

Australasian Consultation on Child Theology

9–13 July 2007

A new look at Creation

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

**Child
Theology**
MOVEMENT

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Report of the Australasia Consultation on Child Theology 9 – 13 July 2007

“Developing indigenous Australasian theology with the Child in the Midst”

Editor: John Collier

April 2008

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AUSTRALASIA CHILD THEOLOGY CONSULTATION 2007

"Developing indigenous Australasian theology with the Child in the Midst"

Preface

The subtitle for this consultation in Child Theology refers to indigenous theology. What the organisers had in mind was to see Christian theology developed and advanced in the specific context of Australasia using the Child Theology Movement's characteristic process of inviting a child into the consultation.

As you read this report of the meeting, the above statement may provoke some questions. For example, where were the children? In this meeting, as in most similar meetings we have arranged, the child was not physically present at any time. There are a number of reasons for this but primarily it was the difficulty of devising a way in which the child, or children, may participate without boring, exploiting or patronising them. However, as all the participants had been children (and claimed not to have completely forgotten that experience!) and all had known many children over a number of years, we felt that we could bring a child into our midst imaginatively. You will see how well or otherwise we achieved this.

Another question that might arise concerns the use of the word 'indigenous'. There was relatively little input from indigenous societies, in the sense of the culture of the original inhabitants of Australasia. The theological reflections were contextualised but we have to acknowledge that, for almost all the participants, the relevant culture is 'white' and 'western'. Therefore, this report reflects that.

The specific theological doctrine to which we attended was the doctrine of creation. We thought of earth, air, fire and water and considered how these elements, and other aspects of creation, might interact with selected children, including someone from an indigenous background. This was a challenge as Australian society, certainly that represented at the meeting, is predominantly urban and we would have been greatly helped had it been possible to have a greater contribution from churches in the indigenous community, who still have an intimate and strong relationship with nature. Perhaps there will be a chance to remedy this in a second consultation

The Australasian Child Theology consultation has been preceded by ten other similar consultations elsewhere in the world. Reports of most of these are available from the Child Theology Movement. You are invited to visit the website (childtheology.org) for details on how to obtain copies of these and other publications.

John Collier

Participants

Drs Cynthia & Geoffrey Dixon Geoff was born in Kent, England and is a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. Cynthia is a Clinical Psychologist. They met at the University of Aberdeen, where Geoff went to study medicine and Cynthia was studying Arts then Psychology and Education. Geoff became a Christian through Boys Camps run by his Religious Education master at school and Cynthia through InterVarsity Fellowship at university. In 1971 we moved with our four children to Perth, Western Australia where Geoff taught Child Psychiatry. From a family point of view our priority was to nurture our 4 children in the Christian faith, finding Beach Mission one of the most effective supports, combined later with an effective Church community and prayer together and with others. Now, with four adult Christian children and seven grandchildren ranging from 4-17 and running a part time psychiatric practice between us, our interests are still the same. What we aspire to is a ministry using the resources of modern psychotherapy and psychiatry in conjunction with prayer to actualise the scriptures and achieve growth and maturity. We both have a book in us waiting for the moment.

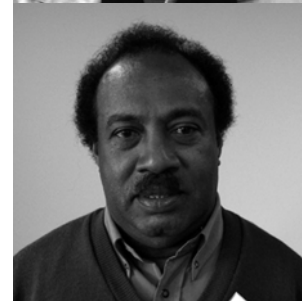
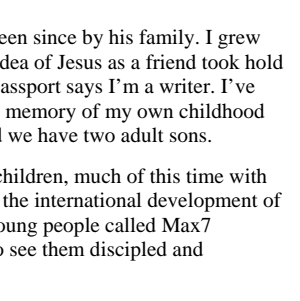
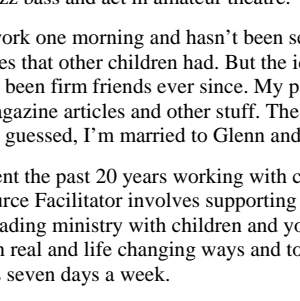
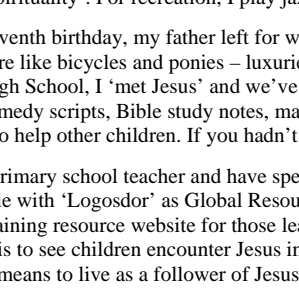
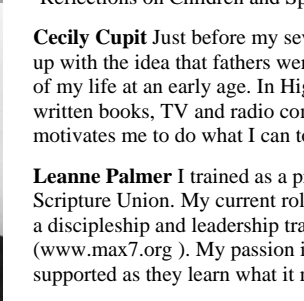
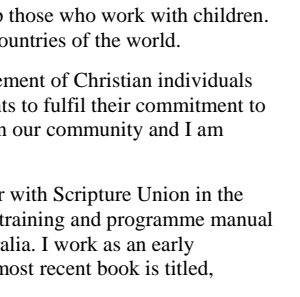
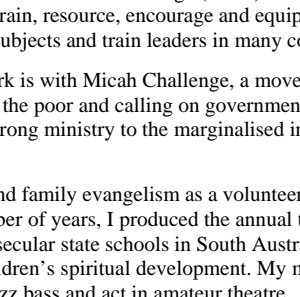
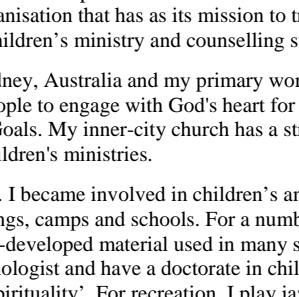
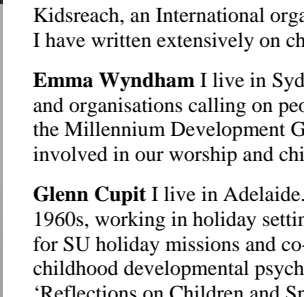
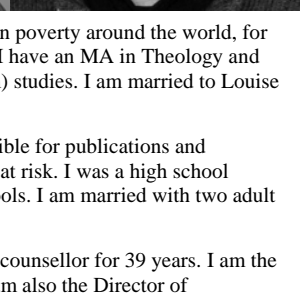
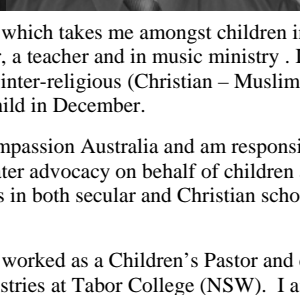
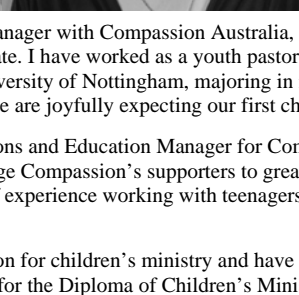
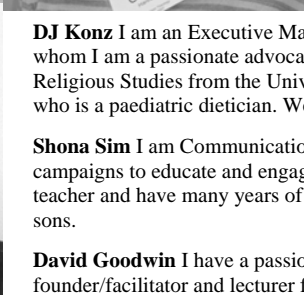
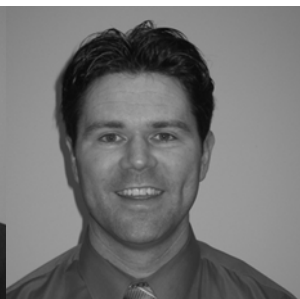
Jim and Maria Waroka I, Maria, am a Ni-Vanuatu, married to Jim. We have two daughters, aged 27 and 25 years, and an adopted 4 year old son. I studied at the University of the South Pacific for a Diploma in Education. With this, I taught home science, English and social studies in Secondary Schools. Later, I studied for a BEd and postgraduate Diploma in Quality Teaching and Supervision. I, Jim, come from the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Along with Maria, I completed a Masters of Education degree in Queensland. In 2000, we responded to God's prompting to start community Christian Schools in Vanuatu. Now, we have six such schools. Jim is the director of Community Christian Schools Vanuatu, a network of home schooling with some 600 students. Maria is the principal of one in Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. Our vision is to see the nation of Vanuatu hold to the Godly values it professes – the nation's motto means 'God is the one we rely on' – by means of the children realising the potential within them as children of God.

Scott Higgins I live in Newcastle, Australia, a city of around 400,000 people, and work as Development Education and Advocacy Officer for Baptist World Aid Australia. I am married to Sandy and we have three children, Ashley (age 12), Jessica (age 10) and Lachlan (age 5). Prior to commencing work with Baptist World Aid Australia, I pastored churches in Sydney and Newcastle. My educational background includes Bachelor and Masters degrees in theology and a Masters in Social Change and Development that I am part way through.

Lester Sutton I am the youngest of four children, born in 1962 into a Christian family with my father a pastor of a beachside church in a small southwest town in Western Australia. I grew up in Victoria on the east coast of Australia. My working career started in Engineering and then some years later began my fulltime ministry in Sydney. I am married to Michelle and together we have three children. Together we have been privileged to pastor three churches one each in Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. In each church we gave priority to the ministry with children. Having a keen awareness of the importance of children to God and in His economy of life and how easily this could be ignored or abused, it behoved us to give children their rightful place within the church. I'm presently ministering with Compassion Australia helping to release children from poverty in Jesus' name and helping Australian Christians understand the Bible's teaching regarding the poor and the needs of Children around the world. Alongside this, I am endeavouring to help every Australian Christian to be an advocate for Children.

Roger Ellem For the last 29 years I have worked with Compassion Australia as a Field Worker recruiting sponsors for children in the 3rd World. This has entailed being an advocate for children and speaking out on the great issues affecting children and their lives. I am married with 6 children and 9 (soon to be 10) grand children. I live in a quiet rural community outside Newcastle. I have been ordained by the Baptist Union of New South Wales and have served as Pastor in several churches as well as a 3 year stint with the ABMS in Bangladesh involved in Economic uplift and Theological Education by Extension. My current passion is involvement with a group of churches in East Africa.

Other participants were: John Collier, Tim and Chris Hannah, Paul O'Rourke, Terry Tibbs and those whose details appear on the following pages. **Note:** the photos on the following pages are arranged to indicate how we sat during the consultation: everyone seated in a large circle (actually an oblong rectangle) with no series of rows, as in a church or lecture theatre; not even a 'second row'. No back row for the sinners, only a front row for the penitents!



DJ Konz I am an Executive Manager with Compassion Australia, which takes me amongst children in poverty around the world, for whom I am a passionate advocate. I have worked as a youth pastor, a teacher and in music ministry. I have an MA in Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Nottingham, majoring in inter-religious (Christian – Muslim) studies. I am married to Louise who is a paediatric dietician. We are joyfully expecting our first child in December.

Shona Sim I am Communications and Education Manager for Compassion Australia and am responsible for publications and campaigns to educate and engage Compassion's supporters to greater advocacy on behalf of children at risk. I was a high school teacher and have many years of experience working with teenagers in both secular and Christian schools. I am married with two adult sons.

David Goodwin I have a passion for children's ministry and have worked as a Children's Pastor and counsellor for 39 years. I am the founder/facilitator and lecturer for the Diploma of Children's Ministries at Tabor College (NSW). I am also the Director of Kidsreach, an International organisation that has as its mission to train, resource, encourage and equip those who work with children. I have written extensively on children's ministry and counselling subjects and train leaders in many countries of the world.

Emma Wyndham I live in Sydney, Australia and my primary work is with Micah Challenge, a movement of Christian individuals and organisations calling on people to engage with God's heart for the poor and calling on governments to fulfil their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals. My inner-city church has a strong ministry to the marginalised in our community and I am involved in our worship and children's ministries.

Glenn Cupit I live in Adelaide. I became involved in children's and family evangelism as a volunteer with Scripture Union in the 1960s, working in holiday settings, camps and schools. For a number of years, I produced the annual training and programme manual for SU holiday missions and co-developed material used in many secular state schools in South Australia. I work as an early childhood developmental psychologist and have a doctorate in children's spiritual development. My most recent book is titled, 'Reflections on Children and Spirituality'. For recreation, I play jazz bass and act in amateur theatre.

Cecily Cupit Just before my seventh birthday, my father left for work one morning and hasn't been seen since by his family. I grew up with the idea that fathers were like bicycles and ponies – luxuries that other children had. But the idea of Jesus as a friend took hold of my life at an early age. In High School, I 'met Jesus' and we've been firm friends ever since. My passport says I'm a writer. I've written books, TV and radio comedy scripts, Bible study notes, magazine articles and other stuff. The memory of my own childhood motivates me to do what I can to help other children. If you hadn't guessed, I'm married to Glenn and we have two adult sons.

Leanne Palmer I trained as a primary school teacher and have spent the past 20 years working with children, much of this time with Scripture Union. My current role with 'Logosdor' as Global Resource Facilitator involves supporting the international development of a discipleship and leadership training resource website for those leading ministry with children and young people called Max7 (www.max7.org). My passion is to see children encounter Jesus in real and life changing ways and to see them discipled and supported as they learn what it means to live as a follower of Jesus seven days a week.



Ron Buckland I am based in Melbourne where I am a minister at Montrose Church of Christ. I am also a chaplain to two local state primary schools and teach a course on 'Ministry with Children' at the Churches of Christ Theological College. I have pondered and researched the theology of the child for many years and written several books, including: 'Children and the King'; 'Children and God'; 'Children and the Gospel'. I have a Masters degree in Theology and several other degrees. My hobbies include going to movies and umpiring cricket matches in the summer.



Stephen Tollestrup I am Executive Director of TEAR Fund New Zealand. I hold a Bachelor of Theology from the Bible College of New Zealand and a post graduate in Organisational Development from Auckland University. My special interest is Child Rights and children's participation in social and political process, particularly issues which directly affect them. I'm married to Deirdre and, to prove I'm not an armchair commentator I have four completely unique children ages 12 to 24.

Keith White This is my second visit to Australia and I have been looking forward to meeting several of the participants for years! I come from London, UK, where Ruth and I are responsible for a Christian residential community called 'Mill Grove' which cares for children. I also teach and lecture in theology, sociology and children's studies. Recent publications include a new Bible, 'The Growth of Love' (Barnabas, 2008) and I am currently working with Haddon Willmer on a book on Child Theology.

Susy Lee The cleverest decisions I've ever made were to follow Jesus and to marry Brian. (And Brian helped me to make both!) Together we are raising two wonderful children so that we can learn more about faith! I also (therefore!) work part-time to provide leadership and support for ministry with children and families to about 380 churches. My areas of interest include thinking strategically about the ways we link children and faith, encouraging families to experience faith together, and providing opportunities for children to contribute to their communities by developing their skills and gifts in ministry.



Tania Watson I come from Perth where I live with my husband Neil and children Sebastian (14) and Lucy (12) and a wild little black dog named Lulu. I love the daily ritual of morning coffee – especially on Saturdays when we spend an hour or so at our favourite coffee place reading the weekend papers. It's a sheer gift that I was born into a family in relationship with God. It's a sheer gift to be in ministry in a local church and some wider networks: to have the responsibility to be a voice for children in the church and community.

Terry Williams I have been on the staff of Scripture Union Queensland for 24 years as the Children's Ministry Consultant. I am a trained teacher and I am committed to the value of training, networking and working together in unity. Some of my responsibilities include being Operations Manager for the biennial Brisbane KidsGames, chairing the Queensland Children's Ministry Network and leading the SU Australia Primary Schools' Network. I am married to Margaret and we have 3 young adult children.

Wendy Strachan I came to faith as a child. I currently work with Scripture Union International as Children's Ministry coordinator, a role that involves the encouragement of healthy contextualised children's ministries in SU's national movements across the world. I am based in Australia now but spent 12 years working with SU in Africa. I am trained as a special needs teacher and taught in various parts of Queensland and for 2 years in Papua New Guinea. I enjoy reading, movies, hospitality and being enriched by the Brisbane L'Arche community.



Tuesday 10 July

S1.1: Devotions

Paul O'Rourke

John 7 :1-9; 8:12-20

Even his brothers didn't believe in him but Jesus had a sense of timing. No-one could lay their hands on him because it wasn't the right time. Jesus put his Father's will first, and found that through a habit of prayer. Jesus followed God's agenda. Do we keep pace with God's plan for our lives or are we running to others' agenda for us? Who are the well-meaning people that want to detract us from the thing that God is calling us to? Those who tell us to soft peddle the Christian connection, that we are 'selling' kids or romanticizing them?

S1.2: Our questions and hopes

Keith

We come by invitation to a consultation, or a conversation. We are seated around a table with no second row. Everyone has a place at the front – the better to hear and to contribute. We seek to engage in and facilitate a conversation, with 'empty baskets' hoping to go away with them full, rather like the disciples at the feeding of the 5,000.

A particular challenge is always how to involve children in our conversation. One way is through our imaginations, so let us bring our rich experiences of children into our meeting. Another way is to let children speak through 'Children's Letters to God' which is a rich source of theology. (Keith read some of the Letters.)

Participants discussed the following questions in pairs: Why have I come? What questions do I bring? What do I hope to learn?

- What should children's ministry look like? - is there a new paradigm emerging?
- How does the passion of Jesus for children work itself out in our theologising?
- How do we help children to be involved in decision making appropriately, without robbing their childhoods?
- I hope to discover and be disturbed
- I hope to make new contacts, to network
- I hope to re-establish and confirm a theological base for what we're doing.
- How do we cope with different theologies – when is it just different and when is it wrong?
- How do we encourage and challenge children's practitioners to think theologically?
- What are the basic assumptions about children that drive our relationship and ministry to them?
- What have we missed in our theological education by not taking children seriously?
- How do we connect children from affluent cultures with those more disenfranchised?
- How do we instruct children in the faith and at the same time leave space for their own experience of God?
- How do we raise children in the midst of a consumerist world?
- How can our resources and experiences be used to develop Child Theology?
- How can we bring to the children in our sphere of influence hope from Child Theology?
- What is the agenda for children now?
- How do we link the church with groups working with children outside of church?

- How does the Holy Spirit work with children not connected with church?
- Do children get left out of crisis counselling situations?

It was our hope as organisers that some, perhaps many, of these questions could be addressed during the consultation but we realised that some were such that Child Theology had nothing particular or new to say.

S1.3: An Introduction to Child Theology: where have we come from?

Keith/Marcia/John

There seems to be a paradigm shift in relation to children happening in recent times. The first textbook on the sociology of childhood is only 15 years old, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted 20 November 1989 and subsequently ratified by almost all nations and the book by Marcia Bunge, 'The Child in Christian Thought' was published in 2001.

How did Keith, John and Marcia get involved in Child Theology?

Keith explained how he got involved: "We used to have family prayers at Mill Grove using material produced by Scripture Union but it didn't work. I told SU and they said 'we know, we're withdrawing it'. They had materials for children alone, at the beach, on the street etc but not in the family. So we had to go ahead with family prayers working out our own material. This led to the development of a new presentation of the Bible. At the same time, I had to face the question of what Jesus meant in Matthew 18, brought home forcefully to me one day as I tried to preach on the text. What does it mean to become like little children? Maybe this question is so scary that the commentators tried to get round it. Child Theology is one way I have of developing an answer to this question."

Marcia: "I am a professor of theology. When I had children I used to take them along to Sunday School but I was shocked and amazed at the materials that were used – scary and inept illustrations and theologically thin. So I set about finding the best curricula. Then there was the problem of finding good teachers. Eventually, I asked about what was going on in the Christian homes of the children. I found that my own students at college, nominally Christian, knew very little about their own faith backgrounds. So this led to becoming the editor of the 'Child in Christian Thought'. After that I was invited to a Child Theology consultation in Houston."

John: "I studied medicine as a way of serving God. For a short time I did some regular medical missionary work, with a particular focus on Paediatrics. Later, I took early retirement to focus more particularly on the call to mission. Part of this involved studying for an MTh as a result of which I met Keith, one of my tutors. I also became involved in voluntary work with vulnerable children in some of the poorer parts of the world. After a presentation by Keith at a conference for those working with children at risk, I offered to be involved in working out the theological issues that Keith had identified."

Comments: When we look at the key passage that Child Theology uses as a text (Matt 18:1-6 and parallels) many of the commentaries will talk about the qualities of childhood, so it's important to note that Luke uses the word which means a baby, which suggests the issue is being helpless. It's interesting that the text in all three gospels flows into the story of the rich young ruler, a man who felt unable to become helpless. 'helplessness' may vary at different times of development. The texts also seem to suggest that an issue was the status of the child in the society. So there may be no inherent quality that was important in the child. Part of our journey can be to rediscover the child within, not as an aid primarily to understand ourselves, but as a way to bring the 'child in the midst' of the discussion and therefore as an aid to understanding the Kingdom of God.

CT has similarities to feminist and black theology but while I can't (as a white male) do either of those theologies, I have been a child and am thereby equipped to do Child Theology, which gives it uniqueness.

S1.4: What Child Theology is and is not

Marcia

Child Theology Distinctions

Christian Theology approaches children and childhood in a number of ways, each with particular emphases and interests. Child Theology is distinct from:

- Theologies of Childhood
- Theologies by Children
- Children's spirituality
- Theologies for children
- Children and religious education

Theologies Distinct from Child Theology

For example:

- Theologies of Childhood:
 - Provide sophisticated theological understandings of children and childhood and our obligations to children.
 - Should take into account various perspectives on children and childhood from the Bible and the Christian tradition
 - Should honour the dignity and complexity of children.
- Child Theologies (Theologies by Children):
 - Build on theologies of childhood;
 - Re-examine fundamental doctrines and practices of the church using the "lens" of the child.
 - Provide new insights into central themes of the Christian faith

Both these examples:

- Put children at the centre of serious theological reflection;
- Prompt action on behalf of children;
- Have implications for the church and children themselves, especially in the areas of
- Children and family ministry
- Religious education and faith formation
- Child advocacy

A Child Theology Approach

The approach adopted by CTM and reflected in this consultation has the following features:

- It involves an international network of theologians and practitioners
- A mixture of genders, denominations, cultural backgrounds.
- All care passionately about the Church, theology, and children.
- All respect and encourage the development of indigenous forms and expressions of Christian theologies and practices world-wide.
- Participants put a child "in the midst" of theological reflection in a distinctive way (which we will explore further). This process has included:

- Sketching out (or reflecting on) one's own existing understanding of a particular doctrine or practice.
- Imagining a child or children in actual contemporary situations.
- Sharing real life stories of such children and knowledge of or experiences with them.
- Drawing out common or salient themes.
- Reflecting on such children while rethinking and re-evaluating the initial doctrine or practice.

It is important to emphasise that child theologies will be diverse, as theologians in their own distinctive ways build upon:

- The Bible
- Authoritative texts in particular traditions
- Research in social and natural sciences
- Experience in specific cultures and faith communities
- The particular challenges of children in their communities.

Child Theology affirms that in traditional understandings of children in theology, the emphasis is too narrow, e.g. as depraved and victims of original sin. We need to broaden our understanding to note that they may equally be models of faith.

Some theological approaches to children emphasise their vulnerability and need. While not overlooking these issues, we should also note their strengths and gifts. We often develop programmes to teach children but within those programmes seldom allow space for the children to ask their own questions.

Comments/Questions

Several commented that this was useful. Some had Child Theology mixed in their minds with the 'theology of the child'. Others had defined Child Theology as the application of a theology of the child to the church's practices but it is clearly not just this. There was a concern that the Child Theology process might end up in abstracting the child from relationships and community. The child is often shown on their own. Child Theology should be careful to avoid this.

CT might be seen to pose a threat in the way it touches on every area of theology and church practice. It can also be very refreshing.

Theology is often seen as a purely rational exercise but spiritual growth in children is not by rationality. It tends to be more relational and intuitive.

S1.5: The child in South Pacific cultures

Jim Waroka

There are several small countries in the South Pacific and they may be grouped on the basis of ethnic and cultural differences as Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. However, despite the differences, there are similarities. Many of the things done in one country is the result of outside aid and the funding agencies often do the same thing in one country after another so my comments even if specific to Vanuatu, are probably representative of the whole region.

It is seen as an area of instability. An attempt to improve the situation through education, e.g. The University of the South Pacific, was recently assessed to have failed. Various reports (e.g. by UN Development agencies) have revealed quite sharp economic differentials within island communities, even after traditional forms of wealth distribution are accounted for. There is a lack of education and health, lack of economic assets or access to markets or jobs that create them, and various forms of social exclusion or political marginalization. These all create a 'poverty of opportunity', especially for the young. The waste of human and social capital is not only an economic loss but is manifest in various negative ways, such as rapid emigration from some countries, unemployment, and subculture of youthful crime and despair. Yet this poverty a/opportunity is not an inevitable aspect of the

development paths of this region. Common national concerns with education systems is how to ensure that education assists national economic growth, increase the efficiency of the public and private sectors, promotes national identity and culture, and resolves the mismatch between skills and livelihood opportunity.

If we focus on education, a key issue is the need to increase access for local children to all levels of education. In the 1999 Vanuatu census, only 55.8% of children received primary education and the proportion receiving any degree of secondary education was only 16.8%. Nationally, 26% of the population are illiterate. There is a teacher shortage, resulting from both a poor supply and failure of retention.

Although there is a belief that education will assist in the promotion of national economic growth as labour productivity increases and export-based development occurs, there are high levels of unemployment and the lack of local opportunities leads to emigration of the educated workforce.

What are the most important theological ideas to use when we work with children? How do you support public schools at the same time as pursuing the home schooling approach? 99% of the population are attached to the church. That they are made in the image of God and he has a plan for their life which they need to discover.

S1.6: The Australian child

Ron Buckland

This presentation has been sourced from three documents:

- A 2006 research report by the Australian Childhood Foundation, entitled “Every Child Needs a Hero”.
- A 2007 research report by the Australian Childhood Foundation entitled “Children’s Fears, Hopes and Heroes.”
- A report from The Australian Law Reform Commission entitled “Seen and heard: priority for children in the legal process.”

One of the first problems we face is deciding what “child” means. In my own work, I take “child” to mean girls and boys up to the age of 12. In this country, as a generalisation, this is about the age kids move into secondary schooling, and the “tweenage” syndrome kicks in. The problem is that the United Nations takes childhood into the mid-teens, and these three reports do the same. I think that once we move into adolescence both the focus of analysis and the implications of that analysis change fundamentally. So I will stay with 0-12 as the meaning of “child” in this presentation.

In taking this stance, I do not suggest that there is not a continuum from childhood into pre-adolescence (“tweenage”), or that individual differences mean that some children below 12 are not already there, physically and/or emotionally. But a paper about “the Australian child” will, of necessity, be based on generalisations. My fear is the same one I have when I read books about developmental “stages” in children: I come away with the feeling that I have just had described a construct, rather than real children. As a Christian committed to journeying alongside Aussie kids for Christ, I want to relate to each child as a unique creation of a gracious and loving Creator. So I will generalise for a while, hoping we will “get real” as we talk about the implications for ministry of those generalisations.

First, here are some statistics. Those 15 and under (the only basis in official statistics!) represent about 20% of the population of Australia. This is about 4,000,000 individuals. The highest percentage lives in the Northern Territory (24.9%), the lowest in South Australia (18.4%). About 1.3 million are aged 0-4 (7.3% of the total population); about 1.8 million are aged 5-11 (10.4 % of the total population). Indigenous children make up about 3.5% of all Australian children and almost 13% of indigenous children were under 5 on census night. In the Northern Territory, 36% of the indigenous population are children; the next highest is just over 5% in Tasmania.

Almost 8% of all Australian children were born overseas, many from non-English speaking countries. As a result, many children in Australia speak a language other than English at home, including Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese); Arabic; Vietnamese; Greek; Italian; Serbian, Croatian. Western

Australia has the highest percentage of overseas-born children (about 10%), with Tasmania the lowest (just over 2%).

Many more children in Australia live in cities and other major urban areas than in rural areas of the country. Almost two-thirds live in major urban centres, and another 25% in other urban areas. The rest live in rural areas, including bounded localities (population clusters of 200-999 people). Indigenous people and their children are more likely to be living in rural or remote areas. About 28% of indigenous people live in capital cities and just under 20% in rural or remote areas, with 50% living in towns and bounded localities.

Noting a child population of about 4 million, we now turn to consider the “frame of mind” of the Australian child. Consultation with children themselves is fundamental and one strength of the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) reports is that the research has been done with children. ACF research is done in collaboration with the National Research Centre for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Monash University (Melbourne).

The 2006 report is entitled: “Every child needs a hero: a report tracking Australian children’s concerns and attitudes about childhood.” The rationale for the research is set out thus in the Introduction:

“In the public domain, it is the voices of adults that are most often heard defining the needs, interests and rights of children (in that context) childhood has historically been viewed as a period of innocence, a carefree time with little sense of responsibility. Yet, increasingly many adults have held the view that childhood is under threat of erosion in the modern world.”

A key finding in this report is that 76% of 10-17 year-olds in the survey believe “kids are growing up faster than they used to.” “Modern technologies are embraced by children for the opportunities they offer to learn, play, engage socially and explore their world. **They are also significant in pushing children into the adult world at a younger age.**” (Emphasis mine).

This reminded me of the significance of Neil Postman’s book, “The Disappearance of Childhood” (Vintage Books 1994). Postman’s overall thesis is that print invented childhood, and the electronic media is making it disappear. “In the medieval world neither the young nor the old could read ... (so).. there had been no need for the idea of childhood.... From print onward, adulthood had to be earned. It became a symbolic, not a biological achievement. From print onward, the young would have to become adults.” (page 36).

“As electric media move literacy to the periphery of culture... a new diminished definition of adulthood begins to emerge. It is a definition that does not exclude children, and therefore what results is a new configuration of the stages of life. In the television age there are three: at one end infancy, at the other senility. In between there is what we might call the adult-child.” (page 99).

Postman argues that “shame” was placed on the other side of literacy; matters known only to adults. To gain access, one had to be able to read. It was a barrier that protected, as much as it differentiated. But television has no such barrier, and undifferentiated matters of “shame” pour into the homes, and the minds, of children. If Postman’s thesis is useful, it should be seen working out in any survey of children about their fears.

The 2006 ACF research seems to confirm Postman. “Significant numbers of children are worrying about what their futures hold. **Critically, children’s worries reflect the concerns of the adult world, rather than their own.**” (emphasis mine). 49% of children are worried about facing cancer when they are older; 39% are worried about facing terrorism in the future; 31% are worried about being a victim of crime; 27% are concerned that the world will end before they get old.

In relation to feelings, the incidence of anger (64%); worry (53%); stress (50%); and sadness (45%) “portrays a picture of children experiencing significant degrees of emotional turmoil.” (page 11). Alongside this picture of need, the research confirmed the significance of adults in the lives of Australian children. Parents are clearly the most important and influential adults in the lives of children, they want a range of adults in their lives that they can turn to for support, reassurance and protection. One difference with adult-based research showed up at this point: “Whilst children indicated that parents and family were the most important influences on children, adults believed the important influences to be friends and peer pressure.” (page 20).

The Conclusion (page 21) of the 2006 report includes:

“The children ...in this study have elucidated an experience of childhood that few adults would have imagined. They have described the way they see their world and their anxieties about the future. They have told us that parents are critical in their lives but that often they are denied time with them because of work pressures. They are also telling us that they need a range of adults in their life that they can turn to when they need support or protection.

Children want adults to engage with them, understand the way they see the world and help them make sense of it. Children need adults to share in their worries, reassure them that they are safe from harm, and give them hope when they feel overwhelmed by scary feelings. These actions are of heroic proportions in children’s eyes.”

The 2007 ACF research report “Children’s fears, hopes and heroes” used cluster analysis to categorise the children who participated into: “well connected and supported” (52%); “worried” (40%); “disconnected and insular” (8%). Children in the “well connected and supported” group tend to feel comfortable with themselves, have trust in adults and like to spend time with their parents. They feel safe and secure, and well connected to friends and family.

The “worried” group accounted for 40% of children and they tend to be self-conscious and stressed. They worry about how others perceive them, both physically and socially, and tend to be concerned about the state of the world and their own future.

The “disconnected and insular” group (8%) are likely to be least attached to family and friends and least trusting of adults. They feel that adults do not understand them, respect them or look out for them and feel there are few people they can rely on. These children tend to be older and are more likely to be boys.

This segmentation raises issues immediately for adults who care about what is happening to Australian kids, with just under half the group worried or disconnected. Concerns about low levels of self-confidence experienced by many children in earlier research were confirmed in this research. The specific numbers in the research were:

- Nearly half (46%) of the children do not feel confident in themselves.
- 57% of children worry about what other people think of them.
- 41% do not ever feel like they are doing well enough.
- 47% worry about how they look.
- 35% worry about being overweight.
- 16% worry about being too skinny.

Many adults assume that children live in the present, with little regard for the future. The research results challenge this popular notion:

- 52% of children are worried about not having enough water in the future.
- 44% are worried about the future impact of climate change.
- 43% are worried about pollution in the air and water.
- 36% are worried about terrorism.
- 31% are worried that they will have to fight in a war one day.
- 27% fear being a victim of crime one day.
- 25% worry that the world will end before they get older.

Once again we see the impact of the media, especially the electronic media, in the shaping of the minds of Australian kids. The positive side could be that with media and community attention profiling and debating a range of environmental issues, children are engaging with broader community problems. But that engagement is having a fairly big negative impact on a worrying percentage of children.

Children have been identified as a profitable target group by marketers. The children in this research know that and responded strongly:

- 88% of children feel companies try to sell them things they don't need.
- 85% of children feel there is a lot of pressure to buy things like games, music and clothes.
- 74% believe there should be less advertising aimed at children.

The average Australian kid sees between 20,000 and 40,000 advertisements in a year. They are bombarded with images about how they should look and what they should own – with resultant anxiety, stress and lower personal satisfaction too often the outcome. One UK report said “girls, in particular, experience feelings of inadequacy and discomfort as a result of ‘images of perfection’ promoted in advertising.” The application to Australia seems unquestionable.

“The role of marketing and advertising is clearly a contributing factor in the pressure children experience.... But it is the changing world and the need to interpret the fear of threats that seems to be at the heart of (any) crisis of confidence in children.”(page 23).

The report shows that in this context children re-affirm the role of parents to help them make sense of their changing world.

Towards the end of the report there is a needed focus on the “disconnected and insular” group of children (8% of 4 million is 320,000 children, if the results can be taken out into the whole child population).

*“Every 13th child who completed the survey was part of (this group). They are in real trouble. They represent the highest proportion of unhappy children...They are less likely to want to spend time with their parents. They do not feel understood, respected and find it difficult to know who to rely on....These are the children who are most likely to suffer from enduring emotional, social and psychological difficulties as they grow older. **Of all the children who undertook the survey, these children need our immediate attention, compassion and commitment.**”* (emphasis mine)

The 2007 report ends with a call for the re-establishment, at the Federal Government level, of a Minister for Children and the creation of a National Children's Commissioner. Whilst our consultation is not politically focused, that call needs to be noted – because unless and until something like it happens, our community is playing only lip service to the place of children in the Australian society.

The last statistics I saw on the number of children in contact with churches in Australia was 7%. To make the obvious point, this means that 93% of children in Australia have little or no contact with local churches. It would seem reasonable to assume that a fair number of the 7% are in the “connected” group of the ACF report – with the implication that the less connected and “at risk” children make up the bulk of the 93%. Apart from the enormous evangelistic challenge this brings, the leadership of our nation, at every level and in every sphere, is mixed up in those generalisations.

“The society that ignores its children is one generation away from destruction.”

Why are so many of the disconnected group boys? Is this a result of globalisation or what? The feminine century, the old rules don't apply any more. Redefine what maleness means. An issue for boys is that the teaching voice in the early years is almost exclusively female (3 out of an intake of 180), which defines expectations etc. In the US, out of 6 medicated children, 5 are boys. One experiment is looking at teaching boys separately from reception class, with some success. The media present men as dumb or failures – in ads and so on. Where are the heroes?

The same issues apply in the church – e.g. the role models are women. There is research that shows that boys learn differently. Some research looked at what factors might prevent kids getting into trouble and it suggested that they would be Ok if they have good relationships across three generations. Girls don't have it easy either – so many sexualised images of young girls. It used to be said that depression didn't occur in childhood but this has changed in the last couple of years, mostly in boys. Why do children no longer see the church as relevant? They do respond positively to the Gospel.

A story: our church sends 26 mentors into one school. The headmaster (not Christian) wrote in his newsletter how the misbehaviour episodes had dropped from 900 a year before the mentoring started, to 300 to less than 100 (annualised figure) in the third year. He attributed it entirely to having the mentors and a chaplain.

Wednesday 11 July

S2.1: Devotions

Steve Tollestrup

Sometimes we need to approach Biblical Theology in a 'playful' manner and attitude open to diversions. That is how this piece has been developed – just following an idea and seeing where it leads.

When we consider the story of Jesus with the children (Matt 19:14; Mk 10:14; Luke 18:16) we sometimes inadvertently leave out an important element. Adults brought the Children to Jesus. They recognised his value and importance and wanted to bless the children and impart something of his wisdom. This is a beautiful image. Children - expectant, curious, full of imagination and enthusiasm, together with adult understanding and nurture.

Adults understand that from childhood, which according to Ron lasts merely 12 years, future families, communities, nations and movements come. In other words, future building is an inter-generational collaborative project.

Bonhoeffer in his wonderful little book 'Life Together' writes "*God does not see us as individuals, but individuals in relationship*" No people ever understood that better than the Hebrew. We can feel we are in rather desperate times and under pressure, but if we look back we find others under great pressure.

The world that surrounded the Hebrew people - indeed it was the world view of the entire world at the time and taken for granted then as we take for granted the world is round today - was a cyclic one, an endless cycle of ritual and religious observance to assure renewal, and prevent collapse. The Hebrew prophets were very brave. They revealed a God who breaks into history and points to a future and a hope where God leads his people forward into new things. God's way of seeing things was different.

Psalm 78. Shows this inter-generational task especially vs 5ff

How did adults strengthen and prepare children for this new way of seeing the world and living in this new freedom for their children?

Three things:

1. Discipline
2. Faith and trust in God: remembrance of things past: salvation history. Look back to the Exodus and Judges and see the mighty works of God.
3. Wonder and awe (fear of the lord).

We need to re-think our eschatology. Dispensational theology has monopolised our thinking. It sees people as passive in the face of end time events. However we can challenge that assumption. Moltmann reminds us that history is kept open by mission.

In the New Testament there is another new paradigm. The new paradigm brought to light in the OT was God in History. In the new paradigm building on the first is the relational dimension. Through Christ we now have peace with God and with our neighbour. This is the challenge for us as we have an inter-generational project that seeks to prepare a generation able to bear witness to the love, faith and compassion of Jesus, which Paul describes in this way: "the only thing that counts is faith expressed in love".

S2.3: Review of participant resources prepared pre-meeting

We revised the programme so that we could begin to discuss the materials prepared by participants before the consultation and circulated amongst the group.

The discussion started by considering some of the major issues with children's work.

The context of the Child

In the Bible's view, children are set in an intergenerational context, with extended family networks. The current Western worldview is very individualistic which presents us a challenge. We need to reclaim the Biblical viewpoint, child and family: how to help families bring up children in the faith.

How do we do church? We often reproduce a segregated model: children are downstairs not hearing the great stories and celebrating with the whole church. What we do on Sunday is critical in this respect. We also need to address child and community: to rethink how we engage with the societal context and culture.

Intergenerational work is difficult and it's easier to work with individuals. But, in fact, many children's workers are exhausted and would like parents to be more involved. There is a movement towards family ministry with more resources being produced. Willow Creek church is taking a lead in this area. Family production: musical drama Bible story show. The idea is that families are sharing faith experiences together that they can then go and talk about.

Development of family ministry is impossible without commitment from parents. But, though they are happy to have parenting programmes, they don't put energy in on a Sunday morning; they want to worship themselves. Sunday School is seen as a childminding service. So when a programme isn't running, attendance drops. We do need to elevate this. To some extent, it's a discipleship issue. It is not godly to think only of yourself. So we should hold people (parents) to account. But we also need to recognise that one of the reasons that people hand children over to others for discipleship is that many parents haven't a clue. The models of discipleship we have tend to be adult centred.

Theology of Church and Worship

Another factor that moulds what we do on Sunday is our theology of church and worship. We see children as "on the way to be faithful", "the church of tomorrow" but not as faithful already. So, the type of worship and fellowship that has evolved tends to exclude children. We need to help the clergy in this. At present, they are the largest problem in terms of changing the Sunday morning event.

If we are creative and prepared to make the effort, there are other ways of exposing children to faith development. For example, one participant took her children on beach missions. There they were part of the team. They were important and part of something bigger than them. They learned so much more in a week or two than twelve months at Sunday School. We should try to get children involved into every area of church life. A bit more extreme, perhaps, was the church that took a group of 12 year olds to the Red Light district in Amsterdam. This changed lives and helped to produce disciples ready to serve. They can do amazing things if we give them the opportunity.

One of the participants had a vivid memory of God speaking to her at 18 months. She is now a minister of a church with many children and we recognise that when they go to school on Monday morning they are on a mission. We need to encourage children to hear from God themselves and not just rely on what someone else is telling them.

Becoming like a child

We have to rethink what it is to change to become like a child. A list of children's qualities may not be a guide. It may be more about joining with them; participating in their world, playing with them. We become like them by being with them. Related to this is the relationship between the theology of child and child theology. Which comes first? One influences the other, like chicken and egg. Perhaps, as has been suggested elsewhere, there should be someone on every church group articulating the views of children. When this happens, then people start asking why children are so important. So this is a way of doing things.

Discipleship means living life with and as a child. It's hard to do this if we don't sit down and listen. The best person to disciple a nine year old is another nine year old. I cannot enter this world as an adult. I may understand it but I can't enter it. That child has the best chance to walk alongside another nine year old.

We heard about an 8 year old whose grandmother was worried about him. He was depressed and literally tearing his hair out because his 11 year old brother was being bullied at school. His father was totally deaf and there was no mother around: two sons, a grandmother and totally deaf father.

That was the group. The therapeutic problem was how to restore the boy to normality so that his hair would grow back. The school chaplain was a key person in the process and some medication was given. He helped with anti-bullying programme. And much prayer was offered up. The father felt better and so took the sons to sporting occasions. Hard for deaf people to know what their words sound like to others.

Changing the paradigm for Children

What is the endgame? It's not enough just to flag the issues and discuss the problems. God is giving us an increasing platform for all children. How do we get the individuals together so that we change the paradigm for children and children's ministry? Just as the church is awakening to the needs of the poor, so the church can and must rediscover its lost children. We may be on the edge of something very significant: a paradigm shift. The process would be similar to the way we change people's thinking about abortion - humanise the unborn. So we could do something like this: a movement that changes people's paradigm of children. This has to happen at all levels, including family, professionals etc. We must change the minds of the decision-makers.

At this point, we went to join the Compassion staff for their devotions. Keith shared some thoughts on 2 Kings 5 where a little girl is used by God to lead a great man to healing and faith. He also shared a little about Mill Grove and CTM.

S2.2: Theological issues arising from work relating to children

DJ

Participants formed groups of 3 to identify some key theological issues relating to children that had arisen in the previous discussion.

Important Theological Questions from the groups

Vulnerability

- God seems to be particularly impassioned when the most vulnerable are ill treated – how does this feed into the way we theologise?
- Why do innocents suffer? What does this imply about who God is? What is the place of the child in crisis?
- God became extremely vulnerable in the incarnation of Christ. What does this say as to how we relate to God and understand him?

Discipleship

- We talk a lot about children experiencing God, not just learning about him. How do we help children to experience discipleship? Do we teach the bible or relationship with God?
- If God knew us in our mother's womb, are we not on a journey with God from before birth? What role is it to ensure that the children stay on this journey after birth? How do we equip the parents to perform this task?
- If the challenge of adults is to become like a child, what is the challenge of a child to become (in their discipleship)?

Anthropology

- What does it mean to say that children are made in the image of God? How do we understand their humanity?
- How do we develop a rich theology of childhood that preserves the tension of who they are, now and not yet, still developing?
- What is the place of child in the family and in the community?
- Theology of family: What is the relationship between theology of childhood and that of family?

Soteriology

- How do children stand before God?
- Children and the sacraments.
- How do we nurture children who are not part of the Christian community?
- Is becoming like a child an end in itself, or is it a part of a process?
- What does it mean to be born again? A picture of revisiting childhood with all its vulnerabilities?

Pneumatology

- Are we happy with a child to have the fruit of the Spirit but not as comfortable if they manifest the gifts?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a child? Who are we to say how the Holy Spirit can work with children?

Ecclesiology

- How do we understand children as part of the body of Christ, as a part of the whole, understanding the Body of Christ as a dynamic, organic identity?
- Intergenerational theology: What is our theology of all the generations in the church?
- What is the role of the child in the church? What opportunity should children have to lead intergenerational worship? If intergenerational was better ten years ago, what went wrong?
- Do we need theologically to revisit church – not laying blame? How do we do that but still turn the church inside out/upside down.
- What needs to happen to bring change? How can the attitude of leaders be changed?

Eschatology

- What is the destiny of the child; what happens when a child dies?

S2.4: A Child Theology Experiment: Creation - Introduction and Preparation***Keith***

John described briefly the experiment that was carried out in Cape Town on the doctrine of Sin.¹ The task before participants was to follow a similar process in revisiting the doctrine of Creation.

The participants divided into three groups to work on their understanding of the doctrine of creation, either using the method described for Cape Town or another method of their choosing. They recorded key elements of the doctrine and also a note of the sources of the doctrine that informed their thinking.

Keeping the results of this work 'in storage', the participants were called on to think how one or two of the following might interact with Creation. The aim was to think of them in context - in families, schools, church, camps, on the streets etc - not in abstract.

- Aboriginal children in Creation (e.g. a 13 year old inner city indigenous girl)
- Children with disability in Creation (e.g. a 9 year old paraplegic only boy)
- Wealthy children in Creation (e.g. a 11½ year boy from a wealthy blended family)
- Trekking children in Creation (e.g. a 7 year indigenous girl)
- Suburban children in Creation (e.g. a 15 year Gothic girl struggling with depression)

Consider the following:

- Earth, air, fire and water

¹ This can be read in detail in the report of the Cape Town consultation.

- Seasons
- Skills, play, dance, music
- media
- sexuality
- own experiences of nature in relation to the children's experiences

Thursday 12 July

S3.1: Devotions

Wendy

Ps 139

At a centre for street boys in Peru they read a passage of scripture each night, usually without comment. One night they noticed many of the boys crying. What was the passage of scripture? It was when Jesus was on trial and being taunted. Where it says that Jesus didn't open his mouth. They said, "this is our story". When they were being interrogated they could say anything but in their silence is their truth.

The God of creation is a communicator, speaking truth.

S3.2: Child Theology experiment: Continued

Keith

Some readings from 'Children's letters to God' relating to creation

- What questions do your children have about creation?
- Think back as a group on what you originally wrote about creation
- Record any changes you might want to make

Group 1

We had two children that we imagined. Our original ideas on creation centred around three themes:

- Creation is the activity of a Trinitarian God
- God has an ongoing relationship with creation
- Humanity created in image God and to steward creation

Considering the children's questions about creation, we focused particularly on point two.

Where is God's Perfection??

In Brooklyn, New York, Chush is a school that caters to learning disabled children. Some children remain in Chush for their entire school career, while others can be mainstreamed into conventional schools. At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of a Chush child delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended.

After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, "Where is the perfection in my son Shaya? Everything God does is done with perfection. But my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?"

² This story has a source which TruthOrFiction.com has been able to trace. It's attributed to Rabbi Paysach Krohn, a popular lecturer and best-selling author of the ArtScroll Maggid series of short stories. In a message to TruthOrFiction.com, Rabbi Krohn said, "Every single word in the story is accurate. I heard it from Shaya's father himself - who is a close friend of mine"
<http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/g/godsperfection.htm> accessed 30 Sep 07

The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father's anguish, stilled by the piercing query.

"I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child."

He then told the following story about his son Shaya:

One afternoon Shaya and his father walked past a park where some boys Shaya knew were playing baseball.

Shaya asked, "Do you think they will let me play?"

Shaya's father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. But Shaya's father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging.

Shaya's father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shaya could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said "We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning."

Shaya's father was ecstatic as Shaya smiled broadly. Shaya was told to put on a glove and go out to play short center field.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shaya's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shaya's team scored again and now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base, Shaya was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shaya bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat.

Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shaya didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it. However as Shaya stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya should at least be able to make contact.

The first pitch came in and Shaya swung clumsily and missed. One of Shaya's team-mates came up to Shaya and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shaya. As the pitch came in, Shaya and his team-mate swung at the bat and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher.

The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shaya would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman.

Everyone started yelling, "Shaya, run to first. Run to first." Never in his life had Shaya run to first. He scampered down the baseline wide-eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shaya, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second." Shaya ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shaya reached second base, the opposing short stop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third." As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, "Shaya run home."

Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team.

"That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection."

Group 2

We envisaged one child – a 15 year old girl who had got into the gothic subculture and had ended up by attempting suicide. She had had successful treatment for depression and moved back into a more mainstream culture.

We observed that the concept of a living God and a good creation doesn't figure in the worldview of such children. Therefore we need to rediscover the goodness and sanctity of creation, including our own bodies. Young people need to hear again their own significance –the apex of creation – and meaning in creation.

The doctrine must not be separated from that of the fall because the experience that not all is well is with creation is obvious all around. This also implies the need to link both these doctrines with that of redemption.

Some caveats were that the young persons encounter with creation is not rational but it more experiential and sensual. We noticed also how in practice our doctrine is often dualistic, over-emphasising the badness of the world and our bodies. Instead we should celebrate the goodness of our bodies.

Group 3

We had two children, 7 year old indigenous girl and an 11½ year old boy. Both children found nature a bit scary. After this, our description of the doctrine changed its focus, with an emphasis more on relationality.

- God created the world in order with structure and form
- God creates, knows and cares for every person
- God creates us for relationship – with himself, with others and with creation
- We are made in God's image to be creators
- Creation continues to be a mystery and to inspire wonder

S3.3: Child Theology experiment: Practical Application

Marcia

Questions for Discussion:

1. What would you like to add to our discussion of a doctrine of creation? Was your own theological understanding of creation strengthened by "putting a child in the midst"?
2. How might what we discovered about children and the doctrine of creation inform or strengthen your ministry with or on behalf of children? What are the practical applications of this exercise in child theology?
3. If we agree on the overall aim of Child Theology (i.e. rethinking theology and practices as a whole by "putting a child in the midst" of a theological argument; re-examining fundamental doctrines and practices of the church using the "lens" of the child), then what did you think about the process? Strengths? Weaknesses? Other ideas?
4. How has our discussion strengthened or informed your own theology of childhood? Are there fundamental elements of a robust theology of childhood that we should all keep in mind and hold in tension? For example, building on resources from the Bible and the Christian tradition, we might keep in mind that children are:
 - Gifts of God and sources of joy (Ex: Genesis, Psalms, Jeremiah, John 16; Luther) Children are gifts of God not only to parents but also to the community.
 - Sinful creatures and moral agents (Ex: Genesis; Psalms, Proverbs; Augustine, Calvin, Edwards)
 - Born into a "state of sin"; and they also carry out "actual sins"
 - Infants and young children are not as sinful as adults; they should be treated tenderly.
 - Some who viewed children as sinful also viewed them as equals and thereby shattered barriers of gender, race, and class.
 - Developing beings who need instruction and guidance (Ex: Genesis, Proverbs, Deuteronomy, Ephesians; Chrysostom, Luther, Calvin)

- Whole and complete human beings made in the image of God (Ex: Genesis; Rahner)
- Moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, and representatives of Jesus (Ex: Gospels; Schleiermacher)
- Orphans, neighbours, and strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion (Ex: Exodus, Deuteronomy; Francke, Wesley)

Child Theology may change the nature of theology – with less emphasis on the rational and more emphasis on the intuitive. As a result of the preceding discussion of the doctrine of creation, there were some new insights and emphases for members of the consultation:

- Creation is an ongoing process
- We have lost some of the mystery and wonder – we get caught up in the argument
- What is important for children is the creation of themselves more than the creation of the world. Many children are unhappy with their bodies. We need to help children honour their bodies and we ourselves need to show more respect for their bodies, e.g. in protecting their bodies from pollution.
- What do we do about secondary creation – the world of art? It seems that a Christian reflection on this should be rooted in the doctrine of creation. We should respect the offerings of children in this area.
- We should be careful not to lose a sense of God as ‘appreciator’ – the joy he takes in his creation. The idea of appreciator and creator are linked (Jim Henson the creator of the Muppets).
- Within children there is an instinctive spirituality that is slowly squeezed out by peer pressure and cognitive overload (see David Hay and Rebecca Nye ‘The Spirit of the Child’). This is reflected in the story of the children in the temple and the quote of Ps 8 which refers to babies’ inarticulate cries.
- Being made in the image of God implies that we are made for relationship and hence open to the pain of alienation. Being healthy is relational not physical. Note 1Sm 16:5 where God’s focus is on the relational and metaphysical.
- Compare Gn 1 and Gn 5 – Adam’s children were made in his image. The phrase may be indicative more of kinship than of similarity.

Any practical applications:

- I will be much more open to eliciting the questions of the children when I’m teaching Christian Religious Education
- Hearing the questions is more important than answering them. Children want to be heard.
- I think I would be less worried about having all the answers and sometimes reflect the questions back to children, knowing they also have spiritual insight and can hear from God.
- Throughout life, maybe from the moment of conception, children are exposed to the power of evil drawing them away from God (also to the Holy Spirit drawing them towards God).

About the aim of Child Theology and the process used:

- It has been both an affirming and frustrating process.
- There would be value in getting children themselves to do Child Theology, if that is possible.
- The child at the centre may be 18 months old so Child Theology need not be articulate Child Theology.
- We noticed that the imaginary children were almost all marginalised or traumatised in some way. So were we really not bouncing off ‘child’ but rather the ‘disability’, which could just as well have been in an adult?

- How did Mary and Joseph bring up Jesus so that he grew in favour with God and man?

S3.5: Key Issues for Child Theology in Australasia: Group reflections and plenary feedback

Keith

In response to Jesus' action in putting a child in the midst in Mt 18:3, the CTM exists to reform all theological reflection and enquiry with a child in the midst and to ensure that this theology informs every aspect of the church's life and mission, including that which relates to children.

Again in three groups, the participants reflected on some practical outcomes that could be pursued in the region.

Group 1

- There is scope locally for Masters level work in the area of children in Australian colleges;
- Also an opportunity arises from Federal funding for school chaplaincy work
- Need to respond to the changes in society – where are the Christian futurists?

Group 2

- Explored the theological presuppositions underlying our work with children and this was very helpful.

Group 3

- We need to aim higher than just spreading the word to children's workers; now we have a shared language we can work together on this; we have a course that we can adapt and put into some theological colleges;
- We talked about churches who might be doing Child Theology without knowing the term;
- We discussed how implementation of Child Theology in churches would be costly and could mean sacrifice of what we think we know; the first step will be prayer.

S3.6. Commitments and plans

Paul

Is CTM useful in children's work in Australia? All the states in Australia have interdenominational networks to co-ordinate children's work. There are also 15 local networks. There is a website. There is quite a lot of frustration at what is being achieved. There is the possibility of pooling resources and working smarter.

I think this movement has the greatest potential for change at the moment and I could envisage these networks being involved in CTM. What can CTM do that the networks can't do? The networks are good at providing resources etc but have not been successful in changing the paradigm, which needs to be done.

Should the emphasis be on Child Theology or on theology of childhood? Child Theology goes to affect the pastors which will have a greater impact than just working with those who work with children. On the other hand, before taking the plunge to develop Child Theology, many would want the reassurance of the importance of children in the Kingdom of God from a good biblical theology of childhood. Unless persons are familiar with the theology of childhood, they cannot do Child Theology well.

When Compassion goes into a new country they get the pastors and parents together and talk to them about children. Shouldn't we do the same with Child Theology? There will be more change in the church by this approach because the colleges just respond to what the churches demand. It's hard to get time on the senior pastors' agenda. But it's not right to use children as bait to get adults into church. Children are of value in their own right and provide a unique insight into the nature of the

kingdom of God. A smaller group was formed to consider how to move things forward. Compassion is willing to facilitate this process.

Appendix: Some relevant Publications by participants

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