Child Theology Movement

Houston Consultation on Child Theology

6 — 8 May 2004

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Report of the Houston Consultation on Child Theology

6-8 May 2004

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Table of Contents

Introduction

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matthew 18:1-3, NIV)

The Child Theology Movement, a worldwide movement with roots in Asia, convened the Houston consultation during May 6-8, 2004. Most of those at the consultation were from North America and Europe but there was representation from developing countries, where most of the world's children live.

This movement was inaugurated at an international consultation in Penang, Malaysia in 2002. It is being developed in part through a series of regional consultations. Early in 2004, a consultation was held in Cape Town, South Africa, to share the vision with Christians from various parts of sub-Saharan Africa. This meeting in Houston mainly consisted of North American participants and focused on what Child Theology would mean for them. Further consultations are in preparation in England, in Eastern Europe and in Latin America.

The Child Theology Movement understands Child Theology to be a purposefully disciplined enterprise of Christian theology. Child Theology is not an umbrella term for any and every sort of concern with children and theology. It names a precisely focused but not fully worked-out enterprise, to revise Christian theology as a whole by attending to the 'child set in the midst' by Jesus. It asks, "What does it mean to have a child standing in the midst of a theological discourse?" Child Theology does not seek to supplant or coordinate the many and varied Christian theological engagements with children, childhood, and child-care. It expects to enter into conversation with them, in order to learn and serve. Through this conversation, it is hoped that Child Theology may be found useful to Christians and others working with and for children.

We believe that Child Theology (hereafter CT) serves:

- *God's Word in the Gospel* by attending to the child as a sign of the Kingdom of God.
- *Theological enquiry* and theological training by contributing new chapters on the child as a theological topic and by developing the whole of theology in the light of the child.
- *Churches*, by exploring the grounding of their work with and for children and also by reminding them of the whole Gospel which is signed by the child.
- *Children*, by exploring not only the theological ground for the rights of the child, and the importance of all caring ministries to children, but also the transcending wholeness of the child in the mystery of God who calls them to grow in his knowledge and service.

Child Theology utilizes an evolving method that is a new way for doing theology. It involves continuous reflection and openness to the Holy Spirit as it:

1. puts a child in the midst of the discussion (the richness evoked by a new child image in each consultation);
2. takes a world-wide point of view (moving from place to place);
3. involves academics and those in the practice of ministry and
4. involves many people from all over the world (pictures and brief bios of each participant) to "write" the theology.

This method was interactive and open, aiming toward understanding, and encouragement. Many issues were opened and few, if any, were closed. This is a work in progress. The report

that follows, then, is full of loose ends! Our hope is that many of those who read this will be inspired and challenged to bring about the necessary work that will incorporate some of these threads into the tapestry.

The Houston Consultation sought to clarify the essence of CT and to explore some of the key issues concerning children and theology, whether it had the makings of genuine usefulness, and if so in what ways. From this starting point, the consultation turned to consider some of the major ways of relating children and theology represented in the group and significant in the American context (a context which has global impact). Each participant brought considerable wisdom, passion, joy and grace to the consultation. Questions were explored such as: How and why is this contribution different from Child Theology? Or is it already Child Theology without using the name? How might this piece of work contribute to Child Theology? How does Child Theology, done in this particular form, relate to Church in its concern with children, whether at risk or in enjoyed blessing?

Research and scholarly publication are a prominent characteristic of North American Christianity. CT in other regions has other advantageous conditions but cannot compete with North America in having such a range of resources for children. This consultation focused on some key forms of this interest, especially where it was being worked out in academic research and in action resourced by research and scholarship. One session was devoted to discussion of the book edited by Marcia Bunge on the child in Christian thought. Other sessions discussed David Sims' current research, Jerome Berryman's 'Godly Play' and John Wall's ethical enquiry.

We are grateful to Jerome Berryman for most generously hosting the consultation at the Center for the Theology of Childhood in Houston and to Ann Benzon for serving so completely and faithfully behind the scenes to meet the needs of the participants.

Shelley Campagnola and John Collier, editors

June 2004

Houston Consultation Participants

Holly Allen

Holly is Associate Professor of Christian Ministries, and Director of the Children & Family Ministry Program at John Brown University. She has a B.A. from Harding University, an M.A. from the University of Iowa and a Ph.D. from Talbot School of Theology. From 1993-1997 she studied intergenerational settings where she saw something different from 25 years of traditional experience and began to ask: "What is the status of children in the kingdom."

Beverly Allison

Beverly is Executive Director, Our Little Roses Foreign Mission Society which supports the work of Our Little Roses Ministries (OLRM), a special ministry for girls at risk, headquartered in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. The project encompasses several interrelated ministries within the community, including a health clinic, community for poor single mothers, bilingual school, Jubilee Centre for justice issues, retreat centre and a bed and breakfast and hospitality house.

Jerome Berryman

Jerome is from the Center for the Theology of Childhood in Houston and the author of "Godly Play". There was nothing in his theological training relating to children and in the first 10 years of his work he didn't have the language to ask the questions for what is now Child Theology. Through decades, degrees and various positions, Jerome came to understand the need for "story" and "theological play" in order to understand the Great Story. Key of this discovery was a period in Italy studying the Montessori approach. He now has the language to ask the questions and to contribute to the discussions, as well as a model of ministry that provides the language that children need to embrace and express theology.

Dan Brewster

Dan is a practitioner and missiologist with Compassion International, a large Christian Child Development ministry. Dan has contributed to the development of CT from the beginning. He presently lives in Penang, Malaysia. He believes that Compassion and other ministries need to have a better theological foundation. Dan's passion is to learn and proclaim how God is furthering the kingdom around the world. Most people being brought to Christ are children, and Dan has coined the term "The 4-14 Window" to reflect this, believing this may be the motivation and drive for missions in this generation.

Marcia Bunge

Marcia is an Associate Professor of Theology and Humanities at Christ College, Valparaiso University. As she taught in a liberal arts college where most of the students would call themselves Christians, Marcia began to think about the lives of her students before they came to college. Her thoughts were further stimulated through her own children. She came to ask, "Why are the children not the central theme in our theology?" From 1998-2000 she directed a project on theological perspectives on children, funded by the Lilly Endowment, and she has edited a collection of essays entitled *The Child in Christian Thought*[1] She also asks, "What does the church (and state) owe children? She is working for positive steps toward legitimacy of theological enquiry around children, not just practical theology or religious education.

[1] Eerdmans, 2001

Shelley Campagnola

Shelley is Chair of Children's Ministry Forum with The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and adjunct professor of Children's Ministries at Heritage Bible College, Cambridge, Ontario. She has been a Pastor of Children and Families in a local church context and has worked on the front lines of Children's Ministries for over 15 years. In her work she consistently hears about the lack of a theological basis for what the church does with children. She herself lived in a North American "war zone" until she came to Christ in her early 20s. She has witnessed the power and love of God to rescue, redeem, and restore children.

John Collier

John decided to train in medicine to work as a missionary. After a short placement in Nazareth, he left clinical medicine to enter pharmaceutical research. He took early retirement to be able to return to mission work. After leading a short-term team to a street children project in Rio de Janeiro, he joined Viva Network to work for them in Brazil. More recently he has been spending more time on administrative issues for the Child Theology Movement (CTM). He is also working on an MTh at Spurgeon's College, where he met Keith White.

James Gilbert

James is an American missionary to Brazil with EQUIP a holistic mission movement for children and families at risk in nine countries around the world. EQUIP works with church based organizations and in Brazil, James ministry includes a day care and an after school program for 300 children at risk. Recently, James has been using the 'Understanding God's Heart for Children' program developed by VIVA network. He is interested in seeing dialogue between theologians and practitioners. He wants to know how can he facilitate this and bring it back to workers in Brazil.

Susan Greener

Susan represents the Mission of Mercy which has fields in 19 nations, predominantly Asian, non-Christian, and poor. Susan was previously in Academia. She is married to an Anglican priest and has three children. She is passionate about the child in the contexts of family, community and culture. Through the lens of holistic child development, Susan asks: "What is the role of the church to the child living in extreme poverty?" and "How can the child reach full potential in settings that are extremely difficult?"

Jenny Hyson

Jenny serves as the Children's Advisor in the Diocese of Oxford. She is responsible for 640 parishes and works with those who work with children to help them think about what they are doing. She also seeks to help pastors think about whole community integration. Jenny was invited to the consultation as an observer and interested practitioner. As Jenny introduces Godly Play (GP) into the diocese she is witnessing a transformation of the way people work with children and the transformation of those who use GP.

Peter Kalumbo

Peter is an Anglican priest and theologian from Tanzania and has lectured in Dar es Salaam for seven years. He has postgraduate degrees from the USA and a doctorate from Leeds, England. Peter was an orphan on the streets in Tanzania from the age of five. He is passionate that children need to return to God, even if marginalized. Peter founded an Anglican research project that helps teachers to teach children. He is the father of two, a boy (3) and a girl (2). His wife is an evangelist and CEO for African Evangelistic Enterprise.

Kevin Lawson

Kevin is the director of the Doctoral program and Educational studies at Talbot School of Theology. His interest in Child Theology has been stimulated through in coming to understand his own three children, answering their questions and seeing their spiritual formation. He was a minister of CE in congregations for 11 years and is now on a new journey feeling the need to get people together to interact about Children's Ministry and has been invited to write a chapter on Childhood Conversion in the evangelical tradition.

Scottie May

Scottie is from Wheaton College, Chicago. She has been on a journey over the last 15-20 years starting with her dissertation on how children come to faith. She is deeply interested in children and the power of the church to affect child's theology for good or, sadly, for bad. She was involved in a ten week research project with four and five year olds in a church setting observing how space, pace, and volume affect attitude and behaviour in encountering God in a spiritual experience. What stands out for her is the statement of a 7 year old: "God touched me" in the "prayer space".

Marcia McQuitty

Marcia is married with three sons, now all adult. After a BA in English, she obtained an MDiv degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Then as she raised her own children, she also worked in the children and youth ministry of various Baptist churches in Fort Worth. Later, she studied for her Ph D back at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary where she is now Associate Professor of Childhood Education.

Alfredo Mora

Alfredo works with Viva Network in Costa Rica. He has a political sciences degree and an MBA. His driving question is, "What is God's will for children?" He would like to see the building of a bridge between theology and the practical outworking of the kingdom. He sees that the church needs a strong motivation to change its agenda and he believes that the child could provide that motivation.

Catherine Stonehouse

Catherine is Professor of Christian Discipleship at Asbury Theological Seminary and is experienced in Christian Education, including local church ministry, publication of a number of books and articles on education, discipleship and curriculum development. She is impressed by what children can do and understand as well as by their spiritual potential. She is very interested in Child Theology and Spirituality and wants to learn how the child is in the midst and how we can help leaders in local churches have children in their midst and beyond.

Don Ratcliffe

At time of the consultation, Don was with the Biola University Education Department but has since moved to a new position as a Professor of Psychology at Vanguard University. Don has a Ph.D. from the University of Georgia. He was involved in the Child Spirituality Conference 2003 planning. He has written and edited several materials. Don is interested in ordinary and empirical theology including developing understanding of children.

David Sims

David is the resident theologian at Family Life Ministries, Little Rock Arkansas. He practiced law for thirteen years with a focus on domestic relations. David is also a doctoral candidate at the University of Durham, England. He works in the Ukraine one month each year with Children at Risk with a local pastor. The focus is ministry to orphans and single parents, street kids, and camps to get street kids off the street and work the land, etc. He brings perspective to understanding and motivating children of first world in light of third world.

John Wall

John is an Assistant Professor at Rutgers University, Camden Campus in the Department of Philosophy and Religion and as an Associate at the Center for Children and Childhood Studies. He is concerned that there has been a lot of work done on families, primarily around marriage, but little on children. He writes in the area of Christian ethics and would like to see the "Social Ethics" of children developed. John is interested in hearing about global discourse, how children are understood and what the problems are.

Keith White

Keith has three degrees each from a different country, has a family of 1200 members (orphans etc.) and lectures at Spurgeon's College. He also teaches theology in Malaysia. He is a sociologist and a writer and preacher, trained in community development. He is presently working on a new bible with the International Bible Society. Keith is concerned that in globalisation studies to date children are invisible. The discovery of the "social continent of children" is as recent as 10 years. This is mirrored by theology.

Haddon Willmer

Haddon has taught church history and theology at the University of Leeds, England from 1966 to 1998. He is specially interested in Barth and Bonhoeffer, in Christian mission and meaning in the contemporary world and has long been reflecting on forgiveness and politics. Thinking about Child Theology with Keith White is giving him great fun in his retirement.

Meditation led by Keith White: Matthew 18

The opening meditation on Day One, led by Keith White and based on Matt 18:3, asked: How do Christians typically minister to young people? Is what we do rooted in an adequate theology? Is this just a question of ministry, or a question of our very faith?

Keith shared a story of how a child had caused a friend to rethink their whole faith. In pairs, we shared stories of children in our lives and in a moment of silence, brought those children into our midst and to Christ so that, whatever else happens, they might not be marginalised.

Introduction to Child Theology

The Process and Organization

By way of background, Keith and John provided a summary of the history of the Child Theology Movement[2].

There is much Christian activity on behalf of children but a scarcity of theological roots. It is time to bring the child in from the cold – "into the inn". Some questions that must be asked in this process are: How do we have discussions/conversations and represent children without making them just tokens? How do we bring children into the midst – they are unlike other marginalized groups that can speak without losing their identity and dispersing their childhood? These are not easily resolved but must remain in the forefront of our minds during this consultation and in subsequent meetings.

We intend to continue the discussion about every two years in international gatherings. In between these we encourage round tables of regional groups. We use a round table because this is not a teacher led high table movement. This Houston Consultation is one such round table.

If the theology is not to be dominated by Christians from the rich world, we need to raise money for travel grants and study fellowships etc. This in turn requires an organization to provide accountability of funds. CTM is now a registered company in London, England, seeking tax exempt status. This provides statutory controls and the needed accountability.[3]

A reflection on Psalm 8

Presentation by Keith White

Introduction

This great hymn of praise starts and finishes with unforgettable cadences that have given rise, among other inspiring Christian songs, to *How great thou art!* Its alpha is praise and its omega is praise, and between these refrains we find the whole of creation: from the tiny little baby to the farthest star; the human realm to creatures that walk, swim and fly; the foe and the avenger to heavenly beings. It meant so much to Jesus that when He entered the Temple in Jerusalem as the Chosen One, the Messiah, the Christ, and healed the blind and the lame for the last time, accompanied by the cries of Hosanna from some young people who were watching what He did, and in the words of the book, *Shouting In the Temple,* He quoted part of the Psalm to the chief priests and teachers of the law. We will return to this climactic encounter tomorrow, but for now we pause to consider a psalm close to the heart of our Saviour and Lord.

The flow of the Psalm so beautifully balanced and expressed when used as a song of worship, is a challenge when scrutinized. Some see it having three stanzas, some two. There are problems of syntax in verses 1 and 2. Jesus and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews both used the Septuagint. In this version the word "strength" in verse 2, is translated "praise'. This is not the time and the place to become bogged down in the detailed analysis of the text, but it is as well to be aware so some of the pitfalls for the unwary. Let us stay with the great opening statement and refrain as our guiding principle. It is a hymn or paean of praise to the Lord. It is about the whole of creation. It exalts the name of the Lord.

So why are we studying it now at the beginning of this consultation? The reason is because it says something quite astonishing, to the point of incomprehensibility, about children, and sets children in their proper context. Marshal Macluhan in *The Global Village* points out that when we focus on any subject or group we take them from their usual place and bring them into the foreground: this is as true of the scientist as of the artist. Having looked at them in this bright light, we find that they never quite fit the background from which they were originally taken. Things have changed both in the foreground and in the background as a result of our action. As those concerned with, and committed to, children and young people this is a risk about which we must be warned. If we overlook it we may sentimentalize and abstract children from their usual and rightful context. We may set children over against adults; we may divorce their education from the natural world, and we may define their rights without an adequately contextualized moral and social framework.

[2] For those interested in this history, accounts have been given in the reports of preceding meetings in Penang 2002 and Cape Town 2004.

[3] Further details available on request.

So we are selecting a Psalm where children have a special place, but in which at the same time they are set within a proper context, as part of the created order, and even more important, as part of the unending hymn of praise to the name of the Lord that emanates from the dawn of creation and produces harmonies, rhythms and echoes, from the freshest raindrop to the oldest nebulae and constellations.

Children in God's Kingdom

So where do children fit in? What is their place and role in the whole of God's way of doing things?

There are three truths articulated here and we will ponder each in turn.

(i) Children are ordained to play a part in the scheme of creation
(ii) Their pit-school and pre-language cries are to be heard as praise
(iii) They have a role in silencing the foe and the avenger.

Children are ordained to play a part in the scheme of creation

That's an interesting word to start with: ordained. We usually associate it with the priesthood, and leaders of the church. Here it is applied to suckling babes. And we must understand, articulate and champion that ordination once we are clear about it. It is possible that one of the reasons why the world is not "fit for children" is because we have lost sight of, are out of touch with, this primary role of children as ordained by the Lord.

- Children are not primarily created to help the economic situation of family and nation.
- Children are not primarily blank pieces of paper on which adults write a script in the name of "education".
- Children are not objects to be entertained by the media.
- Children are not primarily "adults in waiting" or "human becomings".
- Children are not primarily consumers whether of food, market produce, or media images.
- Children are not potential slaves to be branded.

They are ordained to join in the hymn of praise, the music of the spheres, which pulses and resounds throughout creation with its source in the conversation of the Trinity, its development through history, and its fulfilment when the Lamb is seen face to face on the throne surrounded by the worshipping congregation that no one can number.

Before, as adults, for whatever motives or with what intentions, we seek to rescue, care for, educate and mould children, we must grasp the Maker's intentions for them. C. S. Lewis made just such a point at the beginning of his classic work, *A Preface to Paradise Lost:* everything in creation has its unique nature and purpose. Until we understand it we will never be able to respond to it appropriately, and in striving oft we mar what's well. Like the Kingdom of Heaven, a child is both Now and Not Yet. The best parents and teachers instinctively appreciate the uniquely creative space nestling within these two poles of reality and existence.

In preparation, I have been reading around the subject and one of the more harrowing books is *Branded* by Alissa Quart. It is about the buying and selling of teenagers by corporations who seek to groom them into consumers of their particular brands. Descartes started with the premise, *cogito ergo sum*; these corporations posit a consumer rather than a thinker, and conspire to batter and brainwash teenagers into submission by destroying their creativity and individuality. It has been dubbed "corporate paedophilia"[4] Once we are clear what children and young people are ordained by God to be (what is their 'logical service", Romans 12 verses 1 and 2, or "species-being", to use the Marxian concept) then we are able to be genuine advocates for them: to pronounce a resolute and uncompromising 'No!" to the forces that corrupt and undermine the Creator's design and purpose for them.

You will find a host of material in the Scriptures that, like this psalm, sets children in their proper context: an environment overarched by the stars, ("lovely asunder starlight waiting Him out of it", G.M. Hopkins), and shared with creatures that walk, swim and fly. (Have a look at Isaiah Chapter 11 verses 6 to 9, 65 verses 20 to 25.) Children are designed to seek out and enjoy warm and enjoyable human relationships. (Have a look at Zechariah 8 verse 3 to 8.)

When looking at the mission statements and aims of many Christian organizations and groups, as well as international declarations, I have been struck by the assumption they make that we should proceed as quickly and efficiently as possible to prepare children for adulthood whether as producers, parents or citizens. Education is seen as the primary if not exclusive engine of this process. All the time the stark and prophetic

[4] Quart, 2003: 8

warning of Rousseau in his great work, *Emile*, lies virtually unnoticed and unheard: always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man.[5]

Children's pre-language cries are to be heard as praise

The words for children here are perfectly clear: we are reading of newborn babies and suckling infants. These are primal children, in a state before adult conventions and formal processes of education and socialization have kicked in. Their cries should not only not be dismissed as meaningless, but should rather be understood as part of the great hymn of praise throughout creation. To "read" such cries requires a fundamental revolution in adult consciousness and institutions. Frobel studied little children for 15 years or so in coming to realize the subtleties of the communication between mother and baby. Korczak spent his life among children before concluding: "A baby can hold a very complicated conversation without being able to talk".[6]

You probably know of the recent research on babies and their babble. Before real words come rhythms and sing-songs between parent and child. Dr Petitto commented: "there's a marriage between babies' sensitivity to specific rhythms around them, and the fact we give them those rhythms." [7]

The adult must lay aside conventions and patterns around which the social world is ordered[8], and learn to listen all over again, like someone learning a new language with its strange cadences and inflexions. Isn't it obvious that a baby is uniquely sensitive to rhythms and sounds given the period within that rich, resonating mixture of pulse beats and movement we call the mother's womb? Communication continues with movement, rhythm, and song; poetry rather than prose; worship rather than learning by rote.

It follows from this that the parent and the kindergarten teachers must above all else be skilled, intuitively or by careful training, in listening to and observing the little child. They will need to understand the innate signs and movements of the baby, and do so in the context of the natural environment. They will know that bird-song, animal sounds, waves of the sea, the rhythms of the stream, the movement of branches and leaves, of clouds and skies, are of unending attraction to the developing child; that insects, grubs and animals are natural companions of the little child, and that a bee landing on the petal of a flower being swayed by a breeze can become a means of linking the child's inner world to the movement and dance of creation. Play in its various and subtle forms is the primary means or context of development, not learning by rote or catechism (though these have their place within this overarching context),

One of the great joys since beginning to realize the significance of this passage has been my privilege to see parents and teachers coming to realize something more of the significance and meaning of infant babble and children's play. They have come to sense and then understand that the world is full of praise, human and natural, once we, like the composer, Messiaen, are prepared to pause in our attempts to teach and educate, and to begin the infinitely more complicated and rewarding process of listening and observing. It is not just that the child is thus given creative space in which to flourish, but that the adults receive the blessing of inestimable and unending experiences of real praise.

What a joy to discover that there is a more profound psalm of praise reverberating throughout creation than the Sunday School songs however special and beloved they may be!

Children have a role in silencing the Foe and the Avenger

We now reach a statement that has confounded some of the best biblical scholars and interpreters. I have already noted the problems presented by the Hebrew and Septuagint texts. In my view the NIV represents the most sensible and congruent reading.[9] The challenge in this case is not so much in the words being used but in the assault on our adult assumptions and worldview. How on earth can little suckling babies take on and defeat the powers of darkness? In the cosmic battle between principalities and powers represented by biblical books like Job, Ezekiel, Romans and Revelation, there is surely no role for the tiny little baby? Isn't the suckling always the object of suffering and trauma, having no influence on the course of War, Famine, Disease and Death?

Commentators have, in the light of this logic, sought to find another way of treating the text. But Calvin, with his immense scholarship and faith in divine providence reminds us in his commentary on the Psalms that God

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[5] Quoted, Jenks, 1996:2

[6] *A Voice for the Child:* 23

[7] *Guardian:* 10.11.2001

[8] a profound resonance here with the kenosis of the Son entering creation as a human being!

[9] See also Robin Maas, 'Christ as the Logos of Childhood", *Theology Today*, January 2000 Vol. *56*, No. 4: 462, for an excellent reading of this text.

is God! This Psalm is a hymn of praise celebrating the greatness of the Name of the Lord. Is there a problem once we accept that God is sovereign? He chooses (elects) how He will act and who, if anyone, He will use to achieve His purposes. If there is one underlying pattern in history seen through the eyes of faith it is surely the one St. Paul describes in I Corinthians 1:20-31. God chooses the weak and despised things of the world. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 this is spelt out beautifully "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness."

What we have in this Psalm is not therefore a puzzling exception to the way God works, but a statement of the essence of His providential nature and purposes. He delights in revealing the true nature and potential of broken reeds, smoking flaxes, widows with their mites, boys with their picnics, and leaders like Peter who deny and desert Him. The suckling child could not reveal the way God has chosen to work more clearly and memorably. Israel was chosen, not because it was strong and great, but because it was weak. In Ezekiel 16: 4-6 it is described as an abandoned and rejected child with its umbilical cord still uncut, kicking in its blood, despised and rejected. We have, in short found our way to the heart of the Gospel, of grace, and of God's limitless loving-kindness and mercy.

The ultimate enemy is death and the resulting corruption of human relations issuing from despair of ever experiencing justice, peace and joy. This enemy has been in horrifying and chronic evidence throughout recorded history. Human might, organization, education and civilization can do, and have done nothing to tame this enemy. Ozymandias is an unforgettable symbol and reminder of the futility of human empires; whereas every childbirth is another revelation of God's grace and mercy, the triumph of life over death, of hope over despair. Have you every heard a newborn baby cry? There are echoes of the Messianic promise and hope in that cry. When Jesus was born (with, I always imagine a cry, rather than as the hymn writers portray it as "silently") the cry of every newborn baby was compressed, just as at the end of His life the sins of the world were upon Him. Jurgen Moltman wrote: 'With every beginning of a new life, the hope for the reign of peace and justice is given a new chance... Every new life is also a new beginning of hope for a homeland in this unredeemed world... children are not lonely metaphors for our hopes... but of God's hope for us: God wants us, expects us, and welcomes us... God is 'waiting' for the human person in every child, is 'waiting' for God's echo, resonance and rainbow," [10]

Time does not allow us to delve more deeply into this rich Psalm today, to explore the relationship between the suckling babe and the man (verses 2 and 4), between the man and the son of man (verse 4) between the son of man and the heavenly beings (verse *5)* and between human rule and divine rule (verses 6 to 9). We have a richly textured backcloth against which to develop our thinking and work among children today. My plea is that we always heed Macluhan's warning and never sever the link between the child that is the focus of our attention and exploration and the context in which both that child and we live. We share the same environment and owe it to children as well as to our Lord never to abstract children from the created world whether in the name of education, child protection or parenting. This Psalm is a bulwark against all that!

Concluding Reflection

We are only just beginning to discover some of the implications of all this in family, churches, schools and society, because children have been almost invisible to mainstream theologians and theological training until this point of time.

The major corrective to my thinking and work stemmed from the discovery that children were agents of God's providence and purposes, not just recipients of His love and care mediated through parents, teachers and the community of Christ. As I read through the narrative of God's dealings with His people the pattern began to take shape. Here are some of the children and young people God chose:

- The role of Joseph as a teenager: saving a family and nation
- The role of Benjamin in reconciling his brothers and family
- The role of Moses the baby, and Miriam his sister in saving the Hebrews from Egypt
- The role of the baby Obed in the Book of Ruth, and the royal line of David and Jesus
- The role of Samuel in uncovering the total corruption at the heart of God's people
- The role of David in rescuing the Israelites from the Philistines
- The role of the slave girl in the healing of Naaman
- The role of young Esther, the orphan girl, in the saving of her people
- The role of the boy-king, Josiah, in the reformation of Israel.

[10] *Theology Today*, January 2000: 603

The picture should by now have become a lot clearer: it's a description of how God used children to silence and overcome the foe and the avenger. And when we come to the New Testament we should not be too surprised to find that the whole of God's plan of salvation rests on a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger! In fact that is the very sign that the shepherds are given when they want to know how they will recognize the Saviour, the Messiah.

Let us be clear. These children became adults, and were still used of God. We as adults have special responsibilities under God towards children. That's one of the reasons that we are here today. God chooses us and uses us to be advocates, kinsmen-redeemers (like Boaz). But we should never see children simply as objects of our attention and care, as victims needing rescue. We must always be aware that they can also be agents of God's purposes and mediating His love and purposes. They are God's language expressing with particular clarity the nature of His kingdom. They are like God's chosen visual aid, if you see things like this. Like the Heavens, they declare His majesty and glory, not least, and perhaps best, through their infant cries. Perhaps as a result of our brief excursion through the Scriptures you are that more prepared to join in this lovely Psalm from the heart of your being:

> *"0 Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*
> *You have set your glory above the heavens.*
> *From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies*
> *To silence the foe and the avenger."*

And perhaps you will come to understand why children and young people shouting this Psalm in the Temple at Jerusalem were such anathema to the opponents of Jesus, and such a comfort and encouragement to our Saviour and Lord, as He laid aside His majesty, and became obedient even unto death on the Cross, that through His childlike faith and servant hood we might be adopted into His family, and come to experience life as sons and daughters of the Living God.

Houston Child Theology consultation

Document precirculated by Haddon Willmer

Focus

The focus of this consultation is Child Theology. Child Theology is not an umbrella term for any and every sort of concern with children and theology. It names a precisely focused but not fully worked-out enterprise: to revise Christian theology as a whole, by attending to the child set in the midst by Jesus. Child Theology does not seek to supplant or coordinate the many and varied Christian theological engagements with children, childhood, and child-care. It needs to enter into conversation with them, in order to learn and serve. And through this conversation, it is hoped that Child Theology may be found useful to Christians and others working with and for children.

The consultation thus depends on an adequate initial presentation in outline of Child Theology as the focus for conversation. This will be achieved by material provided before the consultation and at the beginning of the consultation. Questions about Child Theology will be identified at the beginning and may or may not run through the whole consultation, depending on the judgment of participants:

- Is Child Theology clear – so far?
- Does it rest on a sound understanding of the key issues concerning children and theology?
- Does it have promise of genuine usefulness, and if so in what ways?

From this starting point, the consultation will turn to consider some of the major ways of relating children and theology which will be represented in the group and are significant in the American context (a context which has global impact).

The focus provided by Child Theology will produce a distinctive conversation with various contributions. In regard to each contribution, we can explore such questions as:

- How and why is this contribution different from 'Child Theology'?
- Or is it already 'Child Theology' without using the name?
- What is Child Theology if this piece of work has a critical or constructive relation to Child Theology?
- How might this piece of work contribute to Child Theology?
- How does Child Theology, done in this particular form, relate to Church in its concern with children, whether at risk or in enjoyed blessing?

More specific questions will arise in particular sessions. For example, *The Child in Christian Thought* raises the issue of the relation between the *history* of Christian thought and action and *theology.* How do we move

from the variety of many Christian pasts, to the decision for one way rather than another, which is necessary for any effective faithful action in the present?

Does *the theology of childhood* contain all that is of value in Child Theology? Opening up the conversation will be very fruitful.

Method

We are committed to a consultation rather than a conference. There is not an absolute difference between them, but in a consultation, there is a greater freedom for free-flowing conversation, for the group to shape the course of the conversation as it goes on, and for work to be done by the group, as well as hearing about work done already by those who are presenting papers.

A consultation is not a shapeless conversation, where stones roll, gathering no moss. Shaping the conversation is done both by preparation, by programme and by process.

Preparation

Before we gathered, we circulated material which will be basic to our conversation. This included material on Child Theology, on the theology of childhood (in outline), *The Child in Christian Thought*, and other sources coming from those who will be taking part in the conversation. In this way we will be able to prepare for it.

We asked all participants to make available before the meeting anything they have written which would be part of the conversation. This method will intensify the consultation – we will be coming to converse with one another, not to talk about work done by people not present.

Programme

The programme starts with introductions (brief) and by a discussion of Child Theology, in order to achieve a group focus upon the theme and to begin to identify some of the arguments and explorations we will want to have.

Then, there will be a session dedicated to *The Child in Christian Thought* and another to David Sims, work on the liberation of the North American Evangelical child. This very self-consciously and concretely reflects the regional situation. Similarly, the session on 'Godly Play' will allow us to ask: What is there of CT in this methodology? We will also have the opportunity to begin to apply the CT method to a current situation: the Child and Media.

Process

In the consultation, we should avoid lengthy presentations of papers, which are followed by questioning of the author, as though he is either the authority or the victim. Each session needs introductions which will open up the conversation, which will be sustained by the whole membership, sometimes breaking into smaller groups. The introduction needs to ensure there is a sufficient information base for the conversation – which will mostly involve no more than checking that people have read what has been made available, and can share in formulating the themes to be opened up in the discussion.

The authors of papers will share in a mainly conversational way. They will have the space to ensure their work is not being misunderstood, and will be asked towards the end of the session to make a constructive response to the discussion, relating their work to Child Theology.

Introduction to a Book on Child Theology

by Keith White and Haddon Willmer

To help the roundtable discussion get going, Keith and Haddon presented an outline of a book on CT they have been working on since Penang 1. It is an intensive free meditation on four images taken from Matthew's Gospel, which suggest ways of doing CT and sum up what it says. Jesus *set a child* in the midst of a theological argument about the kingdom of God (Matt.18.3). He did not merely call those who want to enter the kingdom to become as children but gave them a way of achieving that impossibility: *receiving a child* in his name. Jesus called in *angelic representation* on behalf of little ones who were despised. Jesus himself *blessed children*. Each of these images can be interpreted in an activist way: what do they imply about how we should act for children? They can also be read as advocacy: how are they arguing the case for children and their rights? In CT, particular attention is paid to God in these images. What do they say about God? In what way do they reckon with the

presence and absence of God in the child? What offer of participation in the life and way of God is opened to us by having the child set in the midst?

Such a theological concentration goes against the tide of atheistic culture and untheological religious piety and activism. This is what CTM is committed to exploring and testing out.

Reflection

by Haddon Willmer.

1. The book is the personal contribution of Keith and Haddon to CT. It will not be a textbook of the CTM. It may have been occasioned by the same issues and processes as the movement, but it doesn't define or defend it and is not owned by it. The book and CTM follow the same process – they both start with the child in the midst.

2. It is controversial to insist that we become as a child by receiving a child. In the other Gospels, the discourse refers to receiving the child; only Matthew speaks of becoming a child. We need to beware of implying adulthood to be a lesser state. The adult cannot become a child literally and were an adult to do so, he/she would be rejecting God's creative work of "growing up". If we focus on becoming a child we risk introverted egoism but if becoming a child is serendipity or a by-product of receiving then we are released from our own ego. We need to become a child in a sensible way, which we can do by discovering what it means to receive a child. [Haddon gave as an example receiving Nathaniel, his grandson. He had to learn to walk at his pace and to let him do all the 'being a child'.]

   The concept of receiving could be very fruitful in relation to many issues relating to children and their lives. There are various activities and spheres of receiving: people and institutions, relationships and realms. We need to interpret reality institutionally and systematically. For example, education – how is the child being received there? Is there such a receiving that the staff of the institution "become" children, in a sense beyond the merely emotional and childish?

3. It's clearly wrong to say that we live in a child unfriendly age – there is overwhelming organized child friendliness. But what we are achieving is not enough: children still suffer. There are still millions who are despised. People engaged for children are constantly aware of those they are not helping. In Britain, we talk of reducing the poverty of children by 50%, but what about the other 50%?

The book will address the theological questions embodied in children who are not helped. For example, Psalm 27:10 affirms that, when my parents forsake me, there is a God who will pick me up. Is this so in our experience or in the experience of the world's children? If not, is the idea of 'original sin' the best explanation? And what does the situation of orphaned children say to us about church?

Participant Interaction

Participants offered several possible issues that the book might address, such as:

- The spiritual problem of how adults become more like children;
- How can we welcome children into the church?
- How do we welcome children into the world and society?

When dealing with the first of these issues, we need to make the distinction between childishness and childlikeness in the light of child development. We should not oppose adulthood and childhood as each has potential for perfection. How can we hold the two in tension: not one or the other and not one exclusively? Children are part of the covenant and bring a lot. Can we look for bidirectional discourse?

The group affirmed the importance of maintaining the distinction between spirituality and theology. There is a drive for spirituality not rooted in theology, but in relationships, etc. However, good theology is the root to a healthy Christ immersed spirituality. The goal of the Christian community is to take the spirituality of the child and wrap it around with faith in Christ.

The needs of children should be taken to the church in a way that gives church leaders a clear message. For example, the evangelical church in Latin America generally doesn't accept the CRC[11] but there needs to be an alternative to the CRC offering practical support for children in need.

[11] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Discussion on *'The Child in Christian Thought'*

with Marcia Bunge, editor[12]

Questions *by Haddon Willmer*

The discussion with Marcia Bunge was introduced by a series of questions which started by identifying the difference between the history of Christian thought and theology.

- What in general is the relation between the *history* of Christian thought and practice and our *decisions* today about what we should think and do?
- What is the relation between the *history* of theology and our *theological* decision and service today? The history of theology is not theology itself.
- Does the history, as surveyed in this book, confirm the judgment that the Christian tradition generally has failed to follow Jesus in placing a child at the centre of its life and thinking? Is there not a revealing difference between what is disclosed in Judith Gundry-Volf's article and the predominant themes of most of the succeeding articles?
- If we seek now to do CT out of the resources provided by this history, are we not likely to be sucked back into inconclusive yet dominating discussion about original sin? Do we want to shape Child Theology in this way? Does not a serious enquiry into the child and sin today need to be conducted in genuine freedom from this history (but not in ignorance or despising of it)?
- For CT today, it is especially important to be aware of recent theological developments, so that we understand the situation we are in, what we have been shaped by and what we are speaking to. The book ends with four articles dealing with the twentieth century history but there is still room to ask what further historical study we need of the recent past in order to develop adequate CT. What further requests of the historians might CT make, even when it has this valuable book in its hands? What more is on the way?
- Do we not need a deeper, more comprehensive historical study of the relations between twentieth century theology and contemporaneous Christian theoretical and practical engagement with children, than is given here, or in other sources?
- The book is presented as an occasion to re-examine the limits and possibilities of our own current assumptions about children and our obligations to them. It provides resources for strengthening theological and ethical reflection on children, helping to establish it as a legitimate area of theological inquiry. We might therefore ask: What are the signs that the book is having these effects?

Response *by Marcia Bunge*

A key objective of the book was to determine how to build a vital and more complex theological picture of children and its implications for theology. We need a strong Child Theology, taking account of what we do have: biblical, traditional, and historical. This will require collaborative effort from historical theologians, biblical scholars, ethicists etc. We need a build up of discourse in many areas of theology resulting in a stronger Child Theology.

I. Challenges

Although we believe we live in a child-friendly culture, our actions - not only in our societies but even in our churches - often reveal a lack of commitment to and narrow perspectives of children.

1. Many countries fail to meet even the basic needs of children: poverty, lack of health care, inadequate and dangerous schools, lack of preschool.
2. The church also often lacks a strong commitment to children and treats them as truly "the least of these."

[12] See Appendix I

- Many congregations offer weak religious education classes and fail to emphasize the importance of parents in faith development. Curriculum is poor.
- Many parents neglect to speak with their children about moral and spiritual matters and to integrate faith practices into their everyday lives. Even where curriculum is strong, the lack of parental involvement dilutes its effectiveness and message. In the U.S. a child "receives" 27 hours/week of TV versus 1 hour/week of religious education. If faith and the home are not integrated how does anything stick? Bible college students testify they had no faith discussions with others. Of 8,000 adolescents in 11 denominations, only 10% discuss faith with any degree of regularity and 43% never discussed faith.
- Systematic theologians and ethicists say little about children and offer few well-developed teachings on the nature of children or why we should care about and for them. It is seen as the work of pastors and specialists. There are a lot of resources on abortion, biotechnology and reproduction; there are few resources on family or for families to teach faith.
- National churches have not been consistent public advocates for children.
- Lurking behind our lack of commitment to children in the church and the wider culture are several simplistic views of children and our obligations to them.
- A market mentality has infiltrated our thinking toward children. In a consumer culture, we tend to view children as being commodities, consumers, or economic burdens.
- In popular magazines or newspapers, we tend to depict infants and young children as pure and innocent beings whom we adore and teenagers as hidden and dark creatures whom we must fear.
- In the Christian tradition, we have often focused on children merely as sinful or as creatures that are "not yet fully human."

These simplistic views diminish children's complexity and intrinsic value, and thereby undermine our commitment and sense of obligation to them.

II. Resources from the tradition for a complex view of children

Although theologians within the Christian tradition have often expressed narrow and even destructive conceptions of children and childhood, there are six central ways of speaking about the nature of children within the Christian tradition that, when critically retrieved, can broaden our conception of children and strengthen our commitment to them.

1. **Gifts of God and Sources of Joy** (Ex: Genesis, Psalms, Jeremiah, John 16; Schleiermacher)

   Children are gifts of God not only to parents but also to the community. Joseph was a gift. In Genesis, to be fruitful is to receive blessing. In Psalms, children are seen as a heritage and reward. Children are not only of our own making, they are uniquely designed by God. There is a mystery to conception that we cannot control. There is also a mystery to adoption – we can't control the whole experience.

2. **Sinful Creatures and Moral Agents** (Ex: Genesis; Psalms, Proverbs; Augustine, Luther; Calvin, Edwards)

   Doesn't this view lead to the harsh treatment of children? In the tradition, there isn't that clear a pattern. It is more complex.

   a. Born into a "state of sin" – into a world that is not what it ought to : parents, communities etc., are imperfect; levels of relationship are not what they should be; injustice happens.
   b. Carry out "actual sins": they are moral agents but take into account their capacity for personal responsibility to avoid a distorted view, confusing limited emotional and thinking capacity with sin.
   c. Infants and young children are not as sinful as adults; they should be treated tenderly. They have not developed terrible habits, bad patterns of thinking.
   d. Some who viewed children as sinful also viewed them as equals and thereby shattered barriers of gender, race, and class. Francke, 18th century Pietist, and John Locke both dealt with education but while Francke saw children as equally deserving of the best care, Locke was still deeply class conscious and discriminatory.

3. **Developing Beings Who Need Instruction and Guidance** (Ex: Genesis, Proverbs, Deuteronomy, Ephesians; Chrysostom, Luther, Calvin)

They are on their way to becoming adults, intellectually, morally and spiritually. They need to be taught virtues and habits; develop friendships and contribute to the common good. There are passages about the responsibility of adults to teach and nurture children.

4. **Whole and Complete Human Beings Made in the Image of God** (Ex: Genesis; Schleiermacher; Rahner)

They are worthy of dignity and respect. Gen 1:27 and Carl Rahner – children are fully human already.

5. **Moral Witnesses, Models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, and representatives of Jesus** (Ex: Gospels; Schleiermacher)

The NT depicts children in striking ways as moral witnesses and models of faith. Jesus embraces, blesses, heals, and lifts up as models…receiving children, rebuking those who hurt them. As radical today as it was in Jesus' day; today we rarely emphasize what adults can earn from children.

6. **Orphans, Neighbours, and Strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion** (Ex: Exodus, Deuteronomy; Francke, Wesley)

III. Dangers of retreating from this complex view of children

Whenever we retreat from this rich, complex, and almost paradoxical view of children found in the Bible and Christian tradition, we risk falling into deficient understandings of children and our obligations to them, and we risk treating them in inadequate and harmful ways.

We are good at teaching and biblical stories, but we are not good at respecting the questions of the children themselves – or the opposite – we respect the questions and forsake the story and instruction.

1. **When we view children primarily as gifts of God and as models of faith:**

We will enjoy children and learn from them. However, we may neglect their growing moral responsibilities and minimize the role that parents and other caring adults should play in a child's moral development.

2. **When we view children primarily as sinful and in need of instruction:**

We will emphasize the role of parents and other caring adults in guiding and instructing children and recognize a child's own moral responsibilities. However, we may neglect to learn from children, delight in them, and be open to what God reveals to us through them. We may also narrowly restrict our understanding of parenting and religious education to instruction, discipline, and punishment. Many mainline Protestant churches expect little of children until aged 12 years and then, suddenly, they are fully accountable!

IV. Implications

If we can appropriate and hold in tension all six biblical perspectives of children, then we can strengthen our commitment to children in several ways.

1. **Strengthen spiritual formation and religious education curricula**

- Include parents and their responsibilities, providing them with ideas and resources for nurturing faith in the home
- Include more joy and laughter.
- Develop more substantial religious educational materials and curricula for children in the church.
- Create Christian education courses that emphasize the importance of the family in spiritual formation and faith development.
- Recognize and cultivate more readily the growing moral capacities and responsibilities of children by introducing them to good examples, mentors, and stories of service and compassion; including children in service projects and teaching them financial responsibility; helping them discern their vocations and explore how they can best use their gifts and talents to contribute to the common good.
- Listen more attentively to children and learn from them.
- Structure our religious education classes in ways that respect their questions and insights.
- Recognize the importance of children in the faith journey and spiritual maturation of parents and other adults.

2. **Deepen theological and ethical reflection on children and generate a strong theology of childhood**

- See children not as "belonging" to parents but rather as gifts to the whole community.
- Take more seriously our obligations to all children.
- Strengthen theological and ethical reflection on the role of church and state in protecting children.
- Strengthen theological and ethical teachings on the responsibilities of parents.
- Encourage more courses that help prevent divorce and support all families.

- Understand spiritual formation as a serious area of inquiry in all areas of theological and biblical studies.

3. Renew the church's commitment to serving and protecting all children

- Include children in the worship service as true participants and welcome them as full members of the church.
- Treat all children, regardless of age, race, class, or gender, with more dignity and respect.
- No longer tolerate the abuse or harsh treatment of children, and warn against equating "discipline" with physical punishment.
- Support local and national legislation that addresses the needs of all children and families, such as by fighting for a truly working wage, parental leave policies, health care for all children, and a strong education for all children.
- Attend to the needs of poor children in our community and around the world.
- Work more diligently to protect and serve all children in need.
- Become stronger and more creative advocates for children in our country and around the world.

We need more research on what we think of children today. We need a strong biblical scholarship perspective on children in a fresh and new way. There is more mining of the text to be done leading towards the development of a strong theology

By appropriating a view of children that incorporates these six central perspectives on children found in the Bible and the tradition, we can strengthen our efforts in spiritual formation and religious education. We should do what we can to facilitate a stronger theology of childhood in the church and take up more wholeheartedly and responsibly the Christian call to love and care for all children. Specifically, it would be helpful to see outstanding Biblical scholars taking a new look at the key texts on children and to see more resources for people in Christian ministry with children who are picking up on issues in the book.

Participant Interaction

At this point we moved into smaller groups to focus discussion around the following questions:

- What was your response to the six central ways of viewing children in the Bible and tradition?
- Which of the six perspectives have you emphasized in your own work? Which have you neglected?
- What additional perspectives on children need to be included? In what ways have you seen children as moral witnesses, models of faith, sources of revelation, or representatives of Jesus? In what ways, if any, have children been resources for your spiritual development and maturation?
- Is there a corrective needed (are these six ways valid)?
- What are the implications of a stronger theological perspective?

The following summarizes the discussions as shared in a plenary session. The comments summarised below do not represent 'thought through' positions and are not necessarily the consensus of the group, still less the views of all the participants, but they are included to give an idea of the issues that participants felt needed to be addressed. During this time there was intentional awareness and opportunity for Peter (Tanzania) and Alfredo (Latin America) to respond to the relevance of the discussion to their situations, to ensure "open" or "global" thinking by all of us.

The place of history as it relates to CT

The child in theology has not been considered a legitimate theme of inquiry but has been seen as rather beneath the serious theologian and thinker. This might be attributed to various influences such as the feminization of the care of children, the Sunday School movement, and the Industrial Revolution.

Theological discussion with the child in the midst is developing and starting to gain legitimacy. We do not want to develop CT by resurrecting old patterns and history. Dragging historical baggage into the present is like dragging an iceberg to get a cup of water – by the time it arrives where it is needed, it has melted away.

What must be recognized is that, in some respects, the modern western child was not envisioned in the Bible. Moreover, when children are addressed, the focus is much more on males than females.[13] The biblical model was one of, 'my father has a business and expects me to work in it.' The contemporary picture is one of universal education and the creation of "teenager". In the attempt to reconcile the two cultures we run the danger of polarizing our attitudes: sentimentalized child versus working child; romanticized child versus idolized child.

We also run the danger of putting the child in the centre in such a way that Jesus is marginalized. But *Jesus* set the child in the midst to get them to follow *him* in the way to the cross. This certainly is the spirit of Paul's understanding of the gospel and the Christian life. Deep in the heart of Pauline understanding (Phil 2) is that way of Jesus witnessed to by the child.

The Question of Perspective

The plenary group agreed that a key beginning to healthy theological development would be to determine how children are to be viewed. It was recognized that 'view of children' could imply observation from a distance rather than child in the midst. The former can feel clinical and remote. Children must be viewed in their acculturated context to have an accurate and complex view of children.

One cause of the difficulty of talking about child in Western Theology is the tension between the high and low views of children. Some have a high view of children and a low view of scripture, leaving children romanticized as lovely, beautiful people needing only development and guidance. But, at what age does development stop and at what point do we no longer need guidance? There is nothing inherent in age that diminishes or enhances one's value in the eyes of God. Others have a low view of children and a high view of scripture in which children must be 'saved' lest premature death take them straight to hell. How do we bring these two streams together?

One answer may be found in different attitudes to love: 'accepting love' vs. 'transforming love'. If we express only accepting love and are not willing to transform there is no challenge, which is the equivalent of ignoring the need for change. If we express only transforming love, we will only experience disappointment because we will never be able to be satisfied. It was agreed that a sign of maturity is the ability to hold these truths in tension. How different would our conversation be if we talked about adults? Do we need to have a high and low view of *persons*, not just "child"?

The Child as Gift and Gifted for the family of faith

Children are a gift that may be disruptive to *everything.* Is this disruption often viewed as a gift? There was encouragement to expand on the idea of gifts with the objective of developing the understanding of children as not being just gifts *of* God but also gifted *by* God (1 Peter 4:7-11 and Ephesians 4:11-16). God is working in, for and through children. What are children right now in the community? What are the skills that children can contribute in particular ways? Children's cuteness and ability to disrupt are ministries to us. This is a rich theological concept often missed.

Consider, also, the use of the word "family". It has been 'ghettoized' and 'low-churched', being reduced to "nuclear". But scripture speaks of something bigger. When the text says 'family' it often thinks 'generations'! In fact, it frequently meant three generations were present. Separation of children from generational exposure in the faith community, especially in worship, was frowned on. Think of the Jewish family in the Old Testament, which was the only biblical text available at the time of Jesus, where were the children? Was Jesus' placing a child in the midst something foreign to the Old Testament or was it a full expression of where the child belonged as witnessed to by the Old Testament?

Adults, whose worship is so captured and distorted by language, might not appreciate the often non-verbal ministry of children. Even when children speak, adults often don't recognize the 'ministry' in it. Children resonated with Jesus' actions in the cleansing of the temple in Matthew 21:12-17 (not decent and in good order!). The adult religious community was outraged at the calling out of children but Jesus quoted Ps 8:2 "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger".

The temple clearing account whispers a language of relationship that is perhaps picked up in other parts of the biblical text. There is Mark 2:34-35 – who are my mother, brothers? But the epistles are relatively silent. If we

[13] This does not diminish the authority of the text for the modern western child, nor does it question the eternal perspective of God who inspired the scriptures. This is merely a statement that the biblical culture was radically different than the present American culture. The authors of each of the biblical books wrote in the light of their particular culture, and this must be recognized when developing any theology, including Child Theology.

consider Paul to have written as if the child is in the midst of his thinking, maybe we would find more in the epistles. Perhaps the child's presence was assumed because it was lived out therefore there was nothing left to be explained. This could be a dangerous argument from silence.

The Challenge of Doctrine - Sin

How do we connect a view of children as primarily gifts of God and as models of faith with the view of children primarily as sinful and in need of instruction? Is it a real gift if the gift is sinful? How do we work out the responsibility of children for their own behaviour? How do we understand the word "sinful"? Chrysostom assumed that children are good but must be punished harshly. (He wanted them all to become monks.) Calvin marked the high tide of a low view of children yet, when actually faced with children, he helped them.

The whole question of "sin" is much more complex than we have allowed it to be. How we view sin in connection with the child especially will impact how parents and adults want to relate to children. If we follow Barth there is no need to panic at the evidence of sin in children because there is another truth at work in them of which we are confident. The next step is to ask: "How do we see the child prostitute and the child soldier in the light of Christ?" How do we see sin in these circumstances?

Some Implications

- There needs to be a greater understanding of "community".
- Do we have a rich theological understanding of parenting? Our concept of child will affect it.
- What of "family"? There are 120 million orphans. If family is limited to the purely biological, then many are missing out.
- Getting over poverty involves understanding our identity in Christ. Sentimentalizing children doesn't recognize the suffering and pain of children who take on adult roles.
- How will we negotiate *gift* and *sinful* in light of Augustine, Calvin, Aquinas, and Bushnell? Christianity has the ability to retain the tension of these two, but how?
- If it is true that children do not reveal themselves to people who do not enjoy the company of children, does that eliminate the work of theologians who spoke on the theology of children but who themselves did not enjoy children and therefore missed out on the empirical evidence?

Small group discussion

The consultation divided into four smaller groups for study of one of the issues that arose from the discussion on *Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church*. Many of the groups chose to focus on one or two items in their section as opposed to all of them both because of what they felt was priority and because of time constraints. The notes that follow are bullets, illustrations or brief phrases that aim to capture the essence of each group's presentation.

1. Child Theology

- History and theology relationship
- Sin
- As reflection on praxis
- Incarnation
- Life together

Consider history and theology in relationship. History is a limited resource that can leave us in a box because there were repeated themes that need to be challenged, e.g. child is evil. Good theological reflection needs a lot of resources and many disciplines of which history is only one. Uncritical and exclusive use of history would be a mistake. Other disciplines provide a critical reading of history.

Concerning "Sin" there is a need to break from history i.e. the connection between sin and baptism. We need to talk about child sin without sentimentalism. We also need to bring in and break out the doctrine of election.

We need to be really serious about reflection on praxis and work hard at answering how do we really put the child in the midst and how do we read the Bible? Pursue the impact of the Incarnation as a spiritual and body incorporation, of life together (Bonhoeffer), otherness, kingdom of God, adoption, Israel as child of God.

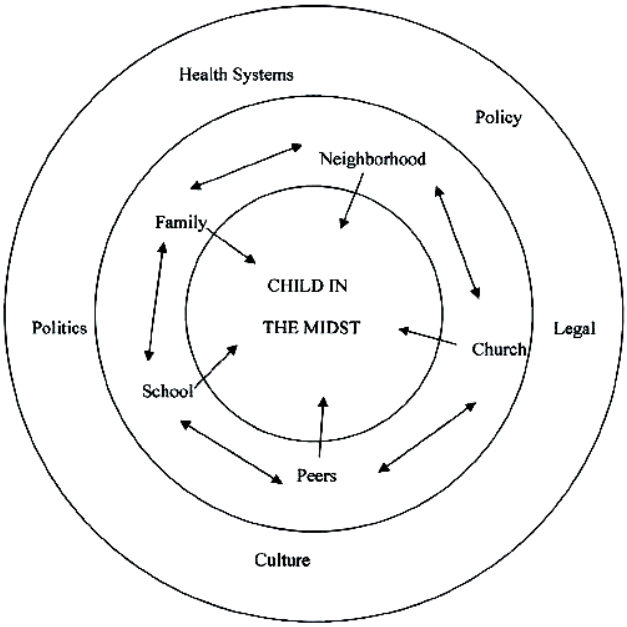
2. Child as such

- Child development
- Sexuality
- Ending of childhood/ transition to adulthood
- 'Good childhood' (biblical profile)
- Child as actor, leader

A good childhood from a biblical perspective includes:

- receiving instruction about God and his ways as emphasized in Deuteronomy
- the passing on to children a knowledge of God and an invitation to them to enter in

Child in the midst does not mean isolation but to be in the midst of tremendous activity and relationships in the context of the influencing community powers of politics, health systems, policy, law and culture - see illustration below



ALL IN TIME

3. Child in the World

- Poverty
- Mass media/culture
- Globalization

What is poverty; what does the child in the world experience in poverty and what does that say to CT?

Poverty can be material or educational etc; urban or rural; poverty of affluence;

Abject poverty is traditionally defined as absence of any two of the basic needs (shelter; clean water; education; food; medical care). Should CT agree on a definition of poverty? Does the child in the midst change the criteria?

What is essential or common to all types of poverty?

- Absence of resources and deprivation
- Access - Power issues – a common feature is powerlessness – God has something to say about this!
- Balance - Poverty is something out of balance – poverty of deprivation and poverty of excess;

Would CT have something different to say than what Liberation theology could say to the issue of poverty? Should there be a preferred option for the child, is that what CT is saying? (cf. Liberation theology)

4. Impact on Church

- On grassroots
- On leadership

- On congregation and organization
- Affirming helping children as 'ministry'
- Publicizing CT
- Resources needed and available

When we consider children in the kingdom and the place of the church, we almost need to get the church out of the way just like the Pharisees and the disciples needed to get out of the way.

We need to exercise a Hermeneutics of suspicion in the same way feminist theology did when it asked if the bible marginalized women. We should be looking at all resources with a critical gaze.

Meditation, led by Susan Greener: Mark 10

Although the chapter preceding Mark 10 is that the kingdom is about 'child', we still find here in verse 13 that the disciples are pushing the children away. Then the rich young ruler comes. He ends up hanging onto his wealth and sadly walking away from Jesus. Verse 24 is a key: "The disciples were *amazed* at his words." The kingdom is not about wealth and status. Continuing on to 10:35-45 we see again how slow they are to learn.

How about us? Are we slow to learn? Do we get it? Can we tear up our credentials and business cards? We can't claim those things for the kingdom because it's not about what we have or bring. What do children bring? Power? Status? Money? Children can worship, pray, invite, witness, usher, offer, help, clean, run Powerpoint, help in nursery, etc. Kids are important and have something to contribute that is not much different than what adults can contribute.

A story to illustrate: One boy, Kyle, is always willing to pray for others when they go forward for prayer. One day he prayed for Jim, a man with oesophageal cancer. He gave Jim a picture and the next week Jim visited children's church to say how important it was that they prayed for him and that the picture was above his bed. On Maundy Thursday, Jim washed the feet of another little girl with cerebral palsy. It had a big impact on the church and was one of the last things he did before he died. This is a great example of a child in the midst! Can we live it?

Feedback and Evaluation of Day One

Again, these notes represent opinions expressed in the groups, not conclusions reached by the consultation and they should be read in that light.

Concerning application, influence and grassroots involvement

- What is the impact of this for the grassroots and leadership around the world?
- How can the church be impacted to move from ideas to action?
- Although we only have a part of the message, as we share what we have, more will become clear.
- We are not yet speaking about poverty and globalization. We need to think of poverty perhaps in conjunction with mass media and also need to have a conversation that is more global and integrated, identifying differences.
- How do sexuality, prostitution, or the effect of media on children influence CT? For example, what is the impact of sexual abuse on the spirit of the child? Like liberation theology, CT needs to be a conversation shaped by the practitioners.
- How do we address the gulf between what happens in the consultations at the theological level and what gets into the hands of the practitioners? Many at the grassroots are recognizing the similar issues as the theologians but do not have the time or tools to think it all through. A strong theology gives confidence that they are doing Christian ministry and not 'just' social work.

Concerning childhood and child development

- We need to look at the process by which childhood draws to a close, the transition into adulthood and responsible faith. How do we identify the boundary? We would also like to see greater discussion of child development: how does the uniqueness of each stage affect our theology? Spiritual development may not be rooted in physical and cognitive development.
- There are thousands of ways to imagine a child but we need a profile from the Bible showing child and childhood from God's perspective. This can provide a holistic view of the child and give a standard by which to measure the reality of the child in our world.
- How do we impart wisdom to children and not just education? Luke 2:52 can provide the basis for a comprehensive model for development. We typically look to education but this may fall short because education focuses on knowledge. Wisdom is knowing how to handle knowledge.
- How do we give children a voice such that we hear from them? It is always important to hear directly from any marginalised group. We might think children can't think at a theological level but they can have a tremendous insight beyond their cognitive development. They have other ways of expressing their theology, e.g. pictures.
- How do we keep the memory of being a child, of being a gift? We need to remember from where we have come.

Concerning doctrine

- Can we work on a 21st century definition of sin rather than just a restatement? It would need to take account of the situations of children around the world, such as child prostitutes, child soldiers, etc.
- We need to explore life together in the Christian community with the child in the midst.
- What is the meaning of the incarnation in this context?

Concerning process

- One of the goals of CT is not simply to develop a theology that relates to children but to achieve a rereading of theology as a whole. What are we asking theologians to do, so that CT doesn't become a "niche" but impacts the whole picture for all people? What is the significance of developing CT for the whole of, for example, American theology – or for the whole range of American theologies?
- Some denominations see covenant relationship acting through parents, therefore CT may wish to ask whether the children of believing parents have a qualitatively different relationship with God – a different way of interacting with God - compared with children of non-believing parents.
- We should aim to open a dialogue with the many people working on CT outside the evangelical tradition. Our objective is to articulate a theological position in such a way that these different perspectives can own it. The question then is: "How do we engage a broader group of people from all those who are engaged in ministry and are living out the kingdom?"
- A valuable role that could be fulfilled by CTM would be to compile a list of resources, relief agencies, initiatives, conferences and meetings etc on behalf of children. All participants could become involved in contributing to these.[14]

[14] To some extent, this function is already being fulfilled by Viva Network (www.viva.org) but CTM may have a specific role related to theology.

The Child in American Evangelicalism[15]

With David Sims

David is preparing a doctoral thesis on this subject. His primary premise is that the system of capitalism fundamental to western economy is a causative factor in the development of the spiritual poverty of the American Affluent Evangelical Child (AAEC), placing that child at risk of being victim to the predatory nature of those who embrace the system, and thus jeopardizing their spiritual condition at the level of desire and relationality. The story of Craig and Iqbal is a very helpful illustration of David's position:

Iqbal, Craig Kielburger and Free the Children

Not only did Iqbal's life and death give birth in a sense to Craig Kielburger, it also gave birth to an international child advocacy organization with global reach. This organization "empowers young people through representation, leadership and action. Over the past six years, Kids Can Free the Children has become the largest network of children helping children in the world with over 100,000 youth involved in more than 35 countries."[16] *At the organization's summer conference in August 2002, youth delegates attended from Japan, Australia, the United States and Canada. The "delegates dove into issues such as child exploitation, and engaged in interactive workshops that addressed encompassing issues such as globalization, poverty, education, war-affected children, positive peace-building... [and] analyzed these issues on the international level, but were encouraged to find local solutions to these problems, by means of initiating grassroots actions in their own communities."*[17]

This looks and sounds very much like the praxis of liberation theology. It is consistent with the children's liberation movement in the United States and United Nations. According to liberation theology, *Free the Children* is engaging in liberating theological praxis on behalf of oppressed children in the world. They are engaged in a work of liberation from the 'underside' of humanity - in this instance, from poor children up. In liberationist fashion, they are engaged in the 'conscientization' process, informing and forming the consciences of children, adults, and leaders in governments and non-governmental organizations around the world about the evils to which children are subjected in the 'glocal[18]' village. Stories such as Craig's help those who have the world's goods to behold their counterparts in need. Hopefully, this will compel them to open their hearts and prove that the love of God is in them by taking liberating action on behalf of the poor children of the world (1 John 3:17).

Free the Children's work would not have come about but for the 'glocal' capitalistic market context in which Iqbal lived. Responses such as Craig Kielburger's to suffering illustrate a powerful point: great things can begin small. Liberation Theology started small as well. Latin American Roman Catholic priests who worked from the underside of humanity, with the small, poor ones lifted their voices and were heard around the globe. Liberation theologians have helped rich-world Christians see that there is an economic and social basis to the oppression of poor children like Iqbal. What is often missed, however, is that unmitigated capitalist desire is also rooted in sinful human hearts, in the motivational dimension of desire. These hearts manifest and coalesce in unjust social structures and economic and political systems that perpetuate oppression. Two-thirds world children no doubt still are chained to carpet looms weaving oriental carpets to fulfil the high-dollar demands of 'glocal' consumers. It is a world in which the dictates of capitalist desire have caused love for children to grow deathly cold at times."

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15 See Appendix II: *The Child in American Evangelicalism: Notes for Houston.*

16 http://www.freethechildren.org (20 December 2002).

17 Id. (emphasis added). The emphasized language bears stark similarity to the base community activities of Liberation theology, except that 'critical reflection on the Word of God' is missing from the formula for action.

18 'global' and 'local'

David's own comments on his paper

My paper can give the impression of being non-capitalist but I am not. We need capitalism for economics of mission but there are pitfalls to capitalism. How did we arrive at the present position of children in consumer culture? And what are the implications of the reality that the western world has no alternative economic model for the developing nations?

All American children watch ads on TV and many of those present could remember jingles from their childhood. Common exports to the developing world are Christian television and western media. These are seen as most troublesome to those who work with Children at Risk around the world. The U.S. is seen as the cause of all the trouble and yet people would emigrate there in a minute. Greed is not just a western thing. What is most difficult for us is that the same techniques are used by Evangelical organizations (e.g. Family Life, the organization for which I work prays for good sales).

It all has an effect on the development of desire and relationality, which in turn impacts our spiritual condition.

Two questions arise:

1. From Haddon's conversation – where do we find the American Evangelical child in the midst of Matt 18:3? What might be stumbling blocks put before the child in American evangelicalism (AE)? Consider 18:3; 18:4; 18:5. Could a primary one be economic? Economic life shapes and underpins life itself; it has deep penetration into the formation of who we are. Ezekiel 7:19: has our money become our stumbling block?
2. From Marcia's comments – the struggle for the recognition of human rights and dignity is rooted in the values of liberal democratic societies and associated free market capitalism. This often ends up producing drastic consequences for children and must be considered in the development of CT. Economics is the most dynamic forum for social activity: we are interpreted and incorporated economically. We need to have a good understanding of the formative impact of economics on society, religion and culture. How are religion, sociology, theology, and anthropology impacted by the interpenetration of economics ? We have to get these realities into our consciousness in order to get them into our conscience.

There is a need for the integration of liberation theology into first world evangelicalism. There are two problems historically:

1. Liberation theology's warm embrace of Marxist ideology at a time when the cold war was at its height meant that it did not get a full and impartial hearing;
2. Liberation theology blamed the U.S. for all the injustice, oppression and poverty in Latin America but we can't reduce capitalism to sin. Christianity does not equal capitalism which does not equal sin.

Participant Interaction

General response

The discussion evidenced some confusion over what David meant by desire and relationality and how CT would relate to these. There was a desire for more clarity over what children need to be liberated from: capitalism or broken relationality (which capitalism too easily targets and feeds on).

Theological anthropology structured in terms of "desire" and "relationality" should be explored more. This is not abstract. We need to answer:

- What do the terms mean? How do they come together?
- Is this a discourse historically rooted or is David the first to connect these two issues?
- What are the opposites of desire and relationality?
- Desire and relationality can be seen as positive; what is the problem of desire and relationality?

Concerning Desire as a Motivator

- Jonathan Edwards and Horace Bushnell are significant players in American theology and traditions, and they might have significance for CT. There is a need for a critical assessment of Edwards and contrast

with Bushnell. The latter speaks of organic laws of family and critical relationships between parents and children. When Edwards spoke of desire he used the term "affections" and maintained that human beings choose in accordance with the greatest desire at the particular moment. Augustine and Bernard of Clairveaux and others also wrote much on desire. More recently, Cavaletti talks of vital exigencies (desire), which, if not satisfied, are destructive to the healthy development of the child.

- We are "desiring" beings – God created us so. But something is amiss and we need to ask: what does the scripture say about it and how does this shape CT?
- Radical orthodoxy treats desire as constitutive of human existence: desire is what drives us and makes us human. This is reductionistic but it can be helpful (see for example Daniel Bell Jr.).
- What is the significance of linking desire to relationality? This culture in which we live and the manner in which desire is taken captive in capitalism and consumer culture is destructive of the relationality that God intends us to have with others, ourselves and God.
- How are love and desire linked or distinguishable? What is the difference between desire and love? They are not synonyms. Augustine spoke of both; did he speak of desire in terms of love? Can we say that we love what we desire and we desire what we love?
- Love includes desire and relationality. "We become what we love". Interestingly, Buddhism stresses the elimination of desire altogether for desire is related to restlessness. What does that mean for "love"?

CT as a Liberation Theology

- Evangelicalism has been very decision oriented so children are in the faith by decision. This has a significant impact on theology.
- AE has focused on family as a private sphere. Family has been a privatized, which has led to the commodification of children. How do we talk about private issues of family in light of global economic and cultural realities? The story of Craig and Iqban communicates much of this – there is the transformative element picking up relational impact outside the traditional boundaries of "church" and "family".
- If we are to make any progress, theology must make it into a prophetic church. To be such a church we need to:
    - Understand God's plan for children, family and society in order to better understand the kingdom;
    - Announce the good news;
    - Denounce obstacles that are against the kingdom. This is harder – we prefer to pronounce good news.
- It is time to examine ourselves, to move to conscientization. There needs to be a critical concern for the poor and a critical examination of the body – do we shame those who have nothing? (see 1Cor 11). What is the significance of the body of Christ? We are liberated to help liberate others.

Capitalism – Cause, Contributor or Channel?

- Is capitalism a cause of injustice? Is capitalism's systemic nature unavoidably a root of injustice? Do nations have a choice to not meet the needs of capitalism at the expense of children? Is there a deeper cause which uses capitalism, turning it into a contributor to, or just merely a channel of, injustice?
- Does desire always lead to capitalism? What is the link? It is clear that capitalist consumer culture knows desire, knows the game, and captivates it, distorts it and disciplines it away from God's original intent so that the ultimate satisfaction of rest in God is lost. Our culture calls us to desire ourselves. God designed and calls us to desire God and he provided the means for the satisfaction of desire – John 6, "eat my flesh" is a huge theological answer to desire.
- The problem is one of distorted desire. Jesus' cleansing of the Temple which had become a "den of robbers" and "a place of trade" revealed hearts that had become distorted and had been consumed and filled with the nonessentials. Where do we see this concretely in our community? What specific problems do we see that are evidence of this captivated desire – in family? in church?
- One problem of the child in American culture is individualism (Gary Becker applying economics to children). Capitalism is merely an economic theory but individualism is deeper. How will CT (or Christianity in general) help shift away from this? How do we understand individuals, especially

children, in light of community? Children best illustrate that we have lost vulnerability and community. On the other hand, is collectivism the opposite of individualism? How about communitarianism? Both take away childhood. How do you become yourself in community?

- Child protection laws in the U.S. are, in reality, driven by economics and technology.

Godly Play

Jerome Berryman gave a demonstration of Godly Play[19] in one of the classrooms at the Center. Upon returning to the meeting area, discussion turned to two of Jerome's papers, *Children and Mature Spirituality*[20] and *Playful Orthodoxy: Reconnecting Religion and Creativity by Education*.[21]

Jerome's Comments

Jesus doesn't define the child but by using parables and particularly using the child as parable, Jesus stimulates our thinking about what we need to do to become like a child. Jesus never describes the child that we are to become like to enter the kingdom. We can't help but use history and psychology because it is what we have at hand, as long as we recognize that the concept of children has changed even if children themselves have not really changed.

Children teach us the value of silence and nonverbal communication. Godly Play, at the least, demonstrates the language of nonverbal communication. If we truly respect children, they will give respect. If we truly enjoy them, they will relate and there will be mutual blessing. Children show us how to bless and be blessed. If we can slow down and take in that "little" creature we can be blessed and bless them. This gets harder as they get older but in doing so, they are moved to mature spirituality.

How will theology inform GP? In the past, we may have been doing more to understand the child and the lifestyle of interaction with the child. Do we teach so children become orthodox or open, or can there be such a thing as "open orthodoxy"? Openness on its own does not require engagement. GP integrates both. What seemed like a contradiction, only because we hadn't found a way to bring them together, is resolved in the practice of Godly Play.

Godly Play and Child Theology

What are the distinctions between GP and CT?

Clearly they have much in common, including a careful reading of children, childhood and child development, theological reflection and awareness, and a rooting of activity in social context, including church. The focus of GP is on the child and children, whereas CT, although working with the awareness of the child in the midst has its primary focus elsewhere. GP is centred on Christian education of children in a church context, whereas CT is not limited to this and considers the whole context of a child's life, including family, school, community, nation and global networks.

GP although theologically aware and informed is aiming to create "space" in which children can experience God their Creator, while CT is seeking to re-examine theological work and formulations with a child in the midst. GP is heavily influenced by and indebted to Montessori and Cavaletti (among many others), whereas CT is more theologically influenced. GP has a carefully crafted training and accreditation course with its own literature, materials and prescribed methods, whereas CT is not influenced by nor wedded to a particular tradition or course.

It may be that GP stresses the spiritual more than the religious. CT is rooted rather in the theological.

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[19] Readers are directed to *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* Augsburg Fortress 1991, by Jerome Berryman for further information.

[20] See Appendix III

[21] See Appendix IV

What does GP say to CT?

The focus of GP is not so much on the child as on the story. The leader gets out of the way. Most children do not know how to listen. The Montessori system aims to create "space", to help children learn to listen and to develop mindfulness and reflection. This resonates with "creating theological space" in Child Theology. Dorothy Sölle in her work on the atonement gives theological insights by looking at Jesus' atoning work not so much as a substitute but as representative who keeps the space open for us. This gives is a beautiful image of salvation as a "safe" place.

There is significance in the Eucharist as a dynamic framework.[22] It provides a "getting out of the way" as well as a notion of container. GP creates a container through which children can experience being held in that safe space of salvation. Without this safe space the development of relationships is impaired.

GP provides a rich insight into all spiritual activity through its exploration of the pervasive nature of play. GP sees play in every human activity, science, finance, politics, sport, family and media as well as the "ultimate game" involving God, self, others and nature. *(Godly Play,* 1991: 1- 23) GP demonstrates the significance of the Eucharist as a dynamic framework ("container") for Godly play. *(Godly Play,* 1991: 3 8-40, 45, 79-109)

GP sees and respects children as children, rather than as "human becomings" or "adults in waiting". At the same time it is aware of the dynamic potential of the child as she develops into adulthood. There is uniqueness about each stage of human development. We are called to respect children as children. Think of Jesus as child, Jesus as Son – what bearing does that have on reflecting on CT or child in the midst.

GP works at a holistic integration of insights and perspectives: theological, educational, cognitive and therapeutic. It does not abstract the religious from the rest of life.

GP emphasizes the importance of process in theological exploration alongside content. (GP, 1991: 78.)

GP is attentive to parables, stories and narratives as ways of engaging wonder, the creative process and revealing our existential limits as human beings. (GP, 1991: 62-64) The wilderness, or better desert, is a dangerous place in communication with children, especially those who have been in horrific circumstances. Kids need ways to explain their existential circumstances – aloneness, fear, death – provided by "desert" as well as difficult experiences. It's important that the wolf is present in the story of the Good Shepherd because children have all the existential fears that adults have and need a language to describe it

GP gives detailed and reflective consideration to the process of introducing children to the Christian faith commensurate with that traditionally given to the teaching of adults.

GP can provide words and concepts for many of the processes and dynamics that workers with children have sensed and operated intuitively or unconsciously. Through the implementation of GP, children and their Christian teaching are no longer seen as marginal in the church and the child is being set in the midst in creative ways.

What does CT say to GP?

How far should the GP process be a part of and inform the worship and corporate life of the whole church?

What are the adaptations appropriate and likely to occur in a range of different cultures and contexts? So, in practical and specific terms, what changes will be necessary if GP is commenced at the CHILD Centre in Malaysia?

What of different church denominations, where the church year, saints' days, and Eucharist are treated differently if at all?

How could a non-church Christian community embody insights of GP in the whole of its life, seven days a week, not just 45 minutes once a week? What of church schools in many parts of the world (not the USA) and how they might incorporate GP into their pattern of life and curriculum?

What discoveries from *The Child in Christian Thought* can be brought to inform and enrich GP?

What extensions of GP can we envisage over time, and what research?

Does GP have a developed doctrine of original sin, a coherent understanding of child (with gender differences), and considered implications for "secular documents" such as the UN CRC?

What theological and pedagogical training is desirable among Christian leaders?

[22] See *Dynamics of Religion* by Bruce Reed

What of children and young people who cannot cope with circles and corporate experiences of the type central to GP? Virginia Axline's *Dibs: In Search of Self* is a good description of one such youngster but others of us have seen the challenge in different settings.

Classical Doctrines and a Theology of Childhood

Jerome presented a draft chart listing classical doctrines as presented in many seminaries[23] alongside themes of the theology of childhood in order to present a possible relation of one to the other. It is a beginning point from which to stimulate healthy dialogue and reflection as we consider CT in light of the whole of theology. The themes of a theology of childhood do not in any sense replace any of these classical areas of reflection. It refreshes them with new insights, perspectives and language. A theology of childhood is coherent, but it is not a systematic theology.

A theology of childhood uses less abstract language than classical theological terms and is grounded more in the silence of the non-verbal communication system, where our spirituality lies, rather than the verbal system, where the attempt to explain and evaluate what we know by the Holy Spirit takes place.

Meditation, led by Jenny Hyson: Matthew 18

The passage starts with the disciples wondering who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. The scene is possibly a home in Capernaum. The child in the scene is perhaps a child of the household. We observe that in our churches children are often not allowed to stand among the disciples, the adults. At times they are called "to the front" to show us what they have been doing (a rather patronizing approach) or they are kept at the back where they will not disturb.

Here, Jesus pulls the child among them. Did the child act as a mirror to those around? Are we the child? Or, are we one of the disciples seeing some reflection?

At this point, Jenny invited us to take five minutes to be still with the child among us.

We need always to receive the challenge to welcome the child to allow it to confront us and change us. What are the stumbling blocks we pose for children…that *I* pose for children?

After this, David Sims led a time of prayer.

The Development of Ethics for Children[24]

led by John Wall.

Jewish, Moslem and other ethicists focus on issues like poverty, war, and marriage. There is so little development of Christian ethics of children.

There are three broad approaches by Christian ethicists:

1. *Communitarianism*. This is a top down model looking at how to deal with the privatization of child rearing. There is a need to transmit social values, traditions, histories and social goods to children. With this model, the responsibility falls chiefly on parents and church because they are most involved in the day to day.

   Who is responsible for raising children today? It has gradually developed over 2,000 years into smaller units of responsibility. Families are smaller – nuclear versus extended. Fathers' roles in children's lives are smaller now than ever. The industrial revolution had a significant impact exacerbated now by the broken family so that even dedicated fathers have little opportunity to be involved. Mothers are ultimately responsible for the children.

   What is good about this model is that it attempts to put children in larger contexts to help them resist the culture around them. The problem is that it puts children at the back of the church or

[23] The list of classical doctrines used here is that of Alister E. McGrath's in his Christian Theology: An Introduction (1994).

[24] See paper: "Let the Little Children Come: Childrearing as Challenge to Contemporary Christian Ethics", John Wall, Rutgers University, Camden, Horizons 31/1 (2004): 64-87.

whatever context. It takes away their dignity by trying to find ways to have children learn social values as understood by the adults so that the voice of the child is devalued.

2. *Libertarianism.* This is a bottom up effort to see the value of children as gifts. It is a grassroots attempt to allow children to develop and grow on their own terms. The chief responsibility of adults in this model is to provide protection. This is seen through the interest in children having sufficient health care and in the interest in political and economic issues such as the rights of education, the right to be heard and the right to basic needs being met.

   Children are the poorest age group in the U.S. overtaking the elderly in the 70's. The younger you are, the poorer you are - 1/3 of the homeless in the US are children. In a market economy/culture where everyone is individualistic and where you get what you put in, the children lose because they cannot put in. They cannot lobby congress for more money so how they do depends on adults.

   There are two problems to this model:

   - It doesn't have a good idea of goals for child rearing. It expects the child, once protected, to reach maturity and social values by itself. What is the kingdom of God we are after? What aim do we have?
   - It tends to place more emphasis on political and economic solutions than on underlying culture. It is culture that determines a society's basic attitudes and beliefs about children.

3. *Covenantalism.* This is a dialectical (not top down, not bottom up) model of integration seeking the integration of children into community. It places a lot of emphasis on marriage and church. The primary cause of child poverty in the U.S. is the father's disappearance from his children's lives; they were either never a part or they left later. The marriage movement believes the way to deal with children's issues is to strengthen families through strengthening marriages. In history, marriage has been key, especially in gaining the economic and moral commitment of fathers.

   Luther and Calvin were the engines behind marriage becoming a public institution. Prior to their efforts, marriage was largely ecclesiastical. They were responding to the social dilemma of the day where women could have trouble ensuring men took the responsibility of fatherhood. Marriage became a social institution that integrated and protected children; the church can function the same way. At the end of the 19th century, Pope Leo XIII in an effort to furnish help ("subsidiarity") promoted the family as a private institution that can only do its work with help from the surrounding society

   The one key problem with covenantalism is that it doesn't understand what liberationists do. Children are not just impacted by family but also by what happens outside the family.

John proposes a fourth model:

4. *Critical Covenantalism.* It is an effort to combine the best of the models and to bridge historical tradition and the contemporary world. It particularly seeks to balance covenantalism with liberationism, generating a larger "social covenant" of commitment to children's whole lives. Practical "consequences" might include the following:

   Media. The amount of media exposure is appalling. Parents need to be involved but it is perhaps too easy to blame parents given the pressures they face. How do we contain media? We live in a culture where if we let free market run its course "everyone wins" but for children that is not so certain. The church needs to speak to the culture.

   Fathers. Fathers have a much stronger role than realized. We speak of family in 19th century terms: women and children, the distant fathers merely impregnate. Before then, the emphasis was on women child-bearing with men taking over child-rearing at an early age of the child. It would be good to good to look at previous models and develop new models more appropriate to our culture. Right now, it is difficult for men to be primary caregivers.

   Church. Churches have a role with the children in their midst (attend church or live in community) and they also have a role in changing culture. Churches can put children in the midst of culture in better ways. CT can advance that.

School. Schools have become a place of excellence, but not as defined by Aristotle (founder of ethics as known in the west) where excellence was equated with virtue and contribution to social good. Today, excellence means being number one, getting the highest scores. The number one person in schools is the athlete who has visibly beaten the others.

Health. There are presently 10,000,000 children without health care in the United States. We tend not to think of children as having bodies but tend to think in more spiritual and ethereal terms.

The bottom line is a question of culture. How do we put children in the midst of American culture? We have tended to respond in one of two opposite ways:

- we over-romanticize and sentimentalize children,
- or we demonize children saying they are evil and in need of civilization.

What we need to do is humanize children. This hearkens back to our earlier discussion on viewing the child. In short, our perspective of the child needs to change, and a strong, healthy CT, working with an equally strong and healthy Christian social ethic will allow this humanization to happen.

Media and Children

Keith introduced us to "Amy" as the child in the midst for today[25]. She speaks of desire, in this case the desire for relationship connected to purchasing something never wanted before. The challenge for us: How do we relate an individual biography to our discourse?

Amy is a fourteen year old who is one of thirty employed as an unpaid "consultant" or "insider" to advise Delia*s (sic.) a clothes company, on how to appeal to her and her friends. Delia*s catalogue has a yearly circulation of 45 million. She typically spends many hours a week testing out new Delia*s products and emailing corporate friends. Her friends then want to buy what she is wearing. She gains a sense of identity both from being valued by the adult professionals in the company, and by her peers. She sees herself as a trend spotter and feels "in the know" and "cool" as a consequence. She does most of her "work" in the Americana Manhasset Mall in New York. Amy's parents also wear designer clothes and her mother believes that this activity of hers is educational and empowering. There are tens of thousands of girls like Amy in the USA all owing allegiance and loyalty to the brand that sponsors and "owns" them.[26]

We discussed the following notes as we began to consider the influence of media and the challenge of CT to respond.

Background

If sociology is having trouble trying to keep up with global societal trends because of the pace of change, the challenge is even greater when focusing on children and the media. Among the factors of unique significance in this generation are the following:

- There is 24-hour global media coverage available to children from their earliest years until adulthood.
- 75% of children aged 5-16 years in the UK have a television in their rooms; 38% have their own video; over 80% have their own mobile phone. (Quart, 2003: xi)
- Unsupervised access to the Internet, friends, and marketing companies is unparalleled in history. Parents and families are not gatekeepers of the media as they used to be in the era of a single radio, television; or telephone.

[25] Amy comes from the book, *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*, by Alissa Quart, Random House Publishers, 2003.

[26] Source: Branded, pages 22-47

- More time is spent watching TV, videos, on the Internet and mobile phones than at school. Family times together without the intrusion of the above are at an all time low. Electronic communication organized globally may now be one of the earliest formative influences in the life of the young child
- The presence of the worldwide web and the information society is changing social consciousness to such an extent that sociologists such as Castells argue that class solidarity is being replaced by the quest for an individual identity that can be constructed and re-constructed by the individual concerned as long as they have access to electronic communication and money.
- The media are dominated by transnational corporations owing no loyalty to a particular culture, tradition or value-system other than that of maximizing their own profit through promoting their own brand(s).
- Censorship is opposed by "liberal democracies" because it is seen as an infringement of the freedom or rights of the individual adult. Little debate has taken place about whether such an argument is sustainable in a contemporary world when children are assumed to need protection from predators who might abuse them physically and/or sexually, but not from the "corporate paedophiles" who seek to groom them as consumers of selected brands[27].

If CT is to engage with contemporary issues then this is a major issue, *possibly the major issue of our times*. In a recent CT consultation in Africa the participants all agreed that the battle for the minds of young Africans has been lost to the western-dominated media. It is arguable that this has happened without adults and adult institutions being alert to what has been happening. Media studies have not developed with "a child in the midst".

It is said that parents and society should understand children in terms of market investment for the benefit of adult lives. Parents invest in their children for their own ultimate benefit. We care about children because it helps us get in touch with our own childness. This is the substance of commodification. So, why do we have children? Essentially it is a lifestyle designed to improve our lives or, at the very least, to make us happy.

Corporations are using children to extract money for their own gain. Of the 27 hours of weekly television watched by children in the USA, 1/3 is advertising. Corporations promote branding (brand loyalty) to children as young as two years old. From the view of the corporation, advertising to the young gives a longer return on the investment.

Questions arising

If this analysis is at all correct then CT may need to start from basic questions and principles. Here are a few that are indicative of the range and importance of what is at stake.

- How far could it be argued that the global media have come between children and their families and local cultures (in the way that the disciples of Jesus came between families and Jesus)?
- What boundaries in media content and coverage are necessary for children to experience "good enough parenting"?
- What effect is the "sexualization" of relationships and identity having on children and childhood?
- What theological insights can be brought to bear on the promotion of the idea that identity is dependent on consumption and possession?
- What effects do the media have on the play of children and the nature and role of intermediate objects on which child development depends?
- How important is a "narrative framework" (including rites of passage) for the formation of personal and social identity, and how far are such frameworks undermined by the changing, market constructed "post-modern" media contexts and images?

[27] Quart, op cit, 2003: 8

- How can Christian adults in families and church provide a creative and nurturing alternative to the dominance of television? What of imagination, wonder, experiences of the sublime in the natural world? What of exercise, physical fitness and hand-eye coordination? What positives are there to be fostered and nurtured in the televisual repertoire?
- How far have the media influenced education, and what are the likely effects of this on child learning and development?

Discussion

led by Haddon Willmer.

The ethical evaluation of the branded child has, to this point, been done without theological work or reference. Does CT have anything to say to this analysis or description?

One answer would be, "No, CT is not needed for this. We have seen the need and been given options of how to respond. We understand the issue and don't need to talk further. What we do need is to get on with the response, with specific action steps".

If we say, "Yes, CT needs to speak to this" then we need to consider a more active role for parents. Critical Covenantal parenting requires an active role in instruction. There can be no passive allowing of branding; neither can there be active encouragement of branding. Parents need to step into the power of the home and their roles.

At the same time, we must be careful with the expectations and responsibility we ask parents to carry. Parents themselves are so caught up in the lifestyle that they have no time. But it is not merely time at issue – it is their whole personal human formation and horizons to be involved. The whole ethical dimension provides a basis for helpful analysis. Consider the tremendous debt that keeps parents busy and that the number one reason college students drop out is because of credit card debt. This can be linked to marketing and media which in turn reduces their opportunities for relational interaction.

An example of an active position is for parents to limit the television viewing habits of their children. The American Paediatric Association recommends that children under two years of age not watch television at all because of the lasting neurological impact. We have been talking about the relationship of the child's humanity and development to the CT discussion; the brain is a critical component to the child's essential humanity which CT needs to interact with to be useful.

The church needs to get its own house in order, including getting the child in the midst of the church before calling out to society. There church is viewed sceptically so it must be seen to "practices what it preaches". So it must check its own ethics toward children. When we consider the child we need to be thinking *stewardship* rather than *property*. This includes NOT paying attention to children just as a means to get adults to church. What the church needs to do is change the message we are giving to the people. Doing this in the U.S. will have global impact. Such commodification is not a uniquely US experience even if such direct marketing is unique.

Does each Christian tradition need to take the framework and go deeper within its own sphere to contextualize it? How does this interface with David Sims work on religion, culture and family? It is critically important to conscientize our culture about what is happening to our children.

One of the implications of analyses such as that by Alissa Quart is that we may be allowing slavery on a historically global scale never witnessed before in history, by which children and young people are being targeted and branded, dispossessed of their culture and kin, and made servants of global corporations. There is no reason why such a process cannot be analyzed from the perspective of a theologically informed "good childhood" and alternative ways of living and learning being advocated. Children themselves may well be the leaders in the campaign for change.

The world-wide-web, the most pervasive media source, could be used to bring about change. What has been used for evil could be turned around and used for good. What we are seeing in the news about abuse in Iraq is a case in point. There is a failure to censure, to teach values and to have the government in the public sector to include the kinds of things that lead us to right conduct.

Media expose, contribute to and express the social ethics of our day. They are not, themselves, the core issue. The media must be addressed in proper perspective to other connected issues. It is our challenge critically to examine media from a theological perspective.

Some theological issues are raised:

Eschatology and CT

When we describe and analyze problems and get ethicists to work on them and get parents to respond, we work with a horizon where solutions are reached. We look to who can do something and expect them to do it. We conceive the problems as solvable. Yet some may only be solvable in the long term, if ever at all. We need to ask, "What is the nature of our general human existence?" The whole concept of an eschatological hope speaks to the reality that *not* all problems have solutions and if we tackle issues as if they do, we will be disappointed. We may conclude that nothing we do works. John 14 reminds us that we will always have trouble in this world and the writer of Hebrews reminds us that we are looking for a city to come *when it comes, not as we compel it.*

We are in an *already-not yet* kingdom. As the child is placed into the midst of the kingdom we can ask, "Is the child a sign gift of the kingdom to come?" In the call to kingdom life, we need to determine what we will strive to accomplish. The biblical call is to strive for justice and deal with present circumstances; to live towards a city that is not here. This is different than living for a city built with our hands. We need to look for solutions for the present age without necessarily striving for solutions for all ages.

Even where there are solutions, whenever there is transition, as for example, from agrarian to industrial and then from industrial to post–industrial, there is great disruption. Disruption is an abstract general word concealing the reality of much suffering, frustration and waste for many real people – including children. If only the next generation gets into the "promised land", what vindication and rescue can the present generation find? Do their angels behold the face of the Father in heaven?

Legitimate Theological Representation.

Amy in the midst brought the world with her in all its complexity. We could ask "How representative is Amy of the world child?" When we put any child in the midst in this process we claim that the child is representative of all children. The question is whether or not we can allow a uniqueness from which we can talk about similarities and differences at a global level.

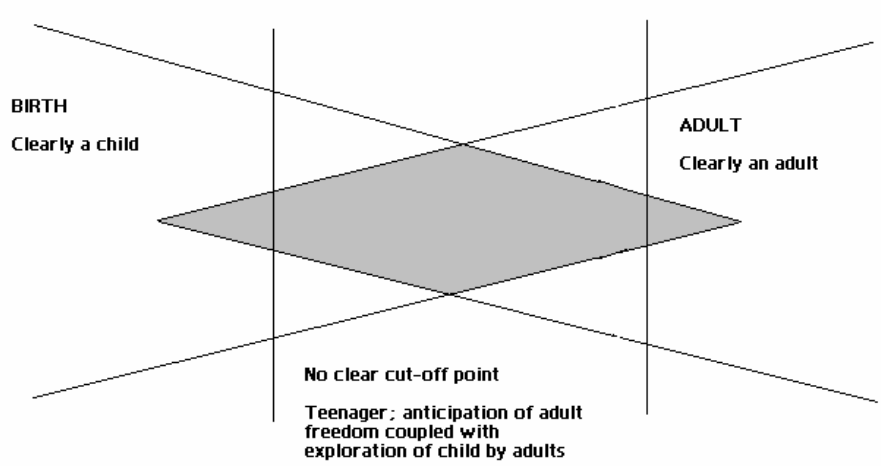
Much theological talk speaks of "child" in generalizing, abstracting or stereotyping language that limits the usefulness of that theology. If a particular child puts us on to something real about the child, it should be attended to regardless of whether that child is representative of many or a few. It is helpful to put different children in the midst. We can ask, "Who is this child representative of, and who not?" Is the subversive power of media shown in a child like Amy in any way typical? In Cape Town we were told that a visit to the slums would show us children who have not eaten but have cell phones.

We could ask about the age of the child Jesus put in the midst and how relevant this is to today's teenagers. But it might be better to ask: "How did Amy get where she is now? As a toddler was she watching TV, was she babysat? What norms and disciplines, desire and relationships in our culture, shaped her?" We are told that by age 4 the hardwiring of the brain is 86% complete and by age 10 it is finished. If we know the roots of the trouble, we may better discern what kind of religious and theological preparation we need to give before teenage years.

Some Christian Education seems to prevent young people from seeing the kingdom lifestyle choices, turning it into a simple "conversionist" decision on how to be safe. What Paul gives us in Galatians 4 and 5 is a more concrete sensitivity to what is going on in our lives. Flesh is like a predator out to get us. The alternative is the call to freedom and love. To tell them "God loves them" alone can turn them into consumers of the love of God. In fact, they are called to choose between living a flesh-driven life and living a spirit-driven life.

Having said all this, we do still need to distinguish what is a teenager. Strict exegetes may leave out the teen because there was no "teen" at the writing of the Bible. However, although the Jewish bar Mitzvah was at thirteen years old, a boy was not considered a full adult until the age of thirty. This created a cultural ambivalence – an *already - not yet* scenario not unlike today (see figure).[28]

[28] Readers wishing to follow up this line of thought are referred to "Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith" by James W. Fowler and Sam Keen; Word Books; 1985 (second edition)



The Question of Global Priorities

CT needs different levels and priorities. To talk about a global CT we need to first think of the amazing capacity for children to be alive in spite of living in a predatory and hostile world:

- 80,000 children in Latin America lost to home violence
- 4,500 children *every hour* lost around the world because of "legal" abortion, never mind illegal abortion

If the most important prophetic role of the church is to be the voice of and for the child, does this mean that we need to identify what is urgent for different regions? What is the relationship of Amy to the global child? What are the first world affluent children concerned about that we need to help them rethink their responsibility to children of the world? Are we blaming Amy for acting out what the culture has formed? Should we be looking at the child in us, creating a connection, calling for reconciliation, peace, forgiveness, so that we, in our raising of children, are changed and break cycles?

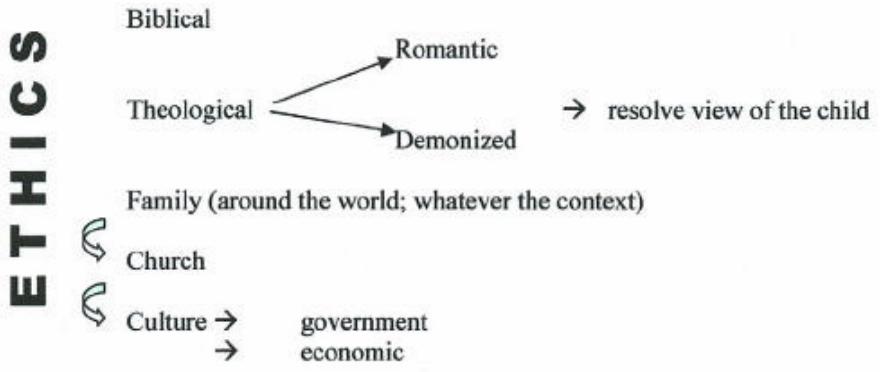
Is it helpful to blame the parents? If we are honest, we have to agree that there is more going on than simply parents passing on their own deficiencies. What role does sin take in this sociological account of what shapes our desires and relationality? Is this a product of individual agents or the system or its "powers" that can't be traced back to the actions of individuals? If so, we are confronted with the real influence of hostile powers. Then there is no use looking around at individuals or groups to put things right.

Do we even want to prioritize CT - for example to prioritize children lost to abortion over teenagers? Or would we put any and every child in the midst so that priority is attached to every child. Consider also how being a parent versus a church leader might present competing priorities.

As a group we took time to answer the question of the need for priorities. There were differences of opinion, some of which rested in confusion over definitions and some in different perspectives. The points made are summarized below:

- Confusion about the unit of analysis - Child? Adolescent? It does seem that some issues are more urgent but an informed response needs a clearer definition of child.
- Abortion and homosexuality are issues that have had priority without "success". We must focus on the principles, not hot button issues. On the other hand, we don't really address issues adequately if we only address one issue. Decisions in one part affect children elsewhere therefore we need to see the issues of children in light of the global picture.
- Some called for being transcultural as opposed to contextualized, while others would look for a universal view but also something for a specific audience. The latter would say that there is room to .prioritize in different ways. The first in terms of theologizing from which we can develop general principles and thus no priority is needed. The second in terms of acting on theology; it is here that priority needed. And yet, how do we prioritize in relation to world needs. How does one decide what issue has greater priority over another
- The method of placing a *particular* child in the midst raises issues that other children would not. However, it can still lead to a theological position applicable in many contexts. An American "Amy" was put here but in Africa there is also concern about the media taking the soul of the African child.
- Does every child bring the world to us as did Amy (through media)? Is it God's gift that every child in our midst brings the whole world, as a representative of the world?

- The greatest priority is to start with the bible in order to understand God's will. In this we have a global system of values.
- There was resonance with the discussion on capitalism. The clearer the theology on the child the clearer the methodology to work with them. Along with this, what does it mean to think globally? Some tensions can be kept in balance. There needs to be room to allow locals to be experts of specific contexts while working together to develop a theology that doesn't create a new tension.
- Ethics needs to be the backbone to the development of CT as it considers the biblical, theological, family, church and culture contexts. There must also be resolution of the view of the child, and cultural analysis must include an examination of the influence of government and economics. The illustration below was developed to capture these relationships.



In summary, the question of priority raised some key thoughts but whatever our approach to CT we must:

- think globally and act locally
- address issues that are of concern to different contexts
- pursue a biblical and well articulated theology that can make a difference regardless of the who the child in the midst is and what he or she is facing
- be clear about the essentials including definitions, objectives and supports

Conclusion

As we began to wrap up our time together, we set aside time to brainstorm and commit to some next steps in the process of developing Child Theology. The following gives some ideas:

- Provide a forum for dialogue and bridge building, with a mix of 'academic' and 'practitioner' theologians, genders, cultures, etc. There should be a specific attempt to include the Roman Catholic tradition and Liberation theologians.
- Develop courses in colleges and seminaries, share syllabi, in all fields of religious education and social cultural analysis.
- make sure the biblical material is fundamental, with more biblical reflection underpinning a strong theological understanding of the child
- Create a new discipline in ethics: social ethics of childhood.
- Encourage writing showing the impact and benefit of Child Theology
- Develop communication networks and websites
- Clarify and exploit the links to Child Spirituality.

We also took 10 minutes to reflect in silence on two questions:

- what insights/discussions/questions have arisen since we've been together
- what tasks have become clearer to me in my personal life and work

Some insights were shared with whole group:

- that practitioners *do* theology!
- there is value and fruit in theology of childhood;
- diversity did not erase commonality and concerns;
- social ethics of children should not be just a Christian ethic of children but should change how ethics is done in light of children in the midst;
- Prayer! To lead this movement to the green pastures so that it can come home through the dark places safely.

Keith concluded our time together reminding us that the Maori in New Zealand have a saying on visiting a house: "I come with an empty basket" and, when they leave, "I go with a full basket". To us, this might convey the notion of emptying ourselves in order to receive[29]. To some extent, we had to do this as we came to this consultation. Many kinds of things can be emptied and received – joy, pain, wounds, healing, etc. We came with an empty basket and we go home *full*.

We concluded our time with a final reading of Psalm 8:1-4 and the singing of a verse of "How Great Thou Art" and "Who can Sound the Depths of Sorrow", the song by Graham Kendrick.

Child Theology MOVEMENT

[29] Phil 2:5

Appendix I: Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church.

Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today

by Marcia J. Bunge, Ph.D.

Marcia Bunge is Professor of Theology and Humanities, Christ College, Valparaiso University; editor of The Child in Christian Thought (Eerdmans, 2001); co-chair of the "Childhood Studies and Religion Consultation" of the American Academy of Religion; and director of the "Project on Childhood Studies, Theology, and Ethics." She is currently working on a book on the vocation of parenting. Sections of this article appear in her essay, "A More Vibrant Theology of Children" in Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics (July, 2003).

Certainly many people today are concerned about children in our midst and in our wider culture, and we all wonder:

- Are they being raised with love and affection?
- Are they receiving a good education?
- Are they safe in their homes and schools?
- Are they being exposed to good role models?
- Will they have a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives?
- Will they contribute in positive ways to society?
- In the church we also ask, will our children have faith?
- Will they live out that faith in service and compassion toward others?

Although we express these concerns, we find that many countries fail to meet even the basic needs of children, and children around the world suffer hunger, poverty, abuse and neglect, and depression. In the United States, for example, 16% of children live in poverty and approximately nine million children have no health insurance. Many children attend inadequate and dangerous schools, and solid pre-school programs, such as Head Start, lack full funding. Children are one of the last priorities in decisions about budget cuts on the state and federal level; road maintenance and military budgets take precedence over our children, even though politicians pledge to "leave no child behind" in terms of health care or education.

Although those in the church certainly care for children and have created beneficial programs for them, the church also often lacks a strong commitment to children and treats them as truly "the least of these." We have witnessed this recently, for example, in the child sexual abuse cases within the Roman Catholic Church. We have been shocked not only by the abuse of children but also by the ways in which financial concerns, careers of priests, and reputations of bishops or particular congregations came before the safety and needs of children. Yet the church exhibits a lack of commitment to children in other, more subtle ways. Here are just four examples.

- **First** of all, many congregations offer weak religious education programs and fail to emphasize the importance of parents in faith development. The curricula and lessons of many religious education programs are theologically weak and uninteresting to children, and qualified teachers are not recruited and retained. Furthermore, there is little coordinated effort between the church and the home in terms of a child's spiritual formation. Many parents don't even know what their children are learning in Sunday school, and parents are also not given the sense that they are primarily responsible for the faith formation for children.

- As a result, we find, in the **second** place, that many parents within the church are neglecting to speak with their children about moral and spiritual matters and neglecting to integrate practices into their everyday lives that nurture faith. This claim is confirmed by many of my college students. I have taught primarily at church-related

colleges, and although my students are bright and articulate, and although most of them come from Lutheran or Catholic backgrounds, have attended church, and are confessing Christians, they know very little about the Bible and their own faith traditions, and they have difficulty speaking about relationships between their beliefs and their everyday lives and concerns. They also tell me that they rarely, if ever, have spoken to their parents about any issues of faith, and they regret that they did not even pray together at home.

The experience of my students is confirmed by several recent studies of the Search Institute and Youth and Family Institute. For example, according to one study of 8,000 adolescents whose parents were members of congregations in eleven different Protestant and Catholic denominations, only 10% of these families discussed faith with any degree of regularity, and in 43% of the families, faith was never discussed. [30]

- In the **third** place, many churches consider reflection on the moral and spiritual formation of children as "beneath" the work of their theologians and as a fitting area of inquiry only for pastoral counselors and religious educators. Consequently, systematic theologians and Christian ethicists say little about children and offer few well-developed teachings on the nature of children or our obligations to them. Although churches have highly developed teachings on related issues such as abortion, human sexuality, gender relations, and contraception, they do not offer sustained reflection on children or our obligations toward them. Children also do not play a role in the way that systematic theologians think about central theological themes, such as the nature of faith, language about God, and the task of the church.
- In the **fourth** place, national churches have not been consistent public advocates for children. Mainline Protestant churches support legislation to protect children's health and safety, yet they hesitate to contribute significantly to public debates about strengthening families. Protestant evangelical and conservative churches, on the other hand, are more vocal in nationwide debates about marriage, divorce, and the family, which has been positive. However, these churches sometimes focus so narrowly on the rights of parents to raise and educate their own children without governmental intrusion that they inadequately address the responsibilities of parents, church, and state to protect, educate, and support all children.

Related to the lack of commitment to children in the church and the wider culture that we see here and in other ways are several simplistic views of children and our obligations to them. Many scholars have argued, for example, that in a consumer culture a "market mentality" molds even our attitudes toward children.[31]

Thus, instead of seeing children as having inherent worth, we tend to view them as being commodities, consumers, or even economic burdens. The language of children as commodities is most blatant in discussions of reproductive technology, in which "high quality" donor eggs from an Ivy League female cost more than "regular" eggs. But we also speak of children as commodities in more subtle ways when we say that they "belong" to us or view them more as expressions of ourselves than beings with intrinsic worth. In our culture, children are also certainly understood as major consumers, and we now market countless goods

[30] Merton P. Strommen and Richard Hardel, Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000), 14.

[31] See, for example, Todd David Whitmore (with Tobias Winwright), "Children: An Undeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching" in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, ed. Maura A. Ryan and Todd David Whitmore (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997), 161-85.

to children in TV shows, videos, and fast-food restaurants. We also treat many children, especially the poor, as burdens and don't supply the resources they need to thrive.

Other scholars have noted that we tend to view children as either all good or all bad. For instance, popular magazines or newspapers tend to depict infants and young children as pure and innocent beings whom we adore and teenagers as hidden and dark creatures whom we must fear. In the Christian tradition, we have often focused on children merely as sinful or as creatures who are 'not yet fully human.'

These kinds of simplistic views diminish children's complexity and intrinsic value, and thereby undermine our commitment and sense of obligation to them. These are just a few examples, but they show us how one-dimensional children often are to us.

Resources from the tradition for a broad and complex view of children

We can do much to overcome these simplistic views of children and thereby strengthen the church's commitment to them by retrieving a broader, richer, and more complex picture of children from the Bible and the Christian tradition. Although theologians within the Christian tradition have often expressed narrow and even destructive conceptions of children and childhood, there are six central ways of speaking about the nature of children within the Christian tradition that, when critically retrieved and held in tension, can broaden our conception of children and strengthen our commitment to them.

1) Gifts of God and Sources of Joy

First, the Bible and the Christian tradition often depict children as gifts of God, who ultimately come from God and belong to God, and as sources of joy and pleasure. Many passages in the Bible speak of children as gifts of God or signs of God's blessing. For example, Leah, Jacob's first wife, speaks of her sixth son as a dowry, or wedding gift, presented by God (Genesis 30:20). Several biblical passages indicate that parents who receive these precious gifts are being "remembered" by God (Genesis 30:22; 1 Samuel 1:11, 19) and given "good fortune" (Genesis 30:11). To be "fruitful" with children is to receive God's blessing. The Psalmist says children are a "heritage" from the Lord and a "reward" (Psalm 127:3).

All children, whether biological or adopted, are "gifts" to us. They are greater than our own making, and they will develop in ways we cannot imagine or control. Scientists are still exploring the mysteries surrounding conception; even with great advances in reproductive technology, we still do not understand and cannot control all of the factors that allow for conception and a full-term pregnancy. There is wonder and mystery, too, in the process of adoption. Adoptive parents often relate stories of the spiritual journey they underwent to adopt, and they cannot understand or explain the miraculous "fit" they sense between themselves and the new member of their family.

Children, we should remember, are God's gifts not only to their parents, but also to the community. They are members of a community from the start, and they play various and complex roles within it. In addition, they will grow up to be not only sons and daughters but also husbands, wives, friends, neighbors, and citizens. Viewing children as gifts of God to the whole community radically challenges common assumptions of them as "property" of parents or "economic burdens" to the community.

Related to this notion that children are gifts and signs of God's blessing, the Bible and the tradition speak of them as sources of joy and pleasure. Here, too, there are many examples. Abraham and Sarah rejoice at the birth of their son, Isaac. Even in his terror and anguish, Jeremiah recalls the story that news of his own birth once made his father, Hilkiah, "very glad" (Jeremiah 20:15). An angel promises Zechariah and Elizabeth that their child will bring them "joy and gladness" (Luke 1:14). In the gospel of John, Jesus says, "When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world" (John 16:20-21).

Parents in the past perhaps wanted children for reasons we do not always emphasize today, to perpetuate the nation or to ensure someone would care for them in their old age. Nevertheless, there is a sense today and in the past that one of the great blessings of our interactions with children is simply the joy and pleasure we take in them.

2) Sinful Creatures and Moral Agents

Second, the Christian tradition often describes children as sinful creatures and moral agents. "The whole nature" of children, John Calvin says, is a "seed of sin; thus it cannot be but hateful and abominable to God."[32] Johann Arndt claims that within children lies hidden "an evil root" of a poisonous tree and "an evil seed of the serpent."[33] Jonathan Edwards writes that as innocent as even infants appear to be, "if they are out of Christ, they are not so in God's sight, but are young vipers, and are infinitely more hateful than vipers."[34]

This view is based on several biblical texts. For example, in Genesis we read that every inclination of the human heart is "evil from youth" (Genesis 8:21) and, in Proverbs, that folly is "bound up in the heart" of children (Proverbs 22:15). The Psalms declare that we are sinful at birth and that "the wicked go astray from the womb; they err from their birth" (Psalms 51:5; 58:3). All people are "under the power of sin," the Apostle Paul writes, so "there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Romans 3: 9-10; cf. 5:12).

On the surface, this way of thinking about children can seem negative and destructive. What good does it do to speak about children, especially infants, as sinful? Isn't this view of children hopelessly out of touch with contemporary psychological conceptions of children that emphasize their potential for development and need for loving nurture? Doesn't this emphasis on sin lead automatically to the harsh and even brutal treatment of children?

Certainly, in some cases, viewing children as sinful has led to their severe treatment and even abuse. Recent studies of the religious roots of child abuse show how the view of children as sinful or depraved, particularly in some strains of European and American Protestantism, has led Christians to emphasize that parents need to "break their wills" at a very early age with harsh physical punishment. This kind of emphasis on the depravity of children has led, in some cases, to the physical abuse and even death of children, including infants.

Although this abuse and even milder forms of physical punishment must be rejected, and although viewing them exclusively as sinful often has warped Christian approaches to children, the notion that children are sinful is worth revisiting and critically retrieving.

There are four helpful aspects of the notion that children are sinful that we must keep in mind if we are going to avoid narrow and destructive views of children.

First, when we say children are sinful, we are saying that they are born into a "state of sin," into a world that is not what it ought to be. Their parents are not perfectly loving and just; social institutions that support them, such as schools and governments, are not free from corruption; and communities in which they live, no matter how safe, have elements of injustice and violence. All levels of human relationships are not the way they ought to be. Furthermore, in addition to the brokenness of relationships and institutions in which they are born, human beings find a certain kind of brokenness within themselves. As we grow, develop, and become more conscious of our actions, we see how easy it is for us either to be self-centered or to place inordinate importance on the approval of others.

Second, when we say children are sinful, we are also saying that they carry out "actual sins," that they are moral agents who sometimes act in ways that are self-centered and harmful to themselves and others. We are taking into account a child's capacity to accept some degree of responsibility for harmful actions. These "actual sins" (against others or oneself) have their root in the "state of sin" and a failure to center our lives on the divine. Instead of being firmly grounded in the "infinite" that is greater than ourselves, our lives become centered on "finite" goals and achievements, such as career success, material gain, our appearance, or the approval of others around us. When this happens, it is easy for us to become excessively focused on ourselves; we lose the ability to love our neighbors as ourselves and to act justly and fairly. This view of "actual sins" of children becomes distorted when theologians mistakenly equate a child's physical and emotional needs or early developmental stages with sin. However, when used cautiously and with attention to psychological insights into child development, it can also strengthen our awareness of a child's growing moral capacities and levels of accountability.

Although it is important to recognize that children are born in a state of sin and are moral beings capable of actual sins against God and others, a third important aspect of the notion that children are sinful, emphasized by

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[32] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 97. Quoted by Barbara Pitkin, "'The Heritage of the Lord': Children In the Theology of John Calvin," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 167.

[33] Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 34-35

[34] Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival* (1742), in *The Great Awakening*, edited by C.C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 394. Quoted by Katherine Brekus, "Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Child Rearing," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 303.

many theologians in the tradition, is that infants and young children are not as sinful as adults and therefore need to be treated tenderly. They do not need as much help to love God and the neighbor. They have not gotten into bad habits or developed negative thoughts and feelings that reinforce destructive behaviors. The positive way of expressing the same idea is that young people are more easily formed than adults, and it is easier to nurture them and set them on a straight path. This is one reason that most theologians who have emphasized that children are sinful have never concluded that children should be physically punished or treated inhumanely. Rather, they view them as "tender plants" that need gentle and loving guidance and care instead of harsh treatment. For example, A. H. Francke, an 18th century German Lutheran Pietist, claimed that treating children with "gentleness and sweetness" instead of "strictness and harshness" is the best way "to present to them the love of God in Jesus Christ" and thus "to plant within their hearts a longing for and love of the Word of God," "to awaken faith in them," and "to bend their hearts toward the good."[35]

A fourth and final dimension of viewing children as sinful is that some theologians who have viewed children as sinful also view them as equals, and they thereby have shattered barriers of gender, race, and class. For example, Francke responded to the needs of poor children in his community in Halle, Germany. He built an extensive complex of charitable and educational institutions to address their needs. He even allowed gifted poor students and orphans to prepare for a university education alongside children of the upper and middle classes—something unheard of in his time. His notion of original sin provided a kind of positive, egalitarian framework of thought that opened a door to responding to the needs of poor children, seeing them as individuals with gifts and talents to be cultivated, and positively influencing educational reforms in Germany.[36]

3) Developing Beings Who Need Instruction and Guidance

A third central perspective within the tradition is that children are developing beings who need instruction and guidance. Because children are "on their way" to becoming adults, they need nurture and guidance from adults to help them develop intellectually, morally, and spiritually. They need to learn the basic skills of reading, writing, and thinking critically. They also need to be taught what is right and just and to develop particular virtues and habits that enable them to behave properly, to develop friendships, and to contribute to the common good.

The Bible encourages adults to guide and nurture children. In Genesis, Proverbs, Deuteronomy, and Ephesians, for example, we find many passages about the responsibilities of adults to nurture children. Adults are to "train children in the right way" (Proverbs 22:6) and bring up children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Parents and caring adults should tell children about God's faithfulness (Isaiah 38:19) and "the glorious deeds of the Lord" (Psalm 78:4b). They are to teach children the words of the law (Deuteronomy 11:18-19; 31:12-13), the love of God alone (Deuteronomy 6:7), and what is right, just, and fair (Genesis 18:19; Proverbs 2:9).

There are also many examples in the tradition of theologians who took seriously the education and formation of children. John Chrysostom, in the 4th century, wrote sermons on parenting and the duties of parents to nurture the faith of their children. He viewed the home itself as "a little church" and ranked parental neglect of children's needs and their spiritual formation among the gravest injustices.[37] Luther and Calvin also wrote catechisms and religious education materials for parents to use in the home, and they emphasized the responsibility of parents to guide and to instruct their children in the faith.[38] In his popular book, *Christian Nurture*, Horace Bushnell, the 19th century Congregational pastor and scholar, emphasized that parents are the primary agents of a child's spiritual formation, claiming that "Religion never penetrates life until it becomes domestic."[39]

We might say that adults are to attend to the "whole being" of children and provide them with emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual guidance. Thus, in addition to providing children with a good education and teaching them skills that are necessary to earn a living and raise a family, adults are to instruct children about

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[35] See his *Ordnung und Lehrart, wie selbige in denen zum Waisenhause gehörigen Schulen eingeführet ist* (1702) in *Pädagogische Schriften*, edited by Gustav Kramer (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer, 1885), 162-163.

[36] For an introduction to Francke, see Marcia Bunge, "Education and the Child in Eighteenth-Century German Pietism: Perspectives from the Work of A. H. Francke," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 247-278.

[37] Vigen Guroian, "The Ecclesial Family: John Chrysostom on Parenthood and Children," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 64, 73.

[38] For discussions of Luther and Calvin, see Jane Strohl, "The Child in Luther's Theology: 'For What Purpose Do We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care for…The Young?'" and Barbara Pitkin, "'The Heritage of the Lord': Children in the Theology of John Calvin," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 134-193.

[39] Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Charles Schribner, 1861; reprint, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 63. For a full discussion of Bushnell, see Margaret Bendroth, "Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture*," *in The Child in Christian Thought*, 350-364.

the faith and help them develop moral sensibilities, character, and virtue so that they can love God and love the neighbor with justice and compassion.

4) Fully Human and Made in the Image of God

Fourth, although children are developing, they are, at the same time, whole and complete human beings made in the image of God. Thus, they are worthy of dignity and respect. The basis of this claim is Genesis 1:27, which states that God made humankind in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Thus, all children, regardless of race, gender, or class, are fully human and worthy of respect. Although children are developing, they are, at the same time, whole and complete human beings.

This theme has often been neglected in the Christian tradition, and we find in the tradition the language of children as "almost human" or "beasts" or "on their way to becoming human." But there are some theologians who have emphasized the full humanity of children, such as the 20th century Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner. In contrast to those who claim that children are not quite fully human or are beings "on the way" toward humanity, Rahner asserts that children have the value and dignity in their own right and are fully human from the beginning. Thus, he believes that we are to respect children from the start. We need to see them as a "sacred trust" to be nurtured and protected at every stage of their existence.[40]

5) Models of Faith and Sources of Revelation

Fifth, the New Testament depicts children in striking and even radical ways as moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, and representatives of Jesus. In the gospels we see Jesus blessing children, embracing them, rebuking those who would turn them away, healing them, and even lifting them up as models of faith. He identifies himself with children and equates welcoming a little child in his name to welcoming himself and the one who sent him. "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," Jesus warns. "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18:2-5). He adds, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:14). [41]

The perspectives on children found in the gospels continue to be as striking today as they were in Jesus' time. In the first century, children occupied a low position in society, abandonment was not a crime, and children were not put forward as models for adults. Even today, we rarely emphasize what adults can learn from children.

One of the theologians who did emphasize what adults can learn from children was Friederich Schleiermacher, the 19th century Protestant theologian. He emphasized that adults who want to enter the kingdom of God need to recover a childlike spirit. For him, this childlike spirit has many components that we can learn from children, such as "living fully in the present moment" or being able to forgive others and be flexible.[42]

6) Orphans, Neighbors, and Strangers in Need of Justice and Compassion

Finally, in the sixth place, there are many biblical passages and examples in the tradition that remind us that children are also orphans, neighbors, and strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion. There are numerous biblical passages that explicitly command us to help widows and orphans—the most vulnerable in society. [43] These and other passages clearly show us that caring for children is part of seeking justice and loving the neighbor.

There are many examples within the Christian tradition of leaders who have taken seriously the situation of poor children. Martin Luther and Phillip Melancthon influenced positive policies and reforms in Germany for universal education that included girls and the poor. Francke, the 18th century Pietist, attended to poor children in his community and built hospitals, schools, and orphanages to serve

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[40] See Rahner's "Gedanken zu einer theologie der Kindheit," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, 8 (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1966), 313-29; translated into English by David Bourke as "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," in *Theological Investigations*, 8 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 33-50. For an excellent discussion of Rahner's views on children and childhood see Mary Ann Hinsdale, "'Infinite Openness to the Infinite': Karl Rahner's Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 406-445.

41 Some of the most significant passages in the gospels are Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48, Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17; Matthew 11:25 and 21:14-16. For a discussion of these and other passages in the New Testament, see Judith Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament" in The Child in Christian Thought, 29-60.

[42] For an excellent discussion of Schleiermacher, see Dawn DeVries, "'Be Converted and Become as Little Children'": Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Religious Significance of Childhood," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 300-328.

[43] See, for example, Exodus 22:22-24, Deuteronomy 10:17-18 and 14:28-29.

them and their families. Like Luther and Melancthon, he also influenced positive educational policies and reforms in Germany so that all children could receive a good education. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is another strong example of a theologian who attended to the poor in concrete ways, and he inspired Methodists from his time to today to care for the poor and to establish a number of institutions and initiatives to serve them.

Dangers when we retreat from the Bible and the Tradition

Whenever we retreat from this rich, complex, and almost paradoxical view of children found in the Bible and Christian tradition, and we focus instead on only one or two aspects of what children are, we risk falling into deficient understandings of children and our obligations to them, and we risk treating them in inadequate and harmful ways.

On the one hand, if we view children primarily as gifts of God and as models of faith, then we will enjoy them and be open to learning from them. However, we may neglect their moral responsibilities and minimize the role that parents and other caring adults should play in a child's moral development. In the end, we may adopt a "hands off" approach to parenting or religious education that underestimates the responsibilities of both adults and children. We see the weaknesses of this approach to children in the past and still today. For example, contemporary Christians who emphasize the innocence or spiritual wisdom of children often fail to articulate the full range of adult responsibilities to children, as well as a child's own growing moral capacities. They also neglect building strong educational programs for children or emphasizing the responsibilities of parents.

On the other hand, if we view children primarily as sinful and in need of instruction, then we will emphasize the role of parents and other caring adults in guiding and instructing children, and we will recognize a child's own moral responsibilities. However, we may neglect to learn from children, delight in them, and be open to what God reveals to us through them. Furthermore, we may narrowly restrict our understanding of parenting and religious education to instruction, discipline, and punishment. Focusing on children solely as sinful and in need of instruction also has real dangers, since it has often been easier for Christians who regard children solely as sinful to brutally punish them or "beat the devil" out of them. Even when Christian parenting manuals today emphasize that children are to be treated kindly but continue to speak of children primarily as sinful, they neglect other important lessons of the Bible and the tradition, such as enjoying children, treating them as fully human, listening to their questions, and learning from them.

In order to avoid these and other dangers, a solid and biblically informed model of parenting must take into account all six perspectives on children outlined here. It must incorporate a complex view of the child that holds together the inherent tensions of being a child: fully human and made in the image of God yet still developing and in need of instruction and guidance; gifts of God and sources of job yet also capable of selfish and sinful actions; metaphors for immature faith and childish behavior and yet models of faith and sources of revelation.

Implications

If we can avoid these kinds of inadequate approaches to children in the culture and the church, and if we can appropriate and hold in tension all six biblical perspectives of children, then we can strengthen our commitment to children in several ways.

For example, these six ways of speaking about children could strengthen spiritual formation and religious education programs. If we see children as gifts of God and sources of joy, then we will include them in worship services as true participants and welcome them as full members of the church, and we will incorporate more joy and laughter into religious education at home and at church. Furthermore, if we see children as sinful and in need of instruction, then we will develop more substantial religious educational materials and programs for children in the church and create Christian education programs that emphasize the importance of the family in spiritual formation and faith development. We will also more readily cultivate the growing moral capacities and responsibilities of children in many other ways, such as by introducing them to good examples, mentors, and stories of service and compassion; including children in service projects and teaching

them financial responsibility; and helping them discern their vocations and explore how they can best use their gifts and talents to contribute to the common good.

Finally, if we truly believe, as Jesus did, that children can teach adults and be moral witnesses, models of faith, and sources of revelation, then we will listen more attentively to children and learn from them; structure our religious education programs in ways that honor their questions and insights; and recognize the importance of children in the faith journey and spiritual maturation of parents and other adults.

The six ways of speaking about children could also deepen theological and ethical reflection on children and inform a strong theology of childhood. For example, if we see children as gifts of God and developing beings in need of instruction, then we will no longer see children as "belonging" to their parents, but rather as gifts to them and the whole community. We will also take more seriously our obligations to all children and strengthen theological and ethical reflection on the role of church and state in protecting children and on the responsibilities of parents. We will also begin to understand spiritual formation as a serious area of inquiry in all areas of theological and biblical studies--not just pastoral care or religious education. In these and other ways, the church could build up a strong theology of childhood.

The six ways of speaking about children could help renew the church's commitment to serving and protecting all children. If we view children as made in the image of God, as fully human, and as orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of compassion and justice, then we will treat all children, regardless of age, race, class, or gender, with more dignity and respect. We will no longer tolerate the abuse or harsh treatment of children, and we will warn against equating "discipline" with physical punishment.

Furthermore, we will support local and federal legislation that addresses the needs of all children and families, such as fighting for a truly working wage, parental leave policies, and strong educational programs for all children. As a society, we will provide the resources they need to thrive, including proper nutrition and adequate health care. We will attend to the needs of poor children in our community and around the world, work more diligently to protect and serve all children in need, and become stronger and more creative advocates for children in our country and around the world.

There are many other implications of a complex and biblically-informed understanding of children. A more vibrant view of children can combat simplistic and destructive conceptions of them and thereby strengthen our commitment to them in a number of areas. By appropriating a view of children that incorporates these six central perspectives on children found in the Bible and the tradition, all of us within the church can strengthen our efforts in spiritual formation and religious education; do what we can to facilitate a stronger theology of childhood in the church; and take up more wholeheartedly and responsibly the Christian call to love and care for all children.

Appendix II: The Child in American Evangelicalism

Notes for Child Theology Consultation in Houston, May 2004 by David A. Sims

I would like to thank the organizers of this Consultation for the opportunity to explore in writing and dialogue at this Consultation my assigned subject, the child in American Evangelicalism, which currently lies at the heart of researching my thesis in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham in Durham, England. I would also like to thank in advance those attending the Consultation who may take time to read, critique and provide critical feedback upon what I present. Reviewing the list of Consultation participants indelibly impressed upon me the auspicious nature this occasion presents for my project, as I continue endeavoring to put research and thought into dissertation form under the working title of "An Evangelical Theology of Liberation for Affluent American-Evangelical Children (AAEC)."[44]

Methodology, Format and Purpose

I have been asked to address two things in this paper: the child in American Evangelicalism and a summary of research on my thesis to date. It should be noted from the title to my thesis that I am taking a somewhat broad economic approach to understanding the child in American Evangelicalism, hence "Affluent American-Evangelical Children (AAEC)" in the title.[45] The paper and presentation are intended to stimulate critical reflection at the Consultation upon the AAEC in relation to the purpose, mission, vision, goals and processes of the Child Theology Movement (CTM).

Except for footnote 51, I have had to resist the urge to expand points put forward in this paper or to support them with extensive footnotes. In order to enhance readability and stay within a reasonable word limit and at the same time satisfy the desire to provide supporting evidence where deemed relevant, I have adopted the convention of providing some abbreviated references in the body of the paper or in a few footnotes. The bibliography I have compiled to date sets forth the various works upon which I rely or have consulted in my research. The organizers have asked me to make my bibliography available at the Consultation, and I am thankful for the opportunity to do so.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first is a high altitude pass over my particular approach to the child in American Evangelicalism from the vantage point of theological anthropology. The heuristic lenses are two constitutive dimensions of human nature: desire and relationality. The goal is to sketch the contours of my argument that desire and relationality of the AAEC has been taken captive within capitalist consumer culture in the United States. The second part of the paper seeks to correlate this claim to my project of constructing a theology of liberation for AAEC. Hopefully, this will stimulate fruitful dialogue consistent with the CTM's "Understanding God's Heart for Children process—an international process of Bible-based reflection and consultation which seeks to enable Christians to hear and understand God's heart and will for children."[46]

The Child in American Evangelicalism, c. 1820-2004 CE

My thesis is that children born into and nurtured in American-evangelical homes are in need of liberation from a particular form of impoverishing oppression in the United States, one that controverts the evangelical tradition's essentials and subverts liberating evangelical praxis on behalf of the poor of the world, especially poor children. I submit that there is a problem of the child in American Evangelicalism, one that is essentially a problem of desire and relationality manifested in a "poverty of affluence."[47] AAEC are those "who suffer from spiritual poverty…for whom Christ in the

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[44] The thesis currently has two working subtitles: "Children as 'Performers' in the 'Dance' of Liberation in the United States" and "A Theological-Critical Relational Anthropology of Affluent American-Evangelical Children."

[45] Depending on the context, "AAEC" denotes either "Affluent American-Evangelical Child" or "Affluent American-Evangelical Children."

[46] "Introduction" to "Processes and Resources" at http://www.viva.org/tellme/resources/articles/gods_heart (viewed 30 March 2004).

[47] Cf. George Tracy, *Transforming the Poverty of Affluence: Preparing the Affluent Poor for Leadership in the Renewal of the World* (1999). One psychological account of the poverty of affluence has appeared in the literature. See Paul L. Wachtel, *The Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life* (1989). See also Robert Coles, 'Privileged Ones', in *Children of Crisis*, 1st ed. (2003), 593-693.

distressing disguise of the poor is often hidden from view in the affluence of modern society."[48] Desire and relationality in AAEC has been taken captive and bent away *from* desire for God and the good of others (particularly the poor) *to* a consuming capitalist desire for self and other things. Instead of desiring God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, AAEC are found desiring capitalism's kingdom on earth as if it is heaven. The effect upon relationality is devastating. Desire bent inward and severed from benevolent, self-donating desire for God and the good of others contracts in upon itself with a relationally destructive force akin to the gravitational force of a black hole in the universe.

But how has this come about? How did the problem of desire and relationality arise in the AAEC? What happened to evangelical theological anthropology? When did the AAEC's implosion of desire and deconstruction of relationality begin? Although many evangelicals might simply blame it on Adam and Eve, two rather clear historical referents can be identified. The first is the Industrial Revolution, which began roughly in 1820, and the second is American Evangelicalism's theological anthropology of children, which began roughly in 1847 with the first edition of Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture*.

Here in the early years of the 21st century, two fundamental theological anthropologies of children are found within American Evangelicalism. The minority position can be traced back to Jonathan Edwards (18th century) and forward to his postmodern disciple, John Piper. The majority position can be traced to Horace Bushnell (19th century) and forward into evangelical iterations of twentieth century religious education. For the purpose of simplifying the discussion, the Edwardsian position is described here as conversionist, and the Bushnellian position is described as developmentalist. At the risk of caricaturizing and oversimplifying both positions, I will venture to suggest that the conversionist view is held predominantly within more theologically and biblically conservative communities within American Evangelicalism that are quite suspicious of what the human and social sciences might teach or illumine about human nature. On the other hand, the developmentalist view is held primarily within more theologically and biblically moderate evangelical communities in the United States. There seems to be a greater openness to theological-critical assessments of the human and social sciences. It might be safe to say that conversionists often leave 'the corpus of empirical research… dormant under the church's curse of extra-Biblical irrelevance.'[49] On the other hand, there may be some truth in the assertion that developmentalists might tend toward less-than-critical biblical and theological appropriations of findings from the human and social sciences.

Edwards and Bushnell have been chosen because they are the most important American-evangelical theologians of their respective centuries and both had a fair amount to say about children. Their theological reflections upon children constitute the headwaters for American Evangelicalism's theological anthropology of children. Bushnell provided the most extensive evangelical theology of nurturing children in the Christian faith prior to the twentieth century, and his *Christian Nurture* has spawned a substantial literature on the relationship between theology and religious education and a vast literature on religious and Christian education, spiritual formation, faith development, etc. However, it does not appear that the economics of desire and relationality as heuristic lenses for the theological anthropology of children have appeared as specific theological-critical foci in the literature.

Horace Bushnell's theology of *Christian Nurture* is the fulcrum upon which the theological anthropology of evangelical children turns. Bushnell is rightly seen as the "greatest figure in American theology in his century," just as Edwards was seen in his.[50] Not only that, his *Christian Nurture* is "now considered to be the basis for the modern development of religious education."[51] If modern religious education in the United States began with Bushnell it began with a genuine concern for nurturing evangelical Christian faith in children. However, by the turn of the 19th century, this concern had undergone substantive but subtle social, cultural and religious transformation. The

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[48] Mother Theresa, as quoted in Tracy, *Transforming the Poverty of Affluence*, 7.

[49] Joshua D. Walker, 'The Psycho-Epistemology of Religious Maturity: Heuristic Faith as a Matrix for Growth', East Texas Baptist University (April 1, 2003) http://www.etbu.edu/nr/etbu/temp_files/word_JoshWalker.pdf (viewed 30 December 2003), 8.

[50] W. A. Johnson, *Nature and the Supernatural in the Theology of Horace Bushnell* (1963), 10.

[51] Wyckoff, *The Gospel and Christian Education: A Theory of Christian Education for Our Times* (1959), 60.

principal cause was American Evangelicalism's formative influence upon and incorporation within the Industrial Revolution.

From approximately 1830 to 1900, the child in American Evangelicalism was slowly transformed from redeemable in the new republic to redeemer of the new republic.[52] The foundations of the AAEC's poverty of affluence were laid during this time, as evangelicals ceded the child to civil society and civil religion in the first great compromise of the child in American Evangelicalism. This was when, in my view, the captivity of desire and relationality in AAEC began. Bernard Wishy provides evidence for this claim from the writings of A. D. Mayo, who in 1899 equated the American education system with Christian education, "the training of the vast majority of American children for an American citizenship that includes the noblest of ideals of a practical, moral and religious manhood and womanhood." As a result of the evangelical-industrial merger during the latter half of the 19th century (Wauzzinski, *Between God and Gold*, 1993), the American education system had become "the people's university for training young America in that Christian civilization which contemplates the union of all the elements of our cosmopolitan population in the common American life; the great achievement of 100,000,000 people living together to the ideals and methods of human intercourse set forth in the Gospel of Jesus Christ." According to Wishy, Mayo's sentiments represented a "most typical position." Mayo believed that finally, after 18 centuries, "the absolute religion of Jesus Christ…has won its greatest victory in the acceptance of the new education by the American people as the last and best organization of the gospel of love for God and man, for the training of American childhood and youth for sovereign American citizenship."[53]

This accommodation of the gospel to American civil religion had powerful economic motivations fueled by industrialism and the emergence of a new culture in the United States that William Leach calls the *Land of Desire* (1994), a culture spun around *Fables of Abundance* (T. J. Jackson Lears, 1994) that *Lead Us Into Temptation* (Twitchell, 1998) with ever-increasing delight. Developmentalist versions of religious and Christian education such as those documented by Wishy evolved in relatively uncritical fashion within the embrace of 19th century consumer capitalism. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the embrace had become a wedding. The roots of this uncritical embrace can be traced back to Bushnell's embeddedness within the Industrial Revolution and his theological anthropology of children developed in *Christian Nurture*. Bushnell's theology of nurture played a central role in assuring that evangelical children would become enmeshed in a culture that would take their desire and relationality captive and bring about the poverty of affluence *from* which AAEC need liberation *to* praxis on behalf of children-at-risk around the world.

In order to see this more clearly, it is necessary to backtrack into the 18th century and obtain a brief glimpse of the conversionist theological anthropology of children held by Edwards in the context of American-evangelical revivalism that began with the First Great Awakening.

Edwards's Theological Anthropology of Children

It is important to keep in mind the context in which the Edwardsian and Bushnellian views developed. Both theologians wrote out of the context of evangelical revivalism. Theological anthropology lies at the heart of revivals and revivalism. Conversion, new birth, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, salvation, reconciliation, redemption, formation/transformation, etc., are in one way or another ultimately theological-anthropological concerns. Revivals and revivalism played important roles in shaping the conversionist and developmentist theological anthropologies of children found in Edwards and Bushnell. They also contributed to American Evangelicalism's uncritical stance toward industrialization and capitalism.

Edwards wrote *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* in 1742 and sought to argue in favor of religious affections as true and valid signs of revival, or "*the distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God*" in conversion. In the subsequent, more extensive treatise on *Religious Affections* (1746), Edwards turned to address the other side of affections in

[52] See Wishy, 'The Child Redeemable (1830-1860)' and 'The Child Redeemer (1860-1900)', in *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (1968), 3-181.

[53] Id., 167-68.

theological-anthropological perspective, "the nature and signs of the *gracious operations* of God's Spirit, by which they are to be distinguished from all things whatsoever…which are not of a saving nature." The winds of revival may have subsided somewhat by the time Edwards finished *Religious Affections*, so he probably had ample time to weigh the evidence of religious affections in his congregation and New England. He seemed to be concerned that perhaps some of the affections arising from the revivals were not genuine manifestations of a work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, he wished to answer criticism on both sides of the debate about what true signs of regeneration and conversion are. His concerns were thus grounded deeply in theological anthropology.

As Catherine Brekus notes in her essay in *The Child in Christian Thought*, Edwards was somewhat conflicted in his views regarding children. As is particularly clear in *Religious Affections*, at times Edwards saw children as naturally possessing and therefore representing those holy and gracious affections that he believed were positive proof of genuine conversion. At other times he saw children as vipers, damnable, unregenerate children of wrath. At all times, however, he saw them as in need of conversion wrought by the Holy Spirit and in need of diligent discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The third part of *Religious Affections* is composed of fourteen arguments for what the "distinguishing signs of truly gracious and holy affections" are in the converted. Three of these arguments (first, eighth and ninth) entail significant theological reflections upon children, which can only be summarized here: that the spirit of children provides a rich analogy of the gracious work of love and adoption by the Spirit in conversion; that children manifest meekness by nature and behavior; and that children are naturally and behaviorally tender in heart. As such, children constitute paradigmatic examples of the affections possessed by and possessing true disciples. Edwards comes very close to equating the spirit of children to the Spirit of love and adoption, the affectional presence and grace of the Holy Spirit.[54]

The theological anthropology of children in *Religious Affections* further confirms Brekus's point: Edwards never fully resolved his conflicted stance toward children. What or who children were in relation to God as humans in the time between human birth and rebirth apparently remained a mystery in his mind. It still remains a mystery in the minds of those who hold his conversionist theological anthropology of children. How does God relate to children and how do children relate to God? How do those relationships change over time as human development proceeds?

Bushnell's Theological Anthropology of Children

Bushnell called the Edwardsian view of Christian nurture a cruel "ostrich nurture" (ostrich mothers bury their eggs in the sand and leave them to hatch on their own) and advocated a developmental view of nurture dependent upon implanting (holy and righteous) Christian parental souls upon the plastic souls of children.[55] According to Bushnell, virtually all was lost or won during the first three years of life. Although Bushnell was prescient of developmental views of human nature in many ways and presaged religious education in profoundly positive and formative ways, his theological anthropology of children is problematic for at least three reasons. It failed to account adequately for the motivational dimension of human nature; put another way, it failed to account for human desire at the level of the heart, the font of affections. Bushnell's regenerative "organic laws" of the family were easily taken captive within the industrial-capitalist culture that emerged after the Civil War. Throughout the twentieth century, these laws were enlisted most often unconsciously and almost always uncritically in both liberal and conservative religious efforts to mold the evangelical child into a Christian for the republic. It is not difficult to see the fruits of the labors in both camps, whether in mainline American Protestantism or moderate to conservative Evangelicalism. As Wishy's account helps confirm, desire and relationality in children are formed first by capitalist culture for capitalist culture. American Evangelicalism gets the leftovers, it seems, without much of a contest and perhaps

[54] I confess frustration in not being able to develop this further with quotes from *Religious Affections* and apologize in advance for causing any corresponding frustration in the reader.

[55] I acknowledge the inadequacy and injustice of this summary of Bushnell's theology of nurture. Neither space nor time permits fuller development of Bushnell's theological anthropology of children in *Christian Nurture*, however.

with a good bit of participation. Bushnell's "plastic soul" of the child slowly morphed into a plastic self in *The (Magic) Kingdom of God* (Budde, 1997) that came in 20th century U.S.A.[56]

If I may diverge for a moment and speak evangelically to evangelicals, the Bible in redemptive-historical perspective represents the human heart as the font of affections. It is a desire factory (Piper). Edwards argued that the mind always chooses in accordance with its greatest desire, and Calvin argued that the human mind is a perpetual forge of idols. Jesus talked about gospel-subverting worldly cares, lures of wealth and "desire for other things" (Mk 4:19). These flow from the heart with its evil reasonings (*hoi kakoi hoi dialogismoi*) and consequent degenerate actions (Mk 7:21-23). Paul's account of desire in Galatians 5:16-25 paints a picture of conflicted desire (flesh/self[57] versus Spirit) as essential Christianity and declares, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (5:24). Bushnell's error here pervades evangelical theology's anthropology of children up to the present. Failing to account in a theological-critical manner for the *how* and *why* of desire's formation, deformation, reformation and transformation in Christian nurture is, in my estimation, the most glaring and long-standing deficiency in evangelical approaches to spiritual/faith formation, Christian religious education and human development in theological perspective. Jim Garrison is aiming at the right target when he says, "We become what we love. Our destiny is in our desires, yet what we seek to possess soon comes to possess us in thought, feeling, and action…."[58] However, he misses the mark due to an inadequate theological anthropology of desire and relationality, one that accounts for the human heart's black hole and for the manner in which advanced capitalist culture feeds its insatiable gravitational appetite for things and self.

This leads to what I perceive to be the second greatest deficiency in Bushnell's theological anthropology of children: the lack of a critically self-conscious awareness of capitalist enculturation of desire and relationality. That is, Bushnell's theology of nurture failed to account for the manner in which desire and relationality are disciplined and formed through the dialectical interplay between the motivational and cultural dimensions of human existence embedded in and interpenetrated by consumer culture. Bushnell's theological anthropology of children was grounded in a complex and uncritically assessed social, cultural, religious and economic vision of life (American Industrialism, Victorianism, Republicanism, Evangelicalism). It helped form idolatrous conceptions of Christian family and conflicted approaches to forming evangelical children, and it played an important role in facilitating the industrial-capitalist incorporation of evangelical desire and relationality in the 19th and 20th centuries. At the same time, the Edwardsian version played an equally significant role. Whereas the Bushnellian version serviced the producing, consuming and domesticating interests of industrialism, the iteration of 19th century Edwardsian conversionism serviced industrialism's need for moral and religious legitimization of republican virtues of individualism, courage, self-discipline and neighborly benevolence that were seen as essential to the mutually successful and fulfilling pursuit of happiness in the American republic. Neither conversionist nor Bushnellian theological anthropologies adequately account for how and why desire and relationality in the American-evangelical child is taken captive in the motivational dimension of the heart and at the cultural levels of life. Thus, they are incapable of resisting capitalism's seduction of the early republican virtues and converting them to the ultimate ends of capitalistic individuation and the making of plastic selves in the variegated self-constructions made available in consumer culture. Both views fail to see AAEC enmeshed and embedded in a cultural context that has won their hearts and formed their relationships for the kingdom of capitalism rather than the kingdom of God that is supposed to belong to little children and those who receive it like them. Perhaps this is why one study has shown that 88% of children raised in American-evangelical homes leave the church after their 18th birthdays and why so many kids

[56] See also Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (2000); Apel, *Nine Great American Myths: Ways We Confuse the American Dream with the Christian Faith* (1991) Shelley, *The Gospel and the American Dream* (1989).

[57] I take the Greek *sarx*, translated "flesh" or "sinful nature" in English bibles, as essentially synonymous with modern psychology's understanding of "ego" and with "self" in modern philosophical understandings.

[58] Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (1997), xiii.

raised in "Christian homes" reject traditional evangelical convictions in favor of more relativistic or materialistic options.[59]

Thirdly, as is true with most attempts to integrate biblical theological anthropology with developmental views of human nature, Bushnell's view failed to account for the pervasive nature of sin in redemptive-historical perspective. In arguing that children should grow up never knowing themselves otherwise than as Christians, Bushnell overlooked the biblical and historical evidence that even "organic laws" of familial regeneration imperfectly form children because they are mediated through imperfect (fallen) parents imperfectly formed through imperfect (fallen) relationships and culture. The issue is not parental formation of children's souls, as Bushnell helpfully illumined and emphasized. Instead, the issue from the standpoint of theological anthropology is the counter-formation of desire and relationality in parents and children embedded in affluent consumer culture. How can the formation/transformation of Christ (Gal 2:20, 4:19; 2 Cor 3:18, 4:4-6) and transformational renewing of the mind (Rom 12:1-2) be nurtured in affluent evangelical parents and children? How can Christ-formation/transformation of the AAEC's desire and relationality be nurtured with a degree of certainty and hopefulness of liberation from the poverty of affluence? How might those "vital exigencies" of children identified by Sofia Cavalletti in her anthropological catechesis be nurtured in the AAEC? It seems that an impasse between the conversionist and developmentalist anthropologies of children gives rise to such questions concerning AAEC.

The Impasse in Evangelical Theological Anthropologies of Children

I would like to suggest two primary reasons for the impasse. The first is that twenty-first century evangelicals are critically unaware of how, when and why desire and relationality were taken captive in the 19th and 20th centuries. Evangelicalism was complicit with American Industrialism in bringing about the contemporary capitalist culture that has taken the AAEC's desire and relationality captive. Robert Wauzzinski's analysis in *Between God and Gold: Protestant Evangelicalism and the Industrial Revolution, 1820-1914* (1993) demonstrates how the evangelical-industrial merger took place in the 19th century and argues that evangelical economic essentials inherited from Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin were compromised in the process. William Leach's *Land of Desire* (1993) shows how the new American culture of consumer capitalism arose during the period form 1880 to 1930, the cardinal virtues of which were "acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire; and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society." Wishy's account of *The Child and the Republic* helps illumine how the American-evangelical child fit within the cultural shift that took place during this period.

Few evangelicals seem to be aware that capitalism is a disciplinary cultural formation that captures, subverts and converts desire and relationality to its ends in ways that controvert the evangelical tradition. There is a direct correlation between that cultural formation and the poverty of affluence of the AAEC, as well as the material and relational poverty suffered by millions of children in the United States[60] and around the world each day. Put another way, few evangelicals seem to be critically aware of the interpenetrating economics of capitalist desire and relationality that disciplines and forms them and their children from womb to tomb. Daniel Bell, Jr., argues convincingly from a critical analysis of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze in *Liberation Theology After the End of History* (2001) that

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[59] Eighty-eight percent (88%) of children nurtured in evangelical homes never return to church after reaching their eighteenth birthday. Pastor's Weekly Briefing, in Religious Market Update, *The Foster Letter* (August 10, 2002), 1; *Current Thoughts & Trends* (November 2002), 5. Fifty-five percent (55%) of American children raised in "Christian" homes deny the faith of their parents before they graduate from college. Another 57% do not believe in an objective standard of truth; 85% are likely to have relative standards of morality – i.e., "Just because it's wrong for you doesn't mean it's wrong for me"; only 29% disagreed with the following statement: "When it comes to matters of ethics, truth means different things to different people; no one can be absolutely positive they have the truth"; only 38% disagreed with the following statement: "nothing can be known for certain except the things that you experience in your life"; 45% could not disagree with the statement: "Everything in life is negotiable." Summary of studies by George Barna, George Gallup, Josh McDowell Ministries and Nehemiah Institute in Tim Wildmon, *American Family Journal*, American Family Association Online (Nov/Dec 2002) http://www.afa.net/WVW082302.asp (viewed 14 November 2003). See also Rainer, 'It's the Economy, Stupid!', in *The Bridger Generation*, 85-97; George Barna, 'Faith and Spirituality', in *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 119-43, and 'The Spiritual Health of Our Children', in *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), 28-42; and Tom Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992).

[60] See Couture, *Seeing God, Seeing Children* (2000).

capitalism is a hegemonic cultural formation that has won the game of desire in the twentieth century over against its only true rival, Christianity. As a result, poor children in the third world have to live on the fringes of refuse dumps and survive on newspaper cakes for lunch and dinner. Vincent Miller (*Consuming Religion*, 2004) suggests that consumer culture forms desire, weakens relationality and undermines Christian traditions in many ways, perhaps most subversively by capitalizing upon the critiques made against it.

James Twitchell contends in *Lead Us Into Tempation* that capitalism is Christianity's dominant alter-ego: "What makes organized Christianity the appropriate precursor of modern materialism is that it does indeed trade a surplus product—redemption of some sort…for the attention of a willing populace….Advertising has been rightly called the church art of capitalism because it continuously reiterates this deep desire for meaning." He goes on:

"It is no happenstance that advertising men, or 'ministers of commerce,' who helped bring about the rise of Consumer Culture were steeped in exactly this Christian teaching [against mammon]. They understood both the forbidden nature of yearning for objects and how to franchise it. They knew the seven deadly sins were full of life. They knew the language of sincerity. They knew the power of promise, large promise. They knew how to make the sale and close the deal. Better yet, they knew how to create and overcome inhibition."

Advertising was a white upper middle-class *Christian* endeavor, in part because most of the educated population was Protestant, and in part because the procedures for selling therapeutic resolution to life's problems were so similar to what Western religion had developed over the centuries.

Of all the evangelical confidence men, none was more influential in translating the zeal of magical thinking to sectarian matters than Bruce Barton (1886-1967). And none was more typical….his father was a powerful Baptist minister….

When you read the lives of the first and second generation of advertising impresarios, this configuration occurs with such startling regularity that it is hard to believe the combination was haphazard. Almost as if to shove aside the old father (the church) in order to get to the new text (commercialism), the youthful copywriter proceeds to apply what he has been taught about ecclesiastical hermeneutics to create a new parochial gospel of salvation. The transition was not easily made, hence the neurasthenic crisis.[61]

The crisis continues today in American Evangelicalism. How else can one explain Reformed-evangelical apologetics (in the apologetical sense) for consumer culture like *Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money and Possessions* and *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Schneider, 1994, 2002), which were written primarily to help alleviate economic guilt found lurking in middle-class evangelical seminarians and wealthy evangelical business persons. Remarkably, Schneider quotes Dinesh D'Souza's quote of Michael Novak to support his thesis that capitalist culture is essentially a good thing and will bring revival through wealth: "We are going to see a revival in this country, and it's going to be led by rich people."[62] The revivalistic bent of American Evangelicalism that began in Edwards's day has thus come full circle. If the rich will be leading the next revival, it will be a first in human history as far as I can tell. It is difficult to find one in the Bible or the history of Christianity. To date, affluence has not gone on record as the harbinger of revival. My read on redemptive history suggests that affluence has always preceded not revivals but declensions: forgetting God, going after idols, economic oppression of the poor, widow and orphan, prophetic denouncement and eventually judgment.

What is plainly evident to me from books like Schneider's is not a lack of competent scholarship and sound biblical reasoning (though I disagree with many, but not all, of the premises and conclusions of his arguments) but instead a lack of sufficiently critical awareness of when and how consumer culture came about and why affluent culture disciplines, forms and captivates desire and relationality at the motivational and cultural dimensions of human existence and thereby controverts the heart of the evangelical tradition. Schneider correctly notes, as I believe I do in my thesis, that "Jesus wants to

[61] Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Tempation*, 62-4.

[62] Quoted in Schneider, *The Good of Affluence*, 1, and D'Souza, *The Virtue of Prosperity*, 143.

liberate the rich from their prosperity" in his consideration of the story of the rich man, but he fails to apply the rich man's condition properly to American Evangelicalism. He thus seems to perpetuate rather then alleviate the neurasthenic crisis in evangelicals, which has its genesis in Jesus' warning, "You cannot serve God and mammon." Americans may have figured out how to worship God and mammon, as Lord Reith of the BBC observed in 1952,[63] but unlike Schneider I'm not so sure it's a good thing.

This leads to the second reason the child in American Evangelicalism remains at an impasse between conversionist and developmentalist theological anthropologies. American Evangelicalism has failed adequately to account for the manner in which the hearts and relationships of its children have been and are enculturated within a culture of affluence. At the heart of this oversight are substance dualist and faculty psychology views of human nature that hinder critical understanding of the motivational dimensions of desire and relationality.[64] There are at least three factors at work in producing this evangelical blind spot.

The first is a failure to assess theologically the impact neuroscience is having upon understandings of desire and relational anthropology, particularly during the first 10 years of life.

The second is the failure to account theologically for recent gains from developmental psychology and from postmodern philosophical reflection upon desire and relationality during the first two decades of life.[65]

And third is the failure theologically to appropriate and incorporate findings from the Montessorian theologians of the child (Standing, Cavalletti and Berryman) into evangelical theology's understandings of desire and relational anthropology in children, particularly during the first 12 years of life.

In my view, it is time for evangelicals to join Maria Montessori in her attempt to find the human in the child[66] and Sofia Cavalletti in her bold claim that children should be our point of departure for anthropological inquiry into desire and relationality: "We ask ourselves, in fact, if it is not the fundamental structure of the child that should be taken as the basis and reference point for that necessary 'attention to man.'"[67] This will require paying attention to children's "vital exigencies", which I interpret in terms of desire, and to their fundamentally formative needs to be loved by others and to have others whom they can love, which I wish to interpret in terms of relational theological anthropology (Rebecca Nye's helpful study and findings of "relational consciousness" in children also corroborate my approach to theological anthropology here).

An evangelical and liberating theological anthropology of children is needed in American Evangelicalism. Children remain caught between two essentially inadequate theological anthropologies. Both are insufficiently critical of how desire and relationality in the AAEC have been captured and impoverished at the juncture between the motivational and cultural dimensions of theological anthropology. Both stand to benefit greatly from theological-critical assessments, appropriations and applications of findings from neuroscience, developments in philosophy and developmental psychology, and the Montessorian theologians of the child. I submit that these are tasks central to liberating AAEC *from* their poverty of affluence *to* truly evangelical praxis on behalf of children-at-risk in the world, those at "the underside of humanity" in liberation theology's perspective from the two-thirds/three-fourths world of suffering in the face of affluence.

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63 "What I would like to know is how you Americans can successfully worship God and Mammon at the same time." Lord Reith, founder of the BBC, in a query of CBS executives in 1952.

64 J. P. Moreland provides perhaps the best example of contemporary evangelical conceptions of these views in his 'A Defense of a Substance Dualist View of the Soul', in J. P. Moreland and David M. Ciocchi (eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Being Human* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 55-79, and 'Spiritual Formation and the Nature of the Soul', *Christian Education Journal* 4 NS, no. 1 (2000), 25-43.

65 Here I find James Loder's *The Transforming Moment* and *The Logic of the Spirit* and LeRon Shults's *Reforming Theological Anthropology* particularly helpful.

66 Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 251; Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, 94 and 148.

67 Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child*, 169.

Summary of Research and Overview of Thesis

Al Pacino plays a very convincing capitalist devil in *The Devil's Advocate* and helps to illustrate a truly devilish understanding of human desire and relationality in postmodernity:

> *…these people, it's no mystery where they come from.…You sharpen the human appetite to the point where it can split atoms with its desire, you build egos the size of cathedrals, fiber-optically connect the world to every eager impulse, grease even the dullest dreams with these dollar-green gold-plated fantasies, until every human becomes an aspiring emperor, becomes his own god, and where can you go from there?….Vanity, is definitely my favorite sin.…it's so basic. Self-love, the all natural opiate.…I'm here on the ground with my nose in it since the whole thing began! I've nurtured every sensation man has been inspired to have, I cared about what he wanted and I never judged him…why? Because I never rejected him! In spite of all his imperfections, I'M A FAN OF MAN!…I'm a humanist. Maybe the last humanist. Who in their right mind…could possibly deny the twentieth century was entirely mine?*

From the way things are shaping up, it looks like the twenty-first century could be all his as well, to the painfully sad detriment of millions upon millions of children on the underside of humanity.

It seems that perhaps capitalism and the devil understand the dialectal and existential interrelations between the motivational and cultural dimensions of desire and relationality much better than American Evangelicalism does. It is surprising to find, however, that although American Evangelicalism maintains a robust antipathy for the devil the same cannot be said of its attitude toward capitalism. Nor can it be said that American Evangelicalism sees the link between capitalism and the devil, even though there appears to be compelling evidence of it in the very Bible evangelicals hold so dear[68] (see, e.g., Mt 4:8-9//Lk 4:5-6; 1 Jn 5:19).

If there is hope for liberating AAEC to evangelical praxis on behalf of the poor, the issues of desire and relationality must be addressed by evangelical theology. This is the task I take up in Part One (chapters 1 through 4) of my thesis, "The Problem of the Affluent American-Evangelical Child (AAEC)."

Part One is an extended exercise in theological anthropology with the AAEC as the focus. Desire and relationality are the heuristic lenses through which AAEC are examined.

- **Chapter 1** explores "The Problem of Desire" by presenting a biblical argument (the requisite evangelical starting point) for viewing desire and relationality in redemptive-historical context perspective (creation, fall, redemption of desire and relationality) and in "Christomorphic"[69] perspective (formation, re-formation, transformation of desire and relationality). I agree with Vincent Miller in *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (2004) that desire is "an unavoidable topic for any theological consideration of consumer culture." At the same time, I contend that it is theologically inadequate to consider desire apart from relationality, and therefore these are the twinned aspects of theological anthropology that lie at the heart of my thesis.
- **Chapter 2** presents the evangelical theological anthropologies of children found in Jonathan Edwards (18th century) and Horace Bushnell (19th century), highlighting the context of revivalism and industrialism during the time Horace Bushnell was theologizing about Christian nurture. From there, chapter 3, titled "Born in the U.S.A.: The Embedded AAEC, 1820-2004 CE," seeks to demonstrate the manner in which desire and relationality was incorporated in the nineteenth century and thoroughly disciplined, formed and converted to capitalist consumer culture in the twentieth.
- The goal of **chapter 3** is to paint a clear picture of the poverty of affluence that the child in American Evangelicalism suffers, the manner in which it controverts the evangelical tradition and the detrimental effects it has upon desire and relationality in the AAEC. This sets the

[68] This should not be taken as sarcastic rhetoric on my part. I am a boomer generation evangelical with a high view of Scripture who has been nurtured in American Evangelicalism. What I am attempting to expose are the insufficiently self-critical and cultural-critical positions far too many of us evangelicals take in our exegesis, hermeneutics and theologizing about children, wealth, God, the gospel and the poor.

[69] Borrowing James Loder's term from *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (1998), 41, 60, 75-76.

stage for picking up Bushnell's trail in the 20th century for the purpose of examining in chapter 4 the "Pedagogy of the Embedded AAEC" that has taken place in evangelical nurture (formation of desire and relationality) since the industrial-evangelical merger of the 19th century. What I seek to show is that evangelical pedagogy missed the economics of desire and relationality as it developed and thrived within capitalist consumer culture. Consequently, I argue that AAEC need a pedagogy of the oppressed and suggest such a pedagogy to American Evangelicalism through theological-critical interaction with the works of Paulo Freire, liberation theology, and the works of Daniel Schipani and Robert Pazmiño.

- **Chapter 4** concludes Part One's exploration of the problem of the AAEC and completes my attempt at painting a picture of the dialectics of the AAEC's embedded and enculturated desire-relationality at the motivational dimension of the heart and cultural dimensions of capitalism in the United States.

Part Two is titled "Liberating the Affluent American-Evangelical Child (AAEC)" and is composed of three chapters that build upon Part One's theological anthropology of desire-relationality of AAEC.

- **Chapter 5** examines the AAEC in the kingdom of God during the twentieth century. It is a theological-critical dialogue between evangelical and liberation theologies regarding the "child in the midst." Both evangelical and liberationist conceptions of the kingdom are critically assessed in light of the child in theological perspective. This discloses that the child is not only marginal in those theological conceptions but is essentially invisible. Rather than being found in the midst of theological reflection upon the kingdom of God, the child is found in the theological mist.

- This leads to **chapter 6's** theological-critical relational anthropology of AAEC. Sofia Cavalletti's radical anthropological claim about the fundamental structure of the child and her conceptions of desire and relationality ("vital exigencies") are reasserted and developed in dialogue with James Loder's conception of human development in theological perspective. The question of why AAEC remain in a theological mist rather than the theological midst runs throughout the chapter. An answer is suggested in light of the findings of Part One through interactions with New Testament studies of the child texts, the theological underpinnings of the children's liberation movement and the emerging CTM (Willmer, White). Children are presented in the theology of children constructed in chapter 6 as sign-gifts of the evangelical-liberating relational fulfillment of desire in the already/not yet of the kingdom of God.

- The theology of children proposed in chapter 6 is the foundation for the theology of liberation of AAEC put forward in **chapter 7.** An attempt is made to bring chapter 4's evangelical pedagogy of AAEC, with the conscientisation hopefully accomplished there, to bear upon the AAEC's poverty of affluence with liberating force. Chapter 7 argues for a liberating ethic of "evangelical franciscanism" by drawing upon the rich tradition of renunciation, donation and dispossession found in St. Francis of Assisi, a fitting pre-modern illustration of how AAEC may be liberated from the poverty of affluence and transformed into evangelical Franciscans whose passions and desires have been crucified with Christ for liberating praxis on behalf of the poor of the world. That ethic, it is hoped, will enable AAEC to engage the task of liberation as active agents in the drama of redemption as "performers" in the "dance" of liberation in the United States. "Performers" signals that the metaphor of performance is employed in the systematic and biblical hermeneutics of chapters 6 and 7. "Dance" is intended to signify the joy that comes with liberation from the poverty of affluence at both the motivational and cultural dimensions of desire and relationality, a joy arising from the transforming discovery of desire satisfied and relationality fulfilled in the love of God and neighbor incarnated through the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is reason to dance, because God has given the Spirit to fulfill desire and relationality as originally intended and to re-form and transform those twinned aspects of human nature by grace through faith in the great love with which God has loved AAEC.

Children dancing in true freedom as conceived in the thesis are sign-gifts to American Evangelicalism of the relational fulfillment of desire in the already/not of the kingdom of God. Liberated *from* the topside of the poverty of affluence *to* liberating praxis on behalf of children-at-risk on its underside,

children of both worlds may yet dance together in joy and join Jesus in the gospel he preached and fulfilled: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news *brought* to them" (Mt 11:5). So liberated the AAEC may become "a praxis-oriented self, defined by its communicative practices, oriented toward an understanding of itself in its discourse, its action, its being with others, and its experience of transcendence."[70]

Perhaps AAEC will experience the restoration and fulfillment of desire-relationality that lies at the heart of the evangelical tradition and find liberating joy in bringing the gospel to children-at-risk around the world.

[70] Calvin Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 9.

Appendix III: Children and Mature Spirituality

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Jesus left us both spoken and unspoken parables about children and spiritual maturity. He showed and said that we adults need to become like children to enter God's domain. This leap of the imagination was as great for his disciples as it is for us.

Erick Erikson (1902-1994) was less parabolic when he made a similar claim. He spoke the language of developmental psychology and argued on the basis of his clinical experience. Adults stagnate in self-absorption unless they take an interest in the next generation. If they do take such an interest they can become "generative." Being generative moves one towards a wise and satisfying old age. The self-absorbed, however, move toward despair. They become "elderlies," distinguished only by old age, instead of "elders," who quietly live up to their role as bearers of wisdom and dignity for the next generation (Erikson, 1997).

The church has overlooked the child's role in spiritual maturity because of three conflicted views.

- First, we hold ambivalent feelings about children, a high and a low value.
- Secondly, we engage in conflicted communication with them. Our spoken and unspoken messages are mixed.
- Thirdly, we engage in inconsistent actions concerning children. We are undecided about whether to make them obey or invite them to be creative.

The trouble with these ambivalent feelings, mixed messages, and inconsistent actions is that they are often unconscious, so they paralyze our ability to think clearly, responsibly, and creatively about children. We don't even realize that we are missing the profound clue to spiritual maturity that Jesus left us.

To dispel this paralysis we need to become aware that both the high and low views of children are correct. Both spoken and unspoken messages are important. Both requiring children to obey and be creative are necessary for growth. If what follows calls attention to these double binds and begins to exorcise them I will be happy, but I have another ambition for these pages.

My greatest hope is to articulate a small theology of childhood that will be useful to guide us toward spiritual maturity. To do this we will look first at Jesus' parabolic view of children and then review the eight concepts it suggests. These concepts will then be grouped into three propositions. Each proposition will be developed in turn and then we will conclude.

Jesus' Parabolic View of Children

Jesus did not define the child he told us to be like. We must consult scripture, the children around us, and our own childhood to discover what spiritual maturity is. Jesus' parabolic method forces us to discover the meaning of children for ourselves. It is the experience of that discovery, which prepares us to enter God's domain.

Like all parables, the language left to us about Jesus and the children is brief. Only about eight clusters of sayings and narrative remain in the gospels to guide us. Still, this provides more than enough raw material from which to conceive a book, as Hans-Reudi Weber's Jesus and the Children shows (Weber 1994).

Recent articles about Jesus and the children are also available. An admirable example is Judith Gundry-Volf's 'To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God: Jesus and Children," written for a children's issue of Theology Today (Gundry-Volf 2000), and expanded into a chapter in The Child in Christian Thought (Gundry-VoIf 2001). Another journal from a Presbyterian seminary, which has

devoted an entire issue to children, is Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology. This was in April of 2001 (Vol. 55, No.2).

My interpretation of this material assumes that Jesus took a high view of children, which gives the events and sayings their best coherence (Berryman, 2002, pp. 121-130). This interpretation has yielded eight concepts.

From Narrative and Sayings to Concepts

The following eight concepts are generalized from eight instances of stories and saying concerning Jesus and children in the gospels:

1. Sometimes a game shouldn't make, as with the children in the market place. This is because children are being invited to play the wrong game. (Matthew 11:16-19; Luke 7: 31-35)

2. A silent child is placed among the talking disciples for ontological appreciation. It is the silent child who teaches. (Matthew 18: 1-5; Mark 9: 33-37; Luke 9: 46-48)

3. Don't hinder children. Let them come to Jesus for a blessing, which they know non-verbally they need and where the Source truly is. (Matthew 19: 13-15; Mark 10: 13-16; Luke 18: 15-17)

4. Causing children to stumble (not be blessed?) is a matter of life and death. (Matthew 18: 6; Mark 9: 42; Luke 17: 2)

5. To enter the Kingdom one needs to become like a child. (Matthew 18:3; Mark 10: 15; Luke 18: 17)

6. Nicodemus discovers the need for a complete transformation, a second naïveté, to enter God's domain as an adult. (John 3: 3-8)

7. Children can intuit Jesus' presence and express their discovery, like the children in the temple. (Matthew 21: 15-16)

8. Children can intuit Jesus' power in a way many over-confident adults cannot. (Matthew 11:25-26; Luke 10:21)

From Concepts to Propositions

Concepts from the above list will now be grouped by similarity and by drawing on a general knowledge of children to create three propositions for this theology of childhood. Together they form a single theme, which is the child's role in the formation of mature spirituality. This is a thematic theology, like those emphasizing various kinds of liberation, rather than a complete systematic statement

- **Proposition One** is constructed by combining concepts 1 and 6 to suggest that playing hide-and-seek is fundamental to our nature. This has been dignified in theology by the Latin phrase Deus *Absconditus atque Praesens* (God is hidden yet also present.). We play this game to continue playing and not to win, which would end the game.
- **Proposition Two** is the result of combining concepts 2, 5, 7, and 8. Infants and young children show the importance of nonverbal communication. Adults tend to forget this because we rely primarily on words to communicate. Despite this distraction our spirituality remains fundamentally unspoken and gives the words we speak their deep connotation whether we notice this or not. Speaking can sometimes hide what presence reveals.
- The **third proposition** is the result of clustering concepts 3 and 4. We know that infants will die without nourishing relationships. They sometimes die even when all their other needs are met. A key aspect of such nourishment is blessing. It affirms one, as he or she actually is, and yet calls forth the best one can offer, since the blessing is asked for in God's name. This ultimate speech act stimulates change in both the one who is blessed and the one who blesses. It is in such mutual blessing between children and adults that mature spirituality is revealed.

These three propositions have seldom been emphasized in the history of theology. Jesus' parabolic sayings and actions concerning children need to be set again in the midst of talking disciples. That is what this essay attempts to do.

The language of this small theology - hide-and-seek, showing, and blessing - is closer to childhood interests and more open than normal theological language. God-talk is usually impersonal, abstract, and closed by the effort to make precise, denotative descriptions and explanations. All of that is good, but what the language of this approach does is invite the whole person to respond in an active and creative way, somewhat like Jesus' parabolic method does.

Usually a theology is large, but this one will remain small, like a child. As Jorge Luis Borges, a modem master of parable, said in the Prologue to his *Ficciones* (1962): "To go on for five hundred pages developing an idea whose perfect oral exposition is possible in a few minutes! A better course of procedure is to pretend that these books already exist, and then to offer a resume, a commentary (p. 15)." Let us, then, develop these three propositions in the spirit of parabolic children and without going on for five hundred pages!

Proposition One:

Children Show Us How To Play Hide-and-Seek with God

The game of hide-and-seek begins at birth. Touching an infant near the mouth causes the child to turn toward the touch and begin seeking life by sucking. This act is neither reasoned nor willed. It takes nothing or anyone else into consideration. Our fundamental nature, then, is to seek nourishing relationships. Infants are the silent bearers of this revelation.

Many mothers are so in tune with their infants' needs that they anticipate them. When this happens the infant is not aware that there is anything "out there" or "other," because desire and satisfaction merge. Seeking and finding seem one.

The game of hide-and-seek enters our awareness when the mother regains her interest in the world around her and no longer anticipates her child's every need. Donald W. Winnicott (1896-1971), an English psychiatrist, called this compromise "good enough mothering (Winnicott, 1971)." An intimate "space" appears between what is "me" and "not me." Winnicott called this a "transitional space" and suggested that the origins of play, religion, and culture begin here. Perhaps, you remember a baby blanket, a stuffed animal, or some other object that was a "transitional object," existing in that in-between place, that was not you but still not entirely separate either.

The game of hide-and-seek needs an in-between, safe place to be played. Laughter signals that play has been established as the basis for the relationship. This allows presence and absence to be coped with in safety. If one hides too long, moves too violently, or shouts "Peek-a-boo" too loudly the transitional space is shattered and the play is over. The game disintegrates. All lose!

As infants mature their play incorporates language. As they grow into adulthood this language proliferates into a variety of "worlds" from poetry to physics to religion. The language games we participate in shape the way we relate to each other, to nature, to the deep self, and to God. This is why it is so important to take great care when introducing religious language to children. I have, therefore, proposed a way of teaching religious language called Godly Play™. It shows the art of how "to speak Christian" in a way that invites children to create meaning about the absence and presence of God while it is being learned in the safety and intimacy of play (Berryman, 1991; 1994; 2002; 2003),

As the young child develops, the words of the game change. "Where are you?" can be heard instead of "Peek-a-boo." The questions are linked by their three syllables, but differentiated by their inflection and words. The little one, who is supposedly hiding, can't help but call back, "Here I am." The game remains as much about being found as about hiding.

"Now you hide," the child laughs or gestures with his or her play face showing what kind of relationship is needed to continue. The adult's hiding, of course, needs to be in plain sight. Perhaps, the child will cover you up, because this keeps him or her in control of the hiding and being found and keeps the game located in transitional space. The alternative is for the relationships to collapse into loss and terror.

About the time children go to school and begin to interact with other children on a regular basis the game changes again. Now children are running and not merely crawling. They can range farther and hide better. Sometimes competition is added to the complexity of the game by running to a base to avoid being "it" The game is more scary now, but at the end all the children gather to confirm that being found is still part of the game and that the fundamental relationship is one of play.

More variations of this game appear during the teenage years. Adolescents play hide-and-go-seek with their parents, their teachers, and with each other. Courtship includes hide-and-seek in its rituals, even today when custom dictates a kind of non-courtship. Adolescents are also at play with their own deep selves to discover who they are amidst the many changes of those years. The necessity of working out how to obey one's image of God to be creative and to obey one's parents and God becomes uncomfortably apparent to all. This is true even without the theological overtones from the two conflicting creation stories from Genesis clanging in their ears!

A little later the game of hide-and-seek becomes more overtly theological. The poets seem to be the best and most outspoken players of this game. Perhaps, their love for and artful use of metaphor, a kind of compressed game of hide-and-seek in itself, makes them more comfortable with such play. The poets also make it quite clear that this game is not trivial.

Francis Thompson (1859-1907) had not been allowed to enter the Anglican priesthood as he hoped. He failed at his medical studies. Finally, all he could do was wander the streets of London, addicted to opium. Still the game of hide-and-seek with God went on, as his "The Hound of Heaven" cries out:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him and under running laughter.
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat
"Nought shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me

(Abrams 1962, p. 1053)."

A more contemporary example of playing with absence and presence, is in the poetry of the Welsh, Anglican Priest R. S. Thomas (1913-2000). By my own conservative count about 50 out of 190 poems in *Poems of R. S. Thomas* (Thomas, 1985) reverberate with hide-and-seek. Perhaps, this is the "one furrow" he returned to again and again after the "learning's gate" had "swung wide (p. 5)." Here is an example:

IN CHURCH
Often I try
To analyse the quality
Of its silences. Is this where God hides
From my searching? I have stopped to listen,
After the few people have gone,
To the air recomposing itself
For vigil. It has waited like this
Since the stones grouped themselves about it
These are the hard ribs
Of a body that our prayers have failed
To animate. Shadows advance
From their corners to take possession
Of places the light held
For an hour. The bats resume
Their business. The uneasiness of the pews
Ceases. There is no other sound
In the darkness but the sound of a man
Breathing, testing his faith
On emptiness, nailing his questions
One by one to an untenanted cross (p. 54).

L. William Countryman wrote in *The Poetic Imagination* that "The dynamic created by the alternation of absence and presence is simply a defining fact of human existence (Countryman, 1999, p. 92)." At least in

Anglican spirituality, which he was studying, there appears to be a "dialectic of absence and presence." It is "the life force that gives energy and movement to the rest."

Understanding this primal rhythm preserves the freedom we were created with so that we can continue to be creators in God's image and yet never be left absolutely alone. As we paradoxically obey God about being creative we also need God to guide us. It is in this hiding and seeking by both parties that we discover who we really are and what we might become if truly mature.

The game of hide-and-seek is not the excusive province of poets and mystics. The theme is also in scripture. Samuel Terrien's *The Elusive Presence* (Terrien, 1978) describes what we are calling "hide-and-seek" as the single thread that unifies the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures. It is the *experience* of God's elusive presence, which weaves the sweeping narrative and other genres together. Of course, abstractions, such as "covenant relationship" arise, but they are grounded in and refer to the experience of absence and presence or they are only words about words.

Finally, we come to playing hide-and-seek with our own death. We play with the absence and presence of all that we know. Our deep self, others, nature, and God may no longer be known consciously in language when we die, but such relationships may still be present in our very different and silent, non-linguistic being. It is then that we are completely found by and find God. We return to the unity we began with when "me" and "not me" were merged before the game became conscious.

In Eden God was always present. Adam and Eve hid. God found them. God then sent them away, but God was still there, playing hide-and-seek, so the relationship could continue. That original game continues today, recapitulated in each child's life as the little one develops into adulthood and beyond.

Proposition Two:

Children Show Us the Importance of Silence for Knowing God

Play is signalled by nonverbal actions. One can play with words but words cannot indicate play. There is nothing that one can do that cannot be done in a playful way, so play is not a class of actions. We have already called attention to the importance of play for coping with presence and absence in life and death. It is now time to examine what is communicated in the silence of being at play with God.

Children are better than adults at tracking relationships without language, because they are not yet as dependent on language as adults are. This "relational consciousness" is a profound part of their spirituality as has been shown by David Hay and Rebecca Nye (Hay and Nye, 1998). This study was based on careful listening to and the classification of children's language about spirituality during interviews conducted primarily by Dr. Nye.

The above study and everything we have to say about silence strains language. We intuit that there is something wrong with such talk. Still, we are language creatures and must try to put silence into language to assess its importance. In fact, the distinction we make between verbal and nonverbal communication could not be made without language.

To better understand the relationship between talking and silence we need to proceed with the brain in mind. We will do this by using three different models. First, we will look at the verbal versus nonverbal communication system. Secondly, the knowing of the limbic system will be examined versus that of the cerebral cortex. Finally, we will consider the function of the left versus the right hemisphere of the cerebral cortex.

1. Silence as Communication: The Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Systems

Silence communicates as powerfully as words. Perhaps, this is why Jesus put the silent child in the midst of the talking disciples. There are three communication problems in religion that this model may provide the key to unlock. First, words are suspect when they are severed from experience. Secondly, when verbal and nonverbal communication are at odds something goes wrong with relationships. Thirdly, religious education is sometimes framed to teach the misuse of religious language.

First, let us examine the two communication systems. Terrance Deacon's *Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (1997) will be our guide. He wrote, "Language evolved in a parallel, alongside calls and gestures, and dependent on them indeed, language and many human nonlinguistic forms of communication probably coevolved (Deacon, p. 54).

In our nonverbal system of communication we have "iconic" and "indexical" referencing, according to Deacon. Iconic referencing is limited to signalling what is like and unlike. Indexical referencing is built up from the iconic and links connections such as smoke and fire. These two kinds of referencing provide the ground from which "a leap" in the complexity of relationships is made to produce symbolic communication. Referencing with symbols, then, is different from but relies on iconic and indexical referencing. This is

because symbols are only tokens of meaning. They cannot function without social agreement, because they are not connected to their referent in any other way. If one does not ascend from experiential iconic and indexical referencing to symbolic referencing, then, he or she is left with only words about words.

Some adults retain a special sensitivity to their iconic and indexical referencing, even after symbolic-referencing is well developed. Artists who play with words, dance, stone, colors, music, and other media are especially gifted at this. Children, on the other hand, have no choice but to be in tune with their iconic and indexical referencing, since their symbolic referencing is just developing.

Words, however, need more than mere social agreement to make meaning with any depth. They need to be rooted in iconic and indexical referencing. A sad and dramatic example of what happens when this is not the case is called Williams Syndrome. Perhaps, you have met people who talk at length about things they have not experienced. We all do this at one time or another, but people with Williams Syndrome have no alternative. They have developed symbolic referencing that is not grounded in iconic and indexical referencing.

The tragedy of Williams Syndrome, however, is not limited to using words about words. It also includes the disability of not being able to reason from one's words to any new or related knowledge.

Williams Syndrome raises the worrisome question of God-talk as words about words. Let us take the case of John Wesley (1703-1791) to illustrate both the problem and the complexity. Wesley did not suffer from Williams Syndrome. He was instead a "reasonable enthusiast," as Henry Rack called him in the tide of his biography (2002). The paradoxical of extremes of his analytical powers and his respect for emotion made him chronically suspicious of his own nonverbal knowing. This tendency or, perhaps, something else may have disrupted the connection between his physical knowing and his ability to understand it in language.

John Wesley wrote to his brother Charles in June of 1766:

> *In one of my last I was saying that I do not feel the wrath of God abiding on me; nor can I believe it does. And yet (this is the mystery) I do not love God. I never did. Therefore I never believed, in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore I am only an honest heathen... And yet, to be so employed of God! And so hedged in that I can neither get forward nor backward! Surely there was never such an instance before, from the beginning of the world! If I ever have had that faith, it would not be so strange. But I never had any other evidence of the eternal or invisible world than I have now: and that is none at all, unless such as faintly shines from reason's glimmering ray. I have no direct witness (I do not say, that I am a child of God, but) of anything invisible or eternal.*
>
> *And yet I dare not preach otherwise than I do, either concerning faith, or love, or justification, or perfection. And yet I find rather an increase than a decrease of zeal for the whole work of God and every part of it. I am borne along. I know not how, that I can't stand still. I want all the world to come to what I do not know. (Tomkins, p. 168)*

Wesley was trying to be honest with his brother and himself. Still, for whatever reason he struggled to speak of what he did not know or was in doubt about knowing physically. He also thought that he might come to know what he spoke of if he spoke of it often enough. Still using only words about words to create meaning can sometimes lead to a lack of flexibility and openness in ones thinking as well as a proclivity to plagiarize, since the richness of experience is not there to ground the words with personal authenticity.

Wesley's doubt about being a Christian, however, seems to have been chronic. His reviews of his original experience when his "heart was strangely warmed" wavered back and forth as reviewed by Heitzenrater in The Elusive Mr. Wesley (2003, p.35). Finally, Heitzenrater wrote that if we want "to see Wesley whole" there is only one way: "His main significance, then or now, rests not in his private meanderings, but in his thoughts and actions that touch upon the concerns of other persons (p. 393)." Still, did he know whereof he spoke or not? If he did not know how can we trust his reasoning from that experience? Williams Syndrome may be clinically clear, but how linking of nonverbal referencing with verbal referencing works itself out in daily life is far from clear. It is, nevertheless, important to take note of.

It was T. S. Eliot, I believe but cannot find the reference, who observed that the reason so much Christian poetry is so bad is that the authors wrote what they thought they ought to write instead of what they actually experienced.

The second problem this model of brain functioning helps us understand concerns the need to keep our verbal and nonverbal communication systems in harmony. Keeping them in tune is important for authentic relationships to develop with other people, with God, with nature, and with our own deep self.

Discord between the spoken and the unspoken are especially tragic for children. This is because discord is sometimes learned AS communication, since that is the only kind of communication they hear. It is hard to

overcome such a distorting start, because when you respond correctly in one system you respond incorrectly in the other one.

Young children have no way to cope with such unrelenting error, because they cannot take the perspective of a third person to see what is happening in the relationship. The pain of discord can finally outweigh the fundamental need for relationship and they will withdraw from trying to form any relationships, since their only experience of communication is that it is toxic. This can lead to suicide.

The third problem this model sheds light on is a problem with religious education. The language of the Christian People is sometimes taught to children in a way that does not promote any deep connection between their spoken symbolic referencing and their silent iconic and indexical referencing.

When religious education exclusively promotes memorizing scripture and/or a catechism framed in adult questions and answers, it is teaching *that* words about words are the norm for religious knowing. This excludes the use of this language domain from participating in the creative process, which joins nonverbal rumination with verbal exposition. This prevents religious understanding from developing. Memorization is important in order to have significant scriptural and liturgical passages in mind, but it does not teach how to actually use scripture or liturgy to create meaning, especially in new situations.

Teaching religion needs to keep symbolic referencing connected to iconic and indexical referencing in general, but it is also important to do so because our spirituality is probably located in our nonverbal system (Berryman, 2001, pp. 9-21). To teach religious language severed from spirituality results in teaching both a language disability and a kind of religious schizophrenia. Nonverbal contact in the area of religion is negated with one's environment, other people, the deep self, and God. Teaching these twin disabilities as religious education can end in insanity, masquerading as Christianity. Fortunately, children usually have more sense than to take part in this. They walk away from such religious education as soon as they can. They reject such "religion" as a terrible mistake, which it is.

We will now turn to the second model for looking at silence and its importance in the religious life. It involves the interaction between the limbic system and the neocortex.

2. Silence As Connection: The Limbic System and the Neocortex

The worlds of infants and young children before language are less differentiated than ours. Their nonverbal communication is relied on for their knowing and it remains somewhat idiosyncratic. It could be, however, that in this unique mix God is experienced as a significant part of the relationships in which the child lives. This is possible, because love does not depend on reason to will it into place. To explore this we return again to the brain.

Paul Mac Lean argued that the human brain is comprised of three distinct sub- brains. Each is the product of a separate age in evolutionary history (MacLean, 1990). The oldest and inner area is the reptilian brain. The limbic brain developed next and is the middle layer. The last to develop is the neocortex, which covers the whole brain like bark or a shell, as the Latin term *cortex* implies.

The neocortex is the site for speaking, writing, planning, and reasoning, while the so- called "limbic brain" is the site for non-verbal communication such as distress cries, play, nurturing, and social signals such as smiling. The limbic system moves us in ways that the neocortex can only imprecisely translate into language.

The joint operation of the limbic brain and the neocortex is at the center of the argument presented in *A General Theory of Love* (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon 2000). One of the topics discussed there was the authors' search for a kind of language to bridge the translation gap between the neocortex and the limbic system. Their solution was poetry. For example, Robert Frost wrote that a poem "begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a love sickness. It is never a thought to begin with (p. 34)."

The Christian language system is a complex repository of such "poetry." There are sacred stories, parables, liturgical action, and silence in this linguistic domain. Such language functions more like poetry than propositions, explanations, or descriptions, which dominate most professional discourse. This language system, then, is most appropriate for connecting the limbic system and the neocortex. It works in an indirect way and surprises us with the grace of its discoveries. The use of reason and logic, on the other hand, as well as tradition are important to guard this language system against misuse, but it is not the heart of the matter.

It appears that love's attachment is made in the limbic system. This is not a decision but a matching. A "decision" implies the logic of language, which only resides in the neocortex. It appears, according to Lewis, Fari and Amini, that our cerebral cortex makes up reasons for the connection that has already taken place in the limbic system.

When we say that a child cannot "know" God's will because the child's will and reason are defective we need to be careful and compare such a statement with what twentieth century science has shown us about how the

brain works. Love does not depend on either reason or will and it does occur in young children, as is evident especially to parents and grandparents, who know them best. If that is true, then, children can show us this connection with God by their very being and can truly guide us toward mature spirituality by their knowing silence.

We turn finally to the model of the two hemispheres of the brain and silence. It is true that the three models presented here may overlap, but how this might take place is beyond my ability to provide a synthesis for. In the meantime, however, the three models provide much for us to think about concerning the importance of silence for spiritual maturity.

3. Silence as Existential Orientation: The Left and Right Hemispheres of the Cerebral Cortex

For most individuals (and nearly all right-handed persons), the left hemisphere is considered dominant It controls the activity of the right side of the body and it is crucial for all language and language related activities as well as for many other cognitive capacities. This is why adults emphasize language in their relationships, which we have already referred to above.

The research about "split brains" began with a discovery in the early 1950s by Ronald E. Myers and R. W. Sperry, then at the University of Chicago. They noticed that when the *corpus callosum*, which connects the two hemispheres, is cut the unique function of each hemisphere can be demonstrated since they are no longer able to work together.

Sperry and his associates carried this research forward at The California Institute of Technology, as described for a general audience by Michael S. Gazzaniga (1967, pp. 24-29) who was part of this team. The implications of this research for religious matters, such as meditation, were discussed early in this process by Robert E. Omstein (Ornstein, 1972).

People who have major injuries to the right hemisphere usually find the movement of the left side of their body impaired, but their language ability remains essentially normal. On the other hand, most people with even a small injury to certain portions of the left hemisphere, especially Wernicke's area for understanding and Broca's area for speech, suffer impaired linguistic performance. A major injury makes them unable to use or understand words. This is why the left hemisphere is associated with language.

The right hemisphere may not usually be associated with language, but it is the site where the emotional meaning of speech is processed. People who suffer injury to their right hemisphere lose their ability to understand and produce delicately shaded emotional meanings in their communication. This is especially true when the locations of the damage in the right hemisphere are the mirror images of Wernicke's and Broca's areas in the left hemisphere.

What is most interesting for our purpose here is that some researchers consider the silent, right hemisphere to be the site of our orientation in space and time. That would make our fundamental existential orientation unable to be spoken about. Perhaps, this explains what theologians are talking about when they say that there are limits to our language and knowing. All three models of brain functioning inform this intuition and make sense out of what the mystics have observed that they know things that they cannot put into words.

The third model also helps us better understand about conflicts in our knowing. When people, who have had their *corpus callosum* severed, are asked questions they sometimes begin to speak and at the same time shake their heads to affirm or deny what is being said. Perhaps, you have even felt such agreement or disagreement within your own brain. This subtle evidence of silent knowing, then, from the right hemisphere is important to remind us to continuously monitor our nonverbal intuitions about our relationships with God, others, nature, and the deep self as we speak of them. This is especially true, since the play with God, as in any kind of play, is only signalled in a nonverbal way.

We have now discussed three models of brain functioning, which show the importance of nonverbal and verbal communication working together for the development of mature spirituality. Children are living revelations of how to play with the presence and absence of God and how nonverbal communication is used to track this. We turn now to a discussion of how children can also show us an ethic of blessing, which is needed to guide us into God's playful and silent presence.

Proposition Three:

Children Show Us How To Bless and Be Blessed

Why was Jesus "indignant" when the disciples prevented the children from coming to him to be blessed? Why was he so violent in his millstone sayings about not hindering children? Perhaps, the extreme language was

linked to the necessity that human children must be reared in nourishing relationships if they are going to be nourishing adults with spiritual maturity.

The ethic of blessing rests on the blunt fact that our species will die out by its own misuse of creativity unless we begin to live by an ethic of blessing. The church has everything it needs to make a new awareness of the relationship between children and spiritual maturity known, but this message is primarily nonverbal, so it must be shown and not merely talked about.

Jesus showed this by his touch. When Jesus blessed he also healed. The massive transfer of affirmation in the touch that accepts people where they are is the beginning of this process. The blessing in God's name then challenges us to be the best we can be, perhaps in ways that we do not yet know but only God knows. The verbal simplicity of the act, a performative utterance, should not distract us from the complex nonverbal transaction that is taking place. Both words and gesture communicate that this is not a power play to put down the one who is blessed. It is rather a sign of affirmation and aspiration.

Blessing is at the beginning of scripture when God blessed the whole creation as good (Genesis 1 - 2: 3). It was present when Abraham was blessed into being a blessing to others (Genesis 12: 1-2). It was there when Jesus laid hands on the children and blessed them. It is also there at the end. John heard a voice from heaven telling him to write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." He then wrote, "Blessed indeed, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them (Revelation 14: 13)." Blessing is part of the whole texture of creation.

Still, this is not primarily a matter of either Jesus' or scripture's authority. It is neither merely an appeal to Jesus' life as an ethical model. These considerations are important, but what needs to be emphasized here is that if you want to reach spiritual maturity, *then* you need to live by an ethic of blessing.

The ethic of blessing tends toward synthesis rather than analysis. It does not intend to be completely impartial nor is it a mechanical application of decision-making principles. It does not distinguish what people do from who they are, but takes motive, action, and consequences into account

Motive

The first part of the ethical situation we will focus on is the motive. It is motive that moves one to act in the first place and to act in a certain way. Sometimes the motive is so strong that people will do things for others that cause them pain or even death, so it must be taken into consideration to understand the whole context for blessing.

The focus on the good person as the source of good deeds is an ancient tradition, usually associated with Aristotle (384-322 BCE). He promoted the idea that a moral agent will experience happiness or flourishing *(eudaimonia)* when motivated by living a golden mean. He developed various moral values-- among them courage, self-control, wisdom, and justice, which were common to his culture's story and tradition.

Christian theologians such as Paul, Augustine (354-430) and Aquinas (1225-1274) added the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love to Aristotle's list, which was also revised. Aquinas identified justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence as the cardinal (Latin: *cardo* meaning hinge) virtues. The rich complex of the theological virtues - loving regard for others, faith in the present, and hope for the future - provide the generative power for an authentic blessing, but it also takes courage, self-control, wisdom, humility, and a thirst for justice sometimes to get it done.

To say that what one ought to do is what a virtuous person is motivated to do is helpful to define an ethic of blessing but a bit circular by itself. We, therefore, need to move on to the act itself and the results of the act to work out more clearly what an ethic of blessing is.

Act

The second part of the ethical situation is the act itself. Here we are interested in action that is so important that it commands our attention and a sense of duty to accomplish it. The classical origin of this emphasis is Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and is called "deontology" after the Greek word for "duty," which is *deon.*

"Importance" may be assigned to an act because it is an ultimate one. An example is killing, which certainly gets our attention. Another example is any act that if not done would make moral conduct impossible. Examples are keeping promises or telling the truth. A blessing is an ultimate act, because it can stimulate mutual blessing, which can generate spirituality maturity across the generations. An authentic blessing, however, still involves the motive and the results.

Results

The third part of the ethical situation is the results. The classical term for an interest in consequences is "utilitarianism" and its origins are usually associated with Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill

(1806-1873). The focus on results requires one to engage in a risk/benefit analysis to predict the outcome of an act with a particular motive. Blessing encourages a utilitarian, risk/benefit analysis, but it also acknowledges that despite our best efforts we still cannot claim certainty about the future. An example is the blessing of a child or grandchild who will probably outlive you.

Sometimes there are no good options for our actions - only shaded, complex alternatives. To bless then is to look at a person or situation from all three of the above points and integrate them as well as possible. The next step is to move forward imperfectly into the unknown, asking for forgiveness for our limited ability to know and control the future. Having done this we take responsibility for what we have done.

Blessing stimulates a kind of blessing in return. The first move entails the second logically and emotionally. The one who blesses recognizes that the one who is blessed is not being manipulated to act in a certain way. The one who blesses, then, lets go of control and in so doing is open to being blessed in return through the quality of the relationship established. Acceptance and aspiration flow back to the one who first performed the blessing. This is structural and is not related to the attitude of the one who is blessed or how things turn out Blessing in this way, rather than as a power play, then, always gives rise to mutual blessing.

Mutual blessing opens up a spiritual "place" of safety and intimacy like Winnicott's transitional space. It also invites God to come and play, for it is done in God's name. Sometimes even sacred objects invested with God's presence are used to bless. They are like transitional objects and contribute to the safety and intimacy of the play.

We mentioned the difficulty of blessing when one is powerful. It tends to put down the one who is blessed and implies submission. To manage this Jesus blessed children as those who could bless, but also included others. He blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who desire what is fair, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for righteousness' sake, and those who are spoken of falsely. The Sermon on the Mount, especially in Matthew 5-7, provides us with a list of those who can bless, because they have nothing to offer except a blessing. The powerless know they cannot control the future. They cannot coerce the present The powerful, on the other hand, have difficulty blessing, because their power always infers control. This is as structural and impersonal as is the blessing received by the one who blesses.

This complicates the normal view of church development For example in Norwich, England, The Reverend Dr. Samuel (Sam) Wells found that the Anglican parish of St. Elizabeth's of which he was vicar, needed a new approach to its relationship with the community. Something was wrong and in this perplexing situation Sam discovered the importance of thinking of the church as a powerless child rather than as a powerful parent. When a new building was built in 1991, there was terrible vandalism for the first five years. In conversation with a girl who had thrown rocks at the previous vicar's house he discovered something about the position of the church as a child.

Gently the church has come to see that the young person who threw the stone is in fact more representative of a widespread view, and thus more like a parent, whereas the church, being small and not taken seriously, is in fact more like a child. The power of the church is not that of a parent - greater resources, more experience, greater physical strength; instead, the church's power is that of the child - stubbornness and doggedness, and the tendency to ask awkward or embarrassing questions. So when the time comes to sit down with the other groups in the community, the church sits down as a child, still learning, potentially disruptive, rather than as a parent, saying "come to where we already are." (Wells, 2000, p.123)

This leap of imagination is remarkable. The church is unable to bless if it takes the role of the powerful parent. Usually church development does not take children into consideration unless it is to *use* them to draw in their parents or to be politically correct. Children are assumed not to be able to make any kind of contribution on their own except, perhaps as a deferred one, as the church of the future.

The contribution of children, however, is so fundamental that it is very hard to see. Churches work hard to maintain the institution and to draw people in to develop the congregation. The question not always asked is why the institution should be maintained or what the invited strangers are invited to. If the goal of church development is to provide a way to help people enter the domain of God, then the children are at the center of what a church is for. Building a child-like church, however, sounds weak and powerless, but that is just the point. The "weakness" is very strong if it is to make the church into a doorway into God's realm.

Nietzsche argued that statements about valuing such weakness are nothing but a rationalization, which discloses an ethic of necessity, an ethic of "slave morality." It makes a virtue of being powerless, when the reality is that what human beings really want and need is power. In his *The Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche,1956) he wrote that this is a "conspiracy of the sufferers against (the) happy and successful"(p. 259). He also exclaimed that it is "the ascetic priest, that virtuoso of guilt" (p. 277) who reduces the "vital energy" of human beings to its lowest point (p. 268) by preaching such an ethic.

On the contrary I propose that mutual blessing generates "vital energy" across the generations. When people forget that they are creatures and not God, they become too inflated to enter the small doorway into God's domain. It is for children and the child-like rather than for the powerful who must expand their power to find their worth. There is nothing generative about that It absorbs rather than generates energy.

In his urgency, pain, loneliness, and desperate, attempted honesty - Nietzsche at times confused the God-Man and the Man-God. Nevertheless, his use of the images of blessing, "second innocence," the child, the personal quality of morality, and his critique of Christianity all contribute to a better understanding of what I mean by an ethic of mutual blessing.

Perhaps, Nietzsche understood this from a negative point of view more than we realize from his brilliant words. There were probably many medical reasons for his insanity, but he also may have been driven mad by the ambivalent feelings, the mixed messages, and the inconsistent actions by the Christians he knew. After all, his last sane act was to throw his arms around a horse being mistreated near the Via Po in Turin about January 3, 1989. He then collapsed.

Before being taken to Basel, a mad man, he begged his Italian landlord, "Dear Signor Fino, will you let me have your *papalina?"* He wanted Fino's triangular popish nightcap with a tassel on it for the journey. He wanted people to know him as a popish clown. As Lesley Chamberlain concluded in her book *Nietzsche in Turin* (1996) this was the visual image of himself he bequeathed to posterity. "His message had to be certain beyond words (p. 217)." Nietzsche risked madness to critique Christianity and Christianity risks madness not to listen. It is the power of spiritual maturity through hide-and-seek, attending to the quality of our relationships, and living an ethic of mutual blessing that is needed and not the kind of power Nietzsche and much of contemporary society think wilt make one spiritually mature.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the three conflicts distorting the church's view of children ambivalent - feelings, mixed messages, and inconsistent actions - will begin to dissolve by being exposed to discussion through these pages. It is further hoped that the three propositions of this theology will be useful to help find the doorway into God's domain through child-like churches.

Children are not adults. Adults are not children. Adults, however, can become like children and over time children can become like adults (who can become like children, etc.). This path of infinite progress is the way into the domain of God. All else is an infinite regress.

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Appendix IV: Playful Orthodoxy:

Reconnecting Religion and Creativity by Education

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People tend towards centered and participatory orthodoxy or openness and objectivity in their theory and practice of religious education, but extreme versions of both tendencies are dangerous. Orthodoxy can tend towards rigidity and conflict while open and objective teaching can result in a lack of commitment and depth.

Religion, therefore, needs to be restored to its grounding in creativity, which includes both opening and closing tendencies, and results in the synthesis of playful orthodoxy rather than either dangerous extreme. The use of play, ritual, and narrative is the way to achieve such a synthesis, but many children do not know how to be active and constructive participants in play, ritual or story. The Montessori method is adapted, therefore, to encourage children to be more self-directed and active in their participation in ritual and story as well as more wondering and creative in their play with regards to religion. A way to accomplish this is Godly Play™**,** an approach developed from within the Christian tradition, but there is no reason in principle why the same strategy could not be adapted by any of the world's religions and thereby provide a constructive approach to pluralism.

The problem addressed here arises when one notices that the two fundamental tendencies of religious education, the closure of orthodoxy and the openness of the seeker, move in opposite directions. Since both tendencies are dangerous, when they stand alone, religious education is confronted with a dilemma.

If one teaches for orthodoxy by memorization, by other-directed authority, by the formation of habits, by promoting single-minded duty, and by an 'us-against-them' mentality, then the result is a deeply centered and participatory practice. The danger is that this one-sided approach can result in the formation of an orthodoxy that is rigid, close-minded, defensive, and sometimes violent.

The opposite extreme is also dangerous. Teaching religion in a way that encourages self-direction, wonder, discovery, perspective taking, and inclusiveness tends towards an "any thing goes" approach. No identity or community is formed to guide and support one. A knowledge of religion in general as an academic subject might be assembled but as nothing more than a collection of facts. This can lead to learned insanity at worst and a rootless inability to cope with life's existential issues at best.

The closing - opening dilemma is false, however, because what appear to be opposing tendencies are actually parts of a larger whole: the creative process. Grounding religious education in creativity, however, is counter-intuitive. It results in "playful orthodoxy," an oxymoron. We are so used to thinking of the opening and closing tendencies of the creative process as opposites that joining them together sounds inappropriate.

The opening and closing tendencies become separated when religion shifts its experience base from the creative process to power. Power based religion is so pervasive that our language has conformed to this separation as being normal.

Power resists the opening aspect of the creative process and favors only the closing tendency. The secondary use of creativity is still involved in orthodoxy but only to reinforce the protection or expansion of the enclosed entity. In this case the "enclosed entity" is the whole communication system of a particular religion. When power becomes the ground for religion then creative coping with trouble is impossible and religion itself becomes trouble.

To address this problem we must re-root the teaching of religion in the creative process. To support this conclusion a long view of religion will be taken to affirm its creative function. Secondly, the "where" and "what" of creativity will be discussed. Thirdly, the stage and style aspects of the creative process will be examined. The fourth step will discuss how religious language can be re-rooted in the creative process. The fifth step examines what kind of teacher is needed to accomplish this. Finally, the question of what should be taught will be addressed.

Religion and Creativity

The established world religions perplex and sometimes frustrate us with their conflicting and exclusive truth claims. To avoid this distraction we shall begin long before any of the present world religions existed. This is not done to discover a "golden age" or to promote some "pure" form of religion. It is done to examine religion's fundamental function as coping creatively with trouble.

Trouble is what prompts stories (Bruner 1996). It forces us to play with a situation to see if we can find another way for it to turn out. Rituals conserve ways for enacting fundamental stories and to protect ways of playing with life to find new solutions. When any of our needs (physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, or self-actualization) are frustrated we experience trouble (Maslow, 1971). This is pan-human and true in whatever time or place one might live.

Taking the long view of religion is interesting. For example, we are still in the same interglacial period that produced the "recent" warming, during which agriculture developed in southwest Asia about 8,000 BCE. Such periods of warm weather have averaged about 10,000 years in duration over the millennia. Since our current warm weather began about 10,000 BCE, we are overdue for another ice age, even as we discuss global warming.

To paraphrase the poet, Robert Frost, either fire or ice will suffice for natural catastrophe, but in our time religion, which began as a way to creatively cope with trouble, when the last ice age was drawing to a close, is now trouble itself. Religious trouble is so potentially dangerous that it could end life on this planet before either fire or ice has a chance.

In 1925 the first australopithecine fossil was found in a cave called Taung in South Africa. Since then at least seven species of this life form have been identified. The most famous representative is "Lucy" who appears to be about 3.4 million years old and is thought to cross the line from ape to human. She had a small brain, long arms, short legs, and probably walked upright. Australopithecus could not speak.

When did our ancestors begin to speak? The evidence for Neanderthals (70,000- 35,000BCE) is somewhat ambiguous. They developed in southwest Asia and Europe. Neanderthal people were resourceful, powerfully built, probably buried their dead, and made fine tools, but did not have much verbal capacity.

The speech picture becomes clear after about 35,000 BCE. The Cro-Magnon people could speak (Crystal 1997), so speech was at last available to help creatively cope with trouble. Writing, however, did not develop until about 3,500 BCE, in southwest Asia, so little is known about the play, rituals, and stories they used to do this.

Casts of Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon brain cavities show that their brains were about the same size as ours. Casts of the nasal, oral, and pharyngeal air passages of the adult Neanderthal vocal tract suggest, however, that the physiological ability to speak was much like that of a modern newborn. Even though a Neanderthal might have been able to construct a linguistic code out of these limited sounds, the development of the nervous system was not yet adequate to control such efforts (Crystal 1997 p. 292). The Neanderthal, however, was far ahead of modem primates in this regard and would still have had play and ritual to creatively cope with trouble.

Since modern mammals play there is no reason to think that ancient humans did not, even as language was developing. Play is fun, so it is self-reinforcing. It is not the product that motivates play but playing itself. It absorbs the player and is entirely voluntary. For example when combat is re-framed as play the combatants do not bite all they way down to kill or eat their prey. Play provides a way to practice, to enjoy one's skill, to discover new moves, to try out new weapons, and live to tell about it.

Play is also associated with learning languages, creativity, learning social roles, and problem solving (Garvey 1977).

Neanderthals may have used ritual to frame certain activities such as play, since they had little or no language. Our Cro-Magnon ancestors must have added language to gesture in their rites. Foundational stories for rituals probably developed and the possibility existed for exchanging stories to interpret and conserve experience.

What-if or wondering play gave rise to creating new ways of doing things. As-if or role play provided continuity by ritual and story telling to induct children into adult roles. These two kinds of play suggest their grounding in the exploring (wondering play) and conserving (role play) aspects of the creative process. Religion's early function, then, was to cope creatively with trouble by play, ritual, and story telling - a particular kind of discourse we now call "religious."

Creative coping by means of religious language probably saved human beings as a species. We, therefore, need to better understand the creative process that gave religion this possibility. We turn to that now.

The Public Place and Private Process of Creativity

Mihaly Csikszentnuihalyi has spent more than three decades studying creativity. He discovered that the experience of "flow," which is related to "deep play (Csikszentmihalyi 1975 pp. 74-75)," is what makes creativity pleasurable and, therefore, self-reinforcing. The tendency to create new ideas and ways of solving problems, however, is not the only clue to our survival.

We are programmed with "two contradictory sets of instructions" (Csikszentnuihalyi 1996 p.11). Human survival is the result of the tendency to conserve as well as to create, as we have observed above. Our instinct for self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and to conserve energy exists alongside our tendency to explore, enjoy novelty, and take risks.

Csikszentmihalyi asked "where" creativity is located to better understand it. He proposed a systems model to define it within a network of relationships involving a domain and a field, as well as the creative person. Creativity takes place when any act, idea, or product changes an existing domain or creates a new one (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 p. 28). A domain consists of a set of language rules, vocabulary, and procedures. Mathematics is one example. Religion is another.

The second component of creativity is the field. This is the group of people who act as gatekeepers to the domain. The third component of the creative system is the individual.

In Godly Play (Berryman 1991) individual creativity was described as a movement with an opening (exploring) and a closing (conserving) phase. The opening begins when an established meaning is broken by a crisis, irritated by dissonance, or dissolved by wonder. This initial step in the creative process is followed by the second step, which expends energy to scan for a more adequate kind of coherence to overcome the disruption. This might last for hours, days, or years and be conscious or unconscious. The third step is insight. A new, more adequate pattern is formed and forces its way into consciousness by means of an image, a fragment of a song, a piece of poetry, a dream, or by some other means.

After the insight closure begins. Up to now the process has been largely nonverbal and outside the confines of customary thought. The fourth step in the process takes the insight and develops it. It is filled out and evaluated by the rules of the particular domain in which it fits.

The fifth step is closure. When the idea is developed enough, according to the canons of the domain, the individual wills closure, since one might go on developing an idea forever. The idea is then presented to the field to be accepted, rejected, or revised.

The whole loop of the creative process is available to all of us, but individuals prefer different parts of it. Sometimes people enter the process at different points, depending on the subject matter, but by and large such preferences are consistent enough to be a general indicator of personality type.

Some people love the free flowing spirit of scanning so much they don't want to interrupt it by an insight, which takes an effort of focused energy quite different from that used in scanning. Sometimes

this energy shift is noticed before the insight is evident so that one can be aware of "having" an idea before knowing what it is.

Other people are so delighted by having insights that they can endure long periods of what they might otherwise experience as pain and loneliness during the chaos of scanning. Once the insight is experienced, however, they often lose interest and do not develop it.

Conserving people step in after the insight. They can't stand the loss of meaning during a crisis or threat of dissonance and they certainly don't want to participate in the potential chaos of wonder. They hate scanning and do not find the insight worth it. They don't even like to be around "creative" people, who enjoy such things.

During step four, stability is sometimes maintained by trimming new ideas to fit what is already accepted by the field. At step five, the greatest control and least risk is maintained by limiting ones involvement to the purely executive step of accepting or denying the developed idea. Steps four and five, then, are most attractive when religion shifts from a creative to a power base.

It is important to note, as we conclude this section, that the creative loop can be used to accomplish destructive as well as constructive results. Sometimes an outcome is unknowable, so one goes forward with the process, betting that the outcome will be constructive. Destructive outcomes are, therefore, sometimes accidents. It is also true that one must tear down to build up a new idea or structure, so destruction is sometimes a by-product of creativity. At other times, however, creativity is explicitly placed in the service of destruction. If religion's domain was developed to help human beings creatively cope with trouble then such destruction with intent in the name of "religion" is not religion. It is trouble, destructive activity pure and simple.

Creativity, then, includes both exploring and conserving tendencies. People, however, tend to prefer only parts of the process, so over time religion has become uprooted from its ground in creativity.

There is more to creativity, however, than its opening and closing loop. Two more important features of creativity will now be examined.

Creativity's Styles and Stages

The styles and stages of creativity give further definition to its process. This discussion will be guided primarily by Howard Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences"(Gardner 1983) and James W. Fowler's theory of "faith development (Fowler 1981)."

Gardner's Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences was published in 1983. Ten years later he applied his theory to creativity in Creating Minds (Gardner 1993), which described what we will call "styles" of creativity. Although Creating Minds was published three years before Csikszentmihalyi's Creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) Gardner adapted Csikszentmihalyi's idea of using a systems model, which they had discussed for years, to help define creativity. What Gardner contributed to this discussion was the variety of ways people create and his interest in the connection between the creativity of the child and that of the master, which we will set aside for another time.

Einstein was Gardner's exemplar for logical-mathematical intelligence. Picasso illustrated spatial knowing. Stravinsky represented the musical frame. T. S. Eliot showed how a particular sensitivity to words can shape one's creative interests. Martha Graham exemplified kinesthetic creating. Gandhi showed interpersonal creativity at work and Freud was his model for a person tuned especially to the intra-personal.

In Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century (Gardner 1999) Gardner reported that he had found an additional frame of knowing to the first seven. It is found in the kind of person who is especially attracted to patterns in nature. He also discussed why existential, spiritual, or moral sensitivities are important aspects of character, but do not qualify as one of his frames of knowing. One might, therefore, display an existential, spiritual, or moral interest in any of the frames of knowing.

Gardner also cautioned that his theory of multiple intelligences was not a recipe for education. To run children through all the ways of knowing for a particular lesson is a waste of the teacher's and children's time and energy. An awareness of the multiple ways of knowing is better used to help

understand learning and communication difficulties when they arise (Gardner 1999 pp. 89-92), so they can be constructively managed.

We turn now from creativity styles to the constraints and opportunities identified by the study of human development. I have primarily used Fowler's model to understand the many facets of this phenomenon since editing and contributing to Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith (Fowler and Keen 1978). There are two major aspects to this discussion. One is how creativity is usually confined to one's dominant stage so that cross-stage static can disrupt this process when working with people at other stages. The second important feature of stage analysis is about the creating of new stages.

People can share the same deep values, but disagree violently within their own traditions and between religions, because of logical misunderstandings related to stage development. The structure of the way things are said is as important as premises and conclusions. Stage confusion is hard to diagnose and mediate, so it causes much needless but painful conflict.

When people are about two stages apart, the person at the less complex and flexible stage cannot understand how the person at the "higher stage" is thinking. This is frustrating. It can create so much static in the discourse that points of agreement are missed.

To make matters worse, bridging the stage gap is not only a matter of linguistic behavior. It also involves our non-linguistic communication system as well. The repertoire of facial expressions, vocalizations, gestures, calls, grunts, social grooming, pointing, and other such communication powerfully influences what we mean when we speak.

There is a complete discontinuity between linguistic and non-linguistic behavior, so the two systems are not always aware of what the other is doing, even in the same person. This also adds to the problem of cross-stage static, because just saying the right thing is seldom enough.

Our two communication systems evolved in separate but parallel ways and are produced by different regions of the brain (Deacon 1997 p. 54 and Chapters 8-10). We can, therefore, describe nonverbal communication with words, as I am doing now, but it makes no sense at all to ask what kind of word a hearty laugh or anguished sob is expressive of. There is no point-to-point translation. Still, the two systems are bound together, because much of what we say relies on nonverbal communication to nuance our verbal meaning. For example someone might say, "Good morning," in such a way that it ruins your day.

Fowler's stages, then, trace the development of linguistic religious meaning, although he would caution us to include feelings as well as culture within that linguistic net. Our nonverbal communication system, however, does not follow the same kind of developmental pattern except, perhaps, in terms of self-awareness, which comes in part from verbal capabilities. Our verbal understanding of nonverbal communication may change, then, according to stage, but the nonverbal system follows its own rules.

We are ushered into the realm of verbal communication about the age of two years. The importance given to non-spoken communication declines from then until about the time Fowler calls the "Conjunctive Stage." Unspoken communication, it seems to me, begins then to be more positively valued. We will have more to say about this in Section Five when we discuss the teacher of religion.

We turn now to the other aspect of stages and creativity. The creative process also contributes to the development of new stages. One is drawn to the next "higher" stage because problems can be solved "one stage up" in a more comprehensive and satisfying way. This creates a dissonance that sets the creative process in motion to create the next "higher' stage.

The opposite occurs, however, when the gap between people is more than one stage. Instead of being drawn to the "higher" stage one is repulsed and frustrated, because the "higher" form of discourse is completely unintelligible to the person at the "lower" stage.

The ability to think at "higher" stages gives one the ability to understand life and death in broader, more abstract and flexible ways, but something is also lost each step "higher" you move. The communication of presence and emotional uniqueness is lost, step by step, as pre-narrative and then narrative forms of speaking are devalued and avoided.

For example a Fowler stage is identified by seven kinds of structures. One of these is the perspective-taking aspect of our thinking. As the creative process moves a person "upward" from stage to stage the ability to interpret a situation with greater perspective-taking increases. One moves from understanding a situation from only his or her point of view to taking into consideration another person's standpoint. Continued development allows one to assume a hypothetical third-person way of looking at the interaction between the self and another person. Then the ability to take the perspective of a different group as it observes you develops. For some people the ability to take the perspectives of conflicting subgroups within a group, that is interpreting your actions and thoughts, can also be developed.

The above illustration shows the potential, which stage development implies, for greater understanding at "higher" stages. It also shows how the possibility for greater misunderstanding between stages develops at the same time. To restrict religious thinking to the "lower' stages of development robs humanity of one of its most important tools for creative coping with trouble, so the encouragement of stage growth is important. It should be accompanied, however, with the awareness, patience, and skill it takes to be aware of and to sort out cross-stage static in religious discourse.

This concludes our discussion of creativity - the public place, personal process, style and stage considerations. We turn now to the fourth step in our presentation. How can we re-ground religious communication in the creative process?

Re-grounding Religious Communication in the Creative Process

This section will follow the outline of the four characteristics of the creative process mentioned above. A suggestion about re-grounding religious communication will be offered for each characteristic.

First, let us discuss the gatekeepers. They need to respect and be more open to the theological inquiry of children. Instead of being told how to think and feel, which stifles creativity, children need to learn to think for themselves within their tradition to develop their own authentic and creative ways to cope with existential trouble or their use of religious language will not be rooted in the creative process.

Recognizing children as theologians also takes advantage of their closeness to God and lack of interest in power-based religion. If it is true that our spirituality is located in our non-verbal communication system and ought to be grounded in the creative process, then, children, who are not yet completely co-opted by adult religious language or religion as power, have especially important contributions to make as creative theologians.

Secondly, the whole creative process, steps 1-5, needs to be emphasized when playing the religious language game with children. As noted above, people are usually drawn to particular parts of the total process. To help re-root the use of religious language in the creative process children need to be encouraged to use the whole process when thinking theologically.

For example a scanning child, who appears to be merely wandering around the open classroom, needs to be supported to discover an insight. An insight child needs to be encouraged to develop his or her idea. A development child needs to be discouraged from copying other children's work and encouraged to discover his or her own unique insights. The executive child, who only wants to say which developed insight is accepted or not, needs to be challenged to set out on the whole risky voyage of discovery.

The pleasure of using the whole process is greater than engaging in only truncated parts of it. Children, however, do not know how self-reinforcing this is unless they are guided and supported to make such a discovery. Since play is voluntary this cannot be forced. Children need to be invited and intrigued to take part.

Thirdly, when we turn to creativity styles we enter one of the most enjoyable and overlooked areas for reconnecting the use of religious language to the creative process. Children in general often go unsupported in their natural tuning to a unique frame of knowing. This is especially true in the area of religion, because the link between a preferred frame of knowing and religion is not always immediately apparent.

Adults also need to be aware of their own frame of knowing so they do not project it onto children as if it were the only possible means for religious expression. As was noted above, there are as many ways of creatively coping with trouble as there are of knowing, so adult guides need to be alert to this richness of possibility.

Children, like adults, need to play to their strengths. Not only is that where the most natural talent lies but also the most security. The creative process does not work at its optimal level unless it can do so in safety, so style support is important for both creative potential and the security in which it can bloom.

In religious education the dominant mode of communication is usually words. Usually the words are to be memorized or interpreted in a prescribed way. Both strategies bypass the creative process. Even if a child prefers the language frame of creation, as T.S. Eliot did, the child's unique gift of verbal creativity is often suppressed as an error or at least troublesome behavior.

Children naturally tuned to the other seven ways of knowing are even more suppressed. The antidote to this is for the teacher to be sensitive to children's awakening styles so they can be encouraged so that their way of knowing is included in what counts as "real" in religion's creative coping with trouble.

Fourthly, we turn to re-rooting religion in the stages of the creative process. There are two problems. The first is to acknowledge how creativity takes place within one's primary stage of knowing, which results in the problem of sorting out cross-stage static when working with others. The second is how to encourage the growth of stages themselves.

One of the difficulties and delights of working with a circle of children is that they might be at three or even four stages, assuming childhood is from 2-12 years of age. Each child is moving through the stages at his or her unique rate, despite statistical guidelines. Sometimes children even mask their natural stages by memorizing a higher vocabulary and syntax to please adults. When such children encounter something new, however, they "drop" in stage and re-engage their language with the creative process.

The use of play, ritual, and story for teaching and using religion to creatively cope with trouble works as well today as it did in Cro-Magnon times. Play is located in our non-verbal communication system, so it does not divide into linguistic stages. Ritual is a combination of the non-verbal and the verbal, so children can find in it what they need. Story is the natural medium for children, as well as many adults. The combination of all three, therefore, is a powerful way for teaching religion by using it appropriately, which is possible even at an early age.

Well-designed teaching involving play, ritual, and narrative can be open to all the stages of language meaning. This can be achieved when the core of the metaphor out of which each sacred story, parable, or ritual action results is fashioned into a teaching object. Children, using such materials, do not need to keep the language in mind as they reflect on it, since they can move the story, parable, or rite about with their hands.

This strategy also means that the storyteller does not have to worry about matching the lesson's language with each child's stage. The children reveal their stage orientation when they respond, so the teacher does not have to guess. All stages can be valued equally and yet treated appropriately in such a situation. When stage differences become apparent to the children, as they wonder together about the lesson, the mentor can also show them how to work out the differences with patience and respect

The open, Montessori-like setting is important in such teaching for many reasons, but it is especially ideal for stimulating stage development. Children will naturally hear "upper" stages in a multi-graded classroom and be drawn to them in the safety of the teacher's support for all stages.

This has been a description of four kinds of interventions - in the public arena, the personal process, with respect to style, and for the two aspects of stage analysis - that can be made while teaching religion, which can help reconnect the use of religious language with the creative process. There are many more such interventions that can be made but these illustrate that such grounding is possible.

The teacher was often mentioned in the above discussion. This raises the question of what kind of person is best qualified to teach religion to children if the goal is to re-root religion in the creative process. We turn to that discussion now.

Who Should Teach Religious Communication?

Two general qualifications for the teacher of religious language can be dealt with quickly. First, he or she needs to be fluent in the language of the tradition being taught. Secondly, the teacher guide and mentor need to be comfortable with the discovery method and life in an open classroom, where children can make choices from among constructive alternatives. This is rather straightforward. What is more complicated has to do with the teacher's stage development and role. It is this third qualification, which will concern us now.

Erik Erikson called those who take a genuine interest in the coming generation "generative." When generativity does not develop in adults there is instead "an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy or of a compulsive kind of preoccupation with self-imagery - both with a pervading sense of stagnation (Erikson 1998 p. 67)," The teacher of religion needs to be truly generative if he or she is going to help ground religious communication in the creativity of the child.

An ability to be comfortable in the rituals of such teaching is also necessary. In Toys and Reasons: Stages in the Ritualization of Experience Erikson defined ritual as "an agreed upon interplay between at least two persons who repeat it at meaningful intervals and in recurring contexts (Erikson 1966 p. 37)." The grounding of religious language in the creative process needs such "an agreed upon interplay." Ritual is what holds the child and adult together in the same language-learning game. It is this interplay that can bridge the stage and experience gaps between childhood and adulthood when teaching religion to children.

For such interplay to be successful the adult needs to be comfortable with being "a numinous model in the next generation's eyes" as well as a "judge of evil and the transmitter of ideal values." When the adult is not comfortable and playful in this role then the ritual becomes ritualism and the mentoring authority of the adult degenerates into what Erikson called "Authoritism," the nonverbal communication of the teacher as self-important and judgmental. Children need instead the safety of ritual interplay with a generative, adult guide and a constructive community of children in which to be creative.

Erikson was appreciative of the power of play to help negotiate all the key psycho-social crises across the life span, but it was especially important during the "Initiative versus Guilt" crisis, during what Erikson called the "Play Age." Play becomes especially important again, it seems to me, when an adult turns toward the coming generation, because this "turning toward" is largely nonverbal.

One cannot distract children from the non-verbal, since they are not yet as co-opted by language as adults. They naturally pick up any conflict between the spoken and the unspoken message. This means that the teacher must be authentic about and enjoy his or her "turning toward" children.

We have been following Erikson to this point. We will now shift to Fowler's stage analysis. As one makes his or her way through the stages of faith development there are exciting and useful changes, such as the shift from primarily valuing and using narrative to concept. What happens later during the Conjunctive Stage, following my interpretation, is that thinking about one's thinking in increasingly complex and abstract ways finally becomes a dead end. Fowler talks about the conjunction of feeling and thinking taking place during this stage, but I would like to describe what happens as the re-assertion of the non-verbal communication system.

After experiencing several stages of cognitive development one cannot go back to the naïveté-without-options of childhood when the non-verbal was primarily relied on. The adult, therefore, must choose in particular situations to allow nonverbal communication to re-assert itself if one is to continue to grow toward epistemological maturity.

An example of non-verbal communication re-asserting itself is when one chooses to not analyze the process of Holy Communion like an anthropologist while participating in it, even though the ability is not only present but respected to do so. Instead one allows the nonverbal to dominate the experience and appreciates the quality of relationships that make the experience truly communion with God, others, the deep self, and nature.

In addition, having passed through several stages, one begins to realize that each step adds abilities for more abstract and flexible thinking but subtracts an emphasis on the intimacy the "lower" stages share.

Moving through several stages and experiencing the gain/loss each time helps one become more stage neutral, neither too attached to "higher" stages nor too repulsed by the "lower" ones. This frees one to become merely interested in where children are and supportive of where they may go in their religious language development

Bridging the stage gap between children and adults requires the person at the more complex and flexible stage to be able to speak in a way that matches or is only one stage "above" the person at the "lower' stage. Unfortunately, this can feel like being "talked down to" and is rightfully resented. An extreme example is the patronizing, singsong voice some adults use when addressing children.

When adults are truly generative and conjunctive they do not "talk down" to children. The child, therefore, knows he or she has a true play partner and the game is one of mutual growth with God, the adult, and the community of children. With a teacher like this religious language can be grounded in creativity.

Unfortunately, most adults do not easily become generative and conjunctive. It is usually a property of one's later years. The compromise is to teach teachers how to teach in a way that incorporates into their teaching role as many of these characteristics as possible.

In addition to an awareness of stage constraints and possibilities the teacher also needs to have a special appreciation for the uniqueness of religious language. This uniqueness was suggested by Ian T. Ramsey (1915-1972) about the middle of the twentieth century, during the linguistic turn in philosophy. The Noloth Professor of the Philosophy of Christian Religion at Oxford (1951), and Bishop of Durham (1966) argued that there is an "empirical placement of theological phrases" so religious language cannot be relegated to some sort of emotional venting. Rather it is an "odd discernment" (Ramsey 1957), which requires a commitment to the linguistic domain to be made before it can be understood. A teacher, therefore, needs to develop in Ramsey's terms" a nose for odd language."

The "oddness" is more than religious language's difference from scientific language. It also includes, it seems to me, that religious language re-directs one back into the nonverbal communication system he or she began life with and where our spirituality is located (Berryman 2001). An awareness of this also needs to be incorporated into the teaching role.

We have defined the role of the teacher for rooting religion in the creative process. We will now turn to what teachers need to teach if that is to take place.

Teaching Creative Religion

We human beings do not learn "language in general." We learn particular languages, such as Arabic or Chinese and even within a particular language, such as English, we learn specialty languages - such as medicine, law, or religion - and each specialty languages in turn has its own sub-functions.

To understand mathematics, for example, we begin with a particular base system, such as base ten, before being able to learn other base systems or speak about mathematics in general. Its sub-functions are "putting together," addition and multiplication, and "taking apart," subtraction and division.

Europeans, to take another example, learn western music and its many formal sub-functions, such as a symphony, to distinguish music from noise. They are then able to recognize and appreciate other kinds of music. Religious communication works in the same way. We need to learn a particular religious language system well, such as Christianity, if we are going to be able to understand another religion such as Islam or make meaningful comments about religion in general.

A brief description follows of a well-developed way for teaching "how to speak Christian" so that a clear, orthodox standpoint is established. This way of teaching also grounds Christianity in the creative process.

Children are invited into a circle with a mentoring storyteller. The surrounding room is carefully laid out with sacred stories, parables, and liturgical action materials. This makes these three kinds of language, the whole system, and the part-whole relationship clear to the children at the level of intuition from age two years onward. The complexity of the Christian system is not simplified but presented appropriately in this way so that the whole system is taught when any part of it is taught.

There is playfulness, clarity about the rules of the game, and safety in the atmosphere. A clear ritual defines the time spent as carefully as the space has been laid out. The deep structure of the Holy Eucharist provides the rules for profoundly playing this orthodox, Christian language game.

Children are invited to enter the teaching/learning time and space after they are "ready," for this language does not work unless people are prepared to make its "odd discernment." They bring their existential troubles with them to be juxtaposed with the power of religious language and God's presence. In the wondering and expressive art that follow the lesson's presentation these troubles are creatively coped with. A feast and prayers are shared and respectful good-byes are said one by one with a sense of blessing and closure.

The adult guides show, rather than talk about, how to use the language to make meaning. It takes being ready, wonder, and play. It is assumed that children naturally know God. What they lack is 'the language and a community in which to be at play with God, as creators created in God's image. Leaning how "to speak Christian" in this way supplies what nature cannot provide for their spiritual maturity.

The curriculum is an integrated spiral for children usually about 2-12 years of age. If adolescents have grown up in such classes many additional options for teaching are available, for the language is already creatively rooted. Adolescents who have not been raised this way can benefit by starting at the beginning with this approach, as can adults.

The basic lessons are returned to year after year, so children can learn to find what is new for them, according to their expanding life experience and stage development, in each classical story, parable, or rite. The content of this kind of language is never exhausted, so it takes practice and creativity to find its hidden meanings and God's presence alive in the language to give new meaning to life and death as the children or older people mature.

On the other hand, the spiral of the curriculum adds complexity and additional lessons as the years go by. For example the lessons about The Creation and The Faces of Christ (the story of Jesus) are told as single lessons and then children are invited to formulate an incarnational theology by placing the tiles from the two lessons together, as they see fit, into an integrated whole. Later, about age ten or eleven years, The Creation, The Faces, and the lesson about Paul are joined with part of the lesson about Holy Baptism to create an experience of the Holy Trinity. This recapitulates the development from narrative to concept in the history of theology and parallels the stages of faith development children have the potential for at this time in their lives.

It is not possible to describe the whole method here, but resources are readily available to do so. The method is called Godly Play™ and was explicitly begun about 1972, although some of the theoretical aspects date back to 1961. See for example: Godly Play (Berryman 1991) Teaching Godly Play (Berryman 1995) and The Complete Guide to Godly Play (Berryman 2002, 2003). The history of this method's relationship to Montessori education is traced in Volume 1 of The Complete Guide (Berryman 2002). Two important websites also available: godlyplay.org and godlyplay.com.

Conclusion

The ability of religious education to ground religion in the creative process is critical for the survival of the human species. When religion is grounded in power its danger to life has been made obvious by centuries of violence. Furthermore, the only kind of religion able to counter the threat of power-based "religion" is religion rooted in creativity. Out-creating the destructionists is our only hope.

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Child Theology Movement
Jesus placed a little child among them.....