

# Child Theology Consultation in South Asia

6 — 9 November 2008

**Child  
Theology**  
MOVEMENT

Jesus placed a little child among them

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**Report of the  
First South Asia Consultation on Child Theology  
6 – 9 November 2008  
Secunderabad, India**

**Editor: John Collier**

December 2008

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# First South Asia Child Theology Consultation

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> Nov

## 1.1 Opening Session

*Paul Joshua*

Paul opened in prayer and went on to reassure participants that the relatively small size of the meeting was intentional as it is important that we have a conversation in which everyone can be heard. Our aim is to have a meaningful discussion in which everyone takes part. It is not a conference but a consultation.

Various groups had been involved in organizing the meeting and each gave their welcome:

- Viva India;
- Compassion India: has been in India for 13 years, working in partnership with many other organizations to improve the situation of India's children;
- The Child Theology Movement: an international grass roots movement involving people meeting in small circles to reflect on Jesus saying to his disciples, "Unless you become as little children..." So we ask ourselves: what does it mean for my church/seminary/organization to 'become a little child'? Often the challenge is to admit that we don't yet know the answer. It's very special for us as India has a very important place in world history, both in the past and in the future. It also has a special place in my (Keith White) personal life, through family connections and my research into the life and work of Pandita Ramabai.
- The Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies – a small and new institute, encouraging research and publishing the results.

We spent some time worshipping God and then prayed in pairs for each other and for the meeting.

Paul reminded us that Jesus came to preach the Kingdom of God and that the first response that Jesus expects is repentance (Mt 4:13). Entry into the Kingdom of God has to do with turning away from self with its pride and turning to God in repentance and humility. This requires a holistic response including the heart as well as the intellect. When we compare Mt 18:1-4, we are encouraged to do two things: to change and become humble. Child Theology is nothing if not kingdom theology.

We took a moment to write down our personal expectations for the next few days: what we expected to learn and perhaps to unlearn. Then, quietly and privately, we prayed over these goals.

## 1.2 Personal Introduction of Participants

### *Basil C Fernando*



I am from the Apostolic Church in Sri Lanka. I was born into a Catholic family of 10 children. When I was 14, I entered a Catholic seminary but 6 years later I had a crisis which caused me to resign and go to work as a clerk in a state corporation. I stayed there 10 years. When I was 23 I was born again at an evangelistic crusade.

My wife came from a Baptist background and we have three children, two sons and a daughter. I have been in the ministry of the Apostolic church for 28 years. I have a diploma in Ministry Development from a Bible College in New Zealand and have been ordained as an apostle in my church. I supervise about 60 churches with 25 pastors.

### *Proshanto Baroi*



I am married to Malobika. We live in Kolkata and participate in an integral mission with Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta founded by the Late Rev. Vijayan Pavamani. We minister to the poor, marginalised and hurting people in Kolkata and its suburbs. The ministry provides holistic development and empowerment opportunities to the drug addicts, homeless people, children at risk, people living with HIV, rickshaw pullers and commercial sex workers. We are also involved in advocacy and training and minister in the local church. The gospel is dynamic in its proclamation and demonstration, therefore it is our vision to influence people in Christ, who will transform their own lives and touch a million others with His love.

***Chihanpam Raikhan***

I work with YWAM in a home for street children. I was brought up in a Christian family in the state of Manipur. I have two brothers and two sisters. I am the eldest son.

After finishing my BTh at the South India Baptist Theological College, I decided to dedicate my life to full time mission work.

Some friends introduced me to YWAM and I did further training with them in their Discipleship Training School. Following this, I started to work in their programmes for helping AIDS victims, slum children etc.

***Noel Samuel***

I am a Pastor of the Indian Pentecostal Church of God in Vishakapatnam and one of the sons of the founder of the church, P.M. Samuel. We are also involved in ministry to the community particularly the poor and children, like running children's homes.

***Prabakhar Samson***

At present, I am working with Viva India as a consultant. I am a medical graduate from the Government medical college in Miraj. After postgraduate studies in the USA, I came to work for the Leprosy Mission as the Southeast Asia Director in Singapore.

As I retired from that, I was challenged to take up the challenge of children in India. I met Keith White in a small meeting in Pune which challenged me to take up the theological issues raised by children. Now we are working with theologians and negotiating with seminaries to include the Holistic Child Development (HCD) diploma in their programs.

I have three children: all are doctors.

***Don Boscoe***

I am secretary of the Viva India network in Hyderabad. We remind people that God cares for children. I also work for a school which caters for Handicapped Muslim children and an orphanage for children whose parents have been taken by AIDS. I like to organise events such as competitions and retreats.

I am married. My wife is a professor in a school of management. We have two children, a boy and girl.

***Sujitha Siri Kumara.***

I am married to Renuka and we have two daughters: Rajinie (14) and Kumary (8). I am struggling to be a good parent and a husband.

I strongly believe in protecting children and providing them with opportunities to achieve their God-given full potential. I have a vision to see that every local church in Sri Lanka will have at least one trained, skilled and committed child-friendly worker to minister to children in their community. To see this vision fulfilled I am currently teaching and training Christian childcare workers in HCD. This way I believe to make an impact on spiritual, physical and psychological well-being of children of our country.

***Shanti Dharmadasa***

I was born in Sri Lanka to a Buddhist family. I became a Christian in 1982 and from that day on I dedicated my life to serve Jesus. Two years later, I started working in the Sunday School. I'm not married

Now I work for Kidsreach which helps children through camps and other programmes. The aim is to help children reach other children with the Gospel. We provide training programmes for leaders. I also teach about children's ministry at Lanka BC. I am here to know more about the Father's heart for children.

***Shova Shrestha***

I am from Nepal and represent CARNET Nepal. We aim to make a better world for children. I help with finance and general administrative duties, but I have the opportunity also to learn about children at risk. My hope is to get a better understanding of the children and their needs so that I can help with their restoration.

I am single. My brother and sister are Christians but my father is not a Christian.

***Elizabeth Giri***

I'm from Calcutta. I am married and have a 30month old son called Amish. My husband is in the final year of a doctorate in religions and I am writing a thesis for an MTh on Child Theology with special reference to children at risk.

I am here to learn what Child Theology is all about. I am very passionate for the cause of children and wish to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

***Keith White***

I have a wife and four children and two grandchildren. We have 1,200 children who have been part of our household, over 108 years. I was not the head or even a member of the household for all this time! The work was started by my grandfather and continued by my father before me.

I lecture in theology at MBTS, Penang, and Spurgeon's college, London. I also write, including a new version of the Bible. I love playing chess. I noticed the children playing outside: there were two games going on at the same time – one was cricket and one was football – without any apparent problem. It's difficult to imagine this happening in the UK!

***Noel Kotian***

I am the director of Christian education with the Evangelical Fellowship of India which is based in Bangalore. We produce many teaching materials, for example a curriculum for Sunday School children age 3 to 16 years and Bible study books for adults. At present there are about 200,000 students using our materials in 20 languages. We are currently revising the curriculum and I hope I will be able to apply what I learn here.

My wife's name is Yashoda and she works with girls from slum communities, teaching them English, behavioural and computer skills. We have three children, two of whom are married.

***Varughese John***

I have been teaching Theology, apologetics and philosophy for the last 10 years. My Ph.D looked at the work of Kierkegaard but my interest also extends to Indian Society, culture, worldview analysis etc. I am now the Academic dean of Jubilee Memorial Bible College near Chennai. It is part of the St Thomas Evangelical Church which came out of the Mar Thoma church some years ago. Child Theology is rather new to me and I'm here to learn from all the participants, most of who seem to have hands on experience in working with children.

My wife Mary is a counsellor and works in a school near our home. She is currently also studying along with her work. We have 2 children. Ashish, our son is 8 and Preetha, our daughter is 5.

***Mathias M Ross***

I am the director of the Institute of Advanced Christian Studies at Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Chennai. We are thinking of including Child Theology in the curriculum. Apart from this, I also arrange conferences and consultations on various contextual issues which call for an adequate theological response.

My wife is a school principal and we have two sons.

***Upul Nishantha Silva***

I'm a pastor of a Pentecostal church so I don't need a microphone! I'm from Sri Lanka. I received my basic theological education at Lanka BC and now I teach there.

I went to a Child Theology consultation in Penang at the invitation of Dan Brewster. I tried to prepare by reading something on Child Theology but couldn't find anything in the Lanka BC library. The principal has asked me to start a two year diploma course on HCD.

I am married to Nilanthika and we have two sons, Nilushan and Nilupal.

***D Jacob***

I'm from Kerala where I was ordained a minister in the church of South India. After working with youth for three years, I joined Compassion International where I worked as a programme facilitator for 8 years. Then I went back to being a pastor. I serve in a small new church in a predominantly Hindu area. I am in charge of the development of a new syllabus for the Sunday Schools in our group of churches, which have over 50,000 children.

I also teach New Testament at the Kerala United Theological Seminary. I am married to Joy Johns who teaches Botany. We have two children.

***Samuel Koshy***

I grew up in Calcutta where I was a pastor for ten years. During that time, I did an Associates Degree in Theology by extension study with Maryland Bible College, Baltimore, USA. Later, I moved with my wife to Bangalore to SABC to study for MDiv. In 2007, after graduating, I joined the teaching faculty. I also served as one of the associate pastors at an Assembly of God church.

***Sonia Koshy***

I'm married to Samuel and I also teach at the South Asia Bible College. I also have an MDiv. Before this I was a media professional working in television.

I have always wanted to be involved in ministry to women and children, especially abused children and those with special abilities but I am presently taking a postgraduate programme on Human Rights from a college in Delhi so that I can be more effective in the Lord's Kingdom

***Padma Mohan***

I come from Andhra Pradesh. After training as a pharmacist in 1982, a pastor led me to Christ. I sought God for his will in my life and he led me to work with the Child Evangelism Fellowship. Through them I was trained in children's ministry and I worked with them for 8 years until I got married (see next).

Now I still work with children. We take children from the slums and put them into schools. We run children's clubs in the slums and train pastors and Sunday School teachers.

***Mohan Kumar***

I'm a pastor in a Fundamental Baptist church. I was brought up a Hindu but became a Christian in 1979. Ten years later, I married Padma. We have two teenage children, a boy and a girl.

Our ministry is a 'faith ministry' working through two organisations, Jehovah Jireh Baptist Ministries and Children for Christ Ministries, amongst Hindus, Muslims and tribal peoples in our area. We aim to plant churches, using camps, rallies retreats, Sunday Schools etc. We train up to 500 pastors in a year. We run a Bible Institute to train lay workers and recently have started a TV channel.

***Jonathan Kodavatikanti***

I was born into a pastor's family in Andhra Pradesh. After a BTh I studied at MBTS for the HCD diploma. I have worked for Compassion in India for more than 20 years.

Compassion started in Korea in 1952. It has grown to cover many countries, including 13 states of India. We have 275 projects and almost 70,000 children sponsored through these projects. But we realise that we cannot sponsor every child. So we have a parallel strategy - to speak for children.

I have recently submitted my thesis on Fatherhood. I only married 9 years ago so I don't have children of my own. But I had 12 siblings – and many nephews and nieces. We still have a hostel in our home with 200 children.

***Tony Senewiratna***

I'm from Sri Lanka. I'm married and have one son. I also like to play chess. I was a typical school dropout and part of the first copy band of the Beatles in Sri Lanka. A Muslim friend took me to a YFC rally and I joined YFC when I was 19. I worked mostly in drug rehab.

When I left there, I heard about child sexual abuse for the first time – a very big problem in Sri Lanka. I helped to set up two organisations, one with the government child protection board and ESCAPE (Eradicating Sexual Child Abuse, Prostitution and Exploitation). I want to see Sri Lanka become a safer place for children. It's hard to protect children at home so we are trying to make schools a

zone of peace for children, where children are seen as a resource.

I also work as the National director of Habitat for Humanity.



***Joseph Durairaj***

I'm originally from Tamil Nadu and I have worked on this campus (International College of Cultural Studies, Secunderabad) for a year. We have two programmes – BTh and MDiv here which I help to run. I have been with OM for 18 years. I heard about Child Theology last year at a seminar and I'm fascinated to know more. It seems to be an important area in both Theology and Church ministry.

I am married to a nurse, Latha, and we have two children.

***John Collier***

I originally trained as a doctor in response to God's call to do mission work but actually for most of my working life I was involved in medical research work in the UK. I was involved in outreach to young people and church work in all of that time. In 1994 I decided to take early retirement and devote the rest of my life to full time mission work.

To prepare for this, I studied at Spurgeon's College in London, where Keith was one of my teachers. I eventually graduated with an MTh. I did a short term mission with street children in Rio de Janeiro and returned there for some years to work with Viva Network. At one of their conferences, I met Keith again and became involved with him in setting up the Child Theology Movement. Now I help to

organise meetings like this and write the reports afterwards.

***Shadrach Peter***

I started working as a High School teacher where I taught for 15 years. I then stepped out in faith to work with the Union of Evangelical Students in India. At that time it was a pioneering work.

I am married to Gladys who has a Masters in Sociology. She has an extensive ministry as a Bible Teacher and evangelist. We have three children who are also involved in Christian ministry. One is a doctor, another a clinical psychologist and my son studied theology. The children married people from 3 different states and I have learned a lot through direct involvement with these different cultures.

When I retired from UESI, I did an MTh. For my thesis, I wrote a history of my home area and through this God called me to return with my wife to the place where we had started, to begin to plant churches, particularly involving the children. It's an area with no other Christians. We started a day care centre for children which grew to be a school of 200 children from 6 villages. We also started a hostel for children in great need, a medical centre, and an Industrial training centre.

***Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj***

I am husband of one wife Sumitha and father of three children: Sithara, Tharika and Pratheek. I come to Child Theology from the perspective of a 'practitioner'. My wife and I worked with slum children and this led to studying about children and God. I have been involved in organising this event.

I work with the Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies which is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of South Asian Christianity. One of the things we do is publish a magazine, called Dharma Deepika. The most recent issue is about God and children.

I also serve as an elder at the Tamil Brethren Church in Bangalore.

### 1.3 Introducing CT

*Keith*

The way we do things is as important as what we do. The way we say things is as important as what we say. So we would not have started a Child Theology consultation unless we were sitting in a circle. We have already started a process that is different. Do you think this is a simple thing? Try re-arranging the chairs in your church into a circle! But first a warning: you may end with more questions than you started with!

I noticed that many have used the words 'Child Theology' in their stories. Over recent months, we have noticed that the phrase is used to describe quite different ways of relating 'child' and 'theology'. Some of these uses differ quite a lot from our understanding. Although, as far as we know, we coined the term Child Theology, we have no copyright on it and others are free to use it to describe what they do but we do believe that it would be helpful to be clear and precise in our terminology. In our view the following are distinctive about Child Theology:

- The way it is done, with mixed groups (male and female, married and single, theologians and practitioners), a circle, a conversation, without 'experts';
- starting with questions from children and those working with them;
- creating groups tasked with responding to the questions;
- recognising that there are many ways of linking theology and children;

Participants watched a PowerPoint slide show to introduce Child Theology. The presentation narrated how the Child Theology Movement grew over the years, the questions it raises and what it seeks to achieve. It included a map of the world showing the various places where consultations have been held (in every inhabited continent). It shows that there is no 'capital' of the empire – in fact, there's no empire! It's a distributed process, with all parts contributing.

So, having seen the PowerPoint, participants were asked to discuss in groups of four, their questions and observations about CT, noting the main points about the presentation. Groups made a summary of the discussion to provide a resource for the session the following day.

#### ***Group discussion***

Here are some of the questions the groups raised in their discussions. (Some similar questions have been combined.)

- Why does the church neglect children? (Suggested reasons included: busyness; more concern with money and power which children lack; male chauvinism; lack of awareness of the spiritual need; sense that children can be evangelised later)
- Is the Child Theology Movement a movement of theologians or of the people? How is the church responding?
- What kind of idea of God do poor/disabled/Dalit children have? How could we change this to a more Biblical concept of God?
- Church worship is adult oriented. How can we change this? How can we get children to stand up for their rights in church and the family? Is this something that the Child Theology Movement would attend to?
- The Child Theology Movement is a movement of adults. Where are the children in its seminars, planning and decisions? How can we get children to promote Child Theology Movement?
- To what extent can children exercise freedom of choice in the religiously pluralistic context of India? Is Child theology also about giving the liberty of Christ to a child and not just a child coming to the knowledge of Christ, which brings in issues of volition and sense of freedom to choose.? [This is in the context of the legislation preventing conversion of children.]
- What are the ingredients/ methods/ hermeneutics of Child Theology?
- Has the World Council of Churches incorporated Child Theology as one of its ministries?
- Should we teach the children to defend themselves or show the other cheek? How can we avoid giving the child the inferiority complex that results from being continuously bullied?
- The question of original sin: are children [infants] sinful? The other extreme might be to idolize children.
- Are children created in the image of God? Do they have dominion over all of God's creation?

- Can we see the image of God in those who are ‘differently abled’? Is it due to the judgement of God for the sins of the child or parent? How can we combat the social stigma that they and their parents face?
- How should the church respond to children who have been abused?
- What does becoming like a child mean in Mt 18:3?
- Why did the disciples of Jesus prevent parents from bringing their children to Jesus?
- How can we facilitate dialogue between Systematic/Biblical Theology and Child Theology?
- How do we bring together the need to respect the authority of parents and the need to hear the voice of the child in our cultural context?
- When do children become accountable for their sins? Is it right to give baptism to a child if he/she really confesses their sins and asks to be baptised?
- Does Ps 8:2 mean that all children believe in God?
- How can we adults empower children to speak on issues that pertain to themselves, for example, can they be part of a church committee?

In addition, in the plenary follow up, groups chose one sentence to share with everyone. The following summarises the feedback:

- Is it right to give baptism to a child who accepts the Lord and asks for to be baptised?
- Why Child Theology now? Why not 50 years ago?
- Mt 18:6 – does this mean ‘all children’ (see Ps 8) or just those who believe in him?
- When Jesus spoke about becoming like a child, was he speaking about the quality or the person of the child?
- To what extent can children exercise freedom of choice? How can Child Theology develop in a religiously plural society like India?
- Most theology has come from the west, including Child Theology<sup>1</sup>. Usually theology is a function of the church and developed by it. Is Child Theology being developed by the church?

#### 1.4 Child Theology Movement resources

The Child Theology Movement uses a variety of resources to develop Child Theology:

1. God’s Word – which is open to everyone and which reveals itself. It is found in scripture, creation, children, and all of it in Jesus the person. Jesus is the ‘alpha and the omega’ of Child Theology.
2. People, like each participant here. Child Theology is connecting people – those gathered here; part of the church, whom we try to connect directly, not through an HQ somewhere.
3. Electronic media - connections through email, website and other electronic communication.
4. Materials that have been produced throughout history; not always using the term ‘Child Theology’, but with the child in mind. [eg. the child in Christian thought, the child in the Bible... ed. Marcia Bunge].
5. Models are being developed of doing Child Theology around the world e.g. Pandita Ramabai showed a way of doing theology just like Jesus who modelled doing theology with a group of 12 men. KL, Penang, Nepal and other places have different models that are practiced although not under name CT.
6. Printed materials produced by the Child Theology Movement– consultation reports and booklets

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<sup>1</sup> The Child Theology Movement would dispute this! It was started in Asia by a group with participants from all parts of the world and it has continued to develop with an emphasis on giving ‘non-Western’ participants a clear voice.

## Friday 7th Nov

### 2.1 Devotions

Noel Kotian

We were led in some worship songs by the Bethel Church music group. Noel then shared a few verses on the child from Proverbs (Pr 22:6; 29:15) and reminded us that Jesus called us to be like little children. Jesus brings our own childhood back to memory – the innocence, openness, vulnerability, etc. He then called for prayer from the participants and concluded with a prayer.

### 2.2 Response to yesterday's questions

Keith White

We reviewed the questions produced by the small groups yesterday. There were several that were similar so we have distilled them down to eight questions. Groups of five with a lady in each group were formed to consider the questions in greater detail and propose possible responses.

1. Why Child Theology now? Why not earlier – children were suffering?	It was always there but Child Theology is new and needs more defining.
2. How is the image of God to be found in disabled (differently abled) children?	We need to redefine the “Image of God” and to look at children with a different perspective. The image of God is not the physical aspect of humanity
3. Is the Child Theology Movement a movement of theologians or of the people?	It has challenged all – a movement of theologians to bring it to all the people through networks.
4. What does ‘becoming like a child’ involve?	Being humble, submissive, teachable, willing to repent, not keeping bad feelings, appreciative and flexible.
5. Is Child Theology ‘western’ like other theologies? How is Child Theology different?	The theology of childhood tends to focus on what God’s heart is <i>for</i> children. Child Theology tries to understand God’s heart <i>from</i> children and what it means to welcome a child. The less we ‘place’ children in our midst, the less it will be child theology. We are all children of God and can bring the experience of the ‘child in the midst’ to theology.
6. Why does the church neglect children?	Too busy! The church is busy with other things such as power and money. There is a lack of awareness of the needs of the children and so children are not in the priority list.  There is a failure to recognize other (non-spiritual) needs – not looking at the child holistically. It needs to understand that the child needs more than just spiritual things. The image of God in the child is not sufficiently acknowledged.
7. How can we facilitate a dialogue with Systematic/Biblical/ theology	A task of Child Theology is to revise the ‘doctrine of man’ to include the ‘doctrine of child’. There is no conflict between systematic theology and Child Theology. Rather the doctrine of man includes man as child. Yet it calls for a revision of the doctrine of man in the light of the doctrine of child. We may need to look what it means to become like a child when systematic theology discusses man as ‘child of God’. Perhaps one should develop a separate doctrine of child.
8. How can we involve children in CT?	Jesus calls us to observe (closely) the child. Children are integral to the Child Theology process therefore the child should participate in the whole process. But others have pointed out that everyone was a child once, or our own adult encounter with children brings an enriched vision that can be engaged in the process of Child Theology.  We have seriously to engage children in our faith practice rather than relegate them to Sunday Schools, to keep them out of the way when ‘more serious’ things are happening.  Where appropriate, children can be invited to be present in planning

	<p>meetings and programmes.</p> <p>Where decision-making is concerned, children can be met by a good facilitator and the children's views are taken into account.</p> <p>Feedback from children can be heard so that adequate and ongoing discussion of what particularly concerns them is carried out.</p> <p>Children can be trained to play leadership roles and supported to be effective in public life.</p> <p>We can help children to be our teachers, and be ready to be shown what they appreciate and what is weak in our structures and practices.</p>
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Comments by Keith.

Keith pointed out that the answers to these questions can be found in a recent issue of Dharma Deepika!<sup>2</sup> The following list gives the page numbers.

- 1 Something is stirring in relation to children in these times; children are being thought of differently e.g. the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It's no surprise that this is reflected in the church. The church has always been interested in children but it's only recently that electronic media have helped networking. [DD pp 80-82;33-37]
- 2 A key thing is the cross – often portrayed as a thing of beauty but for Jesus it was an ugly instrument of torture. In disabled children, we are confronted with the cross. We may need to go back to redefine what we mean by the 'image of God'. Are they a distorted or a perfect image? [DD pp 68-76]
- 3 Initially, it is a movement by theologians hoping to put it through the church to the people. The church can facilitate this process and become an 'action place'. The question still remains: what is Child Theology's distinctive role in the church when so many ministries to children already exist? [DD pp 42-45; 64-67]
- 4 We have no idea of what the child that Jesus brought into their midst was like. But we have a clue: humble. The child had no status in the group of disciples. Jesus seems to have been saying: 'change and become as one who has no status', as far as greatness is concerned. It was the status of '*doulos*', servant. The quality of the child mentioned by Jesus was humility. Children were discounted. The child had no status. So, change and become a 'nobody'. The one who is the greatest is the least. [DD pp 54-63]
- 5 Ramabai remained an Indian but she recognised that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek – that we are all children of one father.  
  
Child Theology used the words 'Child' and 'Theology' in a playful way, without being dogmatic, without defining their relationship. Child Theology naturally embraces UGHFC<sup>3</sup> but wants to go further. We often think of UGHFC as a theology of childhood rather than Child Theology. We want to affirm strongly that we can learn about God's heart *from* children - the child is a sign of God. A distinctive of Child Theology is the child 'in the midst' rather than 'in the way'. [DD pp 68-76]
- 6 The church has been too busy with money, authority, power. There is also a lack of awareness of the needs of children. [DD p46; pp 87-88]
- 7 There are many dialogues between Child Theology and systematic theology. For example, we focused on the need to reformulate anthropology, to include specifically a doctrine of the child. [DD pp 77-78]
- 8 As children are integral to the church's mission, they should be involved in what the church does and the church should also listen to them. Some people want literal children present in every session but others point out that we all were children and that in God's sight we stay children. We probably all have regular experiences of children that we can draw on. In Brazil we did involve children directly. But as we do so we must always respect their childhood [DD pp 5-13; 18-31]

<sup>2</sup> Issue 28; Vol 12; No 2; July – December 2008.

<sup>3</sup> 'Understanding God's Heart for Children' is an international process of Bible-based reflection and consultation promoted by Viva (formerly Viva Network) which seeks to enable Christians to hear and understand God's heart and will for children. See [http://www.viva.org/?page\\_id=104](http://www.viva.org/?page_id=104)

## **2.3: The Child in South Asian Cultures**

*Paul Joshua*

We continued the methodology we had been using, which is that all were invited and expected to contribute.

We don't have to go far to find children in India – they make up 44% of the population. But that doesn't mean that intellectual discussion in society has addressed children. Even the use of the term 'child' is not strictly accurate - when you look at the texts, they actually only address the 'boy child'. The girl child is not addressed at all. She is seen as a beautiful plant, a 'sapling that belongs to another courtyard'. That is, she is brought up to be the property of the 'in-laws'. So, the girl child is often considered to be a burden. For example, in a village where a lady was due to give birth- all came to watch and be a part – within two minutes of the girl child being born the parents offered the child to anyone who was there. Underlying these practices is a culture that prefers the boy child. South Asia is a large area and there are many differences but there are underlying similarities.

Participants divided into four groups to discuss experiences of childhood in the family, in church and in the wider community. The church generated a lot of discussion. We were aware that it is not living up to its calling. But we ourselves are also the church. Likewise in our homes – if we are not careful, we find ourselves reproducing the same way of life.

### ***Home***

The improved economy in India and education are bringing a change but there is still some discrimination. The dowry pays a big part – many pastors expect a tithe from the dowry! Many daughters are abused by their mothers-in-law but they do the same when they become mothers-in-law – it's payback time, inflicted on the next generation. The wife gets little support from her husband, who is more attached to his own family, so she waits for her son who will be her support. It seems that education is not as powerful as we expected to change the culture. Sisters were not given same preference and education.

### ***Church***

We discussed the powerful influence of caste in the churches. There is still some gender discrimination too. Has the church constructed a Christian culture? The Church has been led forward by the communities around. The practices of the church show that the world does in fact shape it much more than we think. For example, in one church, when a woman read a passage of scripture before Holy Communion, the pastor called a male member of the congregation to read it again. Similarly, children from poor backgrounds are often neglected in the church.

How can Child Theology contribute to the transformation of the practices of the church and as a result to the societies around? How can it help the church to become a cultural innovator?

### ***World***

A common view is that boys should be given freedom and girls should be restricted as they will have to fit into the set-up of their future mother-in-law.

There are anecdotes about discrimination against girls, e.g. that a man divorced his wife because she gave birth to a daughter; the baby girl thrown into a dustbin.

Boys are preferred because one is needed to light the funeral pyre, to carry on the family name, because of the dowry that his bride will bring and because the family property should not be taken to another home.

We need cultural innovators. Perhaps we can attend to how Child Theology can assist us in recreating culture. Most of the child care delivered in India is done by the church and organizations related to the church. In this sense, the church is in the vanguard. But in other senses, the church is entrapped in the culture. If Child Theology is rooted in culture, then it can be an agent of transforming culture for the good of society.

## **2.4 Issues facing Christians in South Asia**

*Paul Joshua*

Plenary discussion

Discussion of children in south Asia requires that we qualify who we are speaking about. For example, what if we read into the text that Jesus placed 'a girl child' in their midst - perhaps even 'a little dalit girl child'? We need a Child theology in context not in abstraction. This would help us reflect on the radical nature of the Kingdom of God. Therefore we should approach it prepared for repentance. Do we need to repent? If so, what for? What does it mean to become humble? What humility has this dalit child taught? What changes should I make in my life, in the life of the church, in society and any and everything to make a difference on the dalit child's life?

We started from the macro (subcontinent) level and then moved on to country specific situations. A general discussion led to the following suggestions for current issues facing Christians:

- Media;
- Poverty, hunger education and health;
- Employment;
- Child trafficking;
- Globalisation;
- Religious liberty;
- Child sexual abuse and prostitution;
- Children at war.

Time allowed for detailed discussion of three of these topics and summaries of those discussions follow.

### ***Media***

Issues include: TV in the home; exposure to advertisements; video pornography; cartoons that frequently display violence; children use SMS messages to send negative messages; media can undermine innate creativity and encourage passivity.

All media can have positive and negative influences. Children can benefit from media, but we have to put boundaries. Can't we provide programming which is wholesome but also interesting and appealing? It may mean providing scholarships to young people interested in working in the media to have Christian values propagated. We can educate children to be aware of bad content, teaching them to control their habitual media exposure, but the snag is that children are naturally curious and often want to explore forbidden territory.

Hi tech is attractive but 'hi touch' is also powerful. Children need human contact. Children need security; role models, that build relationship. Guilt is a big problem – once a child feels guilty, it can prevent them seeking help and can reinforce bad habits. We need to be good friends to them, not condemnatory but encouraging.

Children also like activity so some clubs combine wholesome creative activities, with teaching etc. Parents and others must educate children cautiously. It is important to offer training to parents. They need to create and police boundaries. We can train children to police themselves: teach them that the media should not control them but they should control the media.

We should remember that for the majority of South Asian children the problem not access to media but hunger.

### ***Poverty, hunger, education and health***

The real problem is hunger in south Asia. Because parents are unable to feed their children, the children often have to fend for themselves. We can empower people to eradicate hunger but alleviating poverty is multidimensional. We have to feed first and then give them training. One project insists that before a family is enrolled they have to establish a home vegetable garden.

There are rich Christians but poverty is a major problem that needs to be addressed. It is a social responsibility – the church has to participate in social fields. Poverty deprives the child of their sense of self worth. The problem is actually a matter of distribution not of lack of resources. Children might be a model for us – they often share the little they have. Poverty is multidimensional and needs to be tackled at national and local levels. One response suggested is to raise the standard of living by giving workers the right wages. Indian law requires that families living below the official poverty line should be fed by the government but the food goes to party workers. Christians can confront government plans and the misuse of funds by using the Right to Information. Many Christians are unaware of this possibility and other ways of influencing government activity. The local church can also get involved by developing tangible ways to help the poor to come out of their poverty.

Even children of rich parents experience relational poverty – they lack the demonstration of their parent's love.

### ***Globalisation***

Globalisation has created wealth for India. Our families and churches have benefited as a result. Church members may be driven towards profit and monetary wealth. But even though many new opportunities come in health care and education, they are expensive and out of range for the poor. It seems to have increased inequality in the distribution of wealth.

Globalisation can have benefits e.g. IMF gave funding for a road and made sure that the road was built. Similarly, through globalisation the government reluctantly provided English medium education. There are

many positives when we talk about globalisation but we must enable children to face the challenges. Many of the policies are detrimental to protect the rights of the poor. Globalisation affected education as a business and health as wealth making business.

## 2.5 A Child Theology Example and Practice Reflection

*John Collier*

As a prelude and preparation for our own reflection on themes relevant to South Asia, we used an experiment on sin conducted by the Child Theology Movement in South Africa. It was not just a description of the event and its outcomes but participants also took part in the process, even though the time allowed was much abbreviated. This particular process for theological reflection used by the Child Theology Movement has four steps or stages:

### ***Stage 1:***

Participants were asked to summarise, as individuals, what they understood about the Christian teaching of sin. They were asked to write 3 or 4 words or phrases that describe what the scripture, and the church, teach about sin:

### ***Stage 2***

When the disciples were discussing a theological issue, perhaps not very amicably, Jesus did not answer the argument with words but, again, word became flesh. He put a child in the midst. If we are to be true to what Jesus did, it will not be good enough to put 'child' in the midst, as a disembodied concept. Still less would other derivatives such as 'childhood' or 'childlikeness' fit the bill. We need to have a real child that we can recognise, even if not physically present. We attempt to do the same by using our imagination. But the first task is to decide which particular child. In fact we chose two particular children. In South Africa they were a girl forced into prostitution and a boy soldier.

After some discussion and consideration of alternatives by the group, we chose for South Asia a Naxalite<sup>4</sup> boy and a temple child prostitute girl (devadasi).

### ***Stage 3:***

In this stage, we take time to make the children as real as we can, recognising that this is not as good for our purposes as having a real child there but that it might be better for the child if they were not dragged into a group of strangers. So we attempted as best we could to enter into their world and their experience.

We described the Naxalite Boy: Angry, fearful, vengeful, disgusted with society; a child fearful of being caught; he asks many questions: what is the meaning of my life? What sin have I done? He feels guilty about his acts of violence, his birth, and his life. He is pushed along by his parents; he is brainwashed and enjoys killing; he takes orders and cannot say no. It might take perhaps years before he can unlearn what he has been told. He wants to play but cannot. He is never building or mending relationships but breaking them; unhappy and lonely. His name is Raju.

And the devadasi Girl Temple Prostitute: She comes from an utterly poor background and doesn't know much else; she follows what her mother does. She wonders if there is any alternative, alas ! she is born into this. She has a lot of money. She is beautiful. She takes delight that she is ornamented and married to gods. She sustains her family who depend on her in regard to economic and social support. She at some point feels trapped; traumatized; at some point she would dislike and hate men. She is beaten up by some people but is looked after well by some of the men who abuse her. She is repeatedly pregnant and perhaps finds unhealthy ways of aborting to sustain her role as a prostitute. She is confused, infected with HIV. She has several customers, priests, politicians, landlords and even pastors. Her name is Rajeshwari.

### ***Stage 4:***

At this point, we returned to what we had written about our understanding of sin and asked if it needed to be changed in any way. We tried to let our doctrine of sin interpret these children but also, and this is an important point for Child Theology, we tried to let the children speak to our understanding of sin, so that our reflection is a two way process. It seems counter-intuitive to let such children contribute our understanding of Christian doctrine but Jesus said that when we receive the child, we receive him. This must mean receiving a child in his or her sinfulness as there is none without sin.

So we asked: Do we revise what we initially wrote about sin? How much were the children guilty of sin, if at all, and how much are they 'sinned against' by abusers and society that conveniently castigates and marginalises these children? If the children did not choose to these sins, then perhaps they are not sinners.

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<sup>4</sup> The Naxalites are a violent revolutionary communist movement operating in several areas of India.



We understand sin as separation from God. Certainly, they experience darkness to the maximum level. Would knowing God be a way out? How would God help them?

Are we ourselves implicated as perpetrators of this violence? If anyone causes one of these children to falter, it is better for a mill stone to be tied around his neck and drowned. Sin is not loving God with everything we have; not loving our neighbour as ourselves. To the extent that these are caused by poverty, to what extent might we be implicated in that sin? There are sins of omission!

## 2.6 Child Theology Experiment

*Keith White*

The Child Theology experiment conducted by this group was about church i.e. ecclesiology.

### *Children (in Churches) under pressure*

We need to be real about the situation in India at present. What is the place and plight of children in all this? This may be the first time that anyone has seriously looked at things from this perspective. We may find we explore both children within and outside churches, but perhaps we should restrict things to Christian communities in order to make the subject manageable.

From the previous discussion, two areas presented themselves as possible themes:

1. **Riches and poverty.** There are Indian middle class children – a growing number, with growing wealth. Are they open to question, in the way the rich in the Gospel are? Do they have goals other than the kingdom of God? Are they on a way and style of life which blocks entrance to the kingdom of God? Are they like Dives? Are they there for the poor, in real practice? Or does their wealth mix with religion so that, like the rich in many other places, they use wealth to defend themselves from being troubled by the poor and simultaneously use religion to justify privilege and to affect spiritual superiority?

And there is a vast number of poor children. If the child is put in the centre, the poor are also there – as we find in the Gospel. For much of what Jesus wanted to say about the kingdom of God and the way of discipleship, he pointed to the poor rather than the child – but not to set up a competition between them. In India, as in many other places, child and poor go together. Is there already in Indian church a perception of the practical theological gospel significance of the poor? Is there liberation theology – marginally, or officially, or operatively? Does Indian church make the preferential option for the poor, in the name of Jesus, in real practice and with understanding?

And if it does, have children been included in it, or do we have a liberation theology which is not child theologised?

2. **Freedom, respect, space for otherness, and persecution.** This is an issue where churches are under pressure. What exactly does that mean? And how does it affect children. What responses do Christians make? In what spirit and faith? And where is the child as placed by Jesus in Christian thinking about how to deal with the pressure and what to witness to? This I think is not a line in Child Theology we have yet given much attention to.

The experiment started as participants wrote down their understanding of church – what is church? Participants individually wrote down three or four phrases to describe what they believe about church and then the consultation divided into four groups. We asked each group to think of themselves as, in effect, a church – a group of believers gathered in Christ's name.

The first topic considered was the suffering children in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Much of the discussion focused on the recent persecution in Orissa. How is the church responding, in what spirit? What sort of God is emerging from this discussion? What kind of Kingdom of God is beginning to appear?

In summary, the churches' responses were:

- The church is pained.
- Silently praying, there has been unity in prayer. Some are speaking out and praying but no one is taking any action.
- Some want to raise their voices but most Christians are not raising their voice against violence and suffering because they are living in fear. Hindus are against them and Christians are in fear of bomb blasts.
- We see a God who is weak, unable to protect his people.
- We see a God who is willing to make himself vulnerable.

We didn't know what to say. We took time to be silent – 'Be still and know that I am God.' Then we prayed in silence.

## Saturday 8th Nov

### 3.1 Devotions

*Samson Prabahakar*

We were led in some songs by Noel Kotian.

Ecclesiastes 8:5; Ps 12:5 – 8

The day before, we had been talking about the recent violence against Christians in Orissa. The sleeping church has been awakened. Christians in Orissa were faced with tragedies which shook the core of their faith. The response was a united protest by Christians – we are only 2-4% of the population, why are you afraid of us?

All around the world there is bad news and unrest everywhere. Is God punishing the world? Mt 24: 6-7. Our duty is to pray for the peace of those around us. The Cross teaches us about a sacrificial love. It is our duty to plead for the mercy of God. We need to be united. We have to pray and love our enemies. There will be transformation.

### 3.2 Child Theology Experiment (continued)

*Keith White*

Evangelisation

Keith quoted from the French historian Fernand Braudel<sup>5</sup>:

*"In India, for instance, all actions derive their form and their justification from the religious life, not from reasoning. The Greeks were astonished by this, to judge from an anecdote reported by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (265-340): 'Aristoxenus the musician tells the following story about the Indians. One of them met Socrates in Athens and asked him to describe his philosophy. "It is the study of human reality," replied Socrates. At which the Indian burst out laughing. "How can a man study human reality," he asked, "when he knows nothing of Divine reality?"'"*

We began the experiment by recognising the suffering church. What sort of God does this reveal? As "weak" and "vulnerable" as a baby in manger and a man on a cross? When we look at how the Gospel is spread, it is so often through the suffering of Christian people. Keith asked if the groups had discussed time and timing on the day before. Theology requires us to consider time. In Exodus, for example, we read that God heard the cry of the people, but how long had they been crying? They had been in Egypt for 430 years. We must remember that God's time is not ours.

We formed up into our 'churches' again.

#### ***Children as the future of the church***

Our colleague, Dan Brewster of Compassion Asia, coined the term 'the 4/14 window' – to draw attention to the fact that many become Christians between the ages of 4 and 14. So it does make sense to communicate the gospel to children. But in South Asia, one of the things held against Christians is proselytization. There are even some who say that evangelism of children is an abuse.

We considered two sets of questions relating to evangelism. These are given below with in each case a summary of the responses from the groups.

- 1) What are the Biblical bearings that guide our evangelisation of children? In particular, what guidelines you get from Jesus in your mission strategy to children?
  - Jesus at the Temple as a child;
  - The 'Great Commission';
  - The small boy at the feeding of the 5,000;
  - Jesus receiving and blessing children;
  - The Hebrew community made a pile of stones to witness to their offspring;
  - The child is the symbol of true discipleship;
  - Children can worship God and Jesus accepts their worship (Mt 21:15)
  - Jesus himself is a sign (Mt 19:14)

<sup>5</sup> A History of Civilizations; Penguin Books; 1995; p22-23

- Children are the greatest in the Kingdom of God (Mt18:1-6)
- 2) What is the operative theology – the actual worked out day-to-day Theology – of your ‘church’? Is your main concern when you attend to children the future of the church? Or are you concerned about the future of the children, either as individuals or as the next generation? Or is your main concern the Kingdom of God?
  - It’s difficult to make a distinction in the present context but our concern is for the children;
  - Our strategy to change youth from an early age; Early evangelism saves the child for a lifetime;
  - The Gospel should not be misused, encouraging conversion through fear;
  - Our aim is to teach them the Law (Deuteronomy) when they are young;
  - We want to provide a strong Biblical foundation.

### 3.3 Session VII: Child Theology Experiment (continued)

*Keith White*

In this session, we considered the local (gathered) church and the proper place of children in the local church

There are different pictures of the church in the Bible. They all point to the fact that the church is a community – even when Paul speaks of the body of Christ. There is no such thing as solitary Christianity. Hb 10:25

When Jesus brought the child in, perhaps it should remind us of the need to be inclusive. The gathered church includes the outsider. Who are they? Women? Children? How alert are we to them? They may be feeling outside even though they are physically inside.

The community is bound to be inter-generational. This presents many challenges. Much of society is segmented by age. Many institutions are age selective. Where are the models for inter-generational community? Family? Democracy? (but this excludes children); Schools, companies?

In one church the Christian youth took a pastor and tied him to a tree because he had two wives!

Keith asked the groups to undertake three tasks:

1. What are the hallmarks of a church community that is inter-generational, where children are integrally involved both now and as they grow up?
2. How would you go about organizing the gatherings, worshipping, etc.
3. Write a letter from your church to the churches in South Asia

The responses of the groups are given below (under the names that they had given to their ‘church’).

#### ***The Square four church***

This group developed quite detailed outlines of the administrative and worship activities that they would like to be a feature of their church:

- 1) Sunday Service
  - At a child friendly time
  - Ushering and offertory duties shared between adults and children
  - Children welcomed specifically at the beginning
  - Children occasionally asked to open in prayer
  - At least one song appropriate for children to be included
  - The choir to include children
  - Scripture reading to include children
  - Children to take part through testimony and prayer
- 2) Organization
  - An older child (15-18years) to be included on the church board
  - A children’s committee to decide what is taught in Sunday School
  - ‘Now’ concept to be included in the budget for children
  - Provide good infrastructure for the Sunday School
  - Use a children’s hymnal
  - Encourage this participative approach in family life and in local schools
  - Any child who can clearly articulate their saving faith in Jesus to be eligible for baptism (any method) and to take part in Holy Communion.

***The People's Church***

## 1) Key features

- Should children be members in their own right or through their parents?
- Children could be involved in leading the singing
- Be more open to the contributions of children
- Prepare children for life in the Kingdom of God
- Encourage creativity, criticality and a service orientation
- Encourage resistance to globalization and consumerism in church and society
- Encourage inter-generational communication of values, not just accept what the world offers.

***Shalom Children's Church***

## 1) Key features

- The church welcomes outsiders and strangers and makes them feel at home
- But there are difficulties – how to make those who live in shanties next to the church wall come inside the church?
- Opening homes to strangers
- Church helping outsiders, for example with their legal rights

## 2) Organization

- There is a generation gap in some churches and children are not involved in church activities
- There is a cultural problem – for example, seeing a child in the pulpit
- The order of service, hymns and prayers are all focussed on adults
- The story of Naaman shows how children can be effective witnesses. We should encourage them in this.
- Try to avoid hierarchy, encourage everybody to have a servant heart


***Ashraya church;***

## 1) Hallmarks

- Children have important roles to play
- Children are recognised, appreciated and affirmed, their voices heard and taken seriously
- Equal honour and opportunity are given to all

## 2) Organization

- We would have an ashram (shelter) where poor children can find refuge

*Letters*

*"To the church in South Asia from the  
Square 4 church.*

*Dear brothers and sisters and children,  
Believing that our Lord Jesus would have  
children have an equal part in the  
church, family and society, therefore, we  
beseech thee by the mercies of God to  
bring children into an ownership and  
meaningful participation in the life of  
the church, the family and society.*

*May the Lord bless your sincere efforts  
for the advancement of His Kingdom.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Elders of the square four church."*

*"We the people's church, write to all the churches in South Asia.*

*We send greetings to you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

*We who are loved and accepted in Christ as children, women and men and who have experienced the joy of living, worshipping and loving in community, have found some challenges in our time and would like to share the following with you.*

*In our experience, we have found that exclusion of some members, especially children, from our community is a reality. We encourage you to follow Jesus' example of pacing the child in the midst of our community life.*

*This will occasion changes and we trust that you will joyfully participate in this change for greater realisation of God's Kingdom among us. In this way, you will embrace the sustainable values of the Kingdom against the temporary values of the world.*

*In Christ, the People's Church. "*

*"Dear fellow believers of the South Asian Church*

*Greetings from Shalom Children's Church.*

*Thanks be to God that through his Son Jesus Christ we live in the hope of his resurrection. We are one body and therefore share the same lineage as Christ our Lord. We look forward to meeting you and sharing our experience of how important it is to have "a child in the midst".*

*We recognise that the church is an inter-generational community where a child is vital to the growth of the church alongside their own socio-spiritual development.*

*Our earnest prayer to God is that your love in Christ would be extended to the community around you to initiate an impetus for inter-generational community. For this community to grow we urge you to have ministry among children as your greatest priority and place "a child in your midst" in all your church activities.*

*May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and give you peace."*

*“To the churches in South Asia.*

*Dear fellow children of God. We at Ashraya greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. We rejoice that we with you are all children of the same Family. We are excited that it won't be long before we meet together in our Father's house for the big family re-union. We are sure that it's going to be great fun to be together and we will have lots of interesting things to do.*

*While we wait for the family to come together, Ashraya (Shelter) seeks to be a community of grace where people are welcomed, healed and restored. We have started an ashram where children and adults who are needy can find refuge and develop a close and intimate relationship with God.*

*Because God has accepted us just as we are as his children, we urge you to welcome others with open arms, just as Jesus welcomes each one of us.*

*Looking forward to seeing you at the  
great party*

*The family at Ashraya”*



### 3.4 Child Theology Experiment (continued)

*Keith White*

Children in relation to word and sacrament

As we begin to think about this, it will be useful to move away from the categories we are used to when we think of the words: word, sacrament, church, children. As we do that, we may begin to recognise that there might be other ways of being church than those with which we are familiar.

It is in relation to the sacraments that systematic theologians discuss children. What might Jesus do if he were pastor of my church? When it comes to preaching, are there ways that it might be changed when children are present? How is the word communicated? For most people, it is through songs. If the young people only had the songs, what would their theology look like? Contrast this with the Hebrew songbook – the Psalms. Teenage boys often disconnect with worship sessions. How would your church shape the worshipping life of the community in such a way that the word and sacraments are shared with the child in the midst?

Words may go over children's heads but the two things that have drama and spectacle are baptism and communion. If so, why are children excluded from these?

Responses from the groups:

- Word – age groups would participate in the word
- When they are baptised they can take the Lord's Supper. Some thought that any child can participate in the lord's supper after baptism but for others the matter of involvement of the children is questionable since the structures are very stringent
- It would be important to sensitize the church members about the importance of active child participation in worship, word and sacrament.
- It is important to train the children for witness to their peers in school
- Sunday school must not be in the church time
- Children should be encouraged to take responsibility in the church every Sunday and invited to preach one Sunday a month (Rev Jacob has experience of this. He recently sat in the congregation while 17 children led the service. A 13 year old girl preached.)
- We would use stories a lot like Jesus did as they communicate to all ages
- We would use songs rich in content, singing the word.
- Get the Sunday School department to participate actively in the worship service by narrating stories, being involved in presenting and leading music, enacting plays linked to the sermon
- Get children involved with church finances – taking up the offering, counting the money, helping to supervise the expenditure
- Do something similar to Roman Catholic churches that use children as altar boys etc

### 3.5 Session IX: Child Theology Experiment (continued)

*Keith White*

Children and households ('little churches')

One question we often face when we do Child Theology is: are you not taking the child out of context – taking the child in abstract, separated from family? We might reply that the child brings the family/household with him/her or that it was Jesus who placed a child (not a family) in the midst.

A challenge: The church is usually thought of a building. How inclusive are the pastor, elders and leaders; how supportive of households? You cannot separate the whole community from the family. In the New Testament, believers broke bread from house to house. Can we think of family meals as eucharists? Are discussions around the meal table 'Sunday School'? Is there family prayer? Have we explored the evangelistic potential of households?

Think through the whole life of a Christian family with the child in the midst, seeing the household as a 'little church'. What would you want to affirm or change? How can the gathered local church make space for and support the little church? What do we make of Jesus' redefinition of family in Mk 3? Are the 'foreigners and strangers' welcome in the home? What would help my spiritual formation of a child? What is the theological basis of our discussions?

- 1) Seeing the household as little churches where the child is in the midst, what is that you affirm and what you would like to see changed?
  - Households in South Asia have family prayers. Often the head of the family prays, and children are merely listeners. These can be made more intentional with the possibility of praying for each other's concerns and going beyond to address the concerns practically.
  - Meal times could become times of sharing, ideas for the persons concerned to consider
  - There should be grace said over meals, and (non-religious) family time together
  - Avoid entertainment that is not wholesome and enjoyable by the whole family
  - Family retreats; father and son weekends; mother and daughter weekends
  - Be aware of the effect of church events on family life – they are often age-segmented and so involve family members separately
  - The learning experience in the home can contribute to true education not just schooling.
- 2) Gathered Church helping Little Churches
  - Can help parents with parenting and counselling skills
  - Can provide lessons in mentoring and help in decision-making
  - Can encourage teamwork, civil society consciousness, etc.
  - Can make sure that the church activities leave time for family prayer
  - Why can't we have Holy Communion in house churches without an ordained minister as they did in New Testament times?
- 3) Welcoming the stranger into the household
  - There are Difficulties to be overcome before accepting the stranger: appreciating the gospel's demand, preparing the members of the household for greater openness that can happen with the coming in of the stranger.
  - The "special" privileges and care that the original insiders of the family can experience will be compensated by many new experiences that the family might otherwise not have.
  - Each family can go beyond a token way of welcoming the stranger with long gaps in-between by really stretching themselves to be hospitable and taking into their homes strangers, street children, etc.
  - We would accept others with the condition that they keep to our family's values and that we keep some private space for our own family group.

### 3.6 Child Theology Experiment – Practical Applications and ideas for implementation

*Paul Joshua*

The question we faced was: after the process, how did participants want to define the church now? Did they wish to add or take away anything they had written? The members paired up and re-evaluated their definitions, using the following questions:

- How has this process of learning helped us to revisit the definition of the church and change from the previously described definition?
- What are three main theological discoveries in relation to church you have made as a result of this process?
- How do we develop the method/experiment in our local groups?

## Sunday 9th Nov

### 4.1 Sunday Worship

### 4.2 Key Issues for Child Theology in South Asia

Where do we go from here? – Child Theology Movement, CI, MIIS and Viva

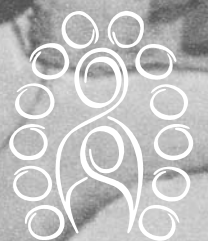
- One struggle as a senior pastor is conflict among the leaders. I think that Child Theology is a practical thing that can help with this. I want to encourage young leaders to continue their studies. We have strong traditions and this is good but can make for resistance to change. Child Theology could provide a theological basis to promote change.
- What is our objective and how can we spread this? We have not defined how we will reach the people. It would be smart if we could align our individual objectives so that we don't work piecemeal but in unity.

- It's important to keep the links that we have made between each other – such as a Google group or a blog. Agreed to share email addresses and set up both of these. It might be possible to publish interesting excerpts in Dharma Deepika.
- At Lanka Bible College we had only one subject on children in the two year diploma course but now we have more resources to offer. Maybe we could have a consultation like this in Sri Lanka. If so, it would be good and perhaps even achievable to involve all the theological schools, catholic and protestant.
- It would be good to form a group to take things forward but at present there were not enough able to commit to the time that might be required.
- Involvement of Pakistan would be good but it would be difficult for them to come to India. Nepal would be easier.

Cover illustrations from a picture by the Indian artist Alfred Thomas  
"Christ journeying to India"

# Child Theology Consultation in South Asia

6 — 9 November 2008



Child Theology Movement