child? There are three main considerations when looking at the meaning of something:

- a) All meaning has to do with existential dimension, the concept and cultural, context
- b) When I try to define something, there other elements and meanings that come around
- c) From decades in philosophy, we are looking for meaning all the time, but where does it end? It begins in God, ends in being and mystery. Mystery has to do with looking for a meaning. There are other elements that come up when try to define something.

‘Floating signifiers’ are a very useful concept – it is not only in our theology that child is a floating signifier, but we are amongst all kinds of ways of trying to catch this concept that is floating, and there is a struggle going on, what do we mean by child? And we have to be aware that we are shaped by commercial messages, by educational theories that want to keep children down. So we have to find an ethically responsible way or deciding what we are letting it signify.

All theologies are contextual. Contextual theologies are theologies. Which one is our point of departure? Secondly, it has to be with the compromise of the child, with a missiological response to particular context. The child is a point of departure, not the only one, but one of many and one that can be brought into dialogue with others including law and politics, etc. The child in the midst is challenging us to talk about law and politics etc. That’s why we talk about it. If we don’t recognize the point of departure, it leads to nothing. The point of departure is a critical issue. It is not just ‘the child in the midst’ but the action of Jesus placing the child and what he said about it. This creates a difference from the other theologies. But we might ask: who is Jesus? We might have different answers and we have to learn to manage the conflicts. so we’re talking about we must think about Jesus put the child, if we have to talk about Jesus without the child, who is Jesus? From where do we answer that question? If not child, it could be woman, indigenous people, the

church, whatever... We'll always have different definitions. We'll never agree who Jesus is. All contextual theologies had the same issues. When I hear: don't forget God is there, it sounds an alarm. The point of departure has to be from our personal lives. It is contextual, but always has to be with God and Jesus. We're always talking about God and Jesus if it's theology. If he placed the child, he wanted to speak to us of the kingdom through the child. God decides to show and speak to us through the child. An option through God. The two extremes are, my truth is the only truth. The other is everyone can think whatever they want. The only solution is to put the solution in the middle. Sometimes we have a bad image of conflict. How can we talk about God with conflict? But yes, we are the ones trying to understand the revelation.

I have difficulty in understanding comparisons between CT and other contextual theologies – there was a point where Keith and Haddon were making some parallels, and then in later writings they were making a distinction between CT and feminist and liberation theologies. In this way we shift to sociology – and I see this in missiology. CT is theology, it is systematic theology, the relation between God and people. So I see CT as theology, not as contextual theology. Because this is only the passage where Jesus proclaims the truth that the Kingdom belongs to children – this revolutionary idea is a deep theological consideration. Jesus doesn't speak about women – the uniqueness is that Jesus speaks about the child.

Is CT located within contextual theology? Yes if you read it so. But two things about this. In my mind, yes, this is unique, in taking one part of creation, and placing that in the midst of a theological discussion and saying something. One interesting question: if it hadn't been called child theology, somewhere between 2001 and 2002, maybe we wouldn't assume we know where it fits in relation to contextual theology. The booklets have been written when there has been a demand from a particular question. Booklet 5 has been in gestation for 5 or 6 years, and I'm writing it – and the question is how does it relate to contextual theology? It's been a huge challenge, because every time I give a paper, I realise I just don't know. So there is a question.

I think the bit of Jesus putting the child in the midst is important, but it goes beyond one instance, that He places more children in our midst because He is still alive. This correlates also that this doesn't justify to children. An early version of Entry Point said Jesus was putting other things in the midst, as an occasion for transformation, it's a playful way of reading the gospel story.

Every theology is contextual fundamentally because of the incarnation. Jesus is never alone. Today He is with the child, tomorrow He is with someone else. Brings the dimension of geography and history. We can only minister out of those environments. It's essential in every theological discourse. To recognize that every theology is contextual is a plus. One temptation is to think Lutheran theology is not contextual. Liberation theology taught us to renounce theologies that labelled themselves as "universal."

The character of universality is given by the sameness of the different points of view. It doesn't necessarily point out to who the child is, but to humanity as the way that God looks at it. Child is the opportunity and the challenge. I find it creative and inspiring. I think is what doing theology means. However, I think there are some, even for the context, there are some variables and non-variables, as well as primaries and secondaries. Like when rich young man comes to ask what he needs to do. The first and the primaries, the way we read the context is how we'll understand. What is primary? – God's view of humanity and the condition. The disciples are talking about secondary stuff. The starting point is to point to the fundamentals. From an Eastern perspective, where do you stop?

I think there are many contexts, but we're mixing them. It's clear that all theologies are contextual and we do it in context, but when we refer to contextual theologies, each of them has contexts. Then the text itself is located in context. The detail we don't have of the child. We don't even know if it was a boy or girl, what economic status, etc. To say CT is the same as contextual theology, I struggle with it for that reason, unless we say which culture becomes the point of departure for the theology.

There is no context if there is no love. There is no context if there is no community. There is an ethical frontier. Love reflected in the way God revealed himself. We can understand love if we see God revealing himself in a context. If we have fear of talking about context, it is because we see it



as something closed. Anthropology insists culture is porous, not something closed. The frontiers of context are porous, and open to the other.

The temptation to lose focus of Christ. We need to recognize that kind of limit. (Liberation theology went off that and put the poor at the centre and the initiator of the theology then denounced it). I'm comfortable with the emphasis of contextual theologies. It's not so much about the child as Jesus who said and acted. The child is a sign of the kingdom, if you could say this in English, what has come out so far is that we haven't arrived yet at definitions or methodology or a child hermeneutic, but you seemed to have arrive, especially point 6, "to recognize this inherently hermeneutical process"

The theology has the potential to become revelational space. Revelational is a gift of God and it's important not to lose sight of Jesus in this process. Because it is a child and not an adult, the reflection will always be disruptive.

One of the exciting things is we look in the scriptures and see the historical event in Mat 18 and that is a revelational event in its own right, but then invites the disciple and to emulate him, whoever receives the child, receives me. As we receive the child in all kinds of other contexts, He will presence himself. So we have the potential of our own encounters, received in the name of Jesus, to become the points of departure for prophetic and constructive confrontation. My life becomes important and can be at the centre of revelation when I receive children in His name. When he sends the disciples out, he invites them in to his messianic mission, but there's something special about the child event.

Why do we have idealized views of children – they're our own projections of what we need or desire. There's a reason we say the child is innocent and cute. We're projecting that as our own desire to have purity, etc. "The child has become a concrete universal symbol of hope."

Differentiate contextualization of theology from enculturation of the Gospel.

From the poem Vermeer by Tomas Tranströmer:

*It hurts to walk through walls,  
it makes you ill but it is necessary.  
The world is one. But walls ...  
And the wall is a part of yourself  
- you may know it or not know it -  
but it is so, for everyone  
except for small children. To them, there is no wall.  
The clear, blue sky stands leaning against the wall.  
It is like a prayer to the void.  
And the void turns its face unto us  
and whispers  
"I'm not empty, I'm open."*

## **5. Exhibition (James G)**

Called "180 degrees" based on Matthew 18. It has a beginning an end. Visit at your convenience.



We were all little children,

180° is dedicated to all those Christians that serve and protect children. Especially those that work in dangerous and difficult places. They are often the unknown or forgotten ministers.

James B Gilbert  
June 2015



### No Power

2000 years ago, there was a group of adults debating a serious question about life and position in the big picture, about success, power, leadership, influence. Their discussion wasn't a bumbling debate, by a group of ego-centric adults. These men did what most of us never do: walked away from their jobs, careers, taking huge risks, to follow Jesus and live off alms.



### No Money

These men had accomplished great things also, cured sickness, cast out demons, preached repentance of sins, fed the poor and distributed alms. They were serious men, on a serious mission to change their nation for good, and they loved their master.



### No Strategy

We can only guess, but during their discussion they may have debated on the qualities and deeds of great leaders like: Abraham, Moses, King David, Elijah, and John the Baptist. They got to the point where they asked their master: *"Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of God?"*



### No Authority

Like the disciples, we keep track of things, conversions, projects, donations, degrees, and other comparisons of success, influence, connections, and accomplishments. .



### No Fame

We know with more resources, power, influence, that we could accomplish so much more good, so much more for the Kingdom. We want to do great things for a great God! Great things are done by great people.



### Greatest

Jesus first called a little child and had him stand among them. Then he warned them, "I tell you the truth, unless you do a "180°" turn and become like this little child, you will never enter the Reign of God!"



### Greatest

So how do we turn ourselves into a little child? How do we return to being little children?



Greatest

We compare ourselves with those we admire, honor and imitate. Like them we may have given up things, helped others, and even walked with the Lord in our ministry



Greatest

He then answered their question:



Greatest

"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven".



Greatest

Jesus first called a little child and placed the child among them. Then he warned them, "I tell you the truth, unless you do a "180°" turn and become like this little child, you will never enter the Reign of God!"

So how do we turn ourselves into a little child? What does it mean to turn around?



## Thursday 28

### 1. Prayers (Victor)

Sing “Amazing Grace”

Life tends to fall into standard routines. Mothers develop this and inculcate it into their children.

2 Cor 4:6-7; Isaiah 64:8

Created not to be empty but to contain something and what we contain is what gives us value. Why does God delight in using ‘cracked pots’? It’s so the life of God will be seen.

Mihai: World Vision is working in Syria. What kind of theology do you show when you meet parents who have just lost their child, or a child who has just seen her parents killed? What do we have to offer the world? Let your heart be broken every day. When your tears dry up you become blind.

### 2. Frances Young responds to CT as she sees it (Haddon)

Will start with a story and invite you to ponder how it relates to what we have been discussing.

Jean Vanier quoted from Mother Teresa: we start with revulsion, move to compassion and end with wonderment. I was sitting at a meal in one of the L’Arche communities and opposite one of the residents was enthusiastic, especially for the red wine. The wine was spilled all down her front, and I was repulsed. On a later occasion at evening prayers, I found myself sitting on a sofa with her..... I found compassion. She was compulsively punching herself. I found myself holding her hand. Then some time later, visiting again, I found she had died. At the wake, one after another got up to describe what she had meant. In the chapel her body lay in peace and I found I had reached the wonderment.

#### a. *Worry about single issue theology*

There are issues about the starting point

Theology has to respond to secular criticism – for example, the Bible endorses slavery, patriarchy, etc. How far can CT be seen as a critique of the tradition and scripture?

Does CT have a distinctive edge of cultural critique as differentiated from theological critique?

Is there something from pre-modern societies relevant for current society?

#### b. *Dangers of projection*

Be careful about projecting ideas onto the cultural group – whether black, disabled, etc. It’s about ‘receiving from’ rather than ‘projecting onto’.

A lot in EP guards against that. Book – Nancy Iceland – *A Disabled God*. She counters the idea that disabled people suffer more than others. Suffering is projected onto them when she says she just needs to get on with life (she is severely disabled). The politically sensitized people with disabilities are very insensitive to carers. Felt they’ve been controlled and disabled by carers. Many projections of the child have been included in the Quito report. Play, trust, dependence, innocence, hope, etc. It’s very important to be conscious of the danger of projection. And yet, there’s the cry for their own voice. How do you get the clients to express?

Many aspects of the child have been highlighted but need to be aware of the need to hear their authentic voice rather than speaking for them. Arthur has no voice of his own; it is only heard through an interpreter.

Autonomy is the word. We’re all “supposed to have” autonomy. This is a deception. The whole ethos of being autonomous is fundamentally damaging. With children, it’s the abuse of children that has also sensitized us. The stress on individual autonomy can be very damaging in relation to disabled people; there is a loss of community, a loss of mutuality.

We've moved from dependence that was not healthy, to independence, that is impossible. But we have to be careful we don't move back too far. We have to hold them both in tension. There are good things about autonomy as well.

Autonomy and dependence need to be considered in mutuality and in a context. The idea of independent adults is illusionary. Tolstoy wrote a play in the 1800's about a master and slave who are thrust into different circumstances, on a desert island. The servant previously seemed dependant on the master, but now the opposite is true.

What can set us free is the welcoming and mutuality of Jesus when he welcomed and brought the child in. Rather than just concentrating on the child – this leads us into projection. We must have Jesus there. There has always been a concentration on becoming like a child (that's not in Luke) and it may deviate us.

**c. *Dignity, love and law***

We accord dignity to another person by receiving something from them. Allowing disabled to help rather than having things done to them. There are stories which tell of people with learning disabilities getting involved in fund raising events, doing things to help rather than things done to and for them. Disability charities have had a lot of critique because they had been a top-down, do things to help, kind of philosophy. By relying on them we give them dignity. Read 'Bleak House' and ponder the character of Mrs Pardiggle.

Rights are often aligned with dignity. The rights language can conspire with humanistic values. Better to see it as a legal framework describing our responsibilities to each other. There was no discussion of competing rights e.g. abortion. It was implicit, but not explicit. A lot of our social conflicts come from our perception of competing rights. Law is important because love and community are so easily corruptible. Love is also confused with lust in our society. Law provides structure to facilitate relationships.

Then there's the whole area of exploitation. I'm sure there's all sorts of attention to C@R. Exploitative aspect of paedophilia. There are areas where the law protects. Sentimentality is a potential issue with children and disabilities.

**d. *The binary choices***

Child vs adult; male vs female; black vs white, academic vs. practitioner etc.

Are we trapped in our need to influence rather than to be ourselves, doing whatever our resources allow. Is it a mistake to be assertive and aggressive? Do we need to liberate ourselves from the desire impact?

It was uncomfortable to be climbing the ladder at the University and visiting L'Arche where the emphasis was to descend the ladder to identify with the people at the bottom.

We have to live with apparent contradictions. We are probably right to say that this approach to theology needs at least a toe hold on those influencing the ministers, but we need to have to hold together tension of both valuing and not valuing. Good theology is about signs. Jesus gave signs rather than putting the world to rights – feeding and healing everyone. In John's gospel, they are pointers, pointers to a changed world.

**e. *Christian anthropology***

The importance of meeting the other is important in post-modern thought. It offers the possibility of disruption and of learning. Can see yourself mirrored and challenged.

Be careful about this spectrum of human development: there is no point as such when the child becomes an adult. A new naivety facilitated by a theology of first and second childhood.

In the Bible, God works through the particular not the general. Particular people were chosen. In the Luke version of the story, it is 'this child' Luke 9:48.

Comment: I don't buy the idea of child being universal. We grow up. I don't see becoming like a child as going back to the ordinary sense of being a child that we think



of. But that kind of universal is useful, because it makes the possibility of the particular of this child, universally available. If we isolate the child vs a universal in the background. Jesus took this child, makes it universally applicable and says something to us.

***f. The Cross***

*Entry Point* had to work hard to put the cross and the child in the same ballpark. It happens with the teaching on humility alongside Philippians 2. There's a bit of a tendency of particularly protestant traditions to focus on the darkness of the cross and the self-denial of being a disciple. My story about discovering the glory of the cross and the glory of God in the cross should perhaps give us a little pause there.

There is a darkness in the lives of children which is quite acute. So I began to ponder the wonderment of a smile of someone like Arthur. The capacity of a child to play and smile in the most extraordinary situations, the resilience that is evident in the ability to switch off in the surroundings and find joy in little things, is extraordinary and deeply humbling.

Perhaps that's one of the signs – children in the midst of circumstances we can't deal with and we don't know how to respond or do because it's all so big, ghastly and horrific. Is that all there is to say about the cross? This darkness and failure. Or is it something about death leading to life? Unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it can't bear fruit. Be careful not to confuse suffering and humility. Loss of control may lead to suffering but not always. Calls to humility to those who do not have power can be oppressive.

***g. Revisiting Matthew 18***

Was Jesus just teasing? It can be seen as parallel to the parable of the mustard seed. The child is a sign of the future. Maybe it's a sign of the new creation. It's like climbing a mountain – you just reach a ridge thinking that's perfection and then realize there's another one. For Gregory of Nissa, because God is eternal, the journey into God is like this, always forward, epictasis. So is becoming like a child about growth potential? In Hebrews, the readers are told they need to be fed more milk because they're not ready for solid food. There's something about maturity which is the potential in the child.

The Cross is the Tree of Life. Life through death.

***Discussion***

Child and the cross both have to do with humility. Phil 2 is about letting go of self and leading to the unknown and possible suffering. When we talk about the cross, we need to be cautious about what aspects of the cross we're talking about. The call to humility and emptying is called to those in power. When used against those who are without power, it can be oppressive. When it comes to children, how do you that without being oppressive? How much can you encourage them to stand up for themselves?

Play music, sports, theatre, and children playing. In Swedish, we have specific word for children's play, and it could be both a good and a bad thing. Setting children's play apart – do they easier step in and out of it? On the other hand the Scandinavian language makes it something that children do and can't come into other aspects of adult life.

I take your point that it was hard work to get the child and the cross together. I was struggling all the way through. Once we decided to make the link between receiving and becoming like a child and taking up your cross, the problem is there. It relates to the practical issue that I want to go on raising re contemporary Christianity, that is child centred. Christianity that tends to push the cross to the side. I think all the way through, the chapter on humility, right up to the last chapter, I was certainly struggling both with the text that I didn't want to submit to simple obvious reading of humble yourself. Maybe we did some over clever work in saying it's not just look up humility, but may correspond with the glory of the cross and the cross as the tree of life. Certainly given all the objections to humility in all its traditional forms, you have to do something with it. And I was thinking of the last chapter where we kind of struggle with the

darkness, maybe almost deliberately, we didn't let ourselves have any easy way out. The world is dark and God is not obvious and easily available. That is pretty desperate. But I was thinking as you were talking, about the passage of children's angels beholding the face of the Father. I think there's glimmers of light in the last chapter (re EP), but that's where I am in thinking of these things. I need to think about what you've said more.

What I'm asking myself is if there is still time for me to make peace with some of the importance of the academy. But I look at you and I sense that the academy that speaks out of you has a peace in it that. But in that peace, there is pain and wonderment. And that is something that I hope I can embrace. I studied theology in Brazil, and when I arrived with my pietistic background at a Lutheran seminary, most of the library in German, and coming to an end of an era where the theological students were divided between Barth and Bultmann. But thinking it's nothing to do with us. Liberation theology was coming in. I wish I'd absorbed more of it, helping us feel the pain of poverty and oppression, bringing in the rage and the conflict of context. I think I spent years of my life struggling with that B and B dichotomy. From a theological point of view that listens to the pain and is able to give words to the pain, but more than that is able to help us and frame and understand it. I think my years in WV helped me with the pain, because of the children. So I hope CT will help us in that regard. I think you are right about talking about single issue theology. You come to it, to theology, out of your own life journey and pain and the peace out of the suffering. It's something we need to bring into our theological journey. Somehow theology goes from agony to a gift. It's not a single issue theology, but out of that experience. I saw it in you. That is an academy that I want.

I think of play in Scandinavian way. And also the parable. One way to leave this climbing upward is to treat the world as the child treats the world, try to make theology more playful. I think parables are a way to do that. The parables are very shocking and if we can't take the shocking truths about them, we are missing something. It would be fruitful to work more with the parables, stories that shock and talk about the most important thing. Playing is what we do when things get too difficult. We make them draw, play etc. as therapy. Playing life when it's too difficult to do. When we're going to grasp the ungraspable, and work with what's impossible to understand, we have to play. It's impossible to grasp God and His kingdom. When he was trying to explain the impossible to those around him, he used parables. Maybe can help us more with understanding the bringing of a child, that is almost like a parable.

Maybe you're just too humble, Frances, your experience as a mother and with Arthur, and what you say about theology and what rescues CT from being a single issue, is that everything a child points to and the Jesus who puts the child in the midst, makes it almost impossible to be a single issue. But the academy problem, speaking from Africa: the problem with theologians in Africa, they have nothing better to do, it's just a career. And meanwhile the church is looking for thought leaders, who can move people through their writing, their brilliant interpretation of God's Word. I'm happy to have a theologian who does that so effectively because they have been a part of the church, but the moment you have professors who stopped going to church 15 years ago, when you talk to them, they're not on a journey, they don't have a story. You represent that model for the academy that everyone is looking for and trying to encourage. In Africa we're looking to reengineer the academy and speak to the issues we all struggle with.

### **3. Resonance: a 'Child Theology' appreciation of *Arthur's Call***

*Haddon Willmer*

Looking for resonance with Child Theology: what can Child Theology learn here?

I value the resonance I hear between *Arthur's Call* and *Entry Point*. It is enriching, stimulating and encouraging. Resonance does not imply close similarity, and certainly not identity or perfect agreement. Resonance opens up new thinking rather than thickens opinion into ideology.

*Entry Point* is intentionally an essay 'towards Child Theology'. It was written and published before *Arthur's Call* appeared. Frances Young had no engagement with Child Theology, as it had grown up from 2001 and as it came to be presented in *Entry Point* and the Child Theology Movement generally. Her book is about 'a journey of faith in the face of severe learning difficulty' rather than with child. Yet I could not read it without seeing that, through telling how she has lived as a

thoughtful Christian theologian with her son Arthur, significant aspects of Child Theology are expressed without the label. Her work helps ours because it deploys the learning, sensitivity and vision of a major theological scholar. It unintentionally brings to CT something we have always desired and have found very little so far: the engagement of good academic theology.

More than that, it does not talk about ‘child’, which always runs the risk of being abstract but rather speaks in narrative and reflective ways of Arthur, one living person in significant relationships. It can therefore be read, if one has the eyes and desire, as an essay of lived child theology. All that Child Theology can say, when it is faced with this book, is that it finds itself rooted and growing in life. It is not voiced as a theory, but comes out through the story. Unless theology lives in that way, unless its thinking is dissolved into action, it is dead and deadly.

I read the first book Frances Young wrote about her life with Arthur (*Face to Face*, 1985) long before Child Theology was invented, and I was deeply moved and instructed by it. By the time *Arthur's Call* appeared in 2014, ten years' work on *Entry Point* had filled my mind with Child Theology. I was by then equipped to see Child Theology when it was coming at me in disguise.

Arthur is Frances' first born son, born in 1967. He was profoundly disabled from birth, cannot talk, or do anything for himself. Frances and her husband Bob cared for Arthur themselves until he was 45, and his parents were in their seventies. Since then, he has been in nearby residential care.

In this life-story is the first resonance with child Theology. Jesus said, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name, receives me.’ In *Entry Point*, chapter 6 explores the meaning of Reception. Arthur is a massive example of reception. Receiving a person cannot be time-limited; all babies need to be received if they are to survive and thrive; some may go on needing the kind of reception babies get when they are much older; Arthur will never get beyond it. (cf *Caring for Life*, Leeds; Mill Grove, London). A parent is someone who is now involved in a life of reception for as long as it is needed. What the receiver does will change over time. It needs to be age-appropriate, but into old-age it is necessary to life. Reception often becomes reciprocal and mutual, between parents and older children. With Arthur, that change to interpersonal reciprocity was not possible.

And this brings us to the second resonance with Child Theology as presented in *Entry Point*.

*Loving my baby, I thought I'd accepted him. But at a deeper level acceptance was hampered by the fact that I simply couldn't understand what had happened. It wasn't just Arthur. He focused my perception of the much bigger problem. If this world was created by the loving purposes of God, how could this sort of thing happen at all? If God intended people to grow to maturity in faith and love, how about those incapable of doing so? p26*

*It was one thing to accept Arthur; it was another to come to terms with the great iceberg of suffering and tragedy he represented. This seemed to resist all attempts at justification. The problem of believing in a good God in the face of the tragedy and evil of the world was posed in a sharper way than before. p27*

Frances, in consequence, spent several years in the wilderness as she calls it. Through it all she cared faithfully, though fallibly for Arthur. So she can say,

*The tragedy was not so much Arthur, as my sense of abandonment, my inability to accept the existence and love of God at those deeper levels where it makes a real difference to one's life....my experience was of an internal blank where God should've been. I had no hope for the future. Despair was lodged deep down inside... p28*

It took years before she began to climb out of her black hole with the help of various friends, theological experiences of various kinds. *Face to Face* was written at the time when the light was only just beginning to shine for her. It is not surprising that it is subtitled, ‘*A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering.*’

Her story thus began with desolation and the problem of theodicy. That topic too is important for *Entry Point*, but it appears in the final chapter. That is partly because the book is shaped by the text of Matthew 18, and the tragedy of evil appears in verses 6-10. We concentrated on v10: ‘*Do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you their angels always behold the face of my Father in*



heaven.' This leads us to explore the despising of little ones, which is not just the abuse of children, or the scorn of superior people for the underclasses. Human beings, we suggest, are despised through their vulnerability to the impersonal world we exist in, by its indifference to the value and fate of persons. Despising is symbolised by death, which operates unfairly, wastefully.

Under the pressure of this despising, we look for hope and salvation. If God is, it should not be like this. Since God is, why is it not different? The text says, We should not despise, or give way to despising, because the representatives of the despised ones, always see the face of the Father. God does not despise: God is for them. That is offered as comfort, but the question nags at us: What good is it that, while we are treated like rubbish on earth, our angels see the face of the Father? We need action now, not a referral to higher up the ladder of irresponsibility, which is often what the despised get from earthly rule.

Here we are confronted by more than the intellectual weakness of theodicy. We are confronted by the problem of the distance and inaction of God and by the challenge of letting God deal with it in his own way. It is not surprising that some people are impatient with God and choose to do without God. It is painful to live with God, to wait for God.

What alternative is there? Frances Young says, *'The only answer, the only thing that makes it possible to believe in God at all, is the cross'* p41.

In the end, Jesus didn't waft away the darkness of the world, all its sin and suffering and hurt and evil, with a magic wand. He entered right into it, took it upon himself, bore it, and in the process turned it into glory, transformed it. Entry Point points in the same direction, pp 198-199

*There is no way forward except through sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of the world* (D Bonhoeffer).

Now, to the third resonance between the two books. She reflects on her 'lifetime experience' and says, *'It's now possible to describe the fundamental change in my life as a move from struggling with the 'why' questions to grasping that I've had privileged access to the deepest truths of Christianity.'* (p xvi)

On its side, Child Theology, as it is developed in *Entry Point*, sees the child placed in the midst of the disciples discussing a theological question, in order to help them to be on the way to enter the Kingdom of God. The child placed by Jesus, received in the name of Jesus, gives access to the deepest truths of Christianity. In her book, Frances shows how living with Arthur has done that for her. Arthur did more than force her to go through the wilderness and only find rescue from it in the way of the cross which is transformed in glory. He did more than commit her to a lifetime of caring, observing, speaking and acting for him. She did indeed speak for him, as he needed, but she was also listening to him. What was to be heard through listening to Arthur? If there was anything to be heard here, how is it spoken and what is being asked of the hearer, if he would truly hear? Arthur is *'telling the glory of God' as do the heavens. That telling is without speech or language, yet there voice is heard through all the earth* (Psalm 19.1-4, cf Ps 8.2)<sup>7</sup>.

If Arthur has a message, it presents itself to us in a strange tongue. It is not heard if it is left alone, in itself. It calls for and depends on interpretation (1 Cor 14.5,13,27-29). Arthur has his interpreter in Frances, and so he has an understandable word for us. Arthur speaks because Frances gives him voice, and can do so out of her listening and learning.

An interpreter in this sort of situation does not displace the Strange Speaker. An interpreter is not an expert who distils what is essential in the original raw material to pass on the useful intelligible bits. The original does not get lost in or superseded by the translation. Rather, the Original is

<sup>7</sup> NRSV: Psalm 19:3-4 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

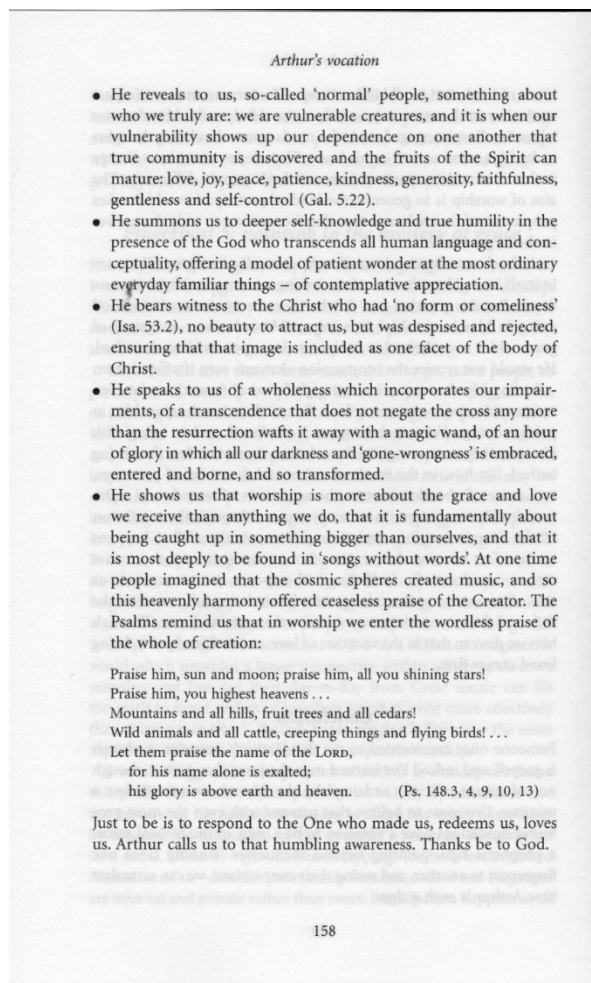
3 There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
4 yet their voice[a] goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.

There are other translations which avoid the mystery of the word that is heard everywhere though there is no speech or language. For example, AV: There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

encountered in its irreplaceable integrity, in its solitary peculiarity. The interpreter serves to place us in the presence of God in the reality of the Mysteriousness, not to spare us fear and trembling.<sup>8</sup>

One aspect of *Arthur's Call*, simply as a literary achievement, is that it does not use Arthur to write another Mother's story, although the mother's living is indispensable to it. The interpreter is not to get in the way of what is there, calling out for interpretation, but to serve it. So long as we keep it in proportion, it is right to read this book looking to learn something about the ministry of the interpreter as well as learning to hear what Arthur, in his own way, is saying. When Jesus placed a child in the midst of the disciples, he pushed them out of the central place they were after and rather required them to become apprentice interpreters of a sign which was not obviously intelligible. The child in the midst did not speak and is a reminder that all of us human beings are always dependent on and vulnerable to interpretation. We do not live without it ever. We are interpreted by parents and educators, experts and exploiters, friends and enemies, sensitive and insensitive, constructive and malicious people. We are located in social and cultural situations, (the 'powers') which prescribe interpretations, fit us into stereotypes, and make us want to flee into the desert, to be our selves. And finally, fundamentally, we human beings are created, judged and recreated by God, whose judgment is more than inquisitorial assessment of good and evil deeds. Rather it is God's decision and action about what and who we are and shall be, a judgment for us already declared in Jesus Christ and to be fully revealed at the last.

So the book has the title *Arthur's Call*. He has a vocation, which is akin to the one given to Frances as both a Christian minister and a theologian. And what then does he say which we can hear? What is the 'privileged access to the deepest truths of Christianity' which Arthur enables? This is reported in chapter 7, called 'Arthur's Vocation'. It is a wonderful piece of writing, not to be dessicated by my summary. The best thing I can do here is to copy page 158, which articulates how Arthur is a sign, pointing beyond himself..



<sup>8</sup> I could not have written this paragraph without D. Soelle, *Christ the Representative* (1967) and R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, (1917).

#### 4. Liberation theology and Gender (Rohan; Maria H; Nicolas; Valdir)

##### *Child Theology (CT) and Liberation Theology (LT) So Far ...*

Claims that CT is in the lines of Liberation Theologies

CT has claimed itself to be in the lines of LT. This assertion is with the best interest of bringing children and children's views to the centre of theological discussion. Therefore, CT by principle has a liberative vision at its core.

Marcia Bunge:

*Drawing on analogies to feminist, black, and liberation theologies, Child Theologies have as their task not only to strengthen the commitment to and understanding of a group that has often been voiceless, marginalized, or oppressed—children— but also to reinterpret Christian theology and practice as a whole.*<sup>9</sup>

Keith White and Haddon Willmer reiterate it:

*As the poor transformed theology in Liberation Theology, and as women transform it in feminist theologies, so in child theology it is the impact of the child that transforms theology.*<sup>10</sup>

Collier:

*Child theology is akin to new theologies that have brought new questions to the Bible based on the experiences of those who had long been marginal to formal theological reflection*<sup>11</sup>

Jan Grobbelaar: Draws his methodological schemes from Clodovis Boff and Gerald West<sup>12</sup> and explains:

*CT does not just seek new knowledge and understanding of God and God's way of doing things but a new way of living with children Coram Deo.*<sup>13</sup>

##### ***Christian Liberation Theologies' way to explain Child Theology's views so far...***

1. **Agency:** The agency in LT means voice of the marginalized/voiceless... here children

CT about Children:

A silent child is good enough. Understanding the child's circumstances helps us understand the contextual struggles of the child.

White and Willmer: "The child is like a lens through which some aspects of God and his revelation can be seen more clearly ... the child is like a light that throws existing theology into new relief."<sup>14</sup>

Advancing the agency or the voice of the child could get idolatrous and has the danger of the child replacing Jesus as the centre of the kingdom of God of which the child is only a sign

2. **Advocacy: Offering Solidarity and Advocacy to the marginalized... here, by the adults**

<sup>9</sup> Bunge, Marcia J, "Theologies of Childhood and Child Theology: International Initiatives to Deepen Reflection on Children and Childhood in the Academy and Religious Communities" in *Dharma Deepika (A South Asian Journal of Missiological Research)* 12/2 (July- December 2008): 33- 53

<sup>10</sup> Keith White and Haddon Willmer, "Our Response" in John Collier ed., *Toddling to the Kingdom*, 19

<sup>11</sup> Collier, preface, *Toddling...* 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Grobbelaar draws from Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications); Gerald O. West, "Contextuality," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*, ed. J. F. A. Sawyer (Malden/Oxford/Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 400-401.

<sup>13</sup> Jan Grobbelaar, *Child Theology and African Context* (London: Child Theology Movement, 2012), 18.

<sup>14</sup> White and Willmer, "Our Response", 6.

CT's method of using the lens of the child to revisit our theologies, doctrines and practices are adult activities on behalf of children. In that sense, deploying the lens of the child is an act of advocacy and solidarity.

White's argument about praxis seems to draw Child theologies towards liberation theologies. He reckons combining the child-in-the-midst method with praxis to "form new ecclesial communities".<sup>15</sup>

### **3. The role of God/Jesus Christ in resignifying the subjectivity of the marginalized**

In CT: Jesus is the author from whom all agency flows. He speaks about the child and conveys the message of the Kingdom of God to his disciples.

#### ***New Developments in Liberationist and Postcolonial Approaches that could enrich CT-LT engagement***

##### **Multiple identities of children in varying contexts:**

While adult advocacy is retained, the new approaches allow children's views and voices to come to the fore especially in the context of the violation of their rights. Adult advocacy could build up on the views of children as much as on adult use of children's lenses.

##### **Critiquing child/adult binary and envisioning an child-adult engagement**

CTM theologies could further explore the agency of children that opens to a health engagement between adults and children than leaning heavily on adults views of children.

##### **The agency of children will not displace the centrality of Christ as exhibited in many liberation theologies**

Children represent humanity's ultimate creative possibility, not in the sense that children secretly know the answer to the meaning of life, but in that they may be more open, on the whole, to the apparent impossibility of creating unknown meaning. Children are simply the newest to the world, and so can play in the world in relatively more creative ways (*Rephrasing John Wall's views*)

##### **Not just a deontological God but also a historical Christ event**

The endless meaning of God unfolds when God is seen as both divine and human. This endless circle of humans-God-creative world opens up to mysterious ways in which every being, including children, participates in meaning-making.

#### ***Comments by Nicolas***

The paper is a very good abstract of the issue, but we wanted to draw in other perspectives, firstly from liberation theology. There have been two main perspectives of liberation theology:

- firstly, it has to do with wider ideas of who is marginalised. For example, who are the poor? The concepts of oppression and marginalisation, cover other subjects (not just 'the poor').
- Secondly, we know already that liberation theology emphasises the importance of contextualisation – that all theology is a particular contextual perspective that gets in dialogue with theology. But liberation theology, traditionally, was the Latin America context, in relation to theories such as Marxism and dependency theories. That was the original liberation theology. But, for example, there are other dimensions of context, such as culture and gender. So this is not criticising liberation theology, but developing it.

Another thing is that liberation theology cannot only be spoken about with reference to Latin America, but also Africa, and Asia. In Africa, there is more emphasis on the missionary legacy and the colonial history. African liberation theology emphasises the context of race and

<sup>15</sup>White, "Thinking about Child Theology".

religious pluralism, and the so called ‘syncretism’ between Christianity and local expressions. One of the most important themes African liberation theology has developed is concern with issues of culture. Theology of reconstruction – we need the liberation, but afterwards, we also need reconstruction. We need Exodus, but we also need Ezra and Nehemiah.

In Asia, it developed more in the context of religious pluralism, but also the deconstruction of Western ontology in theology. Latin America liberation theology criticised the relation with the West, but didn’t recognise its repetition of Western ideas. In Asia the doctrine of the trinity, perichiosis which is hard for Western mentalities, is easier to understand within an Asian ontology. Maybe also it is easier to understand playfulness from an Asian perspective, where not everything needs to be strictly classified.

Three things about the proposal of feminist theology to child theology:

1. The male and adult image of God. Ivon Gavarda (?), known as an ecofeminist, criticises liberation theology for its notion of a male and adult God. We need to criticise this image of God, which legitimises particular practices in society.
2. The gender relations of social structure, and its influence on children, e.g. Marcia Bunge. Recognising that when we talk about children, we also talk about gender struggles and gender relations.
3. The power relations within families. How do children fit into these power dynamics, e.g. with respect to particular models of Father authority. This impacts how we conceive of cultural, social and economic relations.

### ***Comments by Valdir***

Somehow I am a newcomer to CT. I sense that there is a drive to identify CT in relation to Lib Theology. This surprises me because I come from an environment of critically engaging with liberation theology. NB: Liberation theology here is Latin American theology.

1. Liberation theology made an option for the poor. The poor made an option for the Pentecostals.
2. In 1979, Peru, second Latin American conference on evangelisation. We celebrated that in Nicaragua a new time was arriving, and the revolution was coming. But today Daniel Ortega is a very corrupt president, with all the limitations. He drank from the same cultural water that Samosa drank of. There was a revolutionary euphoria which was fed by Liberation Theology, and from which Liberation Theology drank.
3. In 1990, we had a representative of Liberation Theology, coming more from a protestant background with us. We asked him to speak to us every day. I remember one day he said: “don’t make the same mistake we did. We abandoned the church – we went to civil society, because the church was too slow, and not committed to revolution. We went to grassroots organisations and abandoned the church: don’t make the same mistake.” This was a trend in Liberation theology: abandoning the churches.
4. Boff – Claudio Boff, one of his main critiques is the hesitant epistemology. What he wants to say is that the poor took the primary place in liberation theology, and became the centre. And revelation lost its place. Faith became instrumentalised, and liberation theology by embracing the poor became just one more expression of a historical dimension. The immanence took over the transcendence, and only transcendence can redeem immanence.

I say all this because it is very important not to replace the immanent child with the transcendent Jesus.

There is no child theology without a good ecclesiology.

### ***Discussion***

I am a pedagogue, and come to feminist and liberation theology from a more practical angle, and have been inspired by Paulo Freire.

CT has been adults inspired by the child placed in the midst by Jesus, and not giving a voice or a place for them. If Frances is right that we accord dignity to someone by receiving from them, then what could we receive from children?

- What are the connections/ touching points between these theologies and CT?
- What mistakes have these theologies made that CT could learn from going forward?

Liberation Theology lost transcendence, whilst the poor opted for Pentecostal, which has a strong sense of transcendence. I would relate that to Pentecostalism's strong emphasis on the local church.

They are different because it will not be the child doing theology. There is a question about where are we doing our theology from and how is this that inspiring activism? The child can be disarming and invite cooperation and collaboration, rather than an invitation to conflict (as with liberation theology, for example).

Something very insightful from L'Arche: the French catholic ethos very easily adopts a sentimental approach to the poor, which can link up to Liberation Theology. A priest in L'Arche identified those with learning difficulties as the poor. I found this disturbing, because it seems sentimental and lack a recognition of the darkness of the place. But a colleague pointed out that there is another image in the bible – the resident alien – and the OT legal system contains a lot of injunctions about how you should relate to the alien dwelling in your midst. He had a son with severe epilepsy, to the extent that the fits were damaging his brain. He saw in his son the resident alien, who is like us – in fact flesh of his flesh – and yet profoundly different, and profoundly alien in certain respects. This links up to the discussion in postmodernism about the 'other'. I think this is also helpful, because he said that in theory you can end the poverty of the poor – in practice it doesn't happen – but when you are faced with people with learning difficulties, that is the way they are, and you can't remove the situation. There are ways in which the thrust of Liberation Theology is undermined by the incapacity to sort it out, there is no political programme that is going to solve that. I wonder – whether this sense of otherness, and yet similarity – by using this Biblical image of the resident alien, rather than the poor would help. This also picks up what you were saying about transcendence. There are passages in the bible where God is seen as the alien on the outside, that is trying to engage with his people.

The question of liberation theologies, is 'what do you propose?' Liberation Theology has some other dialogue partner – such as the Marxist interpretation of reality, and the Marxist proposal of revolution and change. And there is a political mind-set of transformation, and how do you do this. Progress is materialised – but theologically speaking, it's a trap – you drink from another ideology, but you don't provide the outreach towards other levels of society.

I think it's interesting to reflect who are we in dialogue with? Early Christianity was in dialogue with the philosophy of their time. Political science? Educational theory? How do we preserve the dialogue yet don't take over and "buy the whole package" thinking we're doing theology. What kind of theories do we react with, and how do we preserve our identity in that dialogue.

I was liberated from Liberation Theology very early on by a liberation theologian. In 1974, the World Council of Churches organised a meeting in Geneva to introduce liberation and black theology to European theologians. I was in a seminar with Hugo Asman. One of the things he said 'this is our theology, we are dealing with our situation, and we don't want you coming to make your PhDs out of our work.' He said to us, go and do it where you are, and look at your banking system and your place in international finance.

So I could settle down to think of Christian theology in the context of British political responsibilities and options. And once you start doing that, there are dreams and possibilities you can't really entertained and go very far. It's tempting to look to exciting places in the world where something revolutionary is happening, and you become a consumer and spectator of somebody's work, and that is very bad for any Christian theologian. Bonhoeffer said in his letter to Niebuhr 'in the coming war, we are going to have to choose between Christian civilisation and our nation. I know what choice I must make, but I can't make it in America'. There's something important about locality and accepting it. So I am wary about the globalisation of Liberation Theology. Of course, I am open to charges of insularity, and the

Brexit disease – we will do it all ourselves, -and it's not necessarily that. It's attention to doing what you ought to do where you are.

I want to relate what you were saying about otherness, and relate it to transcendence. Otherness is representative of contemporary social studies. We need to do a theological reading of this. Liberation Theology says we have a subject, which is a point of departure – but that subject may also be other to myself. We can manage the tension between what is immanent and transcendent – in theology we don't have to maintain the extremes, we can keep the tension. So we don't become too immanent about the Kingdom of God, for example. I invite you to read some less famous classics of Liberation Theology. Transcendence is about how God reveals history and reveals history to be more than we think of. Jacques Derrida has a book called hospitality, and another called the philosophy of friendship. There is also a work by John Caputo.

## 5. Moving towards outcomes:

Brainstorm ideas:

Need for writings to be done within a year – therefore planned now

• -web/blog	Bill and DJ
- responses to the 7 chapters of Entry Point	Karissa (driver/editor)
- Book reviews	Stuart
- It would not be worthwhile to write history of CTM but it could be worth writing some articles about the history of the development of thinking about CT	
- This blog would need a social media presence	
- Could there be a calendar on the website announcing local and regional gatherings, so those available can attend?	
• online journal – preliminary research	Sally and Bill
- Academics need to produce in peer-reviewed journals for it to count favourably – this raises the question: what sort of journal would it be?	
- Who would have the credibility to make up an editorial board?	Sally (2017) with Bill
- Question: what language would the journal be in, and where in the world would it be?	
- A journal of our own would allow work to be published in one place, rather than pointing people to articles in multiple different journals	
- How often is publishing necessary? etc	
- Could we guest-edit a journal?	
• an anthology of substantial essays from this forum, with 6-8 essays of 2500 – 4000 words.	Maria K, Rune, Nicolas, Haddon and Keith
• a similar anthology of essays from Melbourne	DJ and Chris Barnett
- Decision: to work on blog first, maybe journal later, and we have a list of 9 people willing to blog. We will then also produce an anthology	

- Anthology could have a wider distribution (e.g. churches and seminaries as well as academic environments)	
- An anthology may work better in Latin America – we don't have an academic environment in L America to receive a journal. We could translate some of the papers of an anthology	
• Much has already been written and not published, from 1999 to 2016, 4 or 5 a year. These would require an editor to look at them and decide if they are worth publishing	Beth Jackson? (Keith)
• booklet on liberation theology	Keith and Nicolas
• work on child rights, Bible and theology	Rune and Maria K
• discussions on CT in the Middle East	Mihai and Keith
• <b>A report could be passed on to our Melbourne colleagues (this will include letters to Melbourne, which will also be sent ahead)</b>	John
• ongoing conversations with Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians	DJ (Melbourne)
- an article on a profound question around God, sin, children and Christ	Valentin
- approach Catholics in Scandinavia	Maria K
• write to Quito contacts stating that we would like translations of their publications into English	Keith, Nicolas and Valdir
• encourage doctoral studies in CT – perhaps easier in seminaries abroad	Keith
- Could we offer supervision (at a distance) to doctoral students?	
• Use Entry Point for discussion – could we create a study guide for it?	
• Create an advisory board/board of reference for CTM, so people could have ownership	CTM Board
• Possibility of a Nordic CT – is this a model we would like to follow?	Maria H, Maria K, Rune
• Is there a way to create CT tracks or presentations within other conferences we are involved in? eg IAMS missionstudies.org	Maria K
• We could present CT papers in conferences organised around other topics	
• Do we need to meet in a year?	
- For one year's time, we could commission 7 people to each write a paper, each responding to and conversing with a different chapter of the Entry Point	
- We could commission work on the child in the midst of each of the four gospels	



- does not have to be convened by CTM; it could be built around another event – e.g. AAR or Nordic Forum etc.	
• What happens when we are approached for theological help?	
- If there are questions around witchcraft and abuse put in touch with theologians working on this issue	Paul S

Note:

*All these suggestions are hot air unless people around this table commit themselves to writing articles within the next year*

*Do we want the CT to finish in 20 years or not?*

## 6. Discussion in groups (Bill; John; Karissa)

Panel giving reflections

## 7. Identify issues for a communique

Divided into three groups to prepare a letter to the twin conference to be held in Melbourne at the end of the year.

## 8. Plenary: devotional/ spiritual reflection (Paul Butler; Maria Klasson Sundin)

Sitting in a circle. Sing a hymn.

IN GRATEFUL LIVING

**In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful**      357

In the Lord I'll be ev - er thank - ful; in the Lord I will re - joice!

Look to God; do not be a - fraid. Lift up your voic - es, the Lord is

near; lift up your voic - es, the Lord is near.

One by one pin leaves on a tree of gratitude, thanking God for some blessing this week.

Reading from Matthew 21

Look at the exhibitions and think about our need to turn and change.

Kyrie eleison sung together

Write down in 10 words what you would do with CT

- Write blogs

- Mobilise and organise African academics
- I will start a Sunday school and give my two grandchildren one afternoon a month
- Finish a series of articles I am writing
- Mentor a new ministry in my church for church
- I will pray for the children I know
- Be more sensitive
- Be allowed to depart in peace
- Continue to welcome children in the name of Jesus
- Pray for the children I don't know and those who have no-one to pray for them
- Be open to the provocative Holy Spirit through encounters with children

#### Prayer

Sing "Amazing Grace"

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear.  
And Grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far  
and Grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me.  
His word my hope secures.  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun.  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.

*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

## Friday 29

### 1. Prayers (Karissa)

The Lord's Prayer Meditation

Draw a picture describing your thoughts. Share the picture and add a prayer.

### 2. Letters to Melbourne

This conference was conceived as a two-part event with the second stage being held in November this year in Melbourne. We invited participants at this 'first stage' meeting to compose letters to Melbourne to communicate any important issues and advice that we had discovered which might enhance their discussion. Three small groups were made and two of these prepared their own letter.

#### a. Group one

*"Dear Melbourne,*

*Greetings from the U.K. The conversation this week has been rich enough to encourage us to believe the conversation needs to keep going. We trust the same will happen to you and wait to hear from you. Here are some of our ponderings.*

*One of the highlights has been those occasions when folk have brought what we know of CT to specific issues and given a critique of that issue from a CT perspective. We hope you will have similar opportunities, not just to discuss the principles, but also to examine in action.*

*When we found ourselves at the limit of how to express ourselves, we found creative and playful ways to allow the mystery to speak to us (poetry, music, story, etc.). They helped to open things up when we hit a cul-de-sac. Along with that, we would like to encourage further conversation and exploration along the lines of CT and the arts.*

*We were encouraged by the recognition that although CT is very young it is in process. We were encouraged to keep thinking, processing, and discovering along the way. It was a pleasant surprise that it's very clear it's in progress. This made a healthy vagueness that encouraged us to keep working.*

*We discussed the importance of context and the need to take context seriously as we grapple with all things CT.*

*We encourage you to continue to bring in different ecumenical partners to join the dialogue and think how this can be further encouraged in the future. We were graced by a few Orthodox brothers among those invited who showed interest in CT.*

*We encourage you not to find yourselves snared by binary perspectives: child vs. adult, practitioner vs. theologian, imminence vs. transcendence. etc.*

*We found it a great blessing to have an outsider who brought friendly critique. One who has been doing CT without even naming it or being conscious of doing that. CT is being done by those who love children all over the world. She added to our sense that the conversation is worthwhile. If you decide to do the same, we recommend you find someone within academia with an empathetic view, someone who can put flesh on what you are talking about who can share from experience with the clout of the academy.*

*We are excited to hear the musings and discussions that come from your gathering."*

#### b. Group two

*"Dear Melbourne,*

*We do not presume to know who you are or what you need and can therefore only share our experiences with you, hoping that they may inspire you in your endeavour.*

*We were thankful for many things during our meeting at High Leigh. Among these, being together with friends from the Orthodox tradition for the first time and hearing their input,*

*gave us important new material to reflect upon. We hope that you, too, will find friends from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches to share your discussion.*

*Latin America offered us interesting insights on hermeneutics, which was rewarding and opened up a new fresh type of conversation between us, with new concepts like “point of departure”. If you can find a way to include these sort of philosophical perspectives in your theological discussions, we think it will be valuable.*

*There was generally more theological talk than at a normal consultation, which we thought was good, maybe because of the papers and contributions prepared in advance, that encouraged deeper thinking and speaking.*

*We spent our time going back and forth between smaller and bigger groups, discussing what we had heard and reflecting together, a good method for letting a lot of material sink in.*

*It was good to have Frances Young with us as someone able to listen to us and then to reflect, to share both her experiences of living with a child who never stopped needing her, and her theological reflection on the suffering and joy it has brought, both a form of child theology and a theology of the cross. Many ideas that she gave us were like beginnings, possible theological themes that we should come back to and reflect on from a CT point of view.*

*We can't stress enough how important it has been to have participants willing to engage and take a wholehearted part in the discussions and workshops. If you can find a way to share, in Christ, your dreams and your experiences, your questions and your perspectives, this may be the key to an open and fruitful consultation.*

*We wish you God's blessing upon your prayers and your meeting as you prepare for the conference and the future.”*

### **3. Thank you to:**

- Everyone for coming
- Commitment
- Practical help
- Planning Group
- High Leigh
- Frances Young
- Nathaniel and Jess
- Compassion International for their support over 15 years
- Ruth and Caroline at Mill Grove for practical support
- Paul Butler for support over the years
- Haddon Willmer for the continuing theological conversation

### **4. Identification of Tasks**

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| • Web blog       | Bill & DJ       |
| • Online Journal | Bill & Sally    |
| • Booklet on LT  | Keith & Nicolas |
| • Child rights   | Rune & Maria K  |

• CT in the Middle East	Mihai & Keith
• Anthology of essays (inc Melbourne)	Maria K, Rune, Keith, DJ, Chris
• Blogs about 7 chapters of Entry Point	Karissa (facilitator)
• Book reviews	Stuart
• Ecumenical contacts	Maria K (RC); Mihai (Orthodox)
• Article on sin and children (Orthodox)	Valentin
• Spanish/Portuguese translations	Keith, Nicolas, Valdir
• Encourage doctoral studies in CT	Keith
• Study guide for Entry Point	[CTM Board]
• Advisory board for CTM	[CTM Board]
• Possibility of Nordic CT	Maria H; Maria K; Rune
• Bibliography for website	Stuart
• CT tracks at other conferences	Maria K; DJ
• Critical review of unpublished papers	[CTM Board]
• Clarify situation re Beth Jackson PhD	Keith
• Conference report as well as an anthology	John
• Letters to Melbourne to be sent	John
• Paper by Frances Young	Haddon
• Responses to queries for input from CT	[CTM Board]
• Prepare paper/blog re witchcraft abuse	Paul
• Do we want to meet again in 18mths?	[CTM Board]
• A meeting calendar on the website?	[Blog Manager]





