

PRAGUE CONSULTATION ON CHILD THEOLOGY



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

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Registered in England, number: 494 3636
Charity Registration number: 1106542
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Report of the Prague Consultation on Child Theology

International Baptist Theological Seminary 1 - 6 April 2005

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23 March 2006

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Prologue

It was poignant that this, the sixth Child Theology (CT) consultation organised by the Child Theology Movement, should meet in Prague. The city has seen bloody attempts to reform theology. We were reminded of this by the prominent statue of the reformer John Huss in the city centre and by a visit to the reconstructed chapel where he had once preached. A mural in the chapel, shown in part on the front cover of this report, depicts how 'Christian' theological debate has too often resorted to actual warfare in times past. Children were 'in the midst' of those battles not as a sign from God but as victims.

Our method is different. This small consultation was open to anyone ready to work for a few days in a group on *Child Theology*. CT seeks to renew and develop our theologies in response to the critical impetus of Jesus who *placed a child in the centre of the disciples arguing about a theological question* – the kingdom of God. This consultation therefore included participants who accompany and care for children in their work, especially those who do so as faithful disciples of Jesus and servants of God's kingdom. Through their presence, the child was placed in *our* midst.

CT judges that if we are to be authentically Christian in the world, we must continually attend to theology. So it is a concern for all Christian people, not just for professional theologians and preachers. In societies where Christian faith is questioned in so many ways, our speaking and thinking of God in Christ must be alive with the life of God, attentive, learning and obedient, abundantly delighting in God in his world and his way, empowering us to persistence in faith and right service. To have theology merely as a statement of orthodoxy, or as an ideology we never think through, is sterile. If we have theology at all it must be better theology than it often is.

The consultation therefore required us to bring into the open our *operative* theologies – the theology we *really* believe and practise which may differ in some degree from the theologies *professed* by our churches and Christian organizations. Once in the open, we asked how far our operative theologies are *already child theologies*, of the sort Jesus points to. Has the child in the midst as a sign of the kingdom of God had a formative influence on our operative theologies? Or have they grown to their present condition without taking notice of the child in the midst? Out of this appraisal, we went on to envisage *what our theologies would become if we developed them in unbounded, receptive responsiveness to the child in the midst*. Through this report, you may judge to what extent we succeeded in this endeavour.

CT is not, at root, theology mobilizing the church and Christians for more urgent, better and bigger work with and for children. It thus differs from a theology of childhood. The consultation was *not* designed, therefore, to work directly at issues such as: improving the status and priority of work with children by churches; mobilising resources for work with children; developing programmes for work with children and proposals for training of those working with children. All these important issues are already the concern of many agencies inside and beyond the churches. CT gladly supports them but it does not seek to duplicate their work because it has its own distinctive task. In practice, however, much Christian activity is theologically minimalist, because it shares the activist assessment.

CT is aware that like all theology today it is weak and beset by difficulties. Many people think theology is of no practical use: the urgent needs of children can be met by intelligent secular activity, which does not need theology. CT faces this weakness, assuming that theology has value by enabling us to set our activity within the judgment, affirmation and gracious accompaniment of God in Christ. This assumption alone is not enough: starting from it, Christians have to display how theology inspires and enhances the practice to which we are called.

So CT is committed to theological reflection for the sake of our service and faith in God and for the being and mission of communities of Christian faith in the world. It is grateful for the child set in the midst by Jesus because the child enlivens and enlightens our thinking and speaking of God. It is the distinctive task of CT to go through the theological door opened by the child in the midst and explore!

The Child Theology Movement

Day 1 (Friday)

Psalm 8

Keith

All our theological explorations in Child Theology have confirmed the significance of this Psalm. It was signalled by Jesus when he was in the Temple at Jerusalem, and the young people were shouting “Hosanna to the son of David” (Matthew, Chapter 21). The reference to children in verse 2 of this paean of praise to the Lord our God is striking and challenging, however it is translated and read. In the English New International Version it reads: “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger.” There is some sort of link between suckling babes (babies in arms who have not yet learnt to speak their parents’ language) and confronting or combating evil. At first sight this seems to be paradoxical, if not nonsensical. How can such creatures do anything about the forces of evil? But set in the context of God’s promises and purposes we begin to see that it is His sovereign nature to choose whom He will for His purposes and it is His nature to choose (“ordain”) the weak and the despised things of this world.

Heard and interpreted in this light, the cry of a newborn baby is a triumph of life over death, hope over despair. And it was the cry of the newborn baby, Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ that ushered in the reign of God as described in the Gospels.

These are deep mysteries and Child Theology is, if it is anything, a process and movement that seeks to take Jesus seriously and to learn from and model his way of doing things. As such it is a disturber of the status quo. We do not and cannot continue to see things in the same way; neither can we live as we did before. Whatever it means, we are grasped by the significance of living and worshipping with the child placed in the midst by Jesus (whether in action or words) as a special sign. And special signs are for pondering together, in the light of the whole of Scripture, the experience of fellow travellers and the history of God’s people.

Introductions

We were welcomed to IBTS by Einike and proceeded to introduce ourselves to the other participants.

I am Romanian and am a social worker. I have worked for many years with children for adoption. As many children come back for advice I’m also trained as a family counsellor. I’m not very interested in theology but I see that there should be no Christian children’s work without theology.



**Ligia
Macelaru**

I am a student at Osijek Bible School and heard about the consultation from the Dean. I worked with children for 10 years in a school in Moldavia.



**Iuliana
Mihai**



***Carmen
Andresoi***

I am a social worker and work with orphan children. I am married and care for four children at home. I have been working with children for 10 years and am a Sunday School teacher so I am involved with children all the time.



***John
Collier***

I am a medical doctor and have worked most of my life in pharmaceutical research. I took early retirement recently so that I could spend more time on mission work. This work has usually involved children at risk in some way or other. To be better prepared, I am in the final stages of an MTh degree, which is how I got to be involved with the Child Theology Movement – I am its Company Secretary.

I am Estonian but work here at IBTS with my husband. I am a lecturer in education. I have three sons so do theology everyday!



***Einike
Pille***

Originally I am from the USA. I was in Thailand for some years at a New Life Centre helping women sex workers. Now I am a consultant for these kinds of projects. I rent a home here at IBTS



***Lauran
Bethell***



***Bill
Prevetie***

I have lived in Romania for two years and have worked with children at risk for 25 years. I am also doing a doctoral thesis at OCMS in Oxford. I expect to live here until 2007. This is the third CT gathering I have attended.



***David
Chronic***

I am from the USA but have lived in Romania for 8 years. I am working for 'Word made Flesh' primarily with children at risk. I am married to a Romanian who works in education. I heard about CT a couple of years ago and am happy to be here to learn.

I retired 7-8 years ago from teaching theology in Leeds. Many of my concerns focus on what it is to be Christian in Europe. Is there a future for beautiful and credible Christianity in Europe? In my working life I never thought much about children theologically I have 3 adopted children and for 8 years have been responsible for a grandson. I met Keith and decided could work with him on CT.



***Haddon
Willmer***

I live in a large household, where 5 generations of my family and 1,200 children have lived over 3 centuries. I'm married to Ruth, have 4 children and one grandchild. I lecture at Spurgeon's college in various subjects and also lecture at MBTS. I did doctoral research in India into the work of a woman theologian who died in 1923. CT came out of my involvement in a "Cutting Edge" conference.



***Keith
White***



I am from Romania but I am studying in Croatia for a master's degree. I am married with two children. I am here to learn.

***Daniel
Oprean***



I am Romanian, married and a grandfather. I used to be in the Communist party but now I work in Romania for World Vision International. WVI work with children so I am here to learn too.

***Danut
Manastireanu***



I am living in Romania but am Hungarian. Three years ago I started to work with children. My older sister was working with gypsy children and I had been helping her while still at school. When she left, I continued by myself. Now I am studying at IBTS.

***Istvan
Erekes***

The Local Context

As well as introducing themselves, the participants spent a few moments highlighting some issues currently affecting children in some of the post-communist countries in which they were living. Here are some key points:

- Emigration: no faith in the future of these countries; not looking for work but for independence,
- Families destroyed by emigration for economic reasons
- Poverty; supporting and helping children in special need; finding a place to live; integration of children from state institutions
- *Identity* – finding an identity is a problem and task – is it better to be part of the world or a Christian community – Hungarian in midst of Romanians, Christian in the midst of non-Christians
- Mafia; prostitution; paedophilia.
- No *partnership between West and Romanian churches*, west buys people, and Romanian exploit naïve westerners = suspicion, no reception, no single body of Christ; some leaders sold themselves to Southern Baptists, for money.
- Churches fear the West will ruin the children in churches through TV, music etc; capitalism
- Families keep children as beggars, so have no interest in investing in them
- Clarification of *the past*, communism, 1 in 3 or 4 were in the secret police or colluders; the churches are involved – one pastor was a collaborator till 1974, and then reconverted and was killed by police to stop him exposing it

In a short PowerPoint presentation, Danut provided some clues to the Post Communist mindset, as he saw it:

- Radical breakdown of individual and social value system
- Generalised suspicion
- Breakdown of community spirit

- Condescending attitude to ethics
- Survival system that downplayed compliance to legality – bribery, corruption, use of ‘connections’
- Devaluation of respect for honest work
- Lack of respect for authority and government, seen as inherently oppressive
- Legal system built on the premise that people are guilty and dishonest until proven innocent
- Dictatorship – the only leadership paradigm available
- Lack of initiative and responsibility
- Improper understanding of freedom
- Inability for civilized communication, especially of disagreements

Source and Goals of this Consultation.

Keith and Haddon

This was the sixth of our consultations, each of which have been written up into reports such as this. Although sharing a methodology and goal, each consultation has been different and this one had its own particular ‘flavour’. In fact, the programme was very open, especially after Sunday. We did not know exactly where the conversation would go. We had some ideas but wanted participants to contribute questions and topics for discussion, which would lead us in a locally appropriate direction even if different to the one we had envisaged.

As Child Theology was new to most people at the meeting, our aim on the first evening was that in the next 24hrs through the various presentations everyone would know what CT is and what it isn’t. Sometimes Christians think it unnecessary to attend to theology in the face of so much need amongst children – isn’t it more important to get in and help? However, at Cutting Edge III there were many questions that were *both* very practical *and* deeply theological. It was activists themselves asking the questions and who thus set CT in motion.

Source – the CT consultation reports give one source of CT (the “Cutting Edge” conferences for workers with children at risk and organised by Viva Network) but we keep coming across other sources. They may not use the term ‘Child Theology’. For example, the recent book, ‘The Child in Christian thought’ is another source.

There are parallel theological initiatives concerning children that should not be confused with CT. For example, the “Theology of the Child”, which is quite distinct and separate. There the focus is on theology coming to children. Another is the work on “Theology of Children” such as children’s prayers and letters to God. A key difference with CT is that it is trying to reform *all* theology with the child in the midst. One means of doing this which we have found helpful is to be aware of the child whenever doing theology. This does not mean amassing information about children to inform our reflection but rather asking what happens if children become part of the process when doing theology. This is somewhat akin to feminist theology, which allows women to come into the foreground.

Goals – most or all of those present had a practical interest in children and their concerns. To some extent we were involved as activists but we wanted to strengthen this activism with theology. It is sad that people don’t want to call themselves theologians unless they are involved in some academic work. But how can you be an intelligent Christian without being a theologian? We do it when we think and talk about God - like Moliere’s ‘*Le bourgeois gentilhomme*’ who discovered he had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it! We don’t have to be involved in Trinitarian speculation, for example.. We must not allow the academics to imprison theology.

CT is not a completed work, it’s not all cut and dried, but we presented what there is and worked to see what we could get out of it. It involved a case study and an opportunity to put this into the context

of our own practice and experience. It also involved a critical review of a significant document which will have a wide circulation and major impact. It was written by evangelical people working with and for children and we had an opportunity to contribute a response. We also planned to look at the implications of CT for an important area of theology, Christology, as CT for us has been found to be deeply Christological. We also attempted to apply CT to a very practical matter involving children – education, as broadly understood, not just what is done in school. We also hoped to address during our time together CT and ecclesiology and mission and what CT has to say to the two big secularities in this part of the world: communism and capitalism.

Day 2 (Saturday)

Devotions

Bill Prevette

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints”
Eph 1:18

I have been speaking to kids in schools and churches in Romania about moral formation. What does Paul mean when he speaks about ‘the eyes of your heart’? God can help us understand.

I grew up in an orphanage with a lot of violence in my life, and a lot of religion but I knew nothing of God. So I have a passion to encourage young people to wake up to a spiritual world that sometimes invades this world. Jesus is always speaking about this other world. I became a Christian age 26 in a Pentecostal church in California, full of people like me, ex-hippies and people who had lived violent lives. Later I went to Fuller Seminary where I did a mission course and there I learnt about the Kingdom of God. This transformed my thinking.

I remember being in Calcutta where the pastor asked for an offering. People brought forward their gifts. There was a pile of paper money. After everyone had left, a woman at the back dressed in rags and with a leprous arm went forward and left a couple of copper coins. A visiting businessman asked if he could have these two coins. He said, this means more to me than all the money our business has given away (which was millions of dollars). Pentecostals love resurrection power but at this moment I began to understand something about the upside down kingdom, that it’s not about power and control. Last night we went out and met some of the gypsy girls working the streets. Afterwards I couldn’t sleep, I just was thinking about God’s heart for the kids. This is how the kingdom works – it doesn’t come out of heaven like a thunderbolt. I remember one girl who just hung on to Lauran as a lost child who didn’t want to be there. Jesus invites us into this world that’s around us all the time.

Presentation of Child Theology

A Walk with Jesus from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem (*Keith*)

Matthew 16-21

Introduction

Today we take a walk with Jesus and his disciples from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem as he made his last preparations to equip His disciples for ministry, including child ministry.

Caesarea Philippi was on the slopes of Mount Hermon, North of the Sea of Galilee not far from the present day Damascus. The journey we are embarking on with Jesus took him from near the very north of the area in which he ministered to near the south, from a centre of pagan worship to the heart of Jewish celebration and sacrifice. All the time Jesus is heading for the place where the divine cup awaits him. And it is significant that his ministry has a new urgency and focus. He is still announcing and revealing the Kingdom of Heaven, but once Peter has declared that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus shares with his followers the heart of the Gospel: that he, the Christ must suffer and be killed before being raised to life, and that the Kingdom is completely and utterly different to the kingdoms on earth.

It is difficult to keep track of Jesus’ life story when we focus on single verses or passages, and so we can miss emerging trends or links. Do you remember what happened immediately after the stunning revelation on the Mount of Transfiguration that confirmed in an unforgettable way the truth of Peter’s declaration? The father of a boy who was suffering from seizures, probably a form of epilepsy, confronted Jesus and told Him

that His disciples hadn't been able to help his boy. They asked Jesus why they were powerless in this situation and when Jesus explained why there began the period and the journey on which we are now embarking with them.

As we look at this we notice of course that He led by actions and example, not simply by words, and that is how we will best teach and equip others. The process is as important as the content of the Gospel. I have argued elsewhere that a theme running right through this climactic period of the ministry of Jesus is that of children and childhood. It seems as if every incident and all teaching is compared and contrasted with childlikeness. I am not going to expound this today, but my exposition is set within this understanding of the narrative context.

So let's begin our walk with Jesus, for some perhaps the idea of a pilgrimage will resonate, possible even for others a forerunner to the Stations of the Cross. I want to share from this passage eight insights into the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven taught by Jesus that are axiomatic in our ministry among children, young people and families

1. The critical importance of faith (Matthew 17: 20) and prayer (Mark 9: 29)

As far as we can ascertain, it was on Mount Hermon that Peter, James and John saw the transfigured Jesus with Moses and Elijah, and it was in the shadow of this snow-capped peak that the father brought his son to Jesus. And Jesus healed the boy. The disciples who had been unable to help wanted to know why they couldn't rebuke and drive out the demon.

And Jesus spoke of their lack of faith (Matthew) and the need for prayer (Mark). The two responses form an integrated truth: faith and prayer are inseparable. And they are the bedrock of our mission with children and in every setting.

As I have pondered this response of Jesus it has begun to dawn on me that the overwhelming importance of prayer and faith was not just something that Jesus reiterates in his teaching and mentoring of his followers, but is incarnate in his life and ministry. In John's gospel we have the privilege of eavesdropping as Jesus prays. Later we will enter into his wrestling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But this was accompanied by the profoundest faith in history. He has just told his followers that he must suffer and die...and that he will be raised to life on the third day. Have you stopped to reflect on the faith of Jesus? I'm not sure what the writer to the Hebrews had in mind when he summoned up his great catalogue of the people of faith by referring to the Jesus as the author of our faith (Hebrews 11: 2), but in using a word applied to Jesus as the author of life, and of salvation, perhaps we should pause to let the significance of this moment in his ministry sink in.

Notice before we move on, the faith of those who brought people to Jesus, including the father of the Epileptic boy. We, the body of Christ have no monopoly of faith. If we think that children's or any ministry in the name of Jesus is possible without faith this is the time to quit! The words "Have faith in God" above the door of Mill Grove, my own home, testify to a century of faith: trusting God, relying on His promises. Faith and love go together. We see that beautifully clearly in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8. The Rose Walton Centre and the Peto model of treatment within our community is founded on faith in the potential of every child.

Until we can pray "Thy will be done" we are loose cannons in our interventions. We should seek to find the agenda of our Heavenly Father in the life of a child or family. Our primary task is to discover the *Missio Dei* and to join Him in it, not to seek to enlist His assistance for our own endeavours!

2. The necessity of changing and becoming like little children (Matthew 18: 3)

By heading south we have now arrived at Capernaum, the well-known town on the shores of Lake Galilee, where Peter's house was situated, and one the centres of the ministry of Jesus. It was the place where he had healed so many as the sun was setting and so fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. (As it happens this was where I stayed for a time as a student in the 1960s, and so the lake and the silhouettes of the mountains come to mind as I speak.) The meaning of this teaching is commonly misunderstood. Usually people make a list of the attributes of children (for example, they are trusting, questioning, reliant and dependent on others) and then seek to apply them to adults. We must be very careful if we do this that we don't read our adult and cultural preferences into children! A primary question concerns whether we are prepared to *change* or not. If we are not, then we are unlikely ever to enter into God's way of doing things. So, let's ask ourselves whether we are allowing Jesus to change us. This is something that is happening to many who have engaged in Child Theology.

Then comes the issue of *becoming like* children, and I want to admit that I am becoming steadily less sure what it means as I study its meaning with others across the world. We certainly must avoid sentimentality in our responses and ideas. Perhaps it has something to do with having open and enquiring minds; being ready to learn and to obey, to grow, to change, to wonder. Put practically, it may be about being ready and willing

to pray the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in Heaven...your way of doing things take precedence, your will be done..." "You are the potter: I am the clay."

3. Welcoming/receiving/accepting children in the name of Jesus, and so welcoming Jesus Himself (Matthew 18: 5)

We are still in Capernaum with the fishing boats moving silently across waters of Galilee clearly visible as Jesus speaks.

Some years ago I was asked a question that cut me to the quick. I had already given more than quarter of a century to caring for children at risk in my family home, Mill Grove. The (angry) questioner challenged me: "Do you really want to be in this ministry?" I immediately knew from my instinctive defensive reaction that he had touched a raw nerve. The result was a deep pondering of my calling during which I realised that I had reservations, and possibly regrets, that must have affected my relationship with the children and young people I sought to help. Over time I began to learn what it was really to welcome children in the name of Jesus: to be open to them with my whole being. And I have come to recognise those parents, teachers and carers who have opened their hearts to children; who love and respect the children they are alongside. The process is similar to that experienced by Jean Vanier, and Henri Nouwen. In fact Henri Nouwen's last book, 'Adam' is a brilliant description of the process involved. For it shows with an honesty and reality that our ministry is only Christ-like when it is two-way, when we open ourselves up to the possibility that we are being blessed. Please don't think this welcoming is an easy or painless process!

And when we are open to children; really joyful in our ministry, then we will find that we have welcomed Jesus. In our book, Haddon and I are exploring whether it is in receiving or welcoming children that we become like them. If so our work is a great privilege. (This interpretation is an antidote to a spirituality that focuses on the pilgrimage and identity of self. In such a case, ministry among children might be a way of meeting our own needs rather than theirs.)

4. Understanding how abhorrent child abuse is to God (Matthew 18: 6-9)

With barely a pause Jesus changes mood as dramatically as, for example, in the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. It could well be that these words of Jesus are His most angry and condemnatory. And as he speaks he surely points at Galilee: that is where the ripples of the person drowned with a millstone around his neck would forever be lodged in the imaginations of the listeners to his dire warning. It's so hard to read and hear them that we often simply omit them.

Don't you shudder when you hear the numbers of priests in the Roman Catholic Church in America who have been involved in child abuse? In 1962 there was a document written by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, discovered by the British newspaper *The Observer* that insisted that clergy should be secretive and silent when confronted by sexual abuse within the RC Church. This silence was to include the alleged victim, under threat of excommunication. Can you conceive of how Jesus feels, or who can sound the depths of sorrow in the Father heart of God (the title of the hymn by Graham Kendrick)?

But this is not restricted to specific acts of abuse. It includes everything that might cause children ("little ones") to sin. Have you considered the world we have allowed to be created for twenty-first century children, and the pressures on them to sin? Think of child soldiers who steal, murder and rape in there hundreds of thousands. Think of the tens of millions of child prostitutes. Think of the children of the rich who grow up to envy the possessions and wealth of others and long to have it. Consider those who are "branded" around the world by trans-national corporations and marketing machines. Think of corporate and institutional paedophilia. In all these cases and so many more, children are being led into sin. How does God see the modern world developing around us, given His primary concern for children, little ones, the weak and the vulnerable? And where does that leave us?

"Why do you go to church? You know everything in the Bible, and you are good, so you don't need to go!" "I go to kneel down and ask God's forgiveness for the sins that I know I have committed, but also for the systems, institutions that I am allowing to be created, and not challenging, that cause little ones to sin." It's a sobering thought.

5. Valuing each child as an individual of inestimable worth (Matthew 18: 10-14)

The water of Galilee is still lapping near the feet of Jesus, but now it is the hills, particularly to the east, richer in colours and textures as the afternoon turns to dusk, where the listeners now focus their attention. Don't overlook the fact that the story of the one lost sheep in Matthew's Gospel is set in the context of children and little ones, and that it begins with a reference to the guardian angels of children. (We are taking this mysterious and often neglected teaching as a context for about a third of the book that we are writing.) There is also a moral: see that you do not look down on these little ones.

Statistics are powerful and they can stir us with a sense of huge injustice and suffering, but in the final analysis it is vital to realise that we are called to be good shepherds who will join in the search for the one

lost sheep. I don't know how administrators in children's work cope! I am impressed by those who sponsor an individual child. We must be ready to restructure our lives so that the individual child is loved unconditionally. I have written about this in *Celebrating Children*. There have been some varied Christian reactions to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but something that underpins the document is a sense of in dignity and worth of each child.

It is salutary to reflect on the fact that this is why we are all here today: because God sees each one of us as of eternal value and sent Jesus as the Shepherd to search for us and bring us to our Heavenly home on His shoulders.

6. *Allowing children and their families and friends to come to Jesus (Matthew 19: 13-15)*

Jesus now leaves Capernaum and Galilee and wends his way south along the River Jordan, but on the East side known as Transjordan or Perea. He would have passed the place where he was baptised and it is not fanciful to consider that it was near such a spot that this next incident occurs. John the Baptist at first resisted the request of Jesus for baptism before allowing the authority of Jesus to take precedence.

This is one of the eight elements where we probably think we can move on without much need to reflect. Surely we all agree on this point? What controversy could there possibly be? Well, the disciples, having been taught specifically by Jesus all that we have just considered actually tried to prevent people from bringing children to Jesus! And sadly it is not difficult to find examples of churches and Christians who have, intentionally or not, done this down through the centuries. We have tended to overestimate our own skills and importance and to underestimate the significance of the direct relationship between children and their Saviour. I was surprised to discover how adults have come between children and Jesus even in the matter of "Children's Bibles". What if people bring children to Jesus outside our office hours? What if they have some very strange ideas? What if they need, in our view, education and medical help? Please don't lightly assume that you and I and our ministries have been innocent in all this. But rejoice that when children do find their way to Jesus, He welcomes them and blesses them beyond our comprehension. And let us be thankful for Fröbel, Montessori, Cavalletti and Berryman in all they have taught and modelled.

7. *Seeing children as signs of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19: 14; Mark 10: 13-16; Luke 18: 15-17)*

We are still alongside the River Jordan, and the final destination of Jesus, and the critical event in the unfolding revelation of His kingdom in Jerusalem, is near. This is where I personally came into the whole field of Child Theology: at Westminster Chapel in London.

Let me briefly mention just two of the points that dawned on me during that period. First, if children are signs of the Kingdom of Heaven, then we must get rid of all notions of power, territory, possession and hierarchies to enter it. This kingdom is a whole new way of living. It's an upside-down, inside-out and back to front world. Put simply it works on almost exactly the opposite principles of the political kingdoms we know from personal experience and history worldwide.

Second, just as the child is both fully human, and yet still becoming an adult, so the Kingdom of Heaven is both 'Now and Not Yet'. You have daily reminders of God's way of doing things whenever you see children at work and play. Is there a better sign of the Kingdom? Is this what the "Resurrection Mind" is all about, as it refuses to become fixed and finalised, as it remains open to further journeying, revelation and change? It is such a complete contrast with what the disciples and the mother of James and John still had in mind somewhere between the Jordan and Jericho (Matthew 20: 20-28).

8. *Understanding children's expressions in the context of God's way of doing things (Matthew 21: 12 -16)*

And now, at last Jesus enters the Temple itself. He has come to His Father's House. He has come home. He has come to His own.

Yesterday we began to see how the cries of newborn babies can be understood in a whole new light when we trust God's way of doing things; His purposes and intentions. In the Temple the authorities saw the behaviour of the young people who were singing and shouting as wholly inappropriate. Jesus saw them in a completely different way: they were doing exactly what God had intended.

As we listen really carefully to everything children and young people say and try to reflect on it in the light of God's heart we will find surprising things happening! When children shout and cry in anger we will see sometimes that this is as it should be; they have experienced abuse and injustice. When children see play as more important than formal education, perhaps that is how God sees it too. And when they don't do exactly what we think they ought to in church, is our disapproval representative of God and how He feels? Perhaps

their worship is more real than that of many adults. At the very least we should ponder what children are saying rather than ruling it out of court straight away.

Closing Reflection

And so we come to the end of our journey, our walk with Jesus. This period in the life of Jesus is of considerable importance in understanding the Kingdom of Heaven, and children, and how they relate to each other. There may be no great surprises, but perhaps we are struck by the way Jesus seems to have anticipated modern theories, policies, conventions and legislation. If we are to equip other Christians to join us in ministering to children, then it makes such a difference if we root and ground our teaching in the life and teaching of Jesus. It is a walk, a journey, a pilgrimage that we must all undertake.

Please notice that the focus is not simply on the needs of children, as if ministry is a one-way street. As we draw alongside children with the eyes of Jesus, then we are called to change, to repent. For some of us this may be equivalent to “being born again”.

The journey from Mount Hermon to Mount Moriah was an epic one for Jesus, and to all those whose eyes and ears are open, the heart of the Kingdom and Gospel have been revealed it is also momentous. And the whole journey is framed by the cries of an epileptic boy and then the cries of a group of rowdy young people. Strange that all this has been so hidden from the wise and learned commentators! But then Jesus had already anticipated this: “I thank you, Father, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes... Yes, Father, for such was thy will.” (Matthew 11; 25-26) So we have come to the end of this particular journey, and find ourselves back at the place where we started, and now we are better placed to understand why the cries of suckling babes are one of the most beautiful, insightful and powerful sounds in creation.

Introduction to Child Theology (*Haddon*)

Haddon asked participants to discuss: ‘What is the most popular and influential story or saying from the Gospel that connects the child and theology?’ There were various answers, including: the child in the midst; the feeding of 5,000; ‘let the children come to me’ (Mt 19).

Traditionally, the most popular text has been “let the little children come to me”. The second most popular text is Mt 18:6 – the millstone. It is now used against child-abusers but such a text should always be read for oneself and not for others. CT would like to offer an alternative text: Mt 18:1-5 the ‘child in the midst’. This story has been far less fashionable.

A ‘theology of childhood’ encases the child in our own thinking. Jesus did something else. The child is capable of breaking through our theologies and habits of mind. Where did Jesus put the child? In the midst of the disciples. yes, but that’s not the whole answer. What were the disciples doing? Arguing – about the Kingdom of God, so it’s a theological argument. And the child was put in the middle of that. Perhaps to show them up for the kind of people they were. Instead of respecting God and his authority, they were turning it into an opportunity for self-advancement. Peter asks, what’s in it for us? We’ve given up so much for you.

Aristotle spoke of the unmoved mover; the perfect circle – all Creation moves towards God but God himself is unmoved. In Aristotle’s judgment, for God to have moved would have been a mark of imperfection. But Jesus reveals a God who is not like that and is rather a God who creates and loves the world, always moving towards us in invitation. Although God is perfect and has no need of us, he is not ashamed to put himself in a position where he desires his creation, in which he is specially represented (imaged) by human beings. By enrolling us into his project, he lays himself open to the possibility that we will subvert and pervert his plan. With us and against us, God persists in his project in creation, and his persistence culminates in Jesus, who proclaims his kingdom and is seen as the express image of God in humanity. In his revelation and service of God, Jesus places the child in the midst of an argument about greatness in the kingdom of God, expecting the child to make a crucial difference to the argument.

Haddon then asked participants to discuss what difference might the child might have made in this story and how. Some answers were:

- The child is small, powerless; easy to look down on; the disciples probably got angry and indignant because children lack power and knowledge;
- Children are receptive; like the lamb in the middle of wolves;
- The Kingdom of God doesn’t work in hierarchical way, don’t look down on the child;
- Children are vulnerable and open;
- Children deal with real concrete questions, not the abstract; the disciples’ argument was very childish! It’s the kind of thing children argue about! ‘I’m the king of the castle!’;

- The child is a model – the text mentions the humility of the child;

The child makes a difference because the disciples are in competition and it's very clear that the child is not in competition with them. The child apparently doesn't stand a chance in the contest but Jesus says the child will win. The child points to a Kingdom that we were meant for, a place where we long to be, but it's a place that runs on quite different lines from what we are used to. The disciples compete to be greatest; Jesus talks about simply 'entering'. Just to get inside the Kingdom is enough, it doesn't matter what position one is given there. "I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God..." (Psalm 84.10) The temptation to seek greatness besets us from all sides: we can even use the resurrection to cancel out the Cross. We don't know how to run the world or to be ourselves without competitiveness and control. This text is not just directing us how to become better people, improving ourselves, e.g. by becoming humble. Rather, the child tells us something fundamental about the Kingdom, about the total and ultimate and pressingly present framework within which all things exist and all is held together. .

Matthew alone talks about *becoming like* the child. All the Gospels, in their slightly varying versions of this incident, say that receiving a child is a way to receive Jesus and the one who sent him and thus to enter into the Kingdom of God. What then does it mean to receive the child? It is in the nature of a child to be received. Adults might survive alone on a desert island but an abandoned and exposed child will not survive. They must be received to continue in existence. Various qualities of children, such as humility, spontaneity etc, are offered as the aspect that Jesus had in mind for us to imitate. Children aren't humble in a moral sense. Most children aren't purely spontaneous. Look at a child who hasn't been given stimulation. These qualities may not then identify what is the basic meaning of the child, as placed by Jesus in the midst of this theological and very practical argument. But every child needs to be received. In needing to be received, the child reminds us of what is true of all humanity and indeed even of God's own being; God has need of nothing, yet in Jesus, whether as a baby or a man, living and dying, he becomes manifestly dependent on being received. In his resurrection, the one who was so little received by men, who nailed him to the Tree, is received by the Father in glory. So reception is a central and fundamental theme in theology, in our understanding of God in Christ and our relating to him. Receiving the child has what some might well see as sacramental significance in this context. It is a theme which leads us to reflect on our various activities on behalf of children. How are we receiving children?

Children are often thought of as incomplete adults and it may be that Jesus intended to teach us something through placing a child in the midst. He did not, in modern fashion, chide the disciples for thinking of the child as incomplete, not 'there' yet. He rather worked with their view of children, in order to question their adulthood. It is not that children are as complete as adults but rather that adults are like children in being incomplete, though adult incompleteness differs from children's incompleteness. Adulthood is much closer to being deceived into denying incompleteness, as though adulthood could be one long sigh of relief to have, at last, escaped childishness. Children open up awareness of our own incompleteness. We all, to the end of our days, have to live in our incompleteness and therefore in our need of others and God. Paul writes, "I don't count on myself as having attained..." (Phil 3.12-16)

A Child Theology Reflection

Keith and Haddon

We were all made to be **received**, including Jesus: Jn 1:10 "His own **did not receive** him.." Jn 1:16 "from the fullness of his grace **we have all received**..." The challenge is to see how that story speaks to our story. Laurie Green speaks of a continual conversation between our stories and the story of Jesus.

The group reflected on the question: "What are the discussions, the live issues, which are uppermost in people's lives in our locality?" (not especially abstract theological issues but everyday, live issues)

Here are some of the responses:

- In Romania, young people are thinking about work and education possibilities outside the country, for music, drugs, lifestyle; the difficulty of finding a place to live; NATO and the EU effect our perspective, national security and economy;
- From a US perspective: how can I protect what I have? how can I be secure from terrorism and violence?
- In Romania older people are concerned that the west will corrupt the young people;
- Problems of security, economy, identity;

- Crisis of identity in both Orthodox and evangelical churches;
- Issues in Romania include accepting and supporting children with special needs; legalization of prostitution; paedophilia;
- In Moldavia concerns include the economic situation; opportunities to get money in other countries and the influence of the Mafia;
- In Romania there is a need for clarification of the communist past, especially the secret police and those who co-operated with them (maybe 1 in 4 of all Romanians), including many church leaders. Some people don't want to see their secret police files because of what they will find out about who spied on them;
- The partnership between the West and Romania – not a partnership at all, really, as most missionaries come to Romania to set up their own work as if nothing existed before. Some smart Romanians exploit naïve westerners to build big projects that they can control; some leaders sell themselves to the Southern Baptists and do what they are told to get the money. Young People wonder whom they can trust and follow.

It's easy to think of the disciples as representing the church but this was pre-Pentecost and they weren't functioning as a community. What evidence is there that they were supporting each other? Perhaps they each represented their own communities. If there were time, we would have considered which institutions are involved – we are apparently now down to five institutions that control all our news – in these issues. But we had to press on to consider how a child might shake things up. At the Camp David Israeli-Palestinian discussions at a point of impasse, the president brought a picture of his grandson and this led to new thinking as the leaders thought about how their decisions would affect their children and grandchildren.

To gather a sense of how a child might disturb the issues, groups considered the question: "Is a child involved in these issues? If so, how – only as victim or more than this?" The following summarises the answers:

- The children of the victims are living alongside the children of the torturers; the solution must point to the future not the past; to allow the children to live together normally
- The problem of poverty would be changed if people saw their own children in the midst – passivity would no longer be an option
- At least the disciples were in dialogue but it seems that in Romania this is not happening; churches build big buildings to cope with the identity crisis, both in the Orthodox club and the Evangelical club; but maybe the children are in dialogue
- In the 90s many western agencies responded to the needs of the child (now over 400 agencies); there was no dialogue with local Christians. They wanted help with their poverty – the average Pentecostal family has 10 children – but the western agencies wanted to deal with the institutionalized kids. Kids ended up incidental to the process.
- Many parents leave children with grandparents or friends so that they can get money; this is not the best for the children; so the children are becoming independent

Jesus did action and then teaching not teaching and action or just teaching.

Case Study: Adina: A New Hope and Future¹

Bill Prevette

Simona who wrote up this story graduated from the Baptist seminary in Bucharest, in both sociology and theology.

*“For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord,
plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”*

Jeremiah 29:11

As a social worker working to prevent newborn baby abandonment in Romania, I come across very impressive cases. Incredible life stories of people who you would be tempted to think that their life had been lived unnoticed!...somehow overlooked by God. I would like to share with you a story that has remained close to my heart, because it was one that opened up a series of similar success stories.

Adina was a part of the street kid's subculture in Bucharest. Together with some of her other street friends she attended a Teen Challenge outreach where she came in contact with a missionary who began building a relationship with her. One day, this lady asked if I could come one evening to the coffee house to meet Adina. She thought that she was pregnant and needed help.

I remember when I met Adina for the first time. She seemed like a scared child. She didn't dare to look me in the eyes and hardly spoke to me. I only talked with her for a moment, just enough time to arrange to meet with her for a doctor's appointment. The following day, she never showed up for the appointment. Just knowing a little bit of her background, I hoped and prayed that she wasn't pregnant. Due to her circumstances, living on the streets, I couldn't see a positive future for herself and a child.

Two months went by when one day I found out that Adina had been hospitalized in the maternity hospital I worked in as a social worker. She gave birth given birth prematurely, to twins, a boy and a girl. I located the room that she was staying in and this is when I found out the details of her courageous life story...

Adina was born into a family with many children. When she was two years old she was abandoned in an orphanage, never to be visited again by her family. When she was 11 or 12 years old, she was transferred to a different orphanage in another town. At this orphanage another child raped her when she was 16 years old. The boy was expelled from the centre and Adina was moved to another institution. She gave birth in a maternity hospital raised her baby until he was 13 months old. Then, she said, she was forced to give up her child. She was moved back into an orphanage, where she continued going to school and where she received training as a qualified seamstress.

When she turned 18 she had to leave the orphanage where she was staying. She was dropped off at her biological parent's home where her parents didn't recognize her.

She lived there for only six months. She was physically abused and forced to work beyond her strength until finally she was driven away from home, again. Only that now, she was grown up and could understand, that this was not the place for her. She says, "It was hard for my family, nine people living in a three room apartment, trying to make ends meet living off of the Romanian welfare system".

So in the spring of 2002, driven away by her family circumstances, Adina had no choice but to try to survive on the streets of Buzau. Her hope was that maybe she would finally find a family there. Though, not even on the streets was she left alone. The police picked her up many times, took her the police station to beat her because she was begging to earn a living. Unable to bear the situation, she left for Bucharest together with another homeless girl, in hopes of being left alone and being able to blend in with the multitude of other street children.

Adina desperately tried to make a future for herself but no matter hard she tried, it felt like she was fighting an uphill battle. Shortly after her coming to Bucharest she was taken advantage of by a street

¹ Text provided by Simona Pop

boy addicted to drugs and became pregnant. Wanting very much the support of a family, she became part of a street children gang that was receiving help from various humanitarian organizations. Through one of these groups, she managed to get a job making candles, which is how I ended up having contact with her two months before she gave birth.

Adina didn't expect to give birth so soon and not at the least, to two children. She didn't know what to do and she was confused. She was struggling whether to keep the babies and try to provide a future for them and a better world for them. She wished she could keep at least the boy as a comfort for the one who was taken away from her when she was 17. I stood with her when she saw her children for the first time, and witnessed one of the greatest miracles of life: a mother allowing herself to be captured by two little lives that God had allowed her to give birth to.

I believed in my heart that with help Adina could be a mother to these little children and provide for them. Though, to prevent their abandonment, I would have to find a solution to get Adina off the streets. So I went to work right away!

Because Adina's babies were born prematurely, they needed to stay in the hospital until they reached a normal weight. However, Adina had to leave the hospital because she didn't have money to pay for extended hospitalization. So, we made use of this time to obtain copies of legal papers that she needed to obtain her children's birth certificates. When we went to register her children Adina asked me to name her baby girl. The name Esther from the Bible came to mind—the woman that was used by God to save a nation!

All that I had left to do was to find a maternal centre where Adina and her children could live and receive the support they needed to be integrated back in to society. I searched all over Bucharest to find a maternal centre, but couldn't find one. It had been almost a month since the children were born. They were normal weight now, so they were ready to leave the hospital. I began to worry but then realized that it wasn't in my power to provide a future for them. I started to pray for the situation and asked others to pray with me also.

It was then that the Lord brought to my mind Jeremiah 29:11. He showed me that He had Adina and her babies' future in His hands. My simple, human ability to help them came into being because of what God had purposed for them long ago. It wasn't my job to prepare a future for Adina and her babies but His.

Why is this interesting part of the story missed out? As I write Adina's story, it has been over a year that we found a maternal centre near Timisoara for her and her babies to live in. The children have grown, they are beautiful and healthy and loved by everyone who knows their story. Adina is considered a model mother and a hero for making the courageous choices she did. She is the pride of the maternal centre. By God's grace, a shy, awkward girl who once didn't know how to feed, change or care for her children is now teaching other mothers how to do this. Adina and her babies are preparing to be integrated into society to live independently from the maternal centre.

And as for me, I have learned that my part is to love and to do all I can to reach out a hand to help those God has put in my life. And in doing so, to be a reflection of His light and life to encourage mothers to put their hope and future in Him.

Discussion: how does this case contribute to Child Theology?

What is missing from the story?

- Where's the father?
- Where's the church?
- Education and schooling – what grade?
- Did the mission attend to Adina as a person? They seem to impose solutions. Automatic assumption –eg: we've got to get this person fixed.
- There were maternity facilities in Bucharest, why couldn't she find them? Individualistic efforts?

The story raises several issues that may be categorised as follows:

- Work/success/finance

- Isolation/western influence
- Identity crisis
- Relevance in a changing world
- Whose children? Whose responsibility?
- Legacy of a communist past
- Partnership issues: The West; Faith Based Organisations (FBOs)

One problem is the separation between ‘children/social concern/economics’ and ‘theology/church/God’. In the Baptist faculty, the sociology and theology tracks are quite distinct. Adina falls in the gap. Why are so many children abandoned in Romania? There are just as many now as thirty years ago.

Comments (Haddon)

Even in spite of Christ, God has done so much to preserve his invisibility – he preserves the mystery and hiddenness, even while revealing himself. We can never grasp God but we have to go on babbling as we attempt to speak about him (Augustine). A lot of life is about waiting in darkness, waiting in faith. “The people that walked in darkness...” Like Simeon waiting in the Temple, until Christ is brought in.

The child was put in the midst as a *sign* of the Kingdom of God but this is not the same as the *presence* of the Kingdom. The child is often a sign of hope but she can also be a sign by pointing to the darkness that is still waiting for the Kingdom, rather like the canaries taken down the mines to detect poisonous gases. Faith does not oblige us to be cheaply optimistic about every situation.

Adina was rescued but what about those that were not? Adina helps us to remember them but they still suffer. People still say: there’s no God or if there is, he’s not around when you need him. So, many social workers are quite hostile to the involvement of FBOs – they think faith only complicates the problem. Many Christians also feel the weight of this question.

The Angels: Mt 18:10 Perhaps Jesus offers us some help in resolving these issues when he admonishes us not to despise the children because their angels always see the face of God. Despising here is very broad: an unfriendly word is a despising and death is a despising. In the end nature throws us all away! Jesus says: don’t join in with this. Why? Because of the angels! God’s face being open to them is a Biblical symbol of God’s acceptance and favour. So how seriously and purely do we take this, the fact that God is for them? Does our concern for children, our receiving them, stem from God? Or are our operative motives and modes of action largely secular? There is a strong humanist case for doing good for children. Christian action for children is often, based on secular, sociological sensibility, science and concern. We add a religious gilding to it.

We can’t leave the angels to do all the representing of the children before the Father’s face. . . Even though they’re despised, God is still on their side. This in itself doesn’t alter the fact of their being despised in the world. We must see this text in the context of receiving a child, which means we should attend to them. So then it would be inconsistent for us not to be on their side, just like /God with his angels. Throughout the Bible, God’s people are to be as God is. Even when the darkness is deep and it seems that the darkness will never yield, we can still have hope that the Kingdom is coming.

In exceptional cases, the angels not merely behold the Father’s face, but come with timely help. The story of Hagar and Ishmael is an example (Genesis 16.7-14;21.15-21) But even stories like this are not to be used to excuse our leaving it to the angels. They strengthen our sense that God is for the despised and abandoned, and so they make it clearer to us what we have to do.

There is an answer which invokes ‘spiritual warfare’. A Pentecostal hermeneutic of the passage might see it in the context of spiritual warfare. The gap between social and spiritual, Pentecostals would like to fill with Holy Spirit, the power of God. Children can be caught in the middle of two worlds in conflict.

Some churches wouldn’t help Adina as she wasn’t ‘one of theirs’. And if she were one of theirs, they would throw her out because of church discipline! What do we actually believe about God? A recent article in the Baptist Times suggested we shouldn’t preach the love of God in the world but only in the church.

How much do we believe that God is active in the world just now? Luran commented that in her work, before starting any new project she waits for God to speak, and he does.

We have spoken about ‘Suffering Child Theology’ but what about ‘normal’ children?

Is there anything in Creation that represents mystery better than a child? The story about angels might be more about God’s care and involvement; reminiscent of stories from the desert fathers which suggest that things are not the way they often appear. And in this way, children may begin to expose the gap between the theology we say we believe and the theology that we actually practice.

Operative theologies

What are our operative theologies? This might differ from our organisation's written theology – its vision statement etc. It's the theology that we actually work by. To open up this issue, the group considered the text: "Anyone who receives a child in my name receives me." And asked, taking the context of their work with children, 'What does it mean to receive a child in Christ's name?' A number of issues surfaced:

- What do we mean by 'child'? Must he/she be young or can the text stand for any powerless or marginalised person? Our focus should be about receiving and in the New Testament there was also an issue about receiving adults.
- Does receiving the child presuppose a movement of the child towards us?
- The child should be received as into a family, so openness, patience and willingness to be changed oneself are important. It is the start of a new relationship.
- An example of not receiving a child - a teenage thug son of a neighbour. Receiving him would be to invite major trauma. How can such a child be received? Luran had received a woman who had been a prostitute for 6 years and had her live with her for 6 months. She left really angry and abusive and is still in prostitution but has called to apologise and say that the influence was very positive.
- The first thing to be done is to make space for the child and let the child become part of the system.
- Receiving the child has been used to preach against contraception
- It might mean to open one's home for the child; but that is a serious matter because it means opening a private space.
- Receiving is complementary to giving. Who is the giver? The identity of the giver may affect our response to the gift.
- Reception must be on the child's terms
- There is a price to pay in receiving
- There might be degrees of reception, for example, World Vision is inclusive but Catholics and Orthodox who come are welcome as guests not as members of the family.

Day 3 (Sunday)

Devotions

For our devotions we joined with others in the chapel of the seminary. The worship was led by members of the Northumbria Community who were also meeting at IBTS. During the service, Haddon spoke about the 'worth and beauty of being Christian in Europe today'.

Haddon started by reviewing some evidence that suggests that Christian faith in Europe is precarious. This is manifest by declining church attendance and increasing ignorance of the key facts of the faith. Whereas, in the past the church used coercion to maintain its position, this is no longer possible because happily it is acknowledged to be wrong. Christian faith seems irrelevant and not worth exploring. Why make the effort when it is widely accepted that the truth of Christianity cannot be proved? In fact, even though we can expound the faith rationally, this is not an argument for its truth. Ultimately it is unprovable. So are churches doomed just to manage the decline, perhaps taking comfort like Hezekiah that the final scenes will not be played out in our time?

There is another possibility. If 'truth' is not a sufficient reason for continuing as a Christian, could 'beauty' be the motivation? This would not be the beauty of externals such as liturgies, vestments and architecture, but the beauty of the faith itself: "If this story is not true, then it ought to be". Beauty can be experienced and be transforming even though it can't be proved, grasped and analysed.

Christians need continually to be playing out the story of love that doesn't give up and run away when faced with difficulty. Instead it brings restoration, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Biblical Framework Document

See Appendix 1

The consultation spent some time considering the draft of a document that had been produced for the 'Cutting Edge' conference of workers with children at risk. It was not clear to us how the document had been produced – whether it was derived from a Biblical/Theological reflection, for example, or if it was an adaptation of and response to a secular document. If it were the former, then it might reflect God's priorities and concerns, but if the latter, then it would likely attend to the issues considered important by social scientists and others working from a secular viewpoint. The task was to apply theological critique. A start was made, but given the comprehensiveness of the document and seriousness of the matters it dealt with, we could only scratch the surface.

Introduction to discussion

Haddon

Haddon presented a model of dealing with the child and impact of sin that was developed at the South Africa CT consultation. It was used again at Penang 2 when we discussed the linkage between CT and UGHFC (the document that shaped the document under discussion). We had understood that the CT process would somehow be reflected in the Biblical framework developed from UGHFC. This did not come through in the document before us.

There were several concerns expressed:

Comments from the group

- Do children only need parental love in a *broken* world?
- Children need *two* parents of both genders and this is God's intention
- The paper seems to be about child development and sin is omitted
- Where is the cross?
- Should the church only speak when secular services fail?
- The paper is written with the child in view but only as an object
- The paper is very conceptual and comes across as if a model was already in mind and texts were found to support it
- Seems like a list not a coherent, consistent framework
- How is it Biblical? Not made so by selected references
- Much of what is said is welcome but it's not anchored. What about Biblical themes such as creation, redemption, etc?
- No mention of the media – probably the biggest issue relating to children in the 21st century

Comments from Haddon

What is the social theory of the child that this is working with? It seems to have at its heart an optimistic social theory. For example, there doesn't appear to be a very serious understanding of the fall. In regard to section 2, for example, relationships are damaged, not just 'can be'. Although *others* can help children, what if society itself is broken, as it often is? The Bible offers resources for acknowledging, picturing and believing within the breaking down of our whole life support system in society and environment, but does this document?

All in all, it seems to be coming from a western individualistic point of view. The institutions spoken of are structured and hard, with demarcated roles. FBOs come into countries and focus on kids, leading to fracturing in other social groups – families, churches, etc. All these organisations have a view of society even if it's not made plain. In its response, the church needs to be prophetic not just collaborative. Whenever there is a particular focus, whether on children or anything else, there is a danger that the act of focusing abstracts, so that the subject is taken out of its context. Abstraction may be necessary for purposes of analysis, but once the analysis has been done, there has to be a renewed contextualisation. There are other issues in society such as: class, power, colonialism, media, and sex. Where is the voice of children in this?

Is what this document says about God adequate? Who is this God? Jesus not mentioned until paragraph 7. There is no mention of the Holy Spirit at all. It is not happily and plainly Trinitarian.

There is little discussion of Sin and the way it affects us.

There are also issues of theological method. The summaries sometimes look like a religious version of the declaration on the rights of the child, which are then followed by a series of texts. The Bible, however, is more than a series of proof texts.

As a practical outcome of our discussion, we asked Bill to write a letter to the steering committee for the Biblical Framework document drawing their attention to the concerns raised in the meeting in Prague.

What should I tell my pastor about CT?

There are so many children at risk and the need is so dire, the church needs to ensure that its practice/practical attention to the child is effective. The participants discussed what they might write to their pastors. Some ideas follow of what might be said and questions that might be asked:

- how does the preacher preach and to whom?
- Avoid “it’s now time for the children to leave.” Why not let the children use the important space and let the adults leave, or have everyone leave for classrooms?
- Should do the deep things when the children are there – sacraments, big events (marriages, weddings, funerals) etc so children can ask ‘what does this mean?’
- Avoid using archaic language – make meaning accessible
- Identify blockages that hinder the church from giving attention to children
- Give children tasks that matter
- Please rethink whether church is distinct from family or if a family can be church too; try to avoid compartmentalising life e.g. Passover starts in synagogue and continues at home
- What can the church do that the family can’t do?
- Open up discussion of prophetic role of church in society – e.g. how can the church address the problems of family in society
- Build bridges with what’s going on in schools; be aware of what is happening to children in school – exams; change of class or school; bullying
- What it means to receive the child and how it has changed our concept of child in church
- What would be a sensible response from the church to its children, in the way it uses its resources?
- Pay attention to special needs children
- Encourage children to use their gifts to express their faith
- CT is theology – a new perspective for the whole church – share Adina’s story with them and ask where the church is in this situation
- Make sure the children know the commandments. God says: teach these to your children

Day 4 (Monday)

Devotions

Ligia

Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, O LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.

But I have stilled and quieted my soul;
like a weaned child with its mother,
like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD
both now and forevermore.

When working with children for adoption I was often struck by the ability of children to talk about their situation. One child had been turned down and so he lived with me and my family. He always asked: what made you choose me? He asked who brought him for dedication in the church. He had no idea of mother but an idea of someone responsible.

Child Theology and Christology

Haddon

A few months after this consultation, a much larger conference was held by the Lausanne Movement. Haddon wrote a paper with that conference in mind. It is attached as Appendix 2. Though it was not presented at the Lausanne conference it was made available at this consultation and provided a background to our discussions on Christology.

Presentation

The early years of the Christian era were marked by struggles to understand Christ and his relationship with the Father. In Nicea in 325AD the incarnate Christ was stated to be of the same substance ('homoousion') as the Father, not a similar substance. This took some 50 years to be generally accepted but it only led on to another argument about the relationship between the divinity and humanity in incarnate Christ. Over a century later, this was resolved according to orthodox, mainstream Christian tradition at Chalcedon (451AD). This provides the framework in which we have Christological discussion. It says that the one person, Christ, has two natures, human and divine, each of which is complete and entire in itself, which are fully united without separation and without confusion and mixture.

This is still a key area of Christian theology producing many books. Our task is to ask: Is there any trace of a child in all this edifice?

There is perhaps a pointer in reference to Christ's nativity. Jesus began as a baby. There are New Testament stories of Jesus as a baby and one of him age 12. If Jesus the baby was God, these stories invite theological development. Reflecting on the birth and infancy of Jesus has generated a distinctive kind of child theology (though it has not as far as we know ever been given that label). John Saward, for example, in 'The Way of the Lamb'² argues that in the modern western world hating the child and being anti-Christian have gone together. This came to the fore in the 1890s, and he identifies five Catholic authors who confronted this: Thérèse of Lisieux; Péguy; Bernanos, von Balthasar; G K Chesterton. The baby is an example of dependence and humility. Saward says that being a little one, like the Infant Jesus, does not justify adults in being childish, but this is a controversial assessment. Babies do have power! They change lives.³

The kind of child theology I am working at is different from Saward's at many points. A key one is that it is not focused on or by the baby Jesus. I cannot expect everyone to agree with my approach. Indeed I know that Keith does not. I will explain what I think, but it is not a teaching which looks for assent, merely an idea which may merit discussion.

What kind of literature are the nativity narratives? It's interesting that Jesus never referred to his own birth as far as we know. The story is told in such a way as to show that the person being born has a pre-history. Both Matthew and Luke draw on much Old Testament material to show how he was promised. There is also an anticipation of the story to come "You shall call him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins". See also Lk 2:34-35 - to make sense of Simeon's song, which speaks of the enlightening of the Gentiles and the glory coming to God's people Israel, Luke had to write not just his Gospel but also Acts.

Babies come as blank pages on which parents try to write what they will and it takes some time before children assert their independence. The Gospels present Jesus as a baby as a proper space in which God, or his gospel writers and apostles, can write the fulfilment of his promise, the full godhead dwelling in the baby etc. Doesn't this go against the 'blank page' idea? What about 'seed' or 'blossom and fruit'? The child of promise? So I don't think this is a good place to start developing CT.

Bonhoeffer points out that, traditionally, Christology deals with the 'how?' question. But the real Christological question is: Who is he? In Mt 16, Jesus raises the Christological question in such a manner:

² T & T Clark, 1999

³ Compare Robin Maas: 'Christ the logos of childhood' in *Theology Today*

who do men say that I am? Jesus' reference to the children in the marketplace in Matthew 11 shows a quite unromantic view of children yet he can still say that God reveals the deep secrets to 'little children'⁴ Peter's response in Mt 16:17 should be seen in that light. It is a secret revealed by God not the product of human intuition or reasoning. Nevertheless, even with this revelation, Peter can still rebuke Jesus⁵. There is no Christology without discipleship because Jesus didn't just say that he was going to the cross but that his disciples would be going to the cross too⁶. This isn't made clear in the Chalcedon statement. Chalcedon could lead one to see the harmony of divine and human in large power structures but the discipleship in the way of the cross, such as exemplified by Francis of Assisi, challenges all this. Receiving a child means denying yourself, just as does taking up the cross. But unlike the cross, it speaks of life not death. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross." The child is one language or voice of God, just as the poor are. Not the only voice. It may be that this is a highly speculative reading of the Gospel.

Reflection

The group spent some time reflecting on the document and presentation about Christology and the impact that might be made by including a child in the midst. Some observations from the discussion are summarised below:

- There seems to be a danger in equating 'receiving the child' and 'taking up the cross' – it makes the child seem like a burden.
- What does 'love of death' mean? How does it take form in receiving a child?
- But others pointed out that the Bible indicates child is a gift to be received with joy and that taking up the cross can also be a joyful event, not necessarily painful.
- What does 'putting the child in the midst' say about who Jesus is? Especially in the context of the transfiguration with its several statements about who Jesus is.
- One group debated the relationship between child-centred projects and churches in the context of a church-planting agency. They often seemed to be antagonistic, two separate poles. So, a link between receiving a child and radical discipleship is very helpful. A more positive relationship between the two is found in the PEPE project in Brazil which set out to receive children in the favelas and ended up by receiving new churches.
- Receiving a child is about being out of control because we don't know how a child will turn out.
- Why think about receiving a child in the context of the entire Christ event – including resurrection, ascension – and the trinity/HS
- What is the price of discipleship and of receiving a child? Is it the same price?
- The reception of a child is a continuing sacrifice for both mother and father and reminds of the 'living sacrifice' of Rm 12:1
- Thought about this with the idea of imitating Christ, this is also a kind of sacrifice.
- Receiving a child might also treat a child as a commodity as the world does. If the church were to do it differently, it could be a model for the world.

Haddon's paper on the Uniqueness of Christ should lead us to be more deeply rooted in Christ because the process is ongoing, not a once for all event.

Child Theology and Education

Keith

In considering Education we moved from a major theological issue to a major social issue. Learning is generally assumed to be a good thing, even if the way it's done is not. It is easy to assume that children and their best interests are central to education but they may not be. For example, education sometimes appears primarily to be about teachers and adult agendas.

⁴ Mt 11:25-6

⁵ Mt 16:22-23

⁶ Mt 16:24

Introduction

On first thinking about education from the perspective of CT we might assume that here is an activity or institution that is non-problematical. That is certainly how it seems to appear in the mission statements and policies of FBOs and the CRC⁷. For surely “the child” is in the centre of the whole process of education? But once we pause to ponder this we realise that it is not that simple.

Is it “child-centred” or “child-focussed”? This distinction often seems elusive but it may be of critical importance, particularly to those who have made child-centredness the basis of their engagement with children. Perhaps we can help to define the differences. But as we do so, we need to be aware whether we are taking the child as “placed by Jesus in the midst” or whether we are dealing with the thinking and feelings evoked by our human reactions to concepts of child and children (that is, child in the midst without reference or relation to Jesus).

People react differently to children. Some are stimulated creatively while others are stimulated to horror. Children don’t have in themselves a particular message. It’s when Jesus places the child in the midst, with his words, that the child becomes a conveyor of particular meaning.

Last night we did an exercise of writing a letter to our pastors. We were not the first to use the genre of a letter (rather than a list, “framework” or creed) as a means of distilling our thoughts for practical use. For example, I have some letters that a grandfather wrote on taking his grandson to school for the first time.⁸ They have a lot to say about education and indeed, it may be that we can use and reflect on these letters: they encapsulate for me exactly how we might set about thinking on this subject. If we were to write a letter or letters on CT and education to whom would we address them: to church, state, parents, children or teachers? If so would we be able to send the same letter? What would the differences be, and why?

What follows is an initial attempt to map out some of the ground in a very rudimentary way, and it is offered to this consultation in order that we can at least establish what a map of this subject should look like. We are thinking here not about an exhaustive mapping of every aspect of education, but a map that highlights education from the perspective of CT.

1. The Kingdom of Heaven/God’s Way of Doing Things

A starting point would seem to be to ask how far a philosophy (I prefer this term to the more common term “system”) of education serves the Kingdom of God, and how far it serves other purposes. What would education look like if it started with the actions and teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven? Would it be upside-down, inside-out and back to front compared to what we tend to find at present and in history?

We might do well to ask who or what the existing systems or philosophies of education serve? Do they serve the state and its economy, social control, children, parents and families, church or other purposes and groups? Do we shape the child to fit the system or shape the institution to fit the child? We should be aiming to create an environment in which we help the child become what God intended him/her to be.

There may be other questions that flow immediately from this approach and perhaps we should pause to identify them before proceeding any further. When map-making it is vital to establish the overall intention and perspective of the map before going into detail and, perhaps, CT by its nature helps particularly at this fundamental stage of any analysis.

Church History gives many horrific examples of education supposedly based on the Kingdom of God. They were often totalitarian and oppressive. We may, to some extent, avoid such mistakes by speaking of ‘God’s way of doing things’ rather than earthly power-based structures, such as ‘Kingdoms’.

2. Child

CT must ask what type of child and what philosophy/theology of child does education have in mind. Is it aiming at “normal” children with others on the periphery? Or does it start with children who have special gifts and needs and thus bring them in from the margins?

And is the concept or understanding of children clear? Are children naturally good as Rousseau seems to maintain in his major work on education, *Emile*? Are children essentially sinful as Augustine, Jonathan Edwards and many other theologians have argued?

CT cannot be silent at this point. It matters greatly when we start with the child placed by Jesus in the midst. That must surely be every child, and Jesus probably sees them differently from the way they are seen by

⁷ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

⁸ Attached in Appendix 3

other humans and institutions. How does Jesus see children? Surely he has an adequate understanding of them as created in God's image, as well as the effects of sin and the Fall? The two insights go hand in hand.

- What understandings of child do we find in existing models of education? Are they adequate?
- Is the child a child or a potential adult? We may need to pause here to ask what the child has in common with adults and what the differences between them are. How does education work with this creative tension?
- Does education consider the whole child or does it stress the cognitive and physical, rather than the affective and spiritual? If the state is seen mainly responsible for education should it concern itself with the spiritual?
- What do we understand to be the gifts and needs of the growing child that should be received, met and nurtured?
- How do children learn best about the things of the Kingdom of Heaven? Catechisms, stories, experiments, play and so on need to be considered. We might do well to see what Jesus preferred.

What other issues are missing here?

3. *Teacher*

Similarly, CT must ask about teachers.

- Are we assuming the teacher is a mature and trained adult? If so what would be the maturity and training that would best equip her for teaching or modelling the Kingdom of Heaven?
- Does this teacher have autonomy so that he or she can respond to a child directly and spontaneously or does the teacher have a "script"? If the teacher is operating a programme or curriculum who decides what it is?
- Is the teacher and the school an agent of social control? In this case might the teacher actually prevent children from coming to Jesus, and presenting an alternative (upside-down) way of living?
- Has the teacher arrived in the sense of having no more to learn, or are the child and the teacher both children of the same Heavenly Father? Does it include the child as educator? This is surely a vital aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven: the child is in the midst not just to learn but to be the means of adults learning too. A poem I love by a teacher, Jane Clements, of the Bruderhof Community puts it like this

"Child, though I take your hand
 and walk in the snow;
 though we follow the track of the mouse together.
 Though we try to unlock the mystery
 of the printed work, and slowly discover
 why two and three makes five
 always, in an uncertain world -
 Child, though I am meant to teach you much,
 what is it, in the end,
 except that together we are
 meant to be children
 of the same Father
 and I must unlearn
 all the adult structure
 and the cumbering years
 and you must teach me
 to look at the earth and the heaven
 with your fresh wonder."

- Can non-Christian teachers be the means of introducing children to the Kingdom of Heaven?

What other issues are missing here?

4. *School*

And a CT reflection on schools might give rise to questions such as these:

- Are schools necessary to education as seen from a CT perspective?
- If learning is lifelong shouldn't everyone go to school?

- Schools should be communities where individual children learn aspects of relationships that develop their awareness of the social nature of their being beyond that learnt in families. Is bullying endemic to schools?
- Are there some types of school that are closer to the Kingdom of Heaven model than others? If so what are they? This may require a look at philosophies of education. My own interim conclusion is that Fröbel offers one of the best models for such a process of learning. He asked how children learn and studied mothers and their children for many years. He believed that all education started with movement: sitting in a circle not lines; helping the soul of the child to connect with whole of the Universe; a creative environment, preferably outside, drawing from the natural world.
- Does the age of children in a class or a school matter? Would CT suggest that little children should be the priority in the system? If so would kindergartens be given a higher status than universities, for example?
- Does CT have anything to say about church schools? Home schooling? If so in a contemporary context it needs to consider all faith-based schooling.

What other issues are missing here?

5. Church and Faith Communities

If education is about lifelong learning and about all of life, not just certain subjects in a curriculum taught in a school, then the church has a strategic role in education.

- Should children's ministry be modelled on secular schools and their teaching philosophies and methods?
- Can churches provide models of learning where the child is in the midst that pioneer new forms *for the state*?
- What would CT derive from the actions and teaching of Jesus, the Jewish community of which he was a part? Festivals, sacraments and worship seem to have played an important part in the learning process of Israelite children: When your children ask what it means then tell them. Jesus did a lot of his teaching at the time of festivals and by making conscious links.
- Does the relationship between the boy who offered his loaves and fish and Jesus provide any clues about how learning might be facilitated? The disciples have a role in the story as told by John that comes close to coming between the boy and Jesus. Does the church do this?
- Where does family fit into all this? Should it not be seen as part of church and closely linked with all the child's learning? If it does not do so, and there is a disjuncture between schooling and church, what does this imply for the learning of the child? CT will need to think carefully about this because its key reference points to date tend to focus on a single child placed by Jesus without reference to the family of the child.
- What is the rationale for children's ministry? What is its philosophy whether in local churches or FBOs? Are there any examples of Jesus talking to and interacting with children except in the presence of adults?
- Who are the leading lights in children's religious education and whence do they draw their philosophy? Westerhoff, Cavaletti, Berryman are key figures in the West, for example.

There is much in the Bible about children and their development. How does CT draw from and disseminate it? What other issues are missing here?

Conclusion

There may be other people who have asked the question that gave rise to this paper. If so I do not know of their work. It has therefore been a tentative foray into a vast territory and the map may be hopelessly inadequate. However it is obvious that CT has much to contribute to Christian thinking and Christian practice in and models of education.

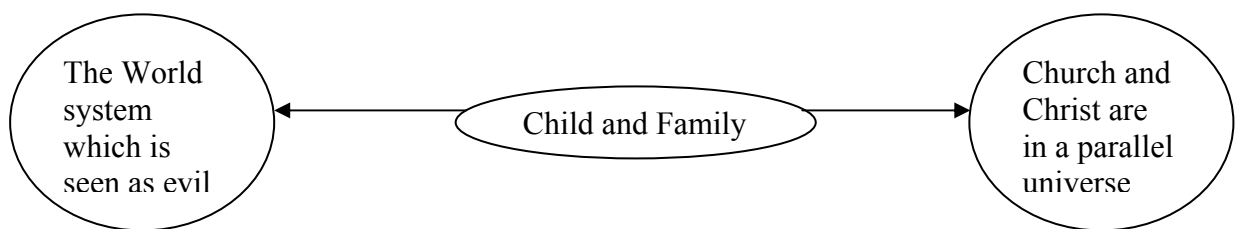
This conference is the first in the CT series that has devoted substantial time to the matter. Perhaps in post Communist Europe, CT has a particular part to play in supporting churches in the development of new models and communities of learning that can be offered to the state. Whether or not this is so, the placing of CT and education side by side will likely as not have more to teach us as adults about ourselves, society, and church than about children. And the wisest teachers seem to know this already. The child in the midst is not placed there by Jesus so that the disciples might gaze at him or her in order to practice a model of mission or

education, but so that they might learn more about the Kingdom of Heaven, and in so doing come to know and receive Jesus in a better and fuller way.

Group Reflection

Groups looked at the place of the family in society and also at the role of education.

In Eastern Europe, there are two common Christian attitudes to family and society. One is the evangelical model (illustrated below) where the family and child are caught in the middle between Christ and church on one side and a world which is evil on the other side – Daniel called this a theological tension. The Child and Family are not at home in the world or the church but are lost in limbo in the middle. Haddon then asked: where is God? Is God only in the church and the world is left to the Devil? This seems a pretty poor understanding of God. Is Christ in the church or with the child/family? Christ is seeking and saving the lost. The church should go where Christ goes. Are the family and child torn apart by this difference or can they be a place of redemption, mediation, forming a bridge? The other model is the Orthodox: that the church and family are in the world and therefore the public schools can teach the child religion. Haddon thought the problem with this model is that the church does not do the work to decide and explain what God means in the world. What does the question of God mean for us here?



This is a practical question which demonstrates the relevance of child theology. Does the place of child and family in the model deny the Kingdom of God? Once we see the child in our mind as God sees the child we might discover the Servant church – serving the needs of the child. How should the church see the child/family in relation to the world? Could it be that in reference to the child and family that the church and the world are out of tune with where God is? We must receive the child where God has placed the child.

If we take this evangelical view of things (given that the world is evil) you could have families and children (just ordinary people) isolated and very frail. If the church is not on your side adequately and the world is not on your side adequately then you are in a fix. God in Jesus goes out into the wicked world – into the dark areas. God goes to the area of the lostness. It could be that in Romania the child/family is where Christ is going – the church should follow.

The groups also looked at the educational system. In Romania after the revolution, evangelical groups started up an alternative education system, from kindergartens to University. But now we find that people produced in such a system are prepared to live in a different kind of society from the one around them. The alternative in Romania, is a state system set up to provide social control. The assumption is that the state knows best and all people are treated as children.

Prague at night

In the evening, the group left the security and comfort of the seminary to visit Prague, to enjoy a meal together and to ‘see the sights’. But there was more to it than that. We also had the ‘child in our midst’ in another way as we joined Luran on her mission to trafficked women. We saw how Prague has become a tourist hotspot for Westerners because of access to cheap beer and prostitutes, many still children.

Day 5 (Tuesday)

Devotions

Danuta

I lived most of my life in a Free Church environment, characterised by pietism, sometimes fundamentalism, occasionally dispensationalism. As I started my studies, I found I became more

sacramental and particularly attracted to Celtic spirituality. They have ethnic connections with Romania and close connections with eastern spirituality – close to nature, Trinitarian, non-hierarchical, missionary etc.

St Patrick's breastplate 8C

Old Irish, eighth-century prayer.

I rise today
in the power's strength, invoking the Trinity
believing in threeness,
confessing the oneness,
of creation's Creator.

I rise today
in the power of Christ's birth and baptism,
in the power of his crucifixion and burial,
in the power of his rising and ascending,
in the power of his descending and judging.

I rise today
in the power of the love of cherubim,
in the obedience of angels
and service of archangels,
in hope of rising to receive the reward,
in the prayers of patriarchs,
in the predictions of the prophets,
in the preaching of apostles,
in the faith of confessors,
in the innocence of holy virgins,
in the deeds of the righteous.

I rise today
in heaven's might,
in sun's brightness,
in moon's radiance,
in fire's glory,
in lightning's quickness,
in wind's swiftness,
in sea's depth,
in earth's stability,
in rock's fixity.

I rise today
with the power of God to pilot me,
God's strength to sustain me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look ahead for me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to protect me.

God's way before me,
God's shield to defend me,
God's host to deliver me,
from snares of devils,
from evil temptations,
from nature's failings,
I Cor 13:1-7

from all who wish to harm me,
far or near,
alone and in a crowd.

Around me I gather today all these powers
against every cruel and merciless force
to attack my body and soul,
against the charms of false prophets,
the black laws of paganism,
the false laws of heretics,
the deceptions of idolatry,
against spells cast by women, smiths, and
druids,
and all unlawful knowledge that harms the
body and soul.

May Christ protect me today
against poison and burning,
against drowning and wounding,
so that I may have abundant reward;
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind
me;
Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ
above me;
Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of
me;
Christ in my lying, Christ in my sitting, Christ
in my rising;
Christ in the heart of all who think of me,
Christ on the tongue of all who speak to me,
Christ in the eye of all who see me,
Christ in the ear of all who hear me.

I rise today
in power's strength, invoking the Trinity,
believing in threeness,
confessing the oneness,
of creation's Creator.

For to the Lord belongs salvation,
and to the Lord belongs salvation
and to Christ belongs salvation.
May your salvation, Lord, be with us always.

Prayer from Oliver Davies and Fiona Bowie,
*Celtic Christian Spirituality: An Anthology of
Medieval and Modern Sources*
(SPCK, 1995).

What Does Love Mean?

A group of 4- to 8-year-olds were once asked: "What does love mean?" Here are the answers they gave to this question:

Eight Year Olds

Emily – "Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mommy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss."

Jessica – "You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People tend to forget."

Rebecca – "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."

Seven Year Olds

Bobby – "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

Chris – "Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is more handsome than Robert Redford."

Danny – "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK."

Six Year Olds

Mark – "Love is when Mommy sees Daddy on the toilet and she doesn't think it's gross."

Nikka – "If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend whom you hate."

Tommy – "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well."

Five Year Olds

Elaine – "Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken."

Karl – "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other."

Billy – "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth."

Four Year Olds

Lauren – "I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and then has to go out and buy new ones."

Mary Ann – "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day."

Terri – "Love is what makes you smile when you're tired."

And the final one

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a 4 year old child whose next door neighbour was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked him what he had said to the neighbour, the little boy said: "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

Practical Outcomes of the Consultation

The group brainstormed some possible practical outcomes from our discussions. We tried to offer suggestions appropriate for churches, for governments, for faith-based NGOs and for CTM itself.

What should I say to my church?

- Develop a programme to teach the church about the significance of the child
- Develop teaching programmes for children inside and outside the church
- Teach children how to relate to the outside world
- Encourage involvement of children in church programmes
- Make the church aware of this meeting and the issues raised

- Encourage the church to develop projects to bridge the gap with the community
- Encourage the church to develop more supportive groups for the workers
- Promote a recognition that theology is not only what is done in academic departments but also done by practitioners as they think and talk about/with/to God
- Promote theological reflection on the work of the church in society, especially work with children
- Introduce CT to the Catechism programme for the Orthodox church “Christ to the Children” (Gospel Light)
- Find ways of introducing CT to the emerging church

What should I say to my country?

- Change the legislation so that children and families are not seen as objects for the benefit of the state
- Lobby advocacy groups for and with the child (e.g. Pro Child Romania)
- Set up new seminaries for caregivers – all those involved in working with children
- Promote dialogue between CT and secular institutions regarding Child Development theory and Educational philosophy

What should I say to FBOs?

- Note: some of the thinking and application needs to be matured before being presented to FBOs
- Encourage them to do find their motivation from the name of Jesus
- Promote dialogue with CT
- Encourage theological reflection so that they do not just follow secular trends and language
- Create platforms where CT can speak into FBOs
- Promotion of interdisciplinary dialogue through conferences and symposia re ‘family and society’ etc
- Promote networking among the FBOs
- Promote a responsible body to monitor standards in FBOs
- Encourage FBOs to interface better with the state, to be transparently accountable to the secular authorities
- Encourage FBOs to be more reflective, to temper (and enhance) their activism

What should CTM do next in Europe?

- Explore the possibility of partnership with local FBOs e.g. Areopagus
- Explore possibility of CT courses in seminaries e.g. Elim Evangelical seminary in Timisoara
- Promote the ‘Celebrating Children’ course in churches and involve Sunday School teachers
- Work with CEF in Romania (Asociatia Misionară Pentru Educarea Copiilor) – establish a dialogue with CTM
- Promote interactive conferences
- Develop dialogue with key leaders in Romania
- Train churches
- Set up a Resource centre?
- Convene a Romanian meeting with academic deans/principals
- Send out Prague report to Europe mailing list
- CTM needs to reach out if it is to have an impact!

*We closed the consultation with a devotion, reflecting on the meaning and implications of the consultation for each of us, and then by saying **The Grace together.***

Appendix 1: Understanding God's Heart Biblical Framework

1. God creates every unique person as a child with dignity.

We all begin life as children, created in the image of God. Children are born fully human, with identity and purpose. The journey of childhood is part of God's plan. All people reflect God's image through living in loving community with him and one another. Children most fully express their God-given dignity in glorifying Him.

God intends that no one prevent a child's life from fulfilling His purpose. Respecting the image of God in every child demands a Christ-like response to nurture them throughout childhood.

Some biblical references:

Gen. 1:26-31; 2:18-25 (creation)	Jer. 29
Ex. 22	Mt. 18:1-10 ("millstone," welcoming children)
Ps. 8	Mt. 21:15-16
Ps. 139	Jas. 1:27
Ecc. 11:9	

2. Children need parental love in a broken world.

God's design is for each child to be born, vulnerable and dependent, to loving parents within the covenant of marriage. God's desire is for each child to grow in this secure, caring environment. In a fallen world, people and relationships can be damaged. When parents struggle to fulfil their intended role, others must provide dedicated care for them and their children.

God intends for all children to be raised by at least one loving, committed adult.

Some biblical references:

Ps. 68:5 (Father to the fatherless)	Zeph. 3:14
Ps. 127:4	Mt. 1; Luke 2 (Nativity story)
Prov. 17:6; 22:6	Eph. 6:1-4
Hos. 11:1-8 (Ephraim)	Col. 3:20

3. God gives children as a gift to welcome and nurture.

It is a privilege to join with children in celebrating their uniqueness, embracing childhood as formative for the whole person. Family, friends, church and the local community are responsible for creating an environment that promotes children's well-being.

God intends for children to thrive in stable and loving relationships.

Some biblical references:

Gen. 21:17-20; 30:17-20	Mt. 18:1-14
1 Sam. 2	Luke 1:47-56, 67-79; 2:52
Ps. 127-128	Eph. 4:32; 5:1,2
Prov. 22:6	1 Thes. 2:7-12
Hos. 11:1-4	1 Tim. 4:12
Zech. 6:1-9	

4. Society has a God-given responsibility for the well-being of children and families.

All children and families live in society and are dependent on institutions for healthcare, shelter, access to social services, safe drinking water, information and safety. The church must collaborate with these institutions for the common good, and if they fail, the church must speak and act with and on behalf of the vulnerable.

God intends children to flourish in a just society. Some biblical references:

Dt. 6; 10:18	Amos
1 Sam. 8:1-22	Mic. 6:8

Ps. 89:14	Mt. 5-7
Prov. 28:5	Mt. 25 (goats and sheep)
Is. 10:1-3 (curse for unjust)	Rom. 13:1-7
Is. 28:17; 58	Jas. 1:27
Lam. 2:19	

5. Children are a promise of hope for every generation.

Each generation has a unique contribution in God's purposes for human history. Children have been shaped by the history of their community, are living fully in the present moment, and will reshape their community for the future.

God intends that each generation will extend faith and fullness of life to the next. God intends that this generation grasp the centrality of children to his purposes for our time.

Some biblical references:

Gen. 15:5; 16:10 (Isaac, Ishmael)	Ps. 2:8
Gen. 25:19-24 (Jacob and Esau)	Ps. 90:1 ("shelter to every generation")
Gen. 48:15-49:28 (Jacob's blessings and curses)	Ps. 127:3
Dt. 11:18-21 (teaching children)	Mt. 1 (genealogies)
2 Kgs. 22:1-2 (Josiah)	Mt. 9:15-17; Luke 5:38 ("new wine")
Est. 4:14	Heb. 13:7 ("Alpha and Omega")

6. God welcomes children fully into the family of faith.

Children are essential to the life and ministry of the church, bringing spiritual gifts and abilities and fulfilling definite roles. The church needs to be a place where children may dynamically connect with God and engage in meaningful participation; disciplined, equipped and empowered for life and ministry. As members of the family of God, children are to be cared for as sons and daughters and are part of the admonition to love and serve one another.

God intends for churches to provide children with opportunities to know him and fulfil their calling in the body of Christ.

Some biblical references:

2 Kgs. 22:1-2 (Josiah)	Matt. 21:12-16;
Ps. 8:2	Luke 2:41-50 (Jesus in temple, knowing Father's work)
Matt. 5:1-19 ("Bless them that persecute you"; Beatitudes)	Rom. 12:4-16 (one another, body of Christ)
Matt. 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48 (Jesus welcoming a little child)	Rom. 15:7 (welcome one another)
Matt. 19:13-15; Mk 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17	Eph. 4:32; 5:21 (be kind; submit to one another)

7. Children are essential to the mission of God.

God desires every child in every generation across the world to know Him and make Him known. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus calls the whole Church to reconcile relationships: with God, with family, with community and with society.

God intends that His Church be a witness in every community of His transforming power, so that His purpose for every child can be accomplished.

Some biblical references:

Gen. 12:2-4 (Abrahamic Covenant)	Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-18, 20; Lk. 4:16-20;
Is. 6:8 ("Whom shall I send?")	Jn. 20:21 (Great Commission passages)
Is. 61:1-4	Rom. 12:4-5 ("We are one body.")
Mt. 22:37-39; Lk. 10:25-37 (Great Commandment)	2 Cor. 5: ("ministry of reconciliation")
Jn. 3:16	Rev. (whole creation waits in anticipation)

Appendix 2: Child Theology and the Uniqueness of Christ as a Lausanne Theme

The uniqueness of Christ is opposed to the threats of inter-religious relativism. Defending it is intended to ground the identity of Christian faith in mission. Mission is necessary and valid because there is no other Name by which we may be saved.

Contending for the uniqueness of Christ in the religious market place is a key characteristic of most Evangelicalism. It contributes to the energetic, outgoing, not to say aggressive-defensive behaviour of Evangelical Christianity – and it allows Christians to justify such behaviour rather than question it. Instead of seeing it as a form of competitive human behaviour, they see it as the necessary true response to the truth of God in Christ. So in our assertions of the uniqueness of Christ, we can easily refuse to see ourselves in humility and truth.

One dangerous consequence of building a movement and mission around the assertion and defence of the uniqueness of Christ is that we end up with a shallow assertive religion. Instead of being deeply rooted *in Christ*, we make statements *about Christ*. It may be – at least we ought to consider whether – the deeper we go into Christ and the longer we walk with Christ, the less our faith consists in statements about Christ, in which Christ is compared with others.

In the depths, Christ does not assert uniqueness. The saving truth Christ reveals to us is not that he is unique. The saving truth is that he who was in the form of God – who somehow shared in the uniqueness of the one incomparable God – became human, one of billions who have only relative differences from each other, and this becoming human was achieved by the route of becoming a servant, a way of being in which identity is surrendered to the master. And this he lived out to the point of dying on the Cross, a humbling loss of identity and all beauty (Isa 53). This is how he was in the world – and how we his disciples are to be. This is the mind we have in Christ. This complete surrender and loss of superior difference, (of which, perhaps, uniqueness is the ultimate form) is followed by God's giving him a Name above every name. Does this eschatological-doxological uniqueness cancel out the incarnational loss of distinct identity? Could it be as though it never happened, has no lasting significance, or has nothing any longer to say to those who know him in and after this exaltation by God? That is not what this text suggests and, overall, is a thoroughly unchristian view. The Name above every name is bestowed on Jesus only as the one who lost any such name in his earthly life – and who remains in heaven the Lamb bearing rich wounds in beauty glorified. The Name above every name is none other than the Name of one who did not care for or defend his dignity or anything approaching uniqueness in his earthly life. This life constitutes him and gives substance to his name. Without this life 'Christ' has no more content than a transferable title, a transliteration of the Greek word for 'anointed'.

The defensive missionary insistence on the uniqueness of Christ is in danger of expressing a post-resurrection triumphalism, built up through the modern global power of Christian countries. These countries, first from old Europe and now from the USA, have come to dominate the world, by trade supported militarily and with various cultural adjuncts, in which Christian mission has played an ambiguous direct and even more often indirect role. The spread of Christianity has never been uncontested – and Christians have always had to justify religious, converting mission. Secular westerners have often been hostile to Christian mission because they merely want freedom to move through the world, always in an advantageous position, able to exploit and profit from the world. They do not want to provoke unnecessary religious sensitivities – let other people have their religions so long as we can get the profits out of them. So Christian mission has had to justify itself against both other religions and cultures in their homelands, and against the pragmatism of trade. Capitalism now dominates the world – and contemporary mission depends on it. No longer do missionaries from Europe think they are representing Christian societies, to non-Christian and so deficient societies. Some North American missionaries may still be labouring under that illusion. But

missionaries from India, who now comprise the second largest national grouping of intercultural missionaries in the world, have never had a base in a Christian national culture. It is the globalisation now achieved by capitalism, by the freedom of money in the world that makes mission possible. And because capitalism is the framework and enabler of Christian mission, Christian mission tends to conform to its requirements – either play the game by its rules, or get out. Whereas once the uniqueness of Christ could be assumed in mission, with the same bland insouciance of the Englishman who walked the world assured of his superiority, now every product has to prove itself in competition. It has to assert its excellence, indispensability, uniqueness. So the post-resurrection triumphalism that can be generated from the Christian story itself, but it is intensified and shaped by the struggle for religious market share in the contemporary world.

Asserting the uniqueness of Christ is an advertising task. And those who live by advertising will die by it, spinning in shallowness.

The question for Lausanne, for Evangelicalism, is whether we can be relaxed enough about the uniqueness of Christ, free from anxiety, so that we are ever more rooted in the reality of the Christ who was free not to protect and hold on to his uniqueness.

Child theology is concerned with the deeper rooting, not the assertion of claims.

In the Gospel, the disciples disputed about who should be the greatest in the kingdom of God – and Jesus then set a child in the midst.

When disciples are saintly enough to give up such personal ambitions, when they know it is not religiously correct, they may yet express all the same passion for greatness by arguing for the Lord's superiority. (Indeed, there is an inner link between the concern to be greatest and Peter's satanic 'far be it from you, Lord'.) The uniqueness of Christ, if asserted loudly enough (it cannot be proved by quiet reasoning) may satisfy our carnal desires to belong to the best winning team.

Jesus sets the child in the midst.

This has a double significance. First, it is a way by which Jesus calls us from arrogance and ambition for greatness, which always implies putting others down. He takes a child, who is not in the race for greatness at all, to tell us about how to enter the kingdom. He questions our concern with greatness by recommending humility. He thus generates an *argument about our values, spiritual standards and goals*.

Secondly, by setting the child in the midst, Jesus invites us into a kind of life that is not merely free of the quest for greatness, but goes beyond the argument in favour of humility and selflessness. It goes beyond argument about values to the practice of living and serving. For Jesus does not only pose the child as a model of humility – as though all the disciples have to do is to see the model and to copy it in their own life, to become children. (Indeed I am sure that Jesus cannot have led us into such a faithless unsocial impracticability – if this is all he meant, there would be little here to free the disciples from the ambition to be greatest, for he would merely be redefining the criterion of greatness.) What Jesus does is to link *becoming like children* with *receiving the child in his Name*.

That means we cannot become like children without children. Becoming like children is not the attempt to transform our selves into something different by remodelling ourselves. It means we have to let ourselves go enough to receive, to give space, to another being, a kind of being who is both receivable by us (children are very acceptable to adult human beings, in a way that slugs and fleas and tigers are not) and will take us out of ourselves, by giving respect and attention, resources and care to another. To model ourselves to be like a child is a narcissism with the smell of death about it – it runs away from our personal adulthood into a make-believe that cannot succeed.

To receive a child is to be taken into life, with the promise of new life. It is where we receive grace because we become givers in a most mysterious way: the adult has the power and responsibility, the ordering initiative, and yet the form of the giving is set by the child (that is what respect involves) and within it, the child is 'received' – so the dominant responsible giver finds himself as the receiver.

In this living process, there is thus much more than an attack on the idea of the quest for greatness, proving a claim either on our own behalf or for Christ; there is a discovery of the way into the kingdom, through liberation from destructive ambition and competition. And the child takes us into living process, because the child is a whole living creature, who cannot be received merely as an idea. And this is a living process because the child by his direct presence to us invites and calls us to be committed to him in the long term: the child is not comforted by friendly words now which come to nothing tomorrow. The child can very early ask questions of a grandparent about how long he will be there for him. And even if a child does not ask, the question is present and can be heard by the adult who attends to the child as child, who truly tries to receive him. The child in his being, beyond what he can articulate, calls out to be received into a living process, which is not just sweets today, but is a real promise of what will be worked out as the child grows.

There are many illustrations and exemplifications of this: for example, the damage to children of being abandoned, which imposes on them more than they can cope with, when parents break up badly or when children are moved from one foster home to another and discover again and again that what purported to be a welcoming reception was an empty promise. After a few such episodes, they no longer hope, they see all offers of reception as empty. Another illustration that deserves more exploration is provided by Arthur Ransome who wrote his books with and for a group of children whom he idolised at one stage of their growth. When they got a bit older, and independent, and no longer fitted in with his ideas, he gave up on them, angrily, so I have heard. He received the child not in a life *process* with a genuine promise of loving companionship but into a life *moment* subject to his own criteria.

To see that receiving a child is a life process may be helpful in thinking about how child theology might relate to the evangelical interest in the uniqueness of Christ. For when Jesus points us to the child in this way (whoever receives a child in my name, receives me...) he is teaching us, not in word only but in life, to be rooted in him, not just to make assertions about him. And this kind of rooting in Christ has its own human substance, struggles, cross and reward. It is life in Christ. Whether or not it is unique ceases to be so pressing or important a question. It is certainly seen as a speculative argumentation which cannot be settled and may bring us into shallowness and arrogance.

There is hardly any need, is there, to argue that the mission church is to be rooted in Christ and not merely to be making assertions about Christ, to be living in Christ's way, not merely carrying on effective theological advertising on his behalf. Well, may be there is. There is need for us to work at theology so that theology is informed by the life of Christ and serves and encourages. This is so much better than what it is so obviously suited for: making theories and slogans, and conducting arguments about God and Christ between different kinds of Christians and with people of other faiths and ideologies.

Child theology is theology that not only sees the child in the midst but is also a theologically articulate and reflective reception of the child, intertwined with all sorts of activities that contribute to the holistic reception of all children. The reception of children is done – or not done – by all sorts of people starting with mother and father and siblings and the wider family. Theology never takes their place. But it contributes something vital: it brings into the open the significance of receiving the child 'in My Name'. Theology is intertwined with all that goes into receiving the child in life process.

As it follows all these activities, in their success and failure, theology follows God where his love takes him. He creates and receives children. He runs his kingdom so that children are the typical stuff of it.

Children lead theology, and life, to an experience of the love of God in which God goes out to everyone, untroubled by protecting or asserting uniqueness. People concerned for children at risk may be rooted in Christ so that they see every child, regardless of his religion, as valued in the love of God. So it is not simply conformity to contemporary liberal political correctness that leads such work to be unassertive about the uniqueness of Christ. Workers may believe Christ is unique, in some arcane reserve, but they do not allow their practice to be shaped by protective anxiety, competitive mission identity, or triumphalist assertion. They know themselves to be called more deeply into Christ, through practice in loving those that Christ gives to them and they then have little time and energy to think intensively about the problems of uniqueness. There is a great danger that if they go on talking in the slogans of uniqueness, that this language becomes ever thinner, in their own ears and for their hearers. This is in contrast to the depth there is in the life of service and love - a life which is not unthinking or untheological but is articulated in exploring the riches of the depths of Christ rather than talk of the uniqueness of Christ.

All this is not to say that there are no issues about the status of Christianity in relation to other faiths, or that the uniqueness of Christ is not at some level a question that must be considered – at the very least to prevent it doing damage to the Christian spirit and mission. But it is not where theological attention should be concentrated in Christian mission. We should be concerned to explore Christ, in faith not in anxiety; to be more fully converted to Christ, not more assertive about him. And it is in my view disappointing, if not worse, that the only terms in which a section of Lausanne is directed to speak specifically theologically about Christ and the Gospel in the world, (rather than talking about some aspect of mission activity and its context) is in this section II with the focus on the uniqueness of Christ. It reflects the tendency amongst Evangelicals to assume that we already know and have the Gospel, that we are Gospel people informed by its adequate and regular presentation in our churches. So the problem in mission is to defend what we have against unfair or ignorant opposition and to persuade more people to accept our truth.

The Gospel stories of Jesus and his disciples suggest a different relation. The disciples do not know and have much to learn in life with Jesus. Even when they think they know, they turn out not to know the truth as it is in Jesus. And unlearning what they are proud to know is a very painful process. Evangelicals in contemporary mode, like many Roman Catholics, suffer from what has often but not quite always been the disease of leaving the learning disciples of the Gospels to the liberals. We know and receive the full Gospel, and we live after the resurrection, and know by the Spirit the Risen Christ. Even without the Pope and the magisterium, Evangelicals tend to be sure they possess the truth and are able to instruct others.

Child theology is rooted in Jesus with his disciples – this Jesus is no less than the Christ, for the Christ is nothing without God who has come in the flesh.

Appendix 3: Letters from a Grandfather to his Grandson

Dear N,

You will be four in June this year and in September you will go to school. That is too early, we think, and we would much prefer you to have the leisure of our German friends until you are Schulreif, at the age of six. It clearly does not disadvantage them in the long run. But we are playing along with the system, even though it is driven by the panic our national business leaders who think you won't be able to spell and count well enough for them unless they get you into school now and start pushing you through the regime of tests.

Well, education is a blessing, even though it always comes in dangerous and inadequate forms. And from the beginning, what you get out of it will depend on how you take it. There will always be something to put you off, something you can take the wrong way, some excuse for thinking education is not worth the effort. Something may happen to you on your first day at school which may alienate you and make it seem like a prison not a liberation. Or it may seem overwhelmingly mysterious, as it was for me in my first school, where I sat on a bench with other children without having a clue why I was there or what was going on – so that I learnt nothing from it, except the taste of milk and cake at break time. I don't think it will be like that for you, because you have already grown up to be gregarious, both at home and in nursery, whereas I grew up in an almost solitary dream with my mother for those first five or six years. And when I met another child, I remember now, I did not know what to say. You are not like that – and school is no longer like that.

There is less reliance on coercion now to induct little children into school. If you don't like it, and are unhappy, people will talk to you and listen. They do not expect you as a matter of course to grit your teeth and get on with it. They know you cannot do well, you cannot be well, if you are not enjoying it. That is how it should be. And it is at least the theory, though you may still slip through the net in practice, and it will never be possible to eliminate every last bully or insensitive person from the system or the bad luck through which some become their victims. By going to school you are going into a very dangerous place. You may be warped for life by it. The system certainly takes a fair chunk of your life and sets about forming you. Much of the process happens as you are put in groups and have to take the rough with the smooth. There may be talk about respecting each person's individuality, but you will have to buy respect by fitting into classes of thirty and schools of hundreds. There is no other way universal education can be practised. And you may pay that price and not get the kind of respect you need at the points when you need it. Your mother, ten years ago, did not get the support of the school when her young life was getting confused. The school took the view that she had her chance the same as everyone else and if she did not take it on the terms on which it was offered, they could wash their hands of her, for ought she not to be taking responsibility for herself – at 13 or so? There are quite a number who get into her extreme situation. In the light of such performance, it would be wrong to go on *simply* praising the school and the dedication of the teachers, it would be even worse to go on trusting their expertise. But I can see that they probably could not have done much else. They were human. They were being pressured by Sir Keith Joseph and his successors. They had many problems. Some of them were weary; some were not very intelligent; some had a defective pelagian view of human beings and morality – they knew very little about grace and love. They knew no other way to keep a school going, and they were given, at the best, mixed up help by those who were running the system. And we as parents were also human. We did not know what was happening to your mother at that crucial time in her life. We took the symptoms seriously and responded as generously and faithfully as we could – we did not abandon her through all these years. But by the time we knew and understood what was the cause of her troubles, by the time we had learnt about what goes on in our society where vulnerable young people are targeted by abusers, it was too late to prevent her suffering from long-term, maybe irreparable

damage. Some of what happened we can trace back to our choice of secondary school, which meant she was exposed to social influences through friends she found which she could not see were bad and was too little and weak to resist.

Of course few have so disastrous an education. There is no reason why you should, but there is no guarantee that you won't. And there are other much more likely dangers. You may be turned into a well-qualified, docile biddable worker, rejoicing in your certificates and your employability, but dulled in imagination and passion. It maybe that our education system equips people to become rich fools as in the Gospel story, who gain the whole world, but lose their soul, who are rich in things, and poor towards God. For all the talk about the school caring about your spiritual development, it is quite likely that it will do little or nothing for you in that regard. The school is hardly to be blamed. It exists in a spiritually confused, careless, and darkened society. We chatter about spirituality a great deal, but we lack the humility and self-knowledge, for the most part, to admit we do not know much of what we talk about and that our action is confused. Some people in despair at the spiritual vacuum take to a definite religion – but without being discriminating enough for that to be truly humanising.

Education these days is a very difficult task. Sooner rather than later, I hope you acquire the insight, that comes from experience and charity, so that you can understand that. It is certain that whenever you leave formal education, get to the end of what the system offers you, you will go into life inadequately equipped for what it brings you. A key part in good education for life, as in good marriage preparation, is to help people to understand and accept that they are not prepared, cannot be prepared, and will have to learn in practice. It is possible to help people to be able to learn in practice, rather than to make a hash of it. To respect and work with others, to want peace rather than war, is a good beginning.

It is possible to come out of education qualified but unfit for life. You may become a scientist, a technologist but not be ethically educated. That may not be because you have never been asked to think about the ethics of your science or technology, but because in practice, the ethics and the business of science are not very closely in step. Your problem will not be that you are unable to think of an ethical question about your work, but that there is no way you can integrate such ethical questioning with your work. Rather the work will have within itself its own ethical self-affirmation – it will reduce ethical discourse to apologetic for the self-interest of the employing enterprise. And that makes for scepticism about ethics and in the end for ethical indifference, when its language is merely another management marketing tool. Now your education will not solve that difficulty for you. It may give you ethical language and even ethical passion, but leave you with the choice of reducing that to a private hobby or being marginalised from the world of work. That is not to say the world of work is wholly and simply immoral, but that its claims to have made peace with ethics are not wholly convincing.

So this is why I have in mind for you the question, how can you survive the education you are going to be put through and come through it still on course to share in full and true humanity? I put the question that way, so that in sending you to school now and for the next dozen years or more, we are not under the illusion that you are being given a simple pure Good. You are rather being pitched into a very mixed, unpredictable experience, a risky procedure. It is not simply good – but nor is it simply bad, imposed on you by a wicked system – though there is plenty of wickedness around that can get you through the system. There is the possibility of many goods and graces coming to you through education – and you should not be deprived of them, or discouraged from seeking them.

So I will not send you to school with a negative expectation. I will not prejudice you before you start. I will enthuse about your learning new things day by day, I will encourage you to respond to your teachers and to make the best of them, I will be glad that you make friends and learn how to manage relationships, I will help you to face up to the things that frighten

you or give you pain and to get through them intelligently, I will simply be glad to see and share the fun you will get out of it and I will stand back in delight when you are seized by something inspiring, when perhaps like your great aunt Joy you are intoxicated by the eloquence of the book of Revelation at the age of seven (oh that you have the chance to hear such words as early as that – not to be taught them but to find them for yourself) or you start building bridges and machines as your Uncle Mark did at that age. I hope you have the best things I had in what was in many respects an inadequate education – teachers and friends who helped me to discover what it is to be human, not just as a socially necessary morality, but as something consonant with the history and literature I was studying, so that thought and action are not separated. Another way of saying what I had – teachers who not only taught me to enjoy studying effectively, but teachers who cared for me personally and were skilled and willing enough to make an effort to help me in the troubles that beset me, troubles that came from the family's poverty and other troubles.

I will not denigrate education. I will not tell you that you would do just as well without it. I will try to see that you go on being educated for as long as you want to work at it – as my parents did for me, making sacrifices beyond any I shall ever have to make.

But I will try to help you to develop a way of living through the education system which does not pretend it is better or more trustworthy than it is. I want you to be prepared for education as it is, which is no better or less confused than life itself.

Now how is that to be done?

I know you are a big boy, now, and getting bigger all the time, but as you say sometimes, you are not yet as big as I am. I can write all this for you – and to you – but you cannot hear it yet, nor should I expect it. The difficulty is: by the time you can understand your education, to make discriminating assessments of its quality, your education is well on its way, maybe too late to amend. It is one of the problems of education – how soon can you be told about the nature of life, and education, so that you start managing it for yourself, knowing what you are doing? Certainly not now, already. But it will have to be before long. You will soon meet situations where you will be required to make a complex response if you are to come through them profitably as a human being. You will have to see and feel what is wrong, but not simply be put off by it, not simply come to hate the teacher, or to give up work, or to compensate for your distress by disturbed behaviour. You will experience troubles – and much will hang on how you work through them.

In the early times virtually totally, and to the end of life, to some extent, you will need to be in a system that understands this for you, that represents your humanity, and what it needs, and its teleology, beyond what you can grasp of it, or articulate. I am not writing to your teachers and education managers as though they are agents of education quite distinct from you - I am bound to talk to them, as to myself, in order to talk to you about your education and what your humanity requires of you. We are never isolated individuals, even when we are as old as I am. And you, and your humanity, is not something to be found within the boundaries of your individual being, within your skin as though that were a wall around the city of your person. You, the very personal you, the infinitely valuable you, the person who will, I hope, live many years after I am gone, and live into God's eternity, are now, in your infancy, partly what we teachers and others represent for you, make present for you. It is our duty to act for your humanity, which we can talk about and understand a bit, while you simply live it without knowing what you are doing – and we need to recognise that it is your humanity that we are living. We are not simply external to you, passing over the wall of our city and through the wall of your city certain items of food and equipment for life. And if your elders represent your humanity to a significant extent, at this stage, another part of it is given to you in your inheritance, your genes, which you are not yet conscious enough of to try to direct or modify. You grow and learn now, not because you choose to do so, as a manager of your own learning

(as now they like to think university students should be) but because it is in your natural development to be curious, to play, to experiment accidentally, to learn not by plan but as a wanderer.

Vocation

One way in which you may be deprived through the kind of education you are likely to have is that you will not hear and enjoy the stories and story of the Bible once and again while you are at school, and you will end up not knowing them and thus you will have less resource for surviving education humanly. Already this has happened at your nursery school, where you sang so well with your friends at the Carol service. But all the songs were about Father Christmas, choking when he got stuck up the chimney, and there was no mention of Jesus Christ. Is this the new political correctness in a multi-religious society? It is dreadful impoverishment, a trivialisation, and of course a simply untruth in practice.

I am afraid it is not only the secular and politically correct people who will deprive you. The deprivation has been prepared for years by Churches where the Bible has been silenced and hardly read, and by experts who told us children should not hear before they were ready, as though the stories themselves cannot create their own readiness in the telling.

What the Bible gives includes lots of stories of people who suffer dehumanising experiences and somehow are brought through them, as more than survivors. That was like Joseph with his many coloured dream coat, who got into prison and then came out. You noticed that this Christmas, when we saw the musical and your attention never wavered – Joseph in prison, locked up in a cell was a moment that stuck with you. The pattern of his life was rather like your initial which you are just learning how to write – Up, Down, Up.

The Bible, like other literature and histories, offers so much that any brief statement is selective and likely to mislead. But stories of people finding life in the Up, Down, Up pattern are a resource for life. In the Bible they often begin with a call, and the faithfulness of the caller is the reason why the stories end on an Up. The caller is God, who was ‘with Joseph, so that he was a lucky fellow’. The musical studiously avoids God; instead this post-modernist marketing success thrives on his dreams, is kept going by his dreams, where ‘any dream will do’. In education as in life, any dream will not do. God is not in every dream; God’s call holds together the mystery of freedom with the judgment of righteousness. Your education may deprive you of God, and give you dreams as a substitute. That is one of its commonest abuses. You may then be split between dreams and hard reality, between free spirit and actuality with little harmony or reconciliation between them.

In the Bible both dreams and actuality are subordinated to God’s calling, to vocation. The initial UP is effected by the call. Now in education, as in modern society, vocation has been largely lost or scaled down to jobs, in functional actuality. Nurses and teachers give up seeing their work as vocation, because the word is an instrument for exploitation. It has been secularised and detached from its roots in God, it withers. When God calls, it is to concrete activity and obedience in the world; but this action is grounded in God, and the obedience is sacrifice to God; the activity is fulfilled in the glory of God. That is, the activity is seen as valued by God and having a value that transcends its human transitory frailty. The Down is not the end; it is followed by an Up.

Education without vocation is deadly – and that is what is mostly on offer.

It does not have to be so. In the Bible particular people are called, in various stories, but the story of the Bible as a whole proclaims the calling that comes to every person and to all of us together. Luther was not on the wrong tack to see that every person in their everyday work and life in society is called. But he did not manage to spell out those callings adequately, and in our more complex, mobile society, it is not easier. But an adequate education must enable people to listen for the call and to see how to respond to it.

Most biblical stories of calling relate to mature people – Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, none of them was of school age, as we know it. Is calling then something for people in their adulthood, when they have already finished with formal education? Is vocation too burdensome and dangerously confusing for little children?

There is the story of Samuel. He was put with an educator at an early age – no doubt Samuel was learning a trade in the Temple, assisting Eli. Though Eli was not fit to teach him much, there was space in the night for God's call to come, and Eli did not get in its way. He did not claim the voice as his own, using the occasion to bolster his own authority. Instead, he eventually understood enough to tell Samuel to listen to the voice and to give himself to it.

The calling was only incidentally an affirmation of Samuel's identity and worth – which is often taken to be a primary function, or implied value, in good education. Samuel was not affirmed in himself, but called to be a prophet, an onerous social function, which started with knowing the truth about Eli and his family and his priesthood. The critical insight of the child-outsider could be echoing here with the call of God. Education is not directed primarily to personal development but to social belonging and service or a prophetic kind.

But was not the calling oppressive, more than a little boy could bear?

Dear N,

Your life has already not been easy. Your mother gave you love and warmth and is deeply attached to you and you have a strong bond with her. But she was unable to protect you from the emotional abuse by the man who has had a destructive grip on her life for more than ten years. So you saw her physically abused by him and you yourself were shunted about at his convenience, kidnapped when he wanted to put pressure on your mother. Eventually, you were put in our care by social services and have lived with us since you were eighteen months old.

It is not what we looked for, when in earlier years we thought that one day we would be grandparents. It is not the ideal way for you or for us, but does life ever offer us the ideal way? Of course we are looking for the best school for you, but it will not be perfect. The best school for you is one that you can make some good out of. And to do that, you must be equipped to make the best of what is less than ideal, may sometimes be quite unsatisfactory. It is no good being the kind of person who will not try to do anything unless all the conditions are right and who makes problems excuses for not having a go. The man who hid his talent in the ground. Of course, you also need schools and a society which makes it easy for people to make the best of what is not so good. And, deep down, educational systems still seem to me to encourage perfectionist expectations.

You do not know it, but already you have been practising that kind of life. You have adjusted to living with us and seeing your mother on her visits here, three or four times a week. You have had an experience of going through a difficult process, over quite a long time, and coming out well from it. But still you have those moments when you want Mummy, not because you don't want us, but because your being has roots in that early warmth and love, of which you still have regular reminders. So your health and joy includes within it repeatedly the overcoming of the loss, the bearing again of the pain, which means you have to work afresh to overcome it, to affirm and enjoy life as you have it now, not life as it might have been if you had been able to live with your mother in unbroken peace and a growing relationship. Every person who grows up has to find this basic skill, which is the skeletal structure of a spiritual way of being: growing up, passing on in time, means leaving behind and losing things that are precious to us. Some of those precious things were simply good, the experiences in which we smiled irrepressibly and were buoyed up in happiness without the least shadow. We lose so many of them as we grow up – we wake up one day to find that what thrilled us yesterday, leaves us bored today, or makes us feel small, so we leave the

beloved toy on the floor, to be thrown away or kept by a doting mother who wants to remember the childhood it is our business to leave behind. But some of the precious things we lose are not goods suitable to one age displaced by goods fitted for the next age. Experiences in which we suffer frustration and pain can also be precious – they are filled with longing, with desires for the good which we do not have. In frustration, we see or feel the moment as one of possibility – but possibility blocked, taken away from us before we can make anything of it. When that moment has gone, when you grow beyond it, even though it was in itself pain and not joy, it may be felt as loss – for we realise that the opportunity which was proper to that moment, even though it was only present there in an immediately frustrated or warped form, will never come again. Growing beyond it, we lose it. We carry in ourselves then not the memory of a joy of which we have had enough and do not need to seek again, but the bitterness of a joy we never had and now can never have. So we speak of children robbed of their childhood – they can never have it, once the time has passed. So you may sometime come to think, what you have actually been working through, which is to be a little boy without a father you can trust and delight in. You haven't made a bad job of your grandfather, but he cannot be quite the same. Maybe some day, you will feel more than you do now, when you are still in dreaming innocence, that the loss of the father is not an easy loss to carry.

Both these kinds of losses are normal and integral to growing up. And people do not become mature true human beings without finding the skills and the spirit to survive such losses, making the best of them. Working with loss has come to you early and in a way which means that the Social Services take note of it, but it is an acute form of what everyone who grows up has to deal with. Special action was needed in your case to ensure that it was not completely destructive of your person and prospects. The hope is that now you are living in conditions which enable you to grow up well, rather than to be overwhelmed by loss you could not cope with. One social worker who saw you in the critical period said you had already experienced more disappointment than you should have done.

For the moment, you have got through that. You are free to cope with the ordinary losses and difficulties of life. You are not being asked to be more heroic than is proper. You are not left for hours on your own. You get hurt and you feel it, but help is near enough to give you courage. You are getting to be a brave boy and to know you are brave, in coping with these hurts.

I enjoy watching you grow – I think I watch you more than I watched our children when they were your age. I am amazed not only at the many things you learn in a few years, so that you are so different now from a baby, but also at the processes of your learning, insofar as I can infer them from what I see. I see you learning new words, sometimes when we tell you a new word, sometimes picking them up as you overhear them – and then playing with them. I see you making a spoon into a bridge for your motorbike to drive on. I hear you now telling yourself stories, dramatising materials you have gathered from many sources. And I see that this is a gathering and organising of information and skills, which grows in an integrated way in your own person, so that it seems to grow out of your own person. What you put together is your person, which you enjoy and live with, happily. There are many external inputs and some of them have coercive insistence. We make you sit at table to eat; we make you go nursery; they make you do all sorts of things. But we also do not try to make you do things where we are powerless – we cannot make you go to sleep until the moment when you say I am tired, and the next moment are fast asleep. You already live in a world of some order, which both requires and encourages you to behave in certain ways, and which gives you space to live your own way. But in total, I do not think this world imposes on you in ways which are oppressive, either because they force you to do what you are not able to do from within yourself, or because they tell you what to do with explanations that are incomprehensible to you and have no persuasive leverage – so that even if you do what you are told, you cannot see, with the understanding you have at the moment, what you are doing or why. Now that is

healthy. This way of growing up well must include being able to incorporate into our being and way of life elements of simple obedience, of doing what we are doing simply because we are told. The world does not work without elements of coercion. That too you are learning. And it can be learnt without violating the person, if we trust those who tell us what to do. In time, if you are to grow up well, you will not only have to learn to do what you are told, but you will have to learn how to decide to give your trust and to withdraw it – and even how to manage the compromises and complications of doing what you are told even when you are not sure whether to trust the authority – as well as not doing what you are told because you must trust one authority – or even yourself – rather than others, even though you are not sure you can trust yourself. Perhaps when you get that far, you will enjoy reading Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. But the point is that you will be living the difference between being merely coerced and so depersonalised and accommodating elements of coercion in life by going on being a growing real person.

I have been watching your growing up, and seeing how long before you are able to put into words what you are doing, you are working through loss and finding skills and spirit to make the best of what is not ideal. Now I hope when you get into formal education this will not be taken from you. There are many ways in which it can be. You may for instance be taught a language of rights, in your citizenship classes, which will cultivate in you an approach to life where you refuse to make the best of a bad job because it is beneath your dignity to lift a finger unless conditions are right (remember Eustace in the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, on his way to becoming a dragon – with his demanding to see the British Consul whenever the sea got rough and with his invention of reasons why he should always have privileged treatment).

It is more likely that you will simply be overwhelmed with the need to acquire knowledge of the kind which your brain as a computer has a great capacity for – and that little space or attention will be given to your continuing growth as a person. That will be left to accident – to your family and friends, who may or may not be equipped to help you. You may be pressured by school until you revolt to find your own space for living, and then you will not be able to make the best of school, as the bad job you have to go through with. The school will not do much if anything to let you see it as a bad job, though it will not be able to prove that it is not. The school is the way by which our modern societies try to make the best of the bad job of bringing children into the world as we have it. The school needs to be respected and sustained by people who day by day are prepared and able to make the best of a bad job. But this is not helped by schools which claim to be simply good, or by Chief Inspectors who believe they will make the schools good. Who articulates the basic truth about what life is, what society is, and how it can work – about what humanity in this world is, after the fall, before the final redemption, but in the present life of Christ – it is making the best of a bad job, it is resurrection out of crucifixion?

Your grandparents have been reckoned to be safe enough for you to be in their care – but no searching enquiry was made into our faith, which gives us an alarming perspective in which to see the ordinary everyday business of our living and growing together and caring for one another. Now of course we think, as I have argued here, that respecting Jesus the crucified as Lord is the source of practical wisdom, for it gives us hope so that we go on making the best of what are bad jobs – but others may think it is dangerous and inappropriate that little boys, even when they have swords for Christmas and rush around the house killing monsters to keep us safe, should be exposed directly or indirectly to the Cross and resurrection as the story which reveals the truth about the nature of human being and human hope. But if in time you come to think that growing up with us has been, because of this religious element, a bad job, I hope you will find the resource and the grace to make the best of this bad job. Very few people have parenting which works well for them unless they learn how to make the best of a bad job.

Now in your formal education I hope you are helped to come to understand what you are already practising – a way of being human in which you can accommodate and overcome loss and hurt, in which you gather skills and resources, and a rooted resilient spirit, for making the best of bad jobs. I hope that formal education will enable you to understand and be articulate about what you are doing now without knowing what you do. When you can speak with understanding, you will then be able to cooperate with others in all sorts of practice, helping to make the best of various bad jobs with them, including making the best of the bad jobs they are and you are.

You will then confront a spiritual and practical problem in all this, which is the reason why so many shy away from this approach to living and take refuge in some perfectionist unreality. If it is known and admitted that life involves making the best of a bad job, do we not live in a world that is perpetually under a black sky, overcast? Is it not like Narnia under the White Witch, always winter and never Christmas? Does it not breed gloomy depressed people, who are even less energetic and willing to make the best of things than those who want to see themselves only as unambiguously good people in a simply good world? Where is the joy, the life? That is another form of the question, is the resurrection true – or does the truth of the Christian story end with the crucifixion, after which there is only wishful thinking and the helplessness of disciples on the road to Emmaus?

No child related activity without theological reflection

No theology without the child in the midst



Child Theology Movement