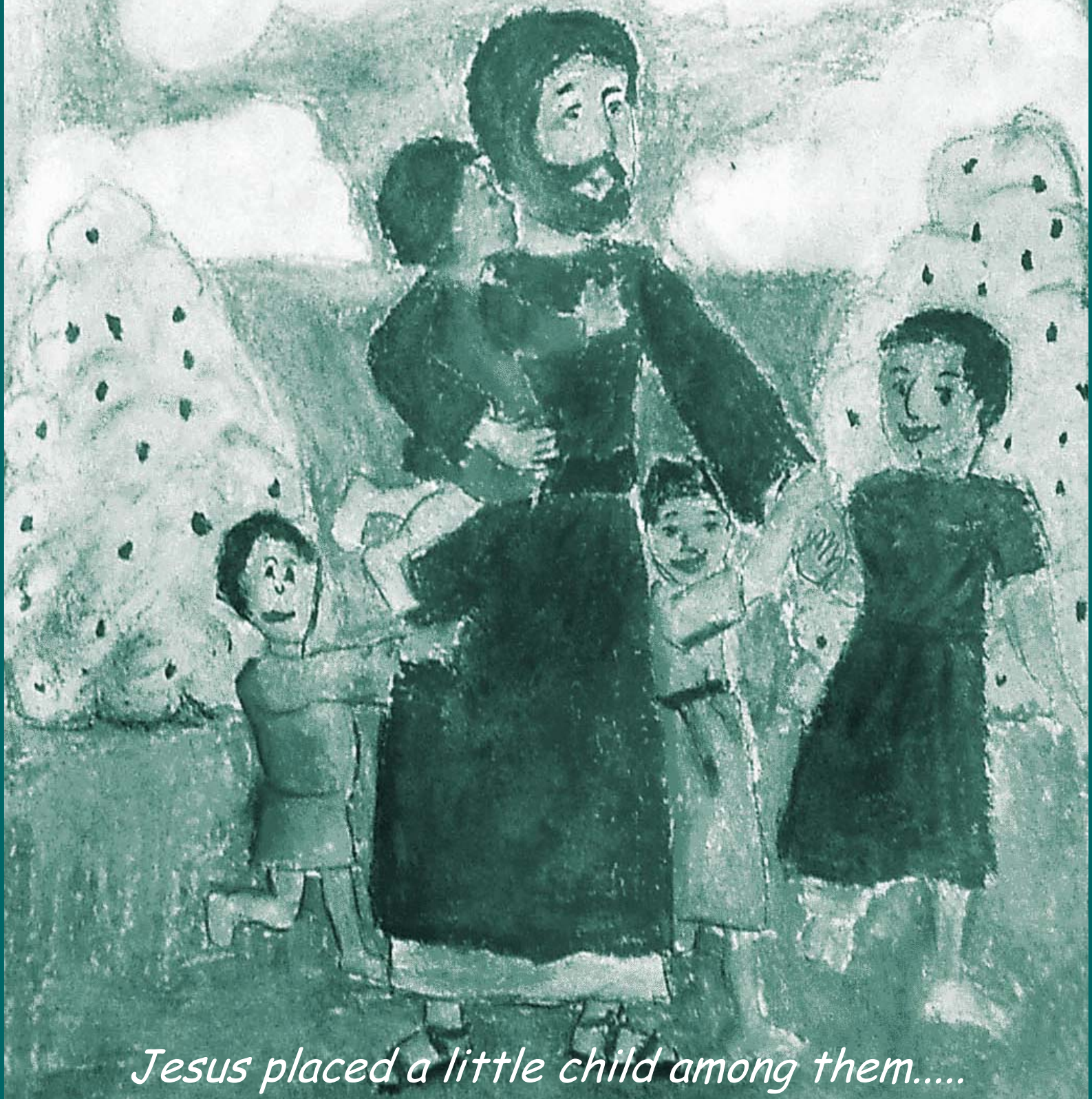


Second Penang Consultation on Child Theology

Child Theology MOVEMENT



Jesus placed a little child among them.....

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Report of the Second Penang Consultation on Child Theology

28 June to 3 July 2004

Editor: John Collier

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Prologue

This report gives a brief account of a meeting held for five days in Penang in June/July 2004. It was the fourth in a series of similar consultations organized by the Child Theology Movement (CTM) and the second hosted by the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS). Other consultations had been arranged by CTM in Cape Town and Houston and others have been or will be held in Cambridge (UK), South America and Eastern Europe. At each consultation, participants were invited to discuss and to help develop aspects of Child Theology.

The report will, I hope, make clear what we mean by this term. I have tried to sum up the discussion using plain English, as far as possible. I am encouraged in this aim by an awareness of how readily my own profession (medicine) resorts to long words and archaic language, especially Latin or Greek, to cover aspects of a problem not fully understood. Not that theologians would ever employ such tactics! But the aim is to write something that, while stimulating those who see theology as their primary calling, is also accessible and useful to 'non-professional' theologians who regularly attempt to work out their Christian faith serving children.

It will quickly become apparent that a key theme, drawn from the Gospel, is 'the child in the midst'. It's a recurrent and formative phrase for us but I have to admit to some discomfort with it. "Midst" seems archaic! It is understandable, for sure, but quite rarely used in modern English. More than this, it can too easily be heard as 'the child in the mist'! If this serves to enhance the idea of the child as a mystery worth exploring, then it's all to the good. But if it suggests a child half hidden in a fog of ignorance and neglect, then it has served to draw attention not to the solution but to the problem, as we see it. Child Theology has as a key motivation the sense that for too long children have been marginalised by the church.

I have, at times, used 'the child in the middle' in this report. It doesn't run off the tongue as well and 'middle' seems uncomfortably close to 'muddle' but it is certainly preferable to 'the child in the centre' because, as we make clear, the aim of Child Theology is not to make the child the focus. Rather, the child is a pointer, a doorway, to the Kingdom of God and thus serves to focus our attention, where it should be, on God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Perhaps, the Eternal Son was recollecting and illustrating his experience as the 'child in the midst' of the Trinity.

In much of its printed material, CTM uses a modern translation of the Gospel which uses the phrase "Jesus put a little child among them". Please understand "child in the midst" as 'shorthand' for this. And, as you read, perhaps have in your imagination alongside you such a little child, known to you, and the questions he or she might be asking God about the issues we discussed.

John Collier (editor)

Cover Pictures:

Front: Jesus and the children by *Sharon Leow, age 11*

Back: Jesus and the children by *Rachael Tiun, age 10*

Participants

Ela Balog

Country of Origin: Croatia

The ministry of my life is to educate Christian and secular educators, social workers, and care-givers about children at risk - to raise a voice in the church against violence in the family. I have 2 children (15 and 21 years old) and have been married 25 years to Aural. I am a mentor to many confused theological students trying to help them to find the right place and meaning of their lives and to help them live a real Christian life.

Aileen Beredo

Country of Origin: Philippines

I work with World Vision in the Philippines as the facilitator for Christian Education for Children. My job basically involves developing spiritual nurture programs for children. World Vision is a Christian, child-focused non-government organization (NGO) that supports children through relief and development programs specifically in the areas of education, health, advocacy, and spiritual formation.

Sunny Boon Sang Tan

Country of Origin: Malaysia

I am a Malaysian of Chinese descent whose grandfather migrated from China to Malaya for economic reason. As a young man, my father became a Christian. In the first few years of their married life, my parents rented a room within a Baptist Church compound; hence, I basically grew up in a church environment shaped by Southern Baptist missionaries from North America. As a young boy of 11 years, I was taught by a missionary to pray "Yes, Lord! Yes and Always Yes!" Thus, since my teenage years, I knew I would end up in the "full-time" Christian vocation. In 1974, I enrolled at the Malaysia-Singapore Baptist Theological Seminary for studies. Upon graduation in 1979, I pastored a Baptist church. I was pastor of this church for 11 years. In between those years I earned my Master of Theology at Regent College, Vancouver. In 1994, I joined the faculty of the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary; and in 2003, I completed my doctoral studies at the Asia Graduate Baptist Theological Seminary, Philippines. I am married to Rosalind and we have a daughter, Sarah (23) and a son, Asher (17).

Goson Boonyuang

Country of Origin: Thailand

I was born in Thailand and am married to Chirayut. We have three sons. I have been working for Compassion for 3 years as the Human Resource specialist and am currently program supervisor. I worked for 11 years in highland community development and for 3 years in children's ministry with Compassion. I am now pursuing a master's degree in Holistic Child Development at MBTS Penang, Malaysia.

Dan Brewster

Country of Origin: USA

I am a senior Partner Relations Specialist for Compassion International. I have been doing relief work and child and family development work for twenty-eight years in Africa, South America and Asia. I was African Director for Compassion during the 1980s. I am married to Alice, and have three children and one grand daughter. I have a doctorate in missiology from Fuller Seminary. My wife and I love living in Penang.

Marcia Bunge

Country of Origin: USA

I have a PhD in theology from the University of Chicago and currently work as Professor of Theology and Humanities at Christ College, Valparaiso University. I am also the Director of a new “Childhood Studies, Religion, and Ethics Project” which aims to strengthen theological and ethical reflection on children and childhood, and co-chair the “Childhood studies and Religion Consultation”, which is a new program unit of the American Academy of Religion. I recently edited a book called *The Child in Christian Thought* and am now writing a book on the *Vocation of Parenting* and editing a collection of essays on *Biblical Perspectives on Children*. I am blessed by God by having two children: Anja(3) and Isaac (10).

John Collier

Country of Origin: UK

I am a physician but I have worked for most of my life in research administration, I went into medicine in order to serve the Kingdom of God and in recent years I have had new opportunities to develop this aspect of my life, principally with children at risk in Brazil, Nepal and Uganda.

I am also a student, currently studying for an MTh at Spurgeon’s College, London. All these things have come together in the Child Theology Movement, where I am the Company Secretary.

Clement Chong

Country of Origin: Malaysia

At present, I am the Business Administrator of MBTS and Associate Academic Dean for off- campus programs. I lecture in practical ministries and in the training of early childhood educators. I had 15 years of church ministries prior to MBTS and 26 years of community service amongst children and youth and in the Malaysian Red Crescent Society.

Rebecca Chong

Country of Origin: Malaysia

I am married to Pastor Micah Lim and we have two children: Joshua, 18 and Debby, 11. I serve in Agape Family, a ministry that helps the delinquent youths. I home school my children, as well as some of the children in AF. I find it a joy to be able to help the delinquent youths; in fact they become wonderful children after knowing Christ. I am also a HCD student (2002), the most exciting thing for me as a HCD student is discovering the “treasures” concerning children. Child Theology is a surprise to me and I felt most comforted to know that theologians are paying attention to children as Jesus Christ did.

I would like this to be a success. To me, without children there will be no adults; and likewise without Child Theology, other theology will not be complete.

Edwin Estioko

Country of Origin: Philippines

I am the communications and Education specialist for Compassion Philippines, writing stories for and about children. I also write and illustrate children’s books for OMF Literature. Presently I am a student of Theology for the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, and a Sunday school teacher for the youth. My lovely wife is Daisy.

Altaf Khan

Country of Origin: Pakistan

I have a PhD in Christian Theology after originally training in Biochemistry and Business Administration. I have been serving as pastor since January 1987, when I founded Grace Ministries. It has small educational institutions for people living in slums, Sunday Schools, a Jesus Film ministry, a women’s ministry (sewing centres and computer centres) and a mobile medical ministry.

I also founded a small theological seminary and a Christian Business Men's group. I am a coordinator for Christian-Muslim dialogue for better understanding.

Sujith Kumara

Country of Origin: Sri Lanka

I am married and my wife works as an accounts clerk in church, a Sunday school teacher trainer and a lecturer in theological seminary. We have two daughters, 11 and 7 years old. I was a pastor for 10 years and left it as I sensed the calling of God to work for children.

Now I am involved in training and in building up children's workers who are ministering to children and involved in prevention of child abuse. I work partly as a resource person for ESCAPE, a Christian organization which is involved in prevention and intervention in child abuse. I am writing small books to educate workers who are ministering to children in church. I am editing a bi-monthly Christian magazine for Christian workers in Sri Lanka which is published by the evangelical alliance of Sri Lanka.

Rosalind Lim-Tan

Country of Origin: Malaysia

I have worked with children since 1976 in academic and church based children's ministries. My present role is director of the CHILD Resource Centre at MBTS, Penang. The responsibilities include designing, developing, and implementing training programs for child-care workers and coordinating Child Theology activities in the Asian region. I am also working on my Doctorate in Education, researching on Lev Vygotsky's social-cultural theory as a formational model in childhood faith development. I have been married to Sunny Tan for 25 years and we have two children: Sarah (23) and Asher (17).

Victor Nakah

Country of Origin: Zimbabwe

I am married to Nosizo and we have two daughters: Nothabo, 11 and Rumbidzaishe, 9. I am an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church and Principal of the Theological College (Evangelical / Interdenominational) in Zimbabwe. I am currently on a two year study sabbatical doing a PhD at Stellenbosch University in Cape Town, South Africa. My thesis is on Evangelical Faith and African culture with special emphasis on Christ and the Shona Culture in Zimbabwe.

Enrique Pinedo

Country of Origin: Peru

I was born in Peru and have been married to Miriam for 13 years. We have four children. I have been working for Compassion for almost 14 years - 10 years in Peru as a Program Manager and Country Director and four years as an Associate Director for the South America Program. I am currently in transition into a new position called Associate Director for Child Advocacy in Latin America based in Florida, USA. I am finishing my Master's degree in Missiology. In addition, at this meeting, I am representing the Latin American Movement "United for Children".

Bill Prevette

Country of Origin: USA – based in Romania

Both of my grandfathers were medical doctors, my dad was a doctor and as a boy wanted to be a doctor. However, my dad died when I was eight years old and I grew up in a Methodist Children's Home in North Carolina, USA, learning firsthand the blessings and shortcomings of a religious institution caring for 300+ children. As a child of the 60's, I found an identity working with campus radicals and anti war protestors and became a rabid anti-Christian while doing an undergraduate degree in political science and chemistry (bad combination anarchy and chemistry!). After University I moved to Alaska and pursued a career in professional downhill skiing and high altitude mountain climbing, then moved to the West Indies to build offshore racing sailing yachts.

A radical experience with Jesus interrupted my life of consumerism and hedonism in 1982 and the next year my wife and I went to India and SE Asia to work with Teen Challenge a ministry for young people addicted to drugs and alcohol. We now have a 15 year old son Danich (who is 6'6") and we have spent the last 22 years as missionaries with the Assemblies of God and Mission of Mercy working with children and youth at risk, based as a family in Thailand and Cambodia with ministry in most of the Asia Pacific region. In 2002 we moved to Bucharest, Romania and are still involved with youth at risk - training leaders and consulting with agencies that are child focused. I am pursuing a PhD through the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and am researching Faith Based Organizations that work with children, youth and local churches in Romania.

David Sims

Country of Origin : USA

I have been married to Tamara Schweizer for 18 years. We have six children aged 16 to 3 (2 boys, 4 girls), we foster one son and have another baby due in January 2005. I came to know Christ while attending law school (Business/ Finance). I went on to train in Theology and am currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Durham, England and work for Familylife, where I am responsible for the biblical and theological content of our material, managing strategic partnerships with other ministries, and peacemaking/ conflict resolution (marital, organizational and ecclesial). I am a Certified Christian Conciliator through Peacemaker Ministries.

Paul Stockley

Country of Origin: England

I am passionate about three things: God-talk and theology; children and childhood issues; peace building and non-violence. I live in Saint Clements, Oxford from where I work in training children's workers and facilitators and creating useful resources. I also work with young people on my local patch, helping them reconnect with others and their world, with themselves and God.

Wendy Strachan

Country of Origin: Australia

I work with Scripture Union International as the Children's Ministry Coordinator. This involves training, resourcing and consulting with our staff throughout the world who are involved in various aspects of helping children to follow Jesus. Now based in Australia, I have just returned from 12 ½ years working in Africa and I am in process of putting down roots "at home". I enjoy offering hospitality, reading good books, and relaxing with movies.

Chaiyun Ukosakul

Country of Origin: Thailand

I was a staunch Buddhist and a "progressive student" (leftist) during my university years. In 1973, I encountered Christians for the first time. I finally gave my life to the Lord and I was kicked out of home as a result. Upon completion of my degree in engineering, I went into the ministry of YFC and served there for eight years. After that I pursued my theological education. I went first to Regent College and later to Trinity International University. My research was on Interpersonal communication among the Thais. I am now serving the Lord in teaching, training and consultation work, in the area of leadership, interpersonal relationship and cross-cultural communication. I also serve at the Itapon Foundations which has two children homes.

Gundelina Velazco

Country of Origin: Philippines

I come from the disciplines of nursing (bachelor's), education (master's), counselling psychology (doctorate) and evolution (post-doctorate). I have lectured in universities / schools in the Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa, USA and Malaysia. I have conducted counselling and psychotherapy with street and traumatized children and have trained workers and professionals in conducting therapy with them in other countries like Cambodia and Namibia, among others.

At present, I am Head of International Research and Process Development of SGM/ Pavement Project based in London. I develop, research, and evaluate materials for children and train workers in different parts of the world in the use of those materials. I have written / co- written books on research and specific topics in psychology and education.

Ian de Villiers

Country of Origin: UK

My concern and work are that Christians across Asia are motivated and equipped to make a difference to children at risk. I (and a small team) are developing local networking to achieve this part of the International Viva Network Movement. I am married to Katharine and we spend what time we can walking in the forest, or touring on a tandem bicycle.

Keith White

Country of Origin: UK

I am the husband of Ruth and we have four children. Our family home is called Mill Grove and 1,200 children and adults see it as their home. Mill Grove is my life. I also preach, lecture at Spurgeon's college UK and teach on HCD courses at MBTS. I am a writer, currently finishing a new Bible for ordinary Hindus, Muslims and people everywhere. I am trained and experienced in: Literature, Theology, Sociology, Child Development, Theology, social work, and Community Development. My PhD was on Pandita Ramabai, a female Indian theologian. I love mountaineering, sailing, music and chess.

Haddon Willmer

Country of Origin: England

I have been married to Hilary for 38 years and we have three adopted children, and five grandchildren, the oldest of whom, Nathaniel, has lived with us for seven years. I am a retired Professor of Theology at University of Leeds, England, where I taught church history, theology and politics (Bonhoeffer, Barth, missiology, forgiveness and politics) for 32 years. I took sabbatical studies in Germany, India and USA.

Now, I am a Baptist preacher, militantly lay and sceptically ecumenical, work for the Coalition for the removal of pimping, supervise research at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and teach occasionally in Osijek. I am concerned about the de-Christianisation of Europe. I was glad to be recruited by Keith to give my retirement to Child Theology but all these things leave no time for painting!



Jesus and Children: *Serome Ching*, 10 yrs

Introduction to Child Theology

Towards a Child Friendly World: Isaiah 11 and Zechariah 8

Article by Keith White

Introduction

If more Christians are to be mobilized to implement God's vision for a world friendly to children, two vital parts of the mobilisation process are:

- deepening our commitment by understanding more of God's heart
- learning from Jesus about equipping His people for ministry.

These alone will not be enough. We need a third element: a vision of a child-friendly world that calls and inspires us to give and do all we can to move towards it.

Two visions from the Jewish Scriptures

I invite you to consider with me two great Old Testament visions. As we pause to allow them to inspire us perhaps we will compare them with existing mission statements we know.

You will notice when you look at Isaiah 11 that:

- there are no adults (or are we all seen as children?)
- there is complete harmony (shalom) in the natural world
- children have a special role in caring and leading
- the child is exploring and taking risks
- play is one of the main activities.

You will notice when you look at Zechariah 8 that:

- old men, women and children are mentioned together
- it is an urban context in which there are smiles and children are playing.

Putting the two together we have complementary visions with the common features being those of children, play and harmony. So do we need to rediscover Shabbat; Sunday, as the one day in the week when children can play safely in the urban streets? Would adults consider it, or has the market taken over completely with its demand for 24 hour, 7 day a week ceaseless activity, especially through the media?

Vision building

We must have visions for our communities, churches, cities and world. Otherwise the plans and intentions of others will hold sway. We will, in short, sell children short, and leave them victims of the market and of those who would shape them in their own images rather than the image of God.

I invite you to consider how far you have got in your organisations and churches with vision-building for a child-friendly world.

The UK Christian Child Care Forum has a vision at the core of its ministry: "a vision of contemporary society in which children and young people have a rightful place..."

The HCD Masters Course in Holistic Child Development worked on this and the women produced a memorable vision of a child-friendly world in which crocodiles were the main form of river transport for children: polite, punctual and completely safe!

We must go beyond statistical targets (e.g. so many children out of poverty; so many % literate) and work towards a transforming vision for our communities, churches and cities. In the process of vision building children are a treasured resource. (Don't forget Acts 2: 17-18) Encourage drawing, poems and music.

Let us remind ourselves that all through the Old Testament the people of God and their leaders were inspired by visions of what God was preparing for them, and where He was leading them. There was the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey; then the vision of a New Jerusalem; of a renewed creation. Without these visions the community of God would have disintegrated and given up hope.

The New Testament has as its driving vision the Second Coming of Jesus; a New Jerusalem and a New Creation. We have inherited this twin-vision, which is, in essence the same, and we are called to develop visions in the light of it for our own day, culture and cities and villages.

Many will recall the great vision of Martin Luther King: I Have a Dream. That has inspired us at Mill Grove, and we have produced our own vision. Life is ordinary, sometimes strained and tearful. Yet some have seen in the community a foretaste of Heaven itself. Is that so surprising? Isn't that what the church is called to be? Let's begin dreaming dreams today!

Child Theology is *theology*

Presentation by Haddon Willmer

It is thinking and speaking *about*, or even more importantly, *from, to, with, for*, God.

Child Theology is thinking about God and his kingdom with the child in the centre. There are many valuable ways of thinking about, observing, analysing, theorising, celebrating, lamenting, advocating children which are not Child Theology. Child Theology is distinct.

It is necessary in the first place to be itself. In cultures which are methodologically, practically or ideologically atheist, Child Theology will have to work hard simply to be itself. Many Christians have already concluded that theology is not necessary or that it is a distraction. Child Theology will always have to battle against untheological religion as well as secular exclusion.

It is necessary to emphasise that the child should not be the primary focus or criterion in Child Theology, because the child is not God. There is a danger of inadvertent or practical idolisation of the child, so that in child-friendly religious discourse the child in effect takes the place of God. Then, rather than the child being upheld and justified by the truth of God, the child would subvert and block the truth of God and our thinking for children would be deprived of the help of God.

The distinction of God and child in this way is merely precautionary, corrective, and not systematic and substantial. For God and the child go together, as a significant relationship within God and his creation. This was made clear by Jesus when he took a child and set him or her in the midst, as a clue to the nature of the kingdom of God and the way into it. In order to speak of God, the Word of God used many human words and many components of human experience, amongst them the child.

Child Theology in its positive substance therefore takes the *child as set in the midst by Jesus* to be a theological clue. The child set in the midst by Jesus tells us something of great importance: it is a clue to the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is important because it is *God's* kingdom, and because it is God's *kingdom* – God over all and for all.

Furthermore, if the child is a clue to the nature of the kingdom of God, which is over all the world, the child must also be a clue to *the way into* the kingdom. The kingdom of God is not a kingdom with guarded borders, designed to keep people out. The kingdom of God is open, it is *intended to be entered*.

But not all ways get us into the kingdom. Some obvious ways lead us into destruction. There are simple ways into the kingdom but not easy or obvious ones. Finding the way into the kingdom always involves us human beings in *learning*. The learning required to enter the Kingdom involves us in knowing ourselves, in seeing ourselves as those who do not know the kingdom truly enough to enter it, in short, in being converted. We are invited into what we cannot understand until we get inside it – and not even then fully. We have to change and be converted in order to be able to see and understand what is on offer. The child is a clue to the kingdom not because the child gives us information, by example or symbolism, but because the child puts us into a crisis, dissolves our existing certainty and assurances and draws us into unexpected possibilities.

It may, however, be a little unusual to make Jesus' setting the child in the midst our methodological hinge. We have not merely quoted this and similar texts (Jesus embracing and blessing the children) in

support of child-friendly practice. We have taken the text and lived with it. Jesus took a child and set him in the centre of this theological argument. So we said, we will not do Child Theology without the child, and we will not talk about the child without theology.

Child Theology – an evolving methodology

First Steps

In our first consultation in Penang, we read Matthew 18:1-5 and talked about it in its wider context in the Gospel. We deliberately, by an act of imagination, set the child among us so that our thinking should never fly off into general theology, into one or another of the kinds of Christian thinking in which the child is invisible, unheard and without impact. If we were to do Child Theology, we had to be bringing our theological sayings back repeatedly to the reality of the child.

Luther said: all our language has to go through the bath of the Cross. So in Child Theology (itself as we shall see later, a form of *theologia crucis*), all our talk of God has to meet the test of the child in the midst. As the poor transformed theology in Liberation Theology, and as women transform it in feminist theologies, so in Child Theology it is the impact of the child that transforms theology.

In Penang 2002 at our first consultation, a seven year old boy, Nathaniel, was with us. We did not inflict our discussions on him, that would have been a form of child abuse and would not have been of any assistance to our theological work, but he ate with us and enjoyed our boat trip and there were frequent references to him. He reminded us of our principle, a vivid orientation point, more impressive than an idea made present in word only. One child in the company stimulated everyone to bring into the discussion the reality of what they knew of children.

This particular child in the midst served as liturgy serves, even when it is done in a routine way: we can pray and read the word without our hearts being strangely warmed and with no fire falling from heaven. Nevertheless even such an apparently arid performance of the liturgy involves us in a publicly enacted restatement of the substance of faith and serves it by rehearsing it. It brings the dry bones together, with sinews and skin on them, all ready for the breath of life to be given. The child in the midst is like a sacrament, as a visible word. When Jesus placed a child in the midst, it was indeed more than a liturgical routine: it was a crisis of conversion, a shaking argument.

Our placing the child in the centre of our theological work cannot produce such a converting effect as a matter of routine. Rather our routine is a service, by which we stand and wait in readiness. Sometimes, the waters are troubled. Sometimes, the critical moment opens up. Then we are found watching, ready for the gift we cannot command.

Toddling

CT is a method for theology in process, grass roots in a sense. At the Penang 2002 CT consultation, 'we wanted to set the child in the midst and see what happened' - a deliberate discipline of critical consciousness of seeing and setting the child in the midst and letting that impact our discussion.

Child Theology definitely holds that Jesus did not set the child in the centre of the circle of disciples for them to admire or to make the focus of attention. Neither did he place the child there as one in need of some kind of care, education, feeding, respect, friendship or whatever. There is no sign that the child needed or was given anything in this narrative – except to be remembered for ever as a child who was useful to God in the service of his Kingdom. A key finding of CT at the *South Africa 2004* consultation was that Jesus put the child *in the middle of a theological argument* about greatness in the kingdom of heaven, an argument which the disciples were having with each other.

The child is placed there by Jesus as a move in the theological game. Jesus did not put his case in words merely, or in signs which could be translated into words. He argued by putting people into challenging and promising situations. That Jesus made theology so serious and drew all of life and all creation into his theological argumentation does not allow us to conclude that Jesus was not theologically engaged.

In terms of being human, we are continually trying to understand that which we cannot fully understand, not just for the child but in general. The Spirit's work in the heart regarding children is a mystery that lies at the heart of understanding and interpreting human relations. But the lack of full

understanding need not prevent us from making progress: one's spouse interprets one in an acceptable way even if not fully.

Given that we understand our discussions as experiments, we may press on despite doubts. We are not teaching an orthodoxy but trying to see and to learn. Putting the child in the midst of any and every theological issue goes beyond what Jesus did, but may nevertheless be in his spirit and his way, and may be justified by its fruit.

Beginning to explore: the doctrine of Sin

At our second meeting, in Cape Town, we conducted a theological experiment on the topic of 'sin'. There are reasons why Child Theology should give attention to the understanding of sin. Sin is taken seriously in Christianity, causing controversy inside and outside the Christian community. And in Christian tradition many issues about the nature and life of children have been intertwined with it.

Christianity is identified by many as analysing the human predicament in terms of sin and as being accusing and punitive as a result. It is especially under criticism in some quarters for the Augustinian tradition, which explains children to a large extent in terms of sin. This is doctrinally justified by understanding original sin as the condition in which all are born, so that sin is expected to manifest itself in even the behaviour of babies. It is alleged that when this view is taken, the upbringing of children will be infected with anxiety and a tendency to punitive coercion, as an attempt to curb or suppress, if not to eradicate, the sinful nature. Historical examples can be found to support this view, which is often generalised into a blanket accusation against Christianity. Various contributors in Bunge¹ show that there is not an inevitable connection between holding a strong doctrine of original sin and punitive or insensitive upbringing of children. The kind of historical precision in their work builds an apologetic for Christianity, which is welcome but it does not get to a central issue, whether Christian understandings of sin might be rethought in terms that are independent of Augustine and notions of original sin.

In such explorations we find ourselves echoing and working with various theological contributions and experiments. The point is not to be original and thus gain theological glory for ourselves but to walk in the light more fully. And that means walking with others. Almost all discoveries in theology are renewals, not new creations.

In Cape Town the exploration was structured in a disciplined process of four stages.

1. Each individual wrote in private three key phrases describing their understanding of sin, thus identifying personal starting positions in regard to sin.
2. The group then placed in the middle of the circle (by imagination only) two children pertinent to the culture as examples of serious forms of sin. In Africa, they were a child soldier and a child prostitute.
3. The group shared all the knowledge, or experience represented by its members, about such children, thus making the imagined children in the midst more substantial and alive
4. The group then asked itself how the doctrine of sin explicitly interprets these children for us and how these children speak to our thinking about sin: What difference did we notice between our individual starting positions on sin and how we thought of it after this full and sympathetic and hopeful attention to the child in the middle? The theological process works in two directions:
 - a. the child interprets sin and
 - b. sin interprets the child

The result of this reflection was expressed in a diagram². The child in the midst is affected by sin in a number of different ways. Firstly, the child is depressed/oppressed/pressed down by the power of sin seen as falling short of the glory of God. Secondly, there is lateral pressure, signifying social forces against the child. Thirdly, there is support, from the bottom up, signifying sin as forgiven in Christ. Finally, there is a force directed outward in liberation/redemption of the child, which signifies the

¹ *The Child in Christian Thought*

² One version of this is reproduced in the report of the Cape Town consultation.

child by grace taking responsibility for sin and walking into responsible relation with God and others out of sin. Significant about this final aspect of sin is that the arrow points outward toward the future, signifying hope in a future that God opens up.

This understanding of sin interprets the child. It is in tension with some traditional Christian teachings about sin, and it is so partly because 'the child' has also been allowed to interpret sin. The picture here of the relation between the nature, the cause and the responsibility for sin is the outcome of trying to respond sensitively and constructively to the reality of these children and others like them. If this is how it is for these children, we may suppose it is similar for all people.

In Cape Town we did not go on to deal with questions which certainly follow, for Evangelical Christians if not others. If this is how sin is interpreted in the presence of the children, what is the truth of atonement and salvation? What implications does it have for how we tell all children the good news of Jesus Christ and invite them to faith? What does conversion mean now? Such questions invite further work.



Jesus and Children: *Ng Joe Yee, 6yrs*

Outline for an exploration of hermeneutics

Document by Keith White

Introduction

“Hermeneutics” literally means “interpretation”. So if there is a picture, a story, an event, a piece of music, there is a question of understanding it, of reacting to it. The issues of interpretation are therefore universal in arts, sciences, politics, theology and ordinary life. Most people, including Christians, don’t reflect much on hermeneutics (although we are in fact interpreting life all the time), and if we did, we would find it very complicated!

It involves some of the most important issues of philosophy, sociology, science, history, language and communication. The whole question of “post modernity” revolves around issues of interpretation. Contemporary theorists are questioning and deconstructing accepted interpretations of history, literature and government.

We are not here to be clever or to create problems for the sake of interesting discussions, but we do need to understand how crucial hermeneutics is as we seek God’s guidance and will in our Christian ministry among children and young people at risk.

Some Historical Background in Christianity

Western Theology

Roman Catholic and Protestant theology have involved many disagreements (for example, the role of the Church, priests, Scripture, Sacraments and so on), but in both cases theology has tended to be dominated by an academic, rational approach. It takes place in colleges and seminaries (note where we are today!) and involves reading and study. It assumes that you work from the Bible (interpreted correctly), to principles and then to individual and corporate belief and action. It also assumes that the principles arrived at are applicable to every situation. Denominations are integral to this process as guardians of what they believe to be sound or authentic theology. They all have their statements of belief or creeds.

To an outsider to the West like Pandita Ramabai, denominations seemed a contradiction of the life and teaching of Jesus.

A key text in understanding how different denominations do theology is: *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, by H.R. Niebuhr³. He traces with sadness how the social background and culture of Christians influences how they select, read and understand the Scriptures. It is a salutary text.

Orthodox (Eastern) Theology

This includes Russian, Greek, Coptic and other traditions. It has always had an emphasis that contrasts with that of the Western churches. It starts from the basis that God can never be fully described in words, and so ikons, celebration, spirituality and charity are integral parts of theology. A theologian is one whose life and teaching form one seamless robe.

Radical, Spiritual and Charismatic Movements

All through the history of Western Christianity there have been challenges to the prevailing practice of theology. Monastic orders in the Roman Catholic Church (for example, Francis of Assisi and Benedict) and denominations in Protestantism (for example Anabaptists and Mennonites) have challenged the accepted beliefs, institutions and practice. There has also been a massive Pentecostal explosion that has transcended denominations and challenges rational methods and processes. It stresses worship, celebration, signs, wonders, and experiences of God’s Spirit. Its “theology” is often done by way of personal testimony, preaching and prophecy.

Radical Alternative Theologies

In addition to challenges within the Western tradition, there have also been challenges from other parts of the world.

The Brahmo Samaj was an early one.⁴ It responded to Jesus and understood His teaching in a way it contrasted with “Western” theology. It found Western theology formal, “hard” and lacking in emotion and empathy.

³ Holt and Company, New York, 1929

Since the 1968 Roman Catholic Conference at Medellin, Columbia, there have been major and sustained challenges to traditional, academic, Western theology (whatever its particular emphasis). These include Liberation Theology, Black Theology, Asian Theology, Feminist Theology, Urban Theology...and arising now, is what I believe is potentially the most challenging of them all, Children's Theology!

These theologies have had immense impact, and question the whole basis of traditional theology, the way it is done, who does it, where it is done, and what it's all about in the first place!

For this lecture I draw on Liberation theology, Asian theology and Urban theology. This is partly because they are all done by committed Christians who are wrestling with real challenges to their faith from contemporary realities, but also because they have been an integral part of my own journey of faith and obedience.

Issues in Hermeneutics (Interpretation)⁵

Richard Bauckham is concerned with politics. That is useful for our purposes because he wants to know how to read the Bible so that concrete action can be taken. He is aware of the different historical and geographical contexts in which the Bible has been used as a guide to Christian behaviour and action.

He sets out three initial issues that arise from the area of life he wants to explore. These will vary depending on the field of study, but it is important to clear the ground in this way, whatever we are looking at.

The Old and New Testaments

The social and political contexts are quite different. In the Old Testament Israel becomes a nation with all the associated stages and issues (terrorism, liberation, law, formation of government, land allocation, kingship), while in the New Testament Christians are a politically powerless minority. This is of crucial importance in understanding God's will whatever our particular commitments and field of service.

There is then the question of selectivity in our focus. What tends to happen is that we favour the parts that support our own positions, and attitudes. Those who stress social justice find plenty of ammunition in the Old Testament, rather less in the New.

How far does the Old Testament apply today? Is it superseded by the New in some or all respects? If so, how do we decide? How far should the Old Testament be read in the light of the New, and vice-versa?

Bauckham concludes that in general the Old Testament is instructive, but does not provide literal instructions.

Personal and Public

How far is the Bible addressed to individuals in their personal lives, and how far in their public lives? Luther argued that a Christian judge was to forgive and to turn the other cheek in his private life but that, as a judge in court, he was to seek reparation in an identical situation.

But there is also the question of whether the Bible applies to everyone and the whole of life, or particularly to Christians. The Anabaptists saw the Bible as a guide for them, but not for others. They would not therefore engage in public office.

Permanent or Culturally Relative Norms

There are huge differences between Bible times and the contemporary world. So how do you span the gap? Is it about finding some general and rather abstract principles that don't change? Or is the Bible itself influenced by the contexts of the writers? (A good example of this is the introduction of kingship in Israel.) R. Bauckham argues for paradigms, analogies or models, that take the specific events or stories of the Bible in context and in detail, but can distil a message for our times and situation.

With these issues clearly stated he moves on to matters to do with textual interpretation. I have listed these under three headings that derive from his book, but are not given in exactly the same way.

Text and Context

Pre-canonical/Original Meanings:

- *Linguistic.* What do the words mean?

⁴ See also Mozoomdar, and Keshub Chandra Sen.

⁵ See Richard Bauckham, pages 13-19, *The Bible in Politics*.

- *Immediate literary context.* Is the passage part of a poem, a story, narrative, a letter, a chronicle, a prophecy, a proverb?
- *Wider literary context.* What are the conventions of this genre?
- *Cultural Context.* What was normal at the time? What did people take for granted?
- *Broad historical context.* What do we know of the historical situation?
- *Immediate historical context.* Do we know anything about the situation of the writer or group?
- *What's the point?* What is the main moral, issue or teaching, so far?

Canonical Context

- How does the interpretation we are working towards fit with the overall thrust of the Bible?
- Is there anything specific that the person and teaching of Jesus draw our attention to?
- Is the point of the passage clarified or amended in any way, by this?

Contemporary Context

- What is our contemporary context?
- What is our position in it?
- What is the position of the community of God?
- How can we understand our contemporary context, by using every available tool of analysis?
- How do we make the link between the “two horizons”, biblical and contemporary?

Evaluating This Academic Theological Method

This method is rational and seeks to be fair. It seems to be open to adaptation and correction, and it has been used for centuries. So what are the emerging critiques?

It works largely at the level of thinking and the mind. It does not involve the whole person, body, soul, mind and strength. It can be detached from everyday life and struggles. Luther: “Not reading and speculation, but living, dying, and being condemned make a real theologian.”

So much time and energy is devoted to the first stages, the first “horizon”, that there is little time and energy left for the second. The contemporary situation is not given the careful interpretive attention and analysis that is given to the “text”.

European/Western theology has developed for long periods in unique conditions and contexts, for example, one religion, not many; relative political stability; common ways of life. It therefore concentrates on the matters on issues that are taken as significant in those contexts. Other parts of the world may need to re-prioritise theology in the light of their contexts.

“Theologians” are not representative of the community of faith: men and the middle classes are over-represented.

It seems to favour the status quo, and is usually conservative, tending to neglect the masses of those who are oppressed, including the poor, women, children and “others”.

The traditional process of theology is very individual and didactic. Lectures, sermons, books, are typical methods. What of the community of faith?

It is “banking model” of education.⁶

Some of the Challenges of Liberation Theology

The writer used as the basis of this section is Jose Miguez (Bonino). The book quoted is *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*⁷. Like many of his Latin American colleagues he found that traditional western theology did not make practical sense in his contemporary situation. His focus is on an alternative way of doing theology, but here we note some of his critiques of traditional theology that have paved the way for alternatives.

⁶ This important critique comes from Paulo Freire: *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 1972.

⁷ Fortress Press 1975

- God can tend to be portrayed as the “eternally Present One who renders superfluous the movement of history” rather than the “subverter of the status quo”⁸.
- Theology has tended to separate temporal/profane and spiritual/sacred history. But there is only one history. Liberation is the term chosen to integrate the two. It is about socio-political liberation; humanization and self-realization, and also deliverance from sin that restores fellowship between human beings and between them and God. Genesis is the story of one history inaugurated in Creation as the beginning of “the human enterprise and Yahweh’s saving history”⁹.
- The selectivity of traditional western theology puzzles the Latin Americans. Why have the obvious political motifs and undertones in the life of Jesus remained hidden? Why are events like the Exodus “spiritualised”, and wrenched from their historical, social and political contexts? Why such stress on “doctrine” and so little on the consequences of doctrine?¹⁰
- The process of theology is inadequate. It stems from the Greek hermeneutic assumption of: *text – principles – action*. But in real life much of the process is reflection that takes place after action and events. The analysis of contemporary life and conditions has preceded the biblical theology of interpretation¹¹.
- The language of the Gospel is never neutral, although that is what traditional theology assumes. There is a political element to the Messianic hope of the Gospel that is missing from this type of theology. “Barth in his transcendentalism, Bultman in his existentialism and Moltman in his ‘futurism’, have submitted to languages that do not take human life and action seriously.”¹² There are no non-partisan languages. All theology must take sides and work out its relation to power.
- Praxis. To do theology we must take action. “Part theology is impossible.” Faith is not a gnosis, but a way. It is always a concrete obedience that relies on God’s promise and is vindicated in the act of obedience. The powers and structures of society must be addressed in specific ways¹³.

Asian Perspectives

(References include: Pandita Ramabai; Kosuke Koyama; Mozoomdar; the Brahmo Samaj; Samuel Amirtham, Fabella)

I am hoping to develop my knowledge of Asian theology while in Penang. One of the problems with growing up and teaching in Europe is the lack of access to non-western theologies.

A Model for Us

As people committed to stand alongside and help children at risk in the name of Jesus, we do not come as neutral bystanders! We are already in the battle. We need to have an accurate and effective way of reading the Bible, as well as an equally effective way of understanding the contemporary world.

- Do we operate at the individual level?
- Do we engage in political action?
- Do we challenge the Christian community and the ways it has traditionally operated?

⁸ Ibid; Page 76

⁹ Ibid; Pages 69-72

¹⁰ Ibid; Page 91 onwards

¹¹ Ibid; Page 61 onwards

¹² Ibid; Page 77

¹³ Ibid; Pages 86-95

There is no way we can avoid these questions, and it would be disappointing if we wanted to evade them, either personally or in our organisations.

Laurie Green emphasises the corporate and communal nature of “local theology”. This term encompasses all the theologies other than traditional academic western theology. He is working with a model very close to that of Freire, where there is a sensitive and open relationship between the “theologian” and the community he or she is serving. Prophets and poets have their place, as do insiders and outsiders. And there is the overall context of the universal church. It is not an option to ignore the experiences of fellow travellers along the way, from the West or from the East!

Laurie Green suggests that groups start with parables and stories from the Bible and find out the surprises that they embody. There is usually a twist that turns traditional ways of seeing things on their heads. Using these twists as starters the group can study a particular issue, say, children at risk and how to help them without making them dependent etc. etc. There is a simple dynamic process involving reflection, an intuition, exploration, and new witness. The process uses the full resources available to the Christian group.

Conclusion

We find ourselves at the intersection of two stories, two horizons. There is the biblical narrative and the life of Jesus and His followers on the one hand, and on the other our own lives and stories today. The challenge of theology is to find ways of these two stories interacting on each other. There are many words that try to describe this process, including dialectic, dialogue, and obedience. But the attempt to be accurate and rigorous should never obscure the simple truth that God has called us to be part of the process of creation, active participants in history (His story), and that as we respond in faith, He comes alongside us in Jesus, to equip us by His Spirit for the specific tasks to which we are called.

Normally this process will take place within a Christian community. It is rare for us to find ourselves like Luther, alone with the awesome task of interpreting the Bible and God’s will without the aid of Christian brothers and sisters. And we will find more help than we ever dreamt from those we have been called to support. They are God’s special signs of His kingdom, and the circle or group involved in the process of theology must never exclude the little one, the marginalized and the oppressed.

An Integrated Biblical and Theoretical Typology of Children’s Needs¹⁴

Document by Keith White with commentary (in italics) by Haddon Willmer

Background

This typology has been developed over twenty years in the context of Mill Grove, a Christian residential community caring for children at risk. It draws from the cross-cultural experiences of this community and from the major insights of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. In 1999 it was adopted at the Cutting Edge Conference Child Development Group as a standard for assessing the quality of models of intervention.

If a child has lost, or is at risk of losing, consistent daily links, contact and bonds with his or her own birth family and kin the following universal needs must be paramount in assessing the most appropriate potential setting to satisfy as many, if not all, of these needs.

Is this document self-sufficient in its own terms and idiom? It seems to do quite well without extensive explicit theological exposition. Or does it? Could it benefit from theological comment or addition?

Love, the Overriding Desire and Need

The overriding and overall need of every child is to be loved by, and to love, one or more significant adults. The five needs listed can best be seen as elements or aspects of this process and relationship. If one or more is not met the capacity of any child to experience and express love will be impaired.

¹⁴ From *Celebrating Children*: Section 5.3 by Keith White

If none are met over a substantial period of a child's early years the likelihood is that the child will be emotionally scarred and impaired.

Does the sentence, 'The overriding and overall need of every child is to be loved by and to love, one or more significant adults' need to be evaluated theologically? 'God' is the Name which signifies the overriding and overall in human existence. How does this statement about love fit with the whole biblical revelation and theological understanding focused by texts like 'God is love'?

God pops in and out of this document — does this suggest that God may be seen here as an intruder, a gate-crasher, a discordant note or an irrelevant digression? Or are the mentions of God here to be likened to an underground stream whose waters bubble up in little springs at various points? Could we detect and chart the underground stream in its whole course? What would be gained by making this hidden theology explicit?

Five Needs that must be addressed if love is to grow

What is the relative status and value of need as a defining category for human being as God's creature? What other categories should be taken into account? Is being human a state of needs, or a privilege/blessing, or a calling or task, or an ordeal in the world as 'a vale of soul-making' or whatever else?

The needs of children are identified by five words here. What other words might be used for the same purpose? Especially consider words which have an equal or greater theological resonance than the ones used here.

Security

This is the primal need. Without security there is no safe base for exploration, relationships, play and development, and dysfunctional defence mechanisms will develop that prevent the experiencing of love.

In biblical terms we note that a safe place (from Eden to the Ark, the Promised Land and the New Jerusalem) is the most fundamental image of salvation. "I go to prepare a place for you."

No intervention, however well intentioned or resourced, will begin to have any effect unless children know that they are safe. This safety can be met in many different ways. At Mill Grove it is represented by an actual place that has remained constant for 100 years, and by people who protect the children as their own. In psychotherapeutic terms this is Bowlby's "secure place".

All alternatives to, and substitutes for a family must provide such security. It is possible in all settings, adoptive, foster and residential. However the security of children in these Microsystems will be jeopardised if there are poor meso, exo and macro systems. It is also possible for each of these Microsystems to be dysfunctional because of internal conflict or inadequacies. No one type of setting is a guarantee of security.

In this document, the needs of the child are primarily described by talking of any individual child and what s/he needs. But it is indicated, more than once, that meeting the needs of the child requires systems: for example, the child's security is presented as dependent on the efficient cooperation of micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems, within which individuals exist. All these systems need to work as one child-friendly system. What theological questions, if any, need to be considered here?

How do we understand God to be related to system in the way system appears in this document?

Is God present and active through the human systems (which represent best human practice)? Are systems then to be understood as creation, in which God is everywhere present, as the source and upholder, even in hiddenness or in the reticence of 'common grace'?

Is God present and active despite the systems, which oppose God by their disobedience as rebellious powers, and do not recognise God but rather squeeze him out of the world to the Cross? God's presence and activity then appears as

criticism of and resistance to the world, effected by God who is on his own in the darkness of the world, without the support or the service of systems to his will?

Is God present and active in redeeming the systems and bringing them back to serviceability? Does this redemption of systems mean they are totally freed from all imperfection, indifference, lack of love, inflexibility, contentment with mere technical efficiency even when it does not attain the true end of humanity (eg gaining the whole world but losing soul when God calls to account)? Or is the redemption of systems never finished, so that it has to be understood afresh in each situation and moment, as God resists and works against it? So God's work on systems issues in the hope which keeps us going for the next struggle, which keeps praying with joy: Your Kingdom come! rather than bringing us into a haven where we can rest from our labours.

How then do we think about system theologically? What significant difference would it make to what this document is talking about?

Significance

Children are people. They are individuals and cannot be treated or dealt with as if they were a group, numbers or statistics. Vital to their development and well-being is the assurance that they are infinitely precious as people, not because of something they have done or achieved but because of who they are. They need to know that at least one adult is committed to them unconditionally. This means that this adult is prepared to be theirs for life, and possibly even to lay down his or her life for them.

- **In biblical terms** this is a wonderful dimension of the whole experience of God and His grace described throughout the Scriptures. God is personally interested in us, not because of our merits or potential, but because of His heart and covenant love. The "I/Thou" relationship is of eternal significance. It is at the heart of the Gospel. It is the ultimate expression of unconditional commitment, in that Jesus Christ sealed the covenant by and through His death.
- **In theoretical terms** this is the essence of child development. The existence of a committed significant other is the sine qua non of "good enough parenting" and on the quality of this relationship depends to a large measure the emotional health of the child.
- **In child care terms** it means that institutions, systems, rotas and training count for nothing unless there is the person, and this relationship. The whole dynamic and structure of Mill Grove revolves around this axis. As a consequence it is quite different from nearly all other residential establishments for children in the UK.

The challenge of identifying one or more adults unconditionally committed to a child is the primary task of any intervention, and its difficulty cannot be underlined too much. This is why separation from natural family is so threatening to a child's well-being. It is for the vast majority of children, parents and kin who are committed in this way. The very existence of a life-long family name is recognition of this bond.

An obvious response is adoption. But it is problematical in certain ways. Cross-cultural adoption often leads to difficulties of identity, and in many parts of the world potential adoptive families are scarce. Assessment is crucial and time-consuming. Adoptive families needs supportive meso and exo systems and should not be assessed in isolation.

Foster care is increasingly popular worldwide, but there can be breakdowns and serial placements. Only rarely does fostering build in an unconditional commitment. (It is most appropriate when there is the prospect of a child being reunited with his or her own family.) Unless there is a permanent fostering arrangement (unusual and difficult) fostering is best seen as temporary, or as a complement to other interventions and systems.

Residential settings are many and varied. Large establishments such as refugee camps, asylums, boarding schools, will be unable to provide unconditionally committed carers who can function in the place of parents and family. However, smaller places (like Mill Grove, for example) may be able to do so. Their strength draws from the support of systems and networks of which they are a part.

The role of the local worshipping faith community is a vital element of the personal support system for all offering unconditional commitment.

Significance here is rooted explicitly in the whole biblical story of God, to show that God gives significance and expresses it ultimately in the unconditional commitment shown in Christ's dying. Then the document switches to another less theological

idiom, and talks of the necessity of good enough parenting and various forms of institutional child-care. Might the statement not be presented with greater theological continuity? The death of Christ did not achieve significance or salvation at a stroke. It is the hinge in the story, which is continued in the post-Cross life of Jesus, at God's right hand, in the Spirit and Church to the ends of the world.

Consider the presentation of institutions of child care: how does it fit with and realise God's work in making present in each new day, to the end of time, what He has committed himself to in creating and in giving himself for the redemption of the world? If God does not make present what he has done in Christ on the Cross, is God credible?

Boundaries

Every child and human being needs boundaries if they are to feel safe, and to relate to others and develop appropriately. Some think of rules, discipline or values. All of these are embraced by this term in some measure.

Biblically we see the way in which God provides boundaries for His people so that they can thrive. There are many: physical, moral, practical, sexual and spiritual. Their purpose is that we might live 'with the grain of Nature', and be at home in God's world. They provide a healthy setting for the development of not only individuals but communities.

In child care terms the place of firm and consistent boundaries is universally recognised. They can be represented in different ways. At Mill Grove we find that the best boundaries are "lived" ones, and that they are appreciated and respected by children of all ages, backgrounds and faiths.

The relevance of such boundaries applies to each alternative form of care for children at risk. It is important to realise that external boundaries, like rules and regulations are no substitute for "lived" boundaries. The adults and peers in the child's life will communicate consistent moral and emotional boundaries by the way they live. It is well to be alert to the many ways in which boundaries can be transgressed consciously and unconsciously. Peer group bullying is one common example, and ever-present in large group care settings. Changes of carer are likely to confuse boundaries in a child's mind. Continuity of boundary between the birth family, culture, tradition, and the new setting is important. A change of culture, language and norms is likely to be detrimental to a child's development.

Boundaries here are said to have the purpose of our 'living with the grain of Nature and be at home in God's world'. Is not this formulation one-sided? What is the grain of Nature? Nature is not a place where we can simply be at home, is it?

Community

Biblically there is a recognition that we are made for community and for relationships. Families are our starting point, but the norm is to find and make bonds beyond kith and kin. The biblical story is of a community, or people, of God.

In child care terms, the importance of peer groups, play, neighbourhoods is often under-estimated. In Britain, for example, the individual child tends to be seen in abstraction or simply as part of a family. Children need to be and to feel part of accepting communities, especially faith communities. Child care cannot be divorced from the wider world of social relationships. Schools are a very significant aspect of "community" for children.

The critical element here is the quality of the links between the child's microsystem and the exo and meso systems. It is possible for the substitute caring system to be separated from the wider community. The danger is probably greatest in large residential establishments which can tend to become total institutions cut off from the outside world. Once again faith communities are a vital resource because they link and support the different systems

The quality of the political, military and economic conditions of the macrosystems is a factor determining the nature of the community, associations and relationships that are available to a child. Street children worldwide show how the desire for community can lead to dysfunctional or dangerous relationships developing.

We may have a dream of a child-friendly world and the dream can be very valuable. But we live in a world where Christ died and where his little brothers and sisters still die. Do we live in an orderly or disorderly world?

Creativity

Children are essentially creative and creators. They are made in the image of God. If they are to fulfil their potential they must be given opportunities and encouragement to create, to make, to shape, to dance. The Scriptures testify to this aspect of humanity. We are to express ourselves with joy, variety, in movement, music, work and play.

In child care terms this is one the most helpful indications of a child's emotional and mental state, and of the group of which the child is a part. It can often be underestimated by adults. Institutionalisation is one of the big stumbling blocks in the way of creativity, as are poverty and deprivation. Education should not be conceived without reference to play and spontaneity.

One of the readiest measures of the quality of any child care is the proclivity of the child to play and create. It is important that routine care and organisation do not stifle play and self-expression. This desire or need can easily be channelled into dangerous and destructive "play" and behaviour. Children may be attracted to war and prostitution, for example, unaware of the larger meaning and implications of their actions.

Creativity finds its ultimate expression in loving and being loved!

This section bristles with provocations which might be explored. Does creativity spell itself in play rather than work or institutionalisation? Is not this a narrow view of creativity? This document virtually equates play and creativity.

Summary

These needs are universal, although the way they are expressed and addressed will vary from culture to culture and place to place. There is no panacea, or single model of intervention guaranteed to meet them.

They can be used as a form of standard against which to assess the effectiveness of any proposed or existing form of child care. It is possible to link them specifically with theoretical frameworks, and also to the understanding of lay people from different faith perspectives. The above has been specifically written with reference to the Christian faith, but this is indicative of how the process can work, not an exclusive prescription.

Meditation

Dan Brewster on *dignity* from 2 Sam 9:1-10

Vinay Samuel has said that our task is to preserve and restore transcendence in children. David showed kindness to Mephibosheth, though he belonged to a disgraced family and was disabled.

As in all things, Jesus is our model. Luke records (from 9:51) how Jesus sets out resolutely for Jerusalem and on the way comes to a Samaritan village, which rejects him. The disciples were keen to call down fire on the village but Jesus rebuked the disciples not the village. The next chapter gives the story of the Good Samaritan, surely not a coincidence. Jesus saw the dignity of the Samaritans. Jesus saw whole persons deserving of respect including children.

This emphasis on the dignity of all persons is unique to Christianity. Compassion International takes care to treat children with dignity, even to the manner of portraying them in pictures.

Booklets on Child Theology

The Child Theology Movement has in mind, as one of its aims, to produce a series of booklets intended to explore aspects of Christian life and ministry from the unique perspective of Child Theology. These are to be a resource for Christians prepared to think deeply, and perhaps radically, about children and the Kingdom of God. The consultation used this aim as a means of conducting an experiment in Child Theology.

Each booklet would be of A5 size, with about 26-30 pages. The style should be pioneering and innovative – not the last word on a subject but perhaps the first. The intended readers are usually busy people, probably church leaders or seminary students, who value brief, clear, quality thinking that addresses current issues in Christian ministry.¹⁵

We may decide to have different sub-series of booklets, within the overall scheme. Almost certainly, there would be two series:

- applied theology for those working at children with risk;
- more general reflection on issues such as sin, eschatology, creation etc.

The booklets would be large enough to be able to say something useful but not so large that they will take as long as a book to produce. We could therefore aim to have manuscripts edited and finished within a few months and the first published a short time thereafter, perhaps sometime in 2005.

The writing process is significant. We expect to have meetings of an editorial group, at which potential authors present their ideas for discussion. When a draft is written there is further discussion. So, while authorship is usually individual, there is a helpful editorial frame.

During the course of the week, the group considered a number of possible titles and what the content might be. The aim was not actually to write a booklet, still less a series, but to move the discussion away from the merely abstract, to root it in concrete issues and perhaps at the end of the time to have a product that could be a resource to an eventual author. The discussion resolved into two parts: ideas for the first four booklets which might be produced relatively quickly and longer term ideas for subsequent titles.

The first four titles

It was accepted that ideally the series would start with four booklets published in quick succession:

1. Introducing CT (Keith)
2. Doing Experiments in CT (Haddon)
3. CT in Asia (Sunny)
4. CT in Africa (someone from the Cape Town consultation)

The introductory booklet would cover the following:

- the aims and purpose of Child Theology
- how it is biblically informed
- how it is done – not in detail but an example of one way how to do it is useful.
- what it is not (i.e. not what the bible says about children, not tokenistic reference to children, not idolisation of the child; not theology of childhood)
- include the story of how this particular movement emerged; context of the story, what triggered the shift in thinking

¹⁵ See: www.grovebooks.co.uk

Other suggested topics

In 'brainstorming' sessions, the group suggested the following list of possible subjects:

1. A survey and critique of current theologies and theories of child/childhood, to be formed especially amongst Christian child-focused activists
2. Adult and child: adulthood and childhood in the light of each other, under God
3. Asian theology and the child (similarly: African and Latin American theology)
4. The child in black theology
5. The child in feminist theology
6. The child in liberation theology
7. The child in urban theology
8. Studies of the ways in which, in particular regions/continents/cultures, the local operative Christian theologies are or not implicitly or explicitly CT
9. Child and church
10. The religious abuse of children
11. Child and pornography
12. Commercial sexual exploitation of children
13. Child and the father
14. Child soldiers
15. Child-headed households
16. Children and divorce
17. Children, family and community
18. Children's rights: CT perspective
19. Children and creativity (see below)
20. CT in MBTS
21. Exegesis of Mt 18:1ff and parallels and the implications
22. Methodology of the new CT
23. Roles of child in the midst (e.g., catalyst, teacher, leader, etc.)
24. Sin - this might be too controversial for the first titles
25. The child and media
26. A booklet designed for major organisations focused on children might be considered with a view to helping them apply Child Theology to their own work.
27. Child as sacrament and child as liturgy are very important ideas but possibly would need quite a bit of unpacking.
28. The Child as a theological tool is could be useful after the first batch of titles.

Creation and Creativity

One of the features of children that tends to be mentioned as a positive attribute is 'creativity'. It is often seen as something inherent, an essential manifestation of our created-ness in the image of the Creator. Is this so? Is it an attribute or a potential? Could it be a need? Is creativity a modern idea?

It was agreed that children need opportunity for exploration, discovery, and learning in and through which the child can express, develop and be herself. It requires the opportunity to make mistakes.

The question arises: Do we allow this in the child's discovery of God? Are we scared of the notion of 'creativity' in relation to knowing God and prefer children to learn our traditions?

The question also arises regarding the relationship between play and work. Should they, as is often done, be put in opposition to each other? In fact, both are languages of expression, part of a continuum. They may even on occasion be the same thing. A child's work is to play; work at its best is as enjoyable as play. 'Work-play' is intended to be purposeful and fulfilling, even though it can be frustrating. Creation is God's play-work

Other dualities discussed were:

- Spontaneity and structure; both may be expressions of creativity; the end should be ultimate diversity with order.
- Creation and destruction; it may be necessary to destroy the old order to create the new - only God creates out of nothing.

Each person is unique and constantly changing, so in a relationship one always needs to respond to the other with creativity.

Booklet Workshops

The following summarises some of the conclusions of the groups. The ideas are still unworked and should be treated as such. They are included as a stimulus for further work.

1. Child and the Church

The involvement of children in the churches of those in the group varied greatly, from country to country, even within the same denomination. In many societies, families are failing. In all societies, some families fail. In some societies, the general conditions prevent rather than enable even a mediocre level of good family living. It can therefore be argued that the 'big family' (the church) should be offering an alternative and a model. This could transform the church. In too many churches, Sunday School teachers struggle with lessons that portray an 'ideal' family (father praying with the children, mother reading to them) which is so far from reality as to be irrelevant.

The target audience of this booklet would be practitioners, pastors and theologians. The purpose would be to help readers reflect critically. The child is part of the church and therefore should be in midst of church. However, children should not be seen just as a mission field (or as missionaries). The booklet should include a definition of the church, in which children are part.

2. Roles of the child in the midst

The group envisaged a booklet with three sections:

- a. **The Biblical Perspective:** how did Jesus see the child? What was the context in which Jesus put the child in the midst? Other situations apart from Matthew 18 in which Jesus put a child in the midst: Jairus' daughter; the boy with the lunch; welcoming and blessing children (Mt 19); Jesus in the manger; Jesus as a child in the Temple. Possible roles of the child could be: resource; God's partner; co-pilgrim; mirror; barometer of society; challenger of the status quo; conscientizer; subject of blessing, protection and care; teacher.
- b. **Other perspectives:** What role does or could the child play now? Various authors could approach the role of the child in the midst from various perspectives: pastoral; evangelism and discipleship; developmental; child resource development; social science.
- c. Summary

3. Children, family, and community

The group started from a perspective of children being covenantally related in families. Redemption in families is about being in loving relationships. Family can be a means of grace to the child and the child can be a means of grace to the family. Classic western salvation models may not recognise the family's input to the child. This is 'obvious' in Asian contexts where a Buddhist family usually has Buddhist children, and Christian families, Christian children. The child can be a means of saving grace within a family, when children who encounter Christ can bring that knowledge into a non-Christian environment. However, this raises questions about the ability and rightness of children challenging the values of the family (and breaking 'filial piety').

Other issues raised were karma and stigma. Families and particularly communities can see an abused child as working out their karma. The stigma of disease can isolate a family. What does the Bible say to these values and actions? Other questions included:

- Why are children rarely treated as responsible (i.e., participating) members in their family and community?
- How can we help the church perceive and enact covenant commitment to the child?
- Is the family the only authority over a child?
- How do we react to family and community putting children at risk?
- How does oppression affect the child and the child's development?
- How do family and community recognize the child carrying the image of God?

- What does God say about the family in:
 - ⇒ Creation – birth, reproduction, safety
 - ⇒ Fall – fear, broken relationship
 - ⇒ Redemption – loving restored relationship

A survey and critique of current theologies and theories of child/childhood

This would be particularly targeted at and perhaps produced from among child-focused Christian activists.

4. A model of Child Theology

A booklet could be written that would show how CT might influence various types of Christian organization. The group used a familiar model of moving from the theoretical to the concrete. As the process moves towards concrete actions and practices, so they need to become more specific to the particular type of organization and the contexts within which it works. The following table gives an idea of how this might be worked out:

Vision	e.g. “A child friendly world” in the church and the world; that children have the place that God intended them to have
Mission	Develop and promote a ‘body of knowledge’ that will engage people in a movement
Set of Beliefs	About the recipients and their needs etc.

	Training Institutions	Local Churches	Christian NGOs
Aims	CT in every part of the theology taught to all	Improve the interaction with children	Improve the interaction with children
Goals	Develop syllabi; do research; write books and papers	Train pastors, youth workers, review use of hymns, songs and liturgies	Develop training manuals
Objectives			
Methods			

5. Asian Exegesis of Matthew 18:1

Subtitle suggested is ‘An Invitation to a Fresh Way of Doing Christian Theology’. The booklet would be designed to invite Asian Christians into a conversation about CT in Asia. It should be seen to address current issues within the Asian church. The church in Asia has several concerns:

- Pastoral: how to mature the church; how to respond to the many needs in the continent
- Missiological: how to be a neighbour to those of another religious group; how to reach the many for Jesus
- Theological: how can theology be local yet universal? How can it be pastoral and missiological?

Asian theology has always complained that Western theology has been too abstract. The booklet will interact with the book by Dr Hwa Yung: Mangos or bananas. It will consider his critique of imported theologies from the West and the weaknesses of various Asian theologies. It should review CT for Asia and the world, because the child is both particular and universal. It may have three sections:

1. What is Child Theology?;
2. How does CT contribute to pastoral concerns in Asia?;
3. How does CT contribute to missiological concerns in Asia?



Exercise with Jesus: *Jeremiah Chin, 6yrs*

Meditation

Wendy Strachan on *taking risks* from Gen 32

One of my Bible favourites is Jacob, though he is generally not considered a pleasant character. On his return to Canaan from Laban's house he was understandably afraid what his reception would be. He makes all the plans he can. Gen 32:22-32 describes an event difficult to understand. Jacob wrestles with God. He gets a new name and God risks giving Jacob his name. Another outcome was that Jacob asked for a blessing, part of which was the limp he carried for the rest of his life, a marker and a reminder of who he is.

God takes risks. He blesses and changes us in ways we don't expect. At a missionary conference in Nairobi, one of the families called in to say their six month old child was sick with cerebral malaria. The children at the conference wanted to pray for her. Wendy wanted to prepare them for failure but could not. The children prayed heartily for four days. At the end of the conference the news came that the baby had died. But the children were able to take it, understanding God's ways are mysterious. One little boy said: "Well, we did our bit."

We may struggle over the next few days and we may be blessed in ways we didn't expect and don't understand. (See what Esau said later! Gn 33:10)

Critique of Holistic Child Development course

The Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, at which this consultation took place, teaches an MA course in Holistic Child Development (HCD), with the support of Compassion International. The course arose out of two concerns: Compassion's wish to improve the

church's ministry to children and the need to equip its own staff. They worked with MBTS to develop a course, using as a model Lk 2:52: "Jesus grew in wisdom, stature and favour with God and men".

Theological content

The theological component of the course is taught by Keith White. The text he uses for the course is "Theology for the Community of God" by Stanley Grenz.¹⁶ This was particularly chosen as it recognises that theology is far more than individual study and reflection. It is a communal process, aimed at forming the basis for life together as Christians and the transformation of the world we live in so that it conforms to the Kingdom of God.

This theological foundation underlines the intentions and purposes of God. Although Grenz, in a manner typical of traditional theology, rarely refers to children, he holds that they are, as human beings, born into a world God intended for their good. They are made for this world, and find their fullest expression in the worship of God as Father. Sin has warped the world and children suffer desperately as a result. It is in and through Jesus Christ that the best understanding of the place of children in God's world is seen. He shines light on the rest of Scripture and shows how children are central to His purposes and God's Kingdom.

Subjects dealt with in the course are:

1. God

God is the "subject" not simply the object of knowledge. Three important considerations must inform all theology:

- ◇ God cannot be reduced to a concept
- ◇ Knowing God is dependent on God's self-revelation
- ◇ Theology is a human response to this revelation.

The Trinity forms the heart of the Christian understanding of God. God is relational. Community is part of divine (and human) nature. The essence of this relationship, hence the essence of God's nature, is love. All other attributes, including holiness and grace, are aspects of love, properly understood.

2. Creation

- ◇ The role of the Son in creation
See John 1, verses 1-10; Colossians 1, verses 16, 17. Grenz understands this as creation being "directed towards Him". Jesus embodies (is the "incarnation" of) the "proper relationship of creation to the Creator" (page 137). This is a filial relationship: child to parent. We, and all of creation, are children of God.
- ◇ Creation as a beginning
It is not completed as if the same for all time. Creation is like a child starting his or her mission or journey. Creation, like a child, develops towards a new creation (Romans 8, verses 19-25). Children are signs of this insight: "good, but not yet complete".
- ◇ Community as God's purpose in creation
Von Rad in his commentary on Genesis sees the Sabbath as signifying the future "shalom". This is characterised by complete harmony and community. The end purpose of creation is not "individual eternal life", but life together, where God is in the rightful place, and therefore so is everything else. (Note that children have a special place in Sabbath, and the Messianic Kingdom, that is different from the "week-days" characterised by work and organisation.)

3. Anthropology

- ◇ Who are we?
We know this in relation to God. He is the ground of our existence. We did not make ourselves. He is

¹⁶ 1994, Broadman and Holman

the universal Father. So if anything comes between ourselves and God, we are cut off from our source, from where we belong, from our real “family” and “community”.

◇ What are we for?

The “image of God” is a key concept all through (page 224 onwards). Are children uniquely made in His image? We will return to this question in the course. But all human beings are made in God’s image and this indicates that we are made for:

Special fellowship with God as part of his “family”

Participation in the process of creation

Part of a community foreshadowing the new community of eschatology

4. Sin and the fall

◇ The disruption of community.

Given the title and emphasis of Grenz’s book, community is a central feature. He sees this as particularly related to the pride of man (as distinct from women). Grenz notes women, but does not refer to children. All relationships are put out of joint. This is very important for understanding holistic child development and how it is thwarted in human situations

◇ The effects of sin on community:

Grenz singles out four aspects of this disruption

Alienation

Humans are alienated from God’s design, and this has the effect of alienating them from each other. Community, as God intended it, is destroyed

Condemnation

Humans live in a way that incurs God wrath. This is a very important section in relation to children and much serious theologising has been done on this matter, including baptism, abortion, communion.)

Enslavement

various ways in which sin infiltrates institutions, families and individuals, and takes over the “ordering” of things

Depravity

Our ability to reason correctly about God is affected along with everything else. This is a big issue in theology, the focus of dispute being the degree to which reason has been affected by sin

5. Christology

◇ Jesus as true human

Jesus is the one “normal” person who has lived! His relationship with the Father is the one normal relationship. (This latter point formed the basis of the psychiatry of the Christian, Dr Frank Lake, who based his work, Clinical Theology, on his reading of John’s Gospel.)

◇ Jesus as new human

He is the new Adam. He is also the first of the new community

◇ Jesus as universal human

This is of great significance in cross-cultural settings. Jesus lived life fully as a Jew in Israel, but he also transcended time and place. He also identified and connected especially with children. (Grenz singles out women, but not children!)

6. Redemption

◇ Grenz distinguishes between *individual* and *communal* aspects of redemption, conversion and salvation.

◇ different ways of describing how redemption was achieved in and through Jesus, such as ransom, sacrifice, atonement, justification. What is not developed is the relation between this and liberation in history. This is where Liberation Theology starts. A key theological concept here is justice/righteousness. This is where those who are alongside children at risk find themselves starting too. What is our mission, our responsibility as redeemed children of God, individually and as a community, where we are?

Grenz is not thinking particularly about children in this theological work. He rarely refers to children throughout, and this is not untypical of traditional theology. However, Child Theology is starting

from a committed perspective. We have found children and young people hurting, oppressed, neglected and abused. We are seeking to act in the name of Jesus and on behalf of the community of God. This means that we have burning questions that we must ask. This theological foundation underlines the intentions and purposes of God. Children, as human beings, are born into a world God intended for their good. They are made for this world, and to find their fullest expression in the worship of God as Father. Sin has warped the world, and children suffer desperately as a result. It is in and through Jesus Christ that the best understanding of the place of children in God's world is seen. He shines light on the rest of Scripture, and shows how children are central to His purposes and God's Kingdom.

Questions and Responses

Given this outline, participants were asked to discuss three subjects in small groups:

1. What do you understand by 'HCD'? How does that relate to what is done at MBTS?
2. What should be the theological foundations for HCD, if any? What does theology have to offer?
3. Would you use this particular framework or would you change it? If so, how?

Responses from the groups are combined and summarised in the following paragraphs.

Question 1: what is HCD?

To some extent, the response depends on for whom the course is intended and therefore what questions it is expected to answer.

It may be important to distinguish *Christian* Child Development from *Holistic* Child Development. The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) promotes HCD. Therefore, in primarily non-Christian settings, it might be appropriate to adapt HCD to that context, relating to felt needs etc. However, development theory starts from presuppositions that are not Biblically based, even if more or less consistent with Biblical norms and values.

For example, what is development? Being human is imprecise. If anthropology is the starting point, subsequent discussion could be flawed, from a Christian perspective, with different aims, priorities etc, for the child. The course should give participants the hope and sense of the fullness of who children are in God.

We need, therefore, to ask: What makes it *Christian* HCD rather than just HCD? How do we understand it in our context? Do practitioners feel theology has anything to help or add to HCD or ministering to children-at-risk? HCD is wider than early childhood development or Christian education. What is the relationship of HCD to 'evangelism' and 'discipleship'? How much is it relevant to where the churches actually are? How much did the course arise from questions asked by the churches and how much came from secular models or other theological models?

Question 2: Theological Foundations of HCD

If the aim is to equip those who work with children to think christianly about their work, the course needs to be developed from a secure theological basis. We would wish to avoid offering watered down psychology baptised with Christian words. This would be to offer the worst of both worlds.

The word 'foundation' as used here is a good and proper word and does not imply the Western debate over 'foundations' in philosophy, epistemology, theology, etc. It is not necessary that all of our professors be operating from the same foundations. When there are, perhaps, only two hours of course work on the 'Theological Foundations of Childhood', one realizes that it may not be possible to have theological foundations as controlling. This does not preclude theological-critical processes throughout the programme. Theological foundations are broader than biblical foundations.

'No child related activity without theological reflection' and 'No theology without the child in the midst'

Question 3: Theological framework for HCD

It is particularly important to help students see that HCD can have a theological framework and sound Biblical reference. For example, the OT model of parenting with God as Father and Israel as the child could be a rich source of inspiration.

Does the Bible understand boundaries in the same way as psychology? For some cultures, the material used at present sounds too individualistic. What are Biblical boundaries and how do they relate to cultural boundaries? How should we acknowledge fallenness? Is “Against the grain of Nature” a useful metaphor?

Syllabus development: Children and Church

Keith White asked participants to reflect upon the child and the church. The process had five steps:

- Step 1. write down three key convictions about church;
- Step 2. place a child in the midst, a girl of 10, who belongs to a religion and culture that is non-Christian;
- Step 3. share together features of this girl from whatever experience and stories we have from our own lives, particularly imagining this girl in her relation/non-relation to church.

The groups shared their ‘insights’ that had come to light during their discussions. One of the first aspects brought out concerned an implication of the church as part of the community. In this case, the child is not only a target of the gospel but also a person who should be recognized, loved, received, and nurtured. This need was poignantly illustrated by descriptions of situations that might be experienced by such a girl:

- A girl hurt by war, mixed marriage and religions, unable to find a place among children or adults, unable to use her name as her father is in the enemy army. There is one little church open to all people and children, this church welcomes her and shares food and toys, they didn’t ask about her name or family, and through friendship, care and love she saw Christ in them.
- A girl lives with her daddy due to separation and comes to church, One day a friend of her dad comes to have drink with her dad, he tries to rape her but she screams and a neighbour comes to her rescue.
- A girl who is the daughter of a church leader but has little personal time with him. Every morning he takes the dog out for a long walk. She feels as if her father loves his animals better than her.
- There is a church in the middle of a red light district and there are many 10 year old child prostitutes. But the church exists by itself and goes about its business right while this business goes on.
- Anna belongs to a Jewish family. Her dad is with another woman, who always insults her.

At this point, the group moved on to:

- Step 4. what does this child say to us about church? Try to identify what these stories seem to be saying about church.

The girl could see the church as not much different from her family: kind of indifferent. The relationship of the child to the church is ambivalent. It could be warm, or hostile and dangerous.

Perhaps the child is not related to the church because the church’s culture and religion creates a block. But sometimes the impediment to accepting love and good deeds are the family religion, such as ancestor worship. It is important to acknowledge obvious hostility to the Christian faith. How should the Christian respond to this?

In some instances, the church exists in the life of the girl in and through personal relationships. Don’t we want to say something more about church being a supportive and sustaining context for people reaching out to such children?

This raises some significant issues for the church:

1. the church is often in conflict with the culture, with social relations, family relations, political relations, etc.;
2. it shows that the child can uncover, reveal, or disclose how to open the door to relations with parents or other adults;
3. it raises the question of how much the church should guard and assert its special identity and how it can guard its integrity/identity in the process of relating to non-Christians, the world, etc.

Here, the group moved on to:

- Step 5. an extension of the 4th step, to go back and see if there is anything that should be said differently about the church

Some were convinced that the Christian religion doesn't understand children, that the church is very often really blinded to the needs of children, even though it is represented by individuals sensitive to children. The church should provide an opportunity for the child whatever the context or situation because church should be an open sanctuary. The church needs to be willing to judge itself for falling short.

At the same time, the process was helpful in showing the importance of the church and the need for the church to be involved with children as well as NGOs, FBOs and governments. For example, the church should receive and welcome the girl situated in Muslim culture, following Jesus, and should place her in the midst of its love and witness, its nurture and care, its provision and protection. In this way, the church should give witness to its faith. When confronting such issues, it is helpful to realize that the church is much more and much bigger than the local church. When we look at how the 10 year old girl can be helped, we realize that a more extensive network is needed. It helps to see the church as a community of faith, salt and light within a larger system responding to the child's needs.

For some, it seemed as if the child had uncovered some complexities of the adult Christian world, shedding new light upon the complexity of the adult world in relation to the child. The church needs to be conscientized to the needs of children.

Meditation

by Sugith on the *Majesty of God* from Psalm 90:

There is a film, 'Listening to Children' produced by Compassion. In it, questions are being presented to children. One question was: "If God were sitting here next to you, what would you ask him?" One child says, "I would look at him very carefully and see what kind of person he is: is he black or white, short or tall?"

Have you ever thought about God that way? See the ocean, wonder how much water is in the sea, how huge is God? Can we imagine a person who can take all the waters in the sea in the hollow of his hand? How big is he? See Is 40:12: who has measured the heavens with his fingers?

The vastness of God is revealed by the universe. Imagine the kind of brain this kind of person must have. It makes me wonder.....

The majesty of this great God, reading from the Scriptures of Isaiah. I come from a Communist background. My heroes were Lenin, Mao, etc. Where are they now? Where is the great Communist empire? The Soviet Union superpower? They fade away...

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Amen.

Other New Initiatives relating to Children

The Book on Child Theology

Presentation by Keith White

The book, being prepared by Keith and Haddon, is NOT about covering all the Bible in regard to children. Rather, it is a 'slice' or 'bore hole' on the meaning of the child as set forth in Matthew 18 and 19. It will be an introduction to a process which we hope will end when there is no Christian child related activity without theological reflection and no theological reflection without attending to the child.

The book has five sections:

- **Setting the child in the midst:** an exegesis of Mt 18. What role does the child serve? The tendency in exposition of this passage is to develop 'what the child means' with attributes describing the child (e.g. humble, vulnerable, dependent, etc.) but Jesus has placed a profound mystery in the midst. The book takes the child as a 'theological hinge' to develop the role of the child as catalyst, teacher, leader, or subject. The book will give examples of how the method might work.
- **Becoming as children:** can be understood as receiving the child, which avoids the temptation to take this as an invitation to look inwards at 'the child within'. It will avoid setting up an adult-child dichotomy, as if adulthood were a disaster. The very act of receiving children is central to the process of becoming like a child. We can receive the child in different ways: are there acceptable and unacceptable modes of receptivity?
- **The angels beholding the Father's face:** not despising children. Children are easily and commonly terribly despised. It is true that there are millions of children, now and throughout history, who are despised, but are they God-forsaken? No, according to this text. Here they are 'nakedly theological' in that they claim that there is a God who proves faithful and therefore we should bear witness to his faithfulness. So we must take care not to despise them. God is calling us to activism. But not everything depends upon us. Rather, it depends on God who is faithful and good. The question then arises: who or what are the angels? Are agencies? Are humans? Abel's blood, Rachel crying, etc.? Is the CRC an angel? All children are represented before God. This is a challenge to be faced. Can any and every agency that represents children to God be an angel?
- **Jesus blessing the children:** Jesus' way of receiving the child didn't replace the mothers. He supports those bringing the children and blesses them. This blessing is linked with receiving. But what is the blessing? Does he appeal to God, that all will go well with the child? Does he pray for healthy development? What did he pray? What is the content of the blessing? Was his blessing shaped by his incarnation, is it deeper into his humanity? Is the blessing to be understood through the Lord's Prayer? What is his wish for children?
- **Child Theology a reworking of the whole of theology:** it will still be an adult activity but continually subverted by the child. We would like to think that this exegesis and exposition can connect in the variegated contexts around the world. So, now in this section CT proper is to be done. CT is a revision or reworking of the whole of theology. It is not the mere child but it is the child placed in the midst by Jesus, which is how we interpret things. The child has been placed, received, represented and blessed. This might resonate with the Eucharist. What difference does it all make to theology? It won't make theology cease to be an adult activity; instead it will turn it more fully to God in Christ. Theology will continue to throw light but it will be seen to be interim -

the child is set in our midst again and again, always reforming the church and theology. The section ends with examples of how children can be placed in the midst.

Drafts are in place for all 5 sections, but not ready for distribution.

Godly Play

When this session was planned, Jerome Berryman intended to be with us to present the Godly Play process for teaching children. In his absence, Keith White introduced the subject and also presented some issues he wished to raise with Berryman.¹⁷ In Godly Play, developed by Jerome Berryman using insights Montessori and Cavaletti, a narrator tells a story using a prepared script and physical materials (sand tray, figures etc). At the end she begins to ponder, saying “I wonder....”, with a view to drawing the children deeper into the meaning of the story.

Groups, in each case including someone from an Asian context, discussed five questions:

1. What “godly play” is there already in Asia?
2. What cultural adaptations are necessary to implement “Godly Play” in your context?
3. Should Godly Play be inside, outside what? or both?
4. What equipment is necessary?
5. In a multi-faith context, what do we want to say to Jerome about the environment in which “Godly Play” is done?

In Thailand, children are taught in Sunday School and in the home, primarily through reading the Bible. Women are usually mainly responsible for teaching and nurturing young children in the faith.

Godly Play probably can and does exist in Asia but may need to take different forms. For example, in Asia, the technique, “I wonder” would probably not elicit a response from children, out of respect for the adult, so you would have to ask the children “why” to draw them out. Experience in the Philippines is that Christians want to protect doctrine and therefore Christian workers are very careful about what they teach. If the material is biblically safe then they will bring children into it and let them experience it. There is godly play in the Philippines even before “Godly Play” comes in. Sunday School teachers use play and going out, and use nature and indigenous materials for play.

There are many religions in Asia, and only a minority are real Christians. There is a strong resonance between Godly Play and the family idol rooms that are used daily in the lives of children from other faiths. In Sri Lanka, children take a major part in Buddhist religious processions organized by Buddhist temples and schools. They dance, act and carry colourful flags. All these carry religious meaning for children.

Is standardized equipment necessary? There was a difference of opinion on this. Some wanted to use indigenous equipment or materials made by children from local supplies. It seems that the physical equipment is less important than the human factor – the persons teaching are much more important.

Children are taught about God throughout history in every religion. God also has been seeking to reveal himself through creation and history. Much of Christian theological training has been focused on preparing adults to lead adults in worship. They have not taken up the insights of Montessori, Rousseau etc, concerning the education of children.

Understanding God’s Heart For Children

Presentation by Paul Stockley

This is a workshop process the aim of which is to help workers with children to reflect upon their experience in light of the Word of God. The original idea came from a process at Lifestream Ministries in the Philippines and it has been developed by Viva Network with input from the Cutting Edge Conference III. The materials have been translated for use in other places: Cambodia, Kenya, Nigeria, Brazil etc. A foundational motivation was to encourage the Christian community to grapple with, rather than dismiss, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

¹⁷ Readers are directed to *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* Augsburg Fortress 1991, by Jerome Berryman for further information.

The material comes in the form of a study guide with 7 modules:

1. Participants reflect on their own implicit perspective on children;
2. Participants reflect on God's Word, bringing from their experience passages of Scripture that motivate them or justify their ministry work with children;
3. Participants try to define God's vision for a child-friendly world based on the preceding;
4. Participants ask themselves what they need to do to make it a reality;
5. Participants compare this understanding of God's perspective with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
6. Participants compare this understanding of God's perspective with the UNICEF document "World Fit for Children";
7. Participants attempt to identify underlying principles for their work, consonant with Scripture and experience, and capable of practical application.

One strength and reason for its popularity is that it is an open process that is much grounded in Scripture. There are no attempts to point to particular key passages.

For a group interested in Child Theology, we would wish to ask certain questions, for example: What is the theology that underpins this? Is "God's Heart" adequate language to express God's concern?

Celebrating Children

Presentation by Keith White

'Celebrating Children' is a book edited by Glenn Miles and Josephine-Joy Wright¹⁸. It was written to be a text book for a course with the same name for Christians working with children. It therefore is relevant to the Holistic Child Development programme at MBTS.

- (1) child development theme (expertise and life work) and
- (2) biblical theme (flowing from work on Bible);

Child developmentalists say that children need five essentials for thriving: - security, significance, boundaries, community and creativity.

Children point to the essential human needs to love and to be loved. Think of two hands: one is a child and the other is a parent and in order to experience loving/being loved the two hands must interplay. Similarly, caregivers are often accused of meeting their own needs at the expense of children. In fact, the dance of the hands suggests that something deeper is happening.

Pavement Project

Presentation by Gundelina Velazco

Scripture Gift Mission had a vision to translate the Bible for street children. From this, the "Pavement Project" was born. A survey was carried out among street children in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa, Colombia, and the Philippines to discover their 'felt' needs. The needs were many: no food, no clothing, no support, etc. but she decided to focus on self-worth. The Bible is *the* book among many books on self-worth! The question was how to present God's Word to children on the street. Further research was conducted among such children to discover the causes and the outcomes, particularly emotional, of the lack of self esteem. Causes included many forms of sin - abuse, abandonment, etc. and the emotional effects were predictable: fear, guilt, embarrassment, sadness, anger, hurt, etc. Children expressed these feelings vividly in response to the question: what do you associate yourself with? Responses included: dark clouds; mouth always hungry; fly that can easily be swatted; hungry thin dogs on street; a doll with dirty clothes. From a review of 104 responses, eight Bible stories were chosen to communicate God's perspective on them.

As children are interactive and imitative¹⁹, it was decided that the material should be presented to children through relationships, which it was hoped would be healing, between the child and a child

¹⁸ Miles, G and Wright J-J (Eds); Celebrating Children, Paternoster Press; 2003

¹⁹ Maybe adults, too, at heart! (Editor)

worker. The interaction allows the processing of feelings. The materials themselves help the child identify his feelings by showing pictures of other children like them. As the children are drawn in, they are told about Jesus who wanted children brought to him, who welcomed children, etc. The child is allowed to choose one of four cards with Scripture references to keep for himself. The process ends with prayer with the child.

Pilot projects were held in Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, India and the Philippines. It was found to be effective in healing painful memories, restoring self-esteem and changing lives. It is being rolled out worldwide.

Latin America : “Las Niñas y los Niños en los propósitos de Dios”²⁰

Presentation by Enrique Pinedo

At the time of the Millennium, evangelical churches from Latin America met for the CLADE IV conference in Quito, Ecuador.²¹ Some 1,300 people attended, with many theologians and church leaders. One of the tracks on offer related to children’s ministry. This took on the challenge to reassess the biblical-theological perspective regarding children; and to understand more about how the Bible speaks to children. A declaration to the Latin American churches was published.²²

Two years later in 2002, the group interested in the church’s work with children met together in Costa Rica and formed the Latin American “United for Children Movement”.²³ They decided to work on a biblical-theological approach aimed at three audiences: seminaries, pastors and children/teenagers. They invited teenagers from Uruguay to their meeting in order actively to involve those who are the subjects of theology. Several more conferences and events are planned.

Child Related academic projects in North America

Presentation by Marcia Bunge

In recent years, there have been a number of positive developments in North America in regard to the Church’s work with children:

1. American Academy of Religion (AAR) meets annually with 8,000 people. All areas of religion and theology are represented. This year there was a ‘Consultation on Childhood Studies and Religion’ which was very well received.
2. Childhood Studies, Religion and Ethics Project. Marcia has received a major grant for this study. It will help to strengthen theological and ethical understandings of children.
3. Other projects include: Vocation of Parenting; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America working Task Force on Education; Role of Children in Missions; Youth and Family/Search Institute

Meditation

led by Dr. Altaf Khan on *our responsibility to children* from Lam 2:19

This text shows the duty of parents and elders toward children. We find children are on the streets, dying with hunger, both spiritual and physical. We find a motivation for prayer, just providing food without prayer or prayer without food would be wrong and sinful.

Muslims teach their children to get up at 4:00 a.m. to go to the mosque to worship. What about Christian parents?

²⁰ “Children in God’s Purposes”

²¹ A Consultation Report was published in the Journal *Transformation* 2001 (Vol. 18, No. 1, page 51)

²² This may be viewed on line at www.redviva.org

²³ Movimiento Juntos por la Niñez



Singing with Jesus: *Yeoh Gi Sean* age 6yrs

Review of CT Achievements and Prospects

Presentation by Haddon Willmer

Haddon led a discussion on the achievements and future possibilities of the Child Theology Movement.

Achievements to date

Haddon gave a brief history of where we have come over the last two years.

- formed a movement and legally constituted company with identity, drive and purpose
- established a partnership between CTM, MBTS and Compassion International
- identified potential networks in Asia, Africa, USA
- Planning to do the same for UK and E. Europe
- Held and published reports from consultations in several locations worldwide

The participants added to this list:

- Developing methodological consciousness about CT
- Developing a way of “setting the child in the middle”, though not actually involving the child in a participative manner
- Have interacted with some of the key players

In addition, Haddon raised some questions concerning the administrative support for the movement and the focus of the movement. Regarding the latter issue, CT is explicitly targeting all theological discussion (not simply discussion about children) by putting the child in the middle. It sees the need to have the child addressing theology, rather than only theology addressing or supporting child-related activities. Nevertheless, again and again in every consultation, we gather together people who are concerned with children and the method used is one that approaches the child from a theological perspective, rather than the other way around as intended by the CTM. We still have a major hurdle in getting to CT. We still need to explore what happens to theology in the light of the child placed in the midst.

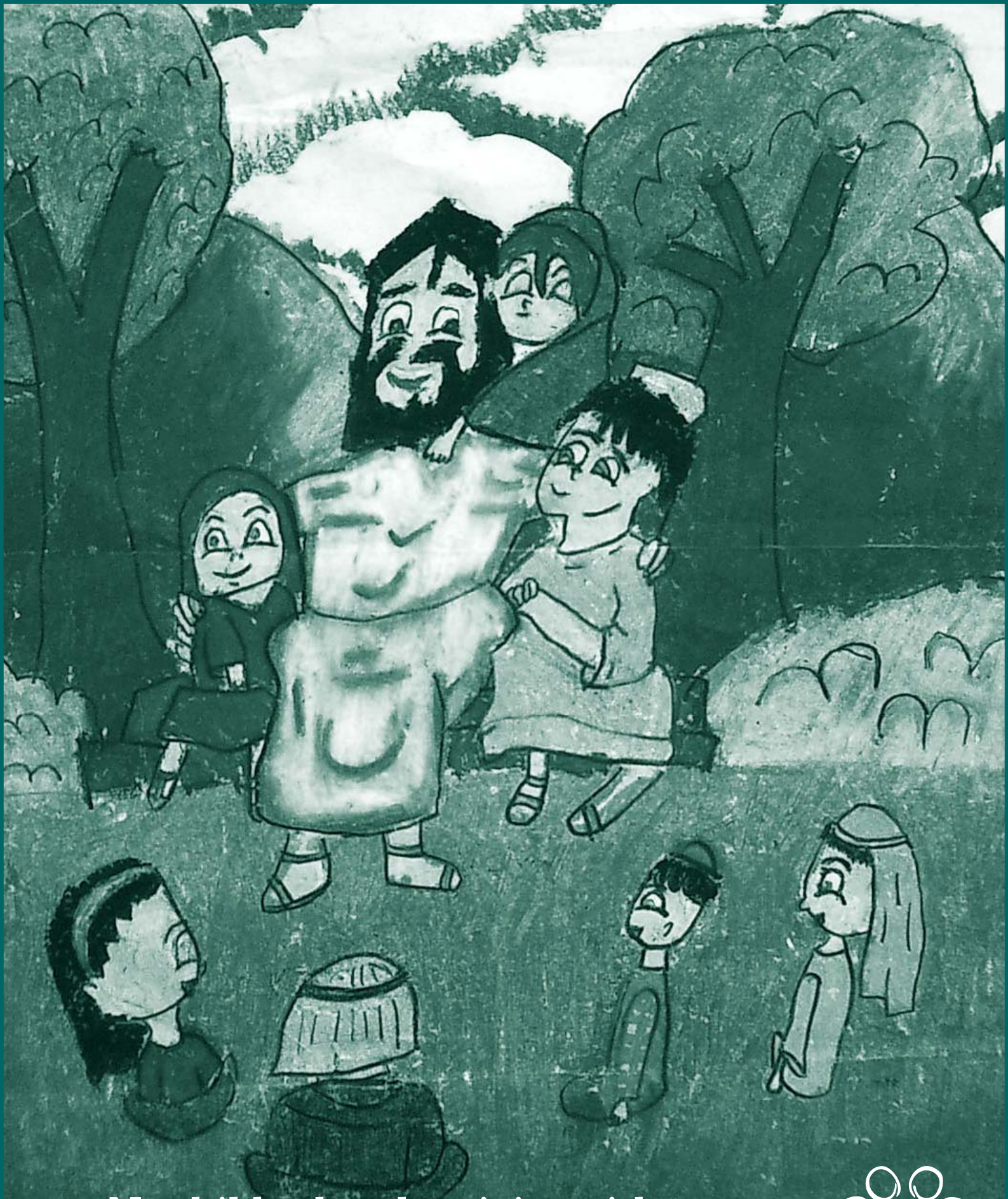
Future directions

Some time was spent canvassing opinion on what future directions CTM should take. Decisions would have to be taken by the directors of CTM but the intention is to gather broad input, formally and informally. The following gives some idea of the issues raised and discussed:

- The distinction between the movement and the body of thinking and knowledge.
- The notion of membership, whether formal or informal. At present, there is a practical membership in terms of a mailing list but there is a need to distinguish between members who wish merely to be informed and those who wish to take some responsibility for shaping the movement. This might translate to different levels of membership.
- There needs to be the formulation of strategies to target the various constituencies: theologians; pastors; etc
- The composition of the governing board needs attention. At present, directors are predominantly, though not exclusively, European. It was said that Africans and Asians often feel that they are always offered only the final product, rather than being offered participation in the process. CTM has a declared aim to broaden representation on the board and is looking for suitable candidates.
- Similar issues arise when selecting names to receive invitations to the consultations. Attention to this could improve the success of each consultation. Perhaps there could be a Board of Advisors in each continent or country to assist in this process. Another suggestion made was to hold pastoral seminars locally, which would ameliorate problems of funding.



Riding Bicycle with Jesus: *Ian Bernie Chong, 6yrs*



No child related activity without
theological reflection
No theology without the child in the
midst

