



Child Theology Movement

*Jesus placed a little child among them... Mark 9:36*



# CHILD THEOLOGY

INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES  
FROM SOUTH INDIA

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# Child Theology

## INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES FROM SOUTH INDIA

A REPORT OF THE CHILD THEOLOGY CONSULTATION, BANGALORE, INDIA,

3<sup>RD</sup> - 5<sup>TH</sup> FEB 2011

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Child Theology Movement

# Preface

## WHY THIS CONSULTATION?

**M**any of us who are engaged in Christian ministry to/with/among children clearly do it out of a deep sense of calling and commitment. We are called by God to serve children so that they may experience the abundant life, in all its dimensions, that Jesus offers. While some of us demonstrate our commitment by spending the majority of our time working alongside children, others spend more time reflecting on and/or managing the affairs related to such a ministry. Whatever the case, we would like to think of ourselves as called and committed people.

However, we agree that we are not always connected people. We are perhaps so caught up in the everyday affairs of our ministry that rarely do we have the luxury of meeting and interacting with colleagues involved in ministry to/with/among children from other organisations. If that is the case among those who are involved in children's ministries, what about others who may be interested in but not actually involved full time in children's ministry? We recognise that opportunities for mutual encouragement, cross-fertilization of ideas, practices and

trends are few and far between.

To help bridge that gap, particularly between those involved in children's ministry and those involved in theological education, the idea for a Child Theology Consultation was conceived. We felt that since we work toward the same end, it is important for each one of us to talk to each other. We need to listen to each others' joys and concerns; successes and failures. We need to be connected people, just as we feel that we are called and committed ones.

This is why we felt that such a consultation would be an important event. You will have noticed that we did not call this event a "conference" but a "consultation". We envisaged the consultation as a gathering in which each participant's voice, whether theologian or activist, was of equal importance. We recognized that we are all called to sit at the feet of Jesus, as equals. All of us were equally resource persons and all of us were equally contributors to the process.

This report is the recording of the contributions of all participants at the South India Child Theology Consultation held from the 3rd - 5th February 2011, in Bangalore. This

is the second CT consultation to be held in India in partnership with the Child Theology Movement. The first was in Hyderabad in 2008. A report of the first consultation was published and is available on the CTM website [www.childtheologymovement.org](http://www.childtheologymovement.org). To date there have been fifteen or so such gatherings held in different parts of the world.

We are truly grateful to God for his enabling and provision to conceive and organize this consultation. We are grateful to the many donors who helped fund the event. We are grateful to the Steering Committee members who helped in organizing the event, which as participants emphatically expressed, was unique and profitable.

*Paul Joshua  
for the Steering Committee*

*We are grateful to the following donors who generously provided funds for the consultation:  
Awana Youth Programs, Bangalore Bible Fellowship, Bible Society of India, Child Theology Movement, Advocacy Department, Compassion International, South Asia Region, Viva, EFICOR, ACTS, CEEFI.*

## Devotion

Ashish Chrispal

### I SAMUEL 16 AND 17

David is seen and treated as a child by his family (Chapter 16). David is seen and treated as a child in the battle against Goliath (Chapter 17). Man (Samuel and Saul) looked on the outward appearance but God looked at the heart. God chose and used a child to accomplish his will.

What role do children have in our churches? In the early 1960's-1980's South Korean churches concentrated on children, and the church grew rapidly. With this growth the focus shifted to adults, and children were neglected. Soon they found that church growth stagnated, even declined. The well-being as well as the future of the church is integrally related to children. We need to give a proper place to children, so that the health of both the present and future church will be secured.



# What is Child Theology?

Keith White

**“THE WAY WE DO THINGS IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT WE DO. THE WAY WE SAY THINGS IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT WE SAY.”**

This is often the way we begin CT consultations. It is a reminder that process and content can never be separated. The gospel is good news. But proselytisation in India is a bad thing. That tells us that the way we go about sharing the content of the gospel is as important as the content. So at the very outset we remind ourselves that although there will be content to this gathering, the consultation itself is a process. When we arrived in this room this morning, the chairs and lectern were set out as if for a normal lecture or sermon. So we set about reorganising the furniture and now we have a circle, with no second row. The circle is important. It has no hierarchy or top table. We can see each other, and there is space between us for role-play, for movement. Jesus said, when you have a feast, don't grab the top seats. So we have neatly prevented anyone even trying to do that! No one is more important than another.

But one more point by way of introduction to the process: we are all theologians. Does that surprise you? Of course it does, because as Paul has reminded us, some of us come bearing that label while others think of ourselves as practitioners. The former have been to theological college, the latter have not. And that is the commonly accepted way of understanding theology and theologians. They are in short, academics or scholars who deal in words, written or spoken. Often they use long words, and complicated sentences that others can't understand.

But theology: that is the word itself simply means speaking of God, with God, to God and for God. Which of here today does not pray? We all pray, so we are all theologians: we speak to God. Which of us does not seek to answer questions about God and His Son, Jesus Christ? We all do, whether the questions come from

our children, those for whom we care, or those whom we teach. So we are all theologians: that is speaking of God. Which of us has never told a story about God, or Christ? We are theologians speaking for God.

Child Theology is not alone in seeking to dispel the well-entrenched myth that theology is a detached scholastic discipline done by those who have little to do with everyday life and practice. Theology is better understood as reflecting on daily life in the light of the Gospel of Christ. And best of all we should understand ourselves as doing theology. It is about life as well as words; actions as well as propositions. In summary, it is as much about how we say things as what we say, and about how we do things as much as about what we do!

# Group Task

## DISCUSS IN TWO'S:

“WHAT AM I HOPING TO LEARN WHILE I AM HERE AT THE CONSULTATION?”

**A**s you talk with each other please pay particular attention to what the other person is saying. Try to understand why they are here, rather than to convince them why you are here! We need to listen carefully and respectfully, actively to each other from the very start.

Next stage of the group process: share your discoveries in groups of six (that is three pairs in each group), and agree on the two most important reasons come to your group that explain why you have travelled to and made time for this consultation.

## THE FINDINGS OF THE GROUPS

We have come in order to:

### GROUP 1

Discover how Child Theology will help practitioners, and benefit children

Learn how to integrate different understandings of theology for the benefit of children: how can we help children to understand the Lords Supper, baptism, filling of the Spirit...?

### GROUP 2

Child Theology is new to us. We want to understand CT.

We are concerned about the future of the church: the children. So we want to learn how Child Theology can help the church.

### GROUP 3

To know how Child Theology can help to be more effective in our ministry with children.

If Child Theology is not theology for children. Then what is it?

### GROUP 4

Child Theology is new to us: we want to know about it. And we want to understand how to apply it to our ministry.

### GROUP 5

We want to grasp the concept: is it Child Theology, or Child and Theology?

How can Child Theology help influence children inside and outside the church?

### GROUP 6

We need to learn about the definition, limitations, scope of Child Theology.

How can we qualify to teach Child Theology at seminaries to pastors and practitioners?



# What Child Theology Means to Me:

## A ROLE-PLAY OF MATTHEW 18: 1-14

Keith White

It sounds as if there is a large measure of agreement between us. We want to be clear, or at least clearer, about what Child Theology is; and we are determined that it should not be merely an exercise in words, but something that will make a real difference in our lives and work. Is that so? In response it was confirmed that there was agreement, that everyone had these two reasons for coming uppermost in their minds.

Let me respond by trying to explain what I understand by Child Theology. I am deliberately choosing to be personal because that may be a helpful way of starting a process that invites us to come just as we are and to receive others just as they are. Another advantage of this approach is that at least I think I understand what I mean by it, even if not everyone agrees!

### A CIRCLE OF DISCIPLES

Child Theology (CT) starts with a group of people in a circle. Look at the logo of CTM found in the booklet in your consultation packs: An Introduction to Child Theology. (This logo is to be found on all CTM publications, including the CTM website.) You will find it on the cover at the bottom left hand corner. How many little circles are there? Twelve. And what do you see in the middle: perhaps you see a mother and child, or Jesus and a little child? The logo was actually inspired by the story told in Matthew Chapter 18 where Jesus placed a little child in the midst of his twelve disciples. So you have the disciples gathered around Jesus and a little child.

Today, and at this moment, I, Keith White am sitting with you in a circle. I like you am a disciple of Jesus Christ: Jesus is my Guru. I want to learn from Him how to walk in God's way. The working definition of

The Kingdom of Heaven that I tend to prefer is "God's way of doing things" or "Where God has his way". Academic and much preached theology, including the definitions of different denominations tends to focus on content: what you might, using the words of the Jewish Scriptures, call "the Law of the Lord" or "the Word of God".

### SEEKING TO WALK IN THE WAY OF THE LORD

But the only reason that the Law is given or spoken by God, is so that people will walk in the way of the Lord. To learn the Law of the Lord without walking in His way is a contradiction because the Law commands us to walk in His way! Jesus makes it clear in what we sometimes call the Sermon on the Mount, that the wise person builds his house by being obedient to the words of Jesus: by doing what he teaches.

So the first step in CT is to accept that we are disciples of Jesus wanting to walk in his way and to follow his lead as closely as we can: "To see him more clearly, to follow him more nearly, and to love him more dearly, day by day." Whoever we are, bishops, professors, CEOs, presidents, directors, ministers, head teachers, this means that we need to become learners. We need to strip ourselves of our qualifications, status, roles, positions and other possessions when we come and address Him as Lord. There is one question that matters above all others at this time: "What are you seeking to teach me while I am here, Lord?" And his reply will be along the lines: "Do you know, my beloved child that you are a lost sheep, and I am bringing you back to the path on which I am seeking to lead and guide you?" For me (KW), CT is perhaps primarily a process of stripping

away of all my qualifications, any positions or status, and putting my presuppositions and beliefs on the line. The question then becomes: "How much am I willing to take off in order to learn from my master?"

## TAKING OFF OUR SHOES

As a symbol of this process, I now take off my shoes. It is of course, only a symbol, but it is an important one. Moses was told to take off his shoes when God revealed Himself to him through the dramatic incident of the Burning Bush. It is still the custom in many places of Christian worship in India to remove your shoes. It is a sign of humility before the One who is greater, the One who is to be respected. And it is a reminder of what Paul describes in *Philippians 2: 5-8*. In the words of the Christian song, Jesus "laid aside his majesty, gave up everything for me, suffered at the hands of those he had created..." If He took off what was his by right, how much more should I be willing to lay aside anything that might stand in the way of seeing him more clearly, following him more nearly and loving him more nearly day by day?

## JESUS AT THE CENTRE

Ashish, who is a professor of theology and had led the devotions at the beginning of the consultation was asked to stand in the centre of the circle in order to represent Jesus for us. (This is not something done lightly and it was made clear that it was not something that he or any other one among us would ever seek to do, unless invited to do so.) The garland of welcome was now placed on Ashish as a sign of our welcome to, and reverence for Jesus, our Lord and Guru.

I (KW) come to you as your disciple. CT is for me a way of coming to Jesus, not primarily because I want to come, but because he calls me, he invites me to come to him. CT is about a disciple coming

closer to his Lord. Jesus teaches me in many ways. He invites me to walk with him, eat with him. He asks many questions. "Who do people say that I am?" He gave many signs to people. In *Matthew 18* He gave a little lesson or sign to his disciples.

## JESUS PLACED A LITTLE CHILD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CIRCLE

He called a little child into the middle of the circle of disciples and their conversation. We need to note at this point that they were talking about greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven. Margaret, a theology student was invited to stand before Jesus, representing the little child placed by Jesus among his disciples. As a group we were invited to ponder this scene. A little child is standing just in front of Jesus. This is an acted reminder that CT is not about the child in the first instance: it is rather about Jesus who places a little child into the centre. We follow Jesus and then find that he gives us the sign of a little child. As a way of representing the placing of the child in the very centre of the circle, Ashish was asked to take off the garland that he had been wearing and to place it on Margaret. Now we had Jesus with the garlanded little child standing in front of him. The act of Jesus was pregnant with possibilities and meaning. We focus on the child, not because the child is in any way special, but because Jesus has called and chosen the child: it is Jesus who gives meaning, not the child herself.

## THE CHALLENGE OF JESUS THROUGH THE CHILD

Jesus then says to me (KW), "Unless you change..." May be one of the problems that people have with understanding and receiving CT is the non-negotiable need to change. And Jesus gives an all-important

clue about the nature of this change: "Unless you change and become humble like this child..." Whatever this may mean, there can be no doubt that this means a form of coming down or stooping. (The word "humble" has the same root as the word "humus", which means soil or compost.) Just to avoid any doubt, it is certainly not an upwards move! And it is not a sideways move! To the disciples, as to most adults of their day and age, a little child was like a nobody. Remember that in their case they were talking about greatness! You would have to think hard to find a bigger contrast between the subject of their concerns, and the challenge that Jesus brought them through the little child.

Jesus continues to disturb and to shock me as I come to him: "Unless you change and become humble like this little child, you won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven." What? He can't be serious! Surely I (KW) am in the Kingdom! I am a somebody in the kingdom. If I am not in the Kingdom, then who is? After all I lecture in theology, I am a minister of the Gospel, I care for abandoned and neglected children, I write books about children...(The list is potentially endless as I try to resist the call of Jesus, and become more and more defensive.) And we know something of how the disciples felt: put crisply they wondered who on earth could be saved. After all they had left everything to follow Jesus!

But, having disturbed our equilibrium, Jesus has more to say to me: "Whoever welcomes (receives) the least of these little ones in my Name, welcomes (receives) me." So when we welcome the little child, we welcome Jesus. In front of us now are two people. In some ways there is a huge disparity between them: one is Lord, the other is a nobody. (In this particular case we have a professor and a student acting this incident.) You could say that there is no comparison between them. But Jesus invites not only comparison, but identification.

Those who have studied this



incident in the three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have all come to the conclusion that Jesus is stressing identification not difference. And at no point does Jesus caution us not to identify one with the other. In fact, the very reverse: you see the little child? You see me. You welcome the little child? You welcome me. He doesn't say that he and the child are one, but he sees no need to put any distance at all between himself and the little child.

So the message is crystal clear to anyone who is open enough to receive it: this nobody represents Jesus. CT is the discovery that in this nobody, Jesus is represented. In this nobody lies a vital clue about how to enter His kingdom.

It is perhaps worth noting here that many people (including Thomas Barnardo) have written how they saw Jesus through the eyes of a little child. Through opening themselves to little nobodies (the least of these little ones), they find Jesus present in an immediate way.

It follows that to despise a little one, is to despise Jesus. Better for these kind of people is to have a millstone around their neck and to be thrown into depths of the lake.

And so we come to the end of our acted parable this morning. Thank you, Ashish and Margaret for being willing to help us, the circle of disciples, to enter into something of what was going on when Jesus sought to teach the disciples such an important lesson.

## **TWO OTHER THINGS ABOUT THE PROCESS OF CT**

You may already have noticed that what Jesus has done in this acted parable is what Jesus himself actually did in His life, as we find it described in Philippians 2:5-11: he made himself nothing (became a nobody); he humbled himself (to ground level); and became obedient

to death, even death on a cross (there is no lower that you can go).

So we see that as we change and become nobodies, we become followers of Jesus, walking in his very steps, and the way that he pioneered. What Jesus asks his disciples, he himself does. He leads the way. When I come to Jesus as his disciple, he asks me to become humble, a nobody. This is not what I expect, and certainly not what I want or choose. But in the process of welcoming a little child I find that I begin to understand him more, to see him more clearly as he really is. I have my own pictures of him and his Kingdom, but he is trying to reveal himself as someone else. And if he is my Lord then it is his revelation of himself that must be more important than the Jesus I would like him to be.

The second thing is that in doing CT we come as individuals, but the fact that we are at this moment in a circle reminds us that in fact with Jesus, we are in community, *koinonia*, with the larger group of Jesus' disciples. So in changing and becoming humble, and receiving him as it were afresh by receiving a little child, we discover that our relationship with each other also changes. The disciples were in competition with each other. If they were all to become nobodies then that competition must cease. The whole dynamics of their community must change: from being preoccupied with greatness in the Kingdom of God and therefore putting down each other, to understanding what the true nature of community is.

## **A QUIET TIME FOR MEDITATION, PRAYER AND REFLECTION**

A question was then posed from one of the participants: There have been many theologies, for example, Feminist, Dalit, Liberation, and so on. How does CT relate to these theologies? What is the difference

between CT and them? Could we bring a Dalit, (woman or poor person) into the circle and have a theological discussion about the Kingdom of Heaven, and call it Dalit Theology? So what is unique about CT?

Response: Thank you for your important question. Let me say that first of all, that theology of whatever kind needs to be demystified. We need to understand that the classroom is not the only (or the best) place in which theology can be done. As followers of Jesus we engage in theology in all the areas of life: at work, at home, at church, and on the road. Properly speaking theology (theo-logos) is really about anyone follower of Jesus talking to God, with God, about God, and for God. It is not done only by a specialised or professional group of people, but by everyone talking to God, with God, about God and for God.

Given this vital general comment, it can be said that CT is one way of doing theology. It can be done by everyone (as we have seen in the role play), and also by academic theologians using the language of formal theology. Interestingly it is one way that encourages everyone, not just black, women or poor people, to do theology, because all of us either are, or have been, children. Not all of us can be black, poor and women, but all of us have been children, so we can all reflect on what that means. And in bringing a child into the midst and receiving that child as placed by and representing Jesus, we will inevitably bring in black children, girl-children and poor children. It is therefore intentionally inclusive. We are all children both in the fact that we have (or had) biological parents, and that we are children of God. This means that each one of us can talk from experience as we seek to bring together 'Child' and 'Theology'. We can all be Child Theologians.



# Group Task

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO RECEIVE OR WELCOME A CHILD?

### GROUP REFLECTION

*Before breaking for lunch the participants were given time to talk together in groups, reflecting on the question: "What strikes you, captures you, and what questions have arisen during the morning we have spent together?"*

*There was space to share some of the thoughts and questions that had emerged during the morning.*

**K**eith White empathised with those who thought that CT might be a challenging and difficult process. Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche communities, was a successful and well connected person. God called him to care for two people with disabilities. Through the failure of his first venture in this field he came to experience a change so great that it is best described as a paradigm shift or a conversion. He came to see that he had been seeing himself as the carer and the giver. Afterwards he recognised that he himself was the disabled one, because of his pride, and the others quite capable of relating to God. From God's point of view their "disability" did not exist, but Vanier's pride was a huge stumbling block. Vanier began to see how in true relationships the humble are lifted up, and the proud humbled.

Doing CT involves making a paradigm shift in the way we welcome the child. How do we receive a child? What does it mean for a church to welcome a child? What does it mean for a family to welcome a child? What does it mean for the school to welcome a child? What does it mean for society to receive a child? In his gospel, John narrates how the world did not receive Jesus: "He came to his own but his own received him not! But to those who did receive him he gave the power to become children of God." (John 1: 11-12) So what does it mean to receive Jesus? How much time and effort do we devote to welcoming in our churches? While we spend time on seating, lighting, song projection on the screen, mike systems, sermon preparation and so on, we can tend to neglect welcoming people in the fullest sense of the word.

Let us do an exercise. We will divide into groups and discuss what welcoming the child will mean to different groups of people. Choose one group and base your discussions on that perspective. Several groups chose to focus on the family, so the responses to this are more extensive than to other groups and questions. All the questions are given below.



**FAMILY:**

**Q: What does it mean to receive a girl child into the family? What does it mean to receive a disabled child into the family?**

A: The girl child is not welcomed into many Indian families because they are seen as liabilities, financially (because parents need to pay dowry at the time of marriage) and socially (they always need to be cared for by males). The boy carries the name of the family not the girl.

Reasons for discrimination against (or non-welcome) of the girl-child:

- They are vulnerable
- They are a liability to the family, in some cases a curse to the family
- They are not in a position to provide security for the parents
- They are expensive
- They need more care

But the Bible encourages us to follow a counter-culture. If we follow that and all children are valued and cared for, if both boys and girls are welcomed into families, then all are able to benefit. We need to give up the practice of discrimination of girl-child. It is a difficult attitude to change though. Particularly if there is a disability, because then people consider this as a curse for the wrong things that the family has done. Having a disabled child is embarrassing and very difficult to cope with. Very few, if any, support systems exist for such children. But long term education, especially in the church, will help rectify this. This needs to be done in society as well.

There are some signs of change in some places. Girls are being educated and gaining good jobs. They are sometimes the bread-winners of the family. Parents stay with them more than their sons.

**How can we welcome the child into the family?**

We are to receive the child with love, accepting them and together looking toward the future with love. We receive her as she is, as an equal, as one made in the image of God, as God's creation. We recognise what she is and the potential that she has. But this is costly thing to do.

**CHURCH:**

**Q: What does it mean to receive the child to the Lord's Supper and the heart of the church, i.e. worship, baptism, membership?**

**SCHOOL:**

**Q: How do we welcome, as a child now, not as an adult later, in our schools?**

**'I only want to enjoy my childhood, ma'**

Inumella Sesikala

*Amma, I don't want to go to school.*

*I am just a child, Ma. I want someone to tell me stories and teach me. I want to watch tadpoles and butterflies and know what they eat, where they sleep. I want to climb a hill and catch a cloud to see what it is made of.*

*I want to wait with my hands in the stream and feel the fish swimming.*

*I want to run with the puppies, sing with the birds, and play with paper-boats in the rain.*

*I want to lie down on the soft green grass and hear the wind whisper.*

*Only then I want to learn more about them from the printed word.*

*Only after my imagination is fired, my thirst to know more has begun, a seed of 'Why?' is planted in my brain.*

*Amma, I feel trapped in the prison-like classroom. I feel my spirit slowly weakening with the monotonous teaching.*

*Often, when I ask a basic question our teachers say, "No time for all that. Let us finish the syllabus."*

*I get tired of studying just for marks without pausing to truly understand.*

*I want to go to the museum with my classmates and hear my teacher explain the stories of the artefacts.*

*I want plenty of nature trips where real Biology classes would be held.*

*I want to see colourful videos of volcanic eruptions and deep-sea dwellings.*

*I want our whole school to visit together the historic and*



*cultural places in my city.*

*I want to learn astronomy after looking through a telescope once.*

*I don't want to just read them in my textbooks; I want to see, hear, touch, smell and taste whatever I can. I want to experience.*

*Why can't the school make at least one such trip every year?*

*And, I cannot stoop down anymore to carry my school sack.*

*My back is ready to break. Why should I carry all the books everyday? Why can't we have only two subjects per day?*

*Or, why don't we have lockers like in the Western schools?*

*And, why should I squeeze in that over-crowded auto?*

*But, Amma, growing up no longer seems to be fun. I see only more of homework, winter projects, summer classes, weekly tests, monthly tests, quarterly, half-yearly and annual exams, external competitive exams, more tests, more competitions, more pressure, more stress...*

*When can I sing, paint, dance, swim, or cycle?*

*When I can just play cricket or even hide-and-seek?*

*What happened to that minimum sleep that you always say a child needs?*

*Why should I always study, study?*

*Ma, right now, I don't want to be a doctor, engineer or anything else.*

*I just want to feel safe and secure, play and learn without any stress before I become an adult like you.*

*I only want to enjoy my childhood, Ma.*

*Although this was not mentioned at the Consultation, the poem expresses what many of us feel. Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/article45377.ece>*

## PROJECT:

**Q: Who does the parenting in the project? Where is love in the project? Who is committed to the child in the project? Who is welcoming the child?**

Caring for children in our 'projects' is a clear Christian calling that has to be carried out in love and in a team. Sometimes some projects exist for the sake of running an organisation, rather than actually serving the children. Love can be demonstrated in the following ways:

Accept the child as they are without the normal care and support that many of us have. We need to receive them as our own, not as a charity case.

Un-conditional acceptance with sensitivity to their backgrounds and needs.

Positive affirmation of their gift and potential so that they can grow and improve their gifts and talents.

Policies of the organisation need to be child friendly.

Everyone should be part of the welcome that the child receives, not just some people like the leaders.

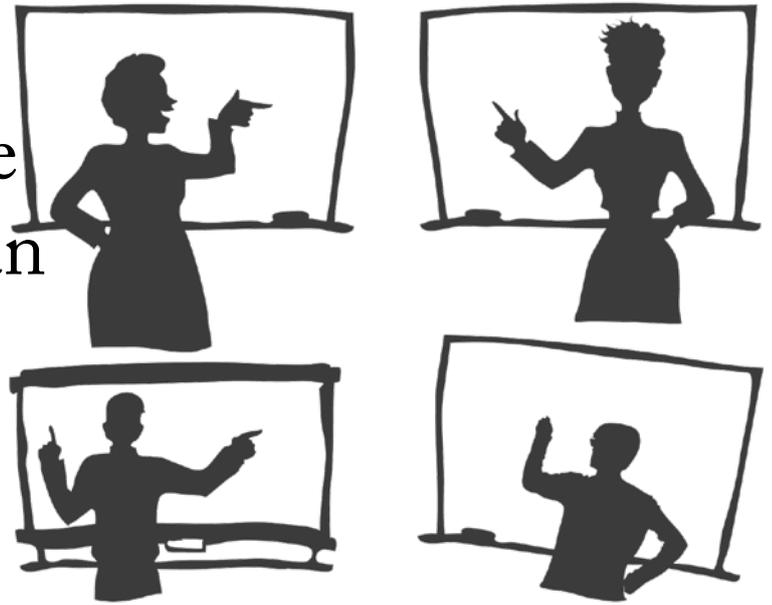
The answers above were written down by the groups and handed to the note-taker responsible for preparing the report of the consultation.

Feedback was done in a plenary by sharing the key-words at the heart of what we meant by a good, full, open-hearted welcome. These included:

Love; Acceptance; Sensitivity, Unconditional / Without Expectation; Trust



# Understanding the Child in the Indian Context



The following are representations of Powerpoint Presentations.

## I. CHILDREN AT RISK

Prabhakar Samson

### WHY CHILDREN?

Because they are so many. More than 375 million children in India, the largest number for any country in the world.

India contributes to about 5.6 million child deaths every year, more than half the world's total.

### CHILDREN AT RISK

- Poverty; Abuse; Child Labour; Health; Homelessness;
- Total number of HIV infection in India was 2.47 million.
- 15% of India's 2.5 million HIV + are children. That's 375,000 children, with 50,000 being born infected / becoming infected each year.
- Children suffer for no fault of their own.
- Every day 35,000 children die.
- 40 lakh children die each year (Before Birth).
- 10 lakh children in the sex industry.
- 100-200 million involved in child labour.
- More child soldiers die in war than adults.
- Never in history have there been so many children

among us. Never have so many of them been at such great risk.

### THE NEXT GENERATION AT RISK?

- All children and young people are at risk.
- Some are at risk from poverty.
- Others are at risk from prosperity!
- Young people today have everything to live with, but nothing to live for.

### REASONS FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

- Economic Reasons – Poverty, lack of medical and educational facilities, mal-nutrition, child labor, etc.
- Social Reasons – structure of the society- patriarchy, caste system, broken homes
- Political reasons – using children for violence, war and ethnic conflicts (e.g. Palestine, LTTE)
- Religious Reasons – wrong teachings of religious leaders- child sacrifice, marriage, male child preference.

### HOW CAN CHILD THEOLOGY HELP?

- Use theological approaches and insights to understand the world of children.
- Think theologically about children, their significance, values, humanity & needs.
- Enter into and actively participate in God's creative and redemptive work in the world.

- The goal is to equip Christians – child and adult – to become competent and passionate leaders.
- Reflect on childhoods and families & the potential, nurture and needs of children in light of Scripture, culture and theology .

## 2. GLOBALISATION AND CHILDREN

K. J. Andrew

### WHAT IS GLOBAL?

The expansive interconnectivity of localities—spanning local sites of everyday social, economic, cultural, and political life—a phenomenon but also a spatial attribute—so a global space or geography is a domain of connectivity spanning distances and linking localities to one another, which can be portrayed on maps by lines indicating routes of movement, migration, translation, communication, exchange, etc.

### GLOBALISATION

“Globalisation, basically means the world is getting smaller in just about every sense, except for geographically. Exchange is becoming more rapid, travel more feasible, communication faster and more accessible, advertising and media more widespread and movement of money more free-flowing.”

–*Andrew Colgan, Auckland*

“Globalization – the growing integration of economies and societies around the world.”

–*The World Bank Group*

“in its simplest sense Globalization refers to the widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness....”

–*Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton, 1999. Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*

“If globalization is conceived as turning the world into a global market for goods and services dominated and steered by the powerful gigantic transactional corporations and governed by the rule of profit, then all the human rights of the people in the world, particularly in the South would be seriously threatened.”

–*Paul L.S.J*

The Globalized world is like a small boat... “We cannot “afford to ignore the condition of our fellow passengers on this little boat. If they are sick all of us

risk infection. And if they are angry, all of us can easily get hurt.”

–*Kofi Annan Ex-Secretary General of UN*

### BENEFITS

Strengthens International ties; Rising living standards; Industrial capital has ended up in developing countries; The share of the trade of goods of all developing countries has risen; Global competition and cheap imports keep a lid on prices; An open economy spurs innovation with fresh ideas from abroad; The population of internet users worldwide has rocketed; The easy availability of technology has shrunk time and cut cost, advances in IT/Information exchange; Growth in International Travel; Understanding of Cultures; Democracy promoted;

### NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Millions of people fear losing their jobs, especially at those companies operating under competitive pressure; Policies of structural adjustment such as privatization imply an increase in unemployment since it reduces the demand for labor.

### CHILDREN IN GLOBALIZATION

The cost of global reconnection has been steep; Risk of HIV/AIDS; Terrorism; Environmental disaster; Globalization also exposes countries to shocks occurring elsewhere in the international economy; The unequal distribution of resources leads to an increase in “Poverty” and “inequality”; Orphaning & abandonment of children; Neglect of the sick, illiterate, disabled and elderly as government’s priorities shift to economic growth; Toxic dumping on Third World Countries; Globalization – Culture of Violence; Globalization - the Impact on the Indigenous Communities

### IMPACT ON CHILDREN

100 million children world-wide live on streets in abysmal conditions; 60,000 to 100,000 children & youth are sexually exploited; World-wide, more than 1 million children are in prison; 1 in every 5 children in the developing world has to work that is 246 million child workers; 5.7 million children work in especially horrific circumstances, 1 million in prostitution some as young as 8 and 9; There are around 50,000 child soldiers in Africa; Between 8,000 and 10,000 children are killed or maimed by land mines every year; Increase in dropout rates & declined enrolment rates; Worsening levels of basic health - Malnutrition

### REFLECTION

- Evolve mechanisms to face the challenges of Globalization.



- What would be the impact of Globalization in next 20 years?
- List down the policy level changes brought by your government in favor of Globalization.
- Develop a global partnership for development. e.g. MDG's

## MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 1 - Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger

Goal 2 - Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3 - Promote gender equality & empower women

Goal 4 - Reduce child mortality

Goal 5 - Improve maternal health

Goal 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases

Goal 7 - Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8 - Develop a global partnership for development

# Devotion

Jonathan Bangerera

## MATHEW 5: 1-12 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Message of the Kingdom is preached. The Power of the Kingdom is demonstrated. As a result Jesus is becoming popular, many people begin following him. He used a rabbinical model of teaching, with much question and answer followed by more questions. The similarity with the account in Exodus of Moses giving the law from the mountain top is clear in the passage. Jesus begins with a message of blessedness. Blessed are those who are poor, those who are broken, and those who mourn. The Greek word for poor refers to the utterly poor: that is those who are down and out. The gift to those who are such is the Kingdom of Heaven. Next, mourners will be comforted. The word 'mourn' refers to one who is inconsolably sad like a mother who has lost her young child. Blessed are the meek. The meek refers to domesticated strength – like a horse in the stable. Blessed are those who thirst. This refers to those who are famished, and dry-mouthed, who long for a drop of water. Those who thirst will be filled and satisfied. Blessed are the merciful. To receive and give mercy is a character of the Kingdom-dweller. A shift occurs here. After having been filled with blessing, we are to share our blessings with others. We receive mercy to show mercy. Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called the sons of God. 'Sons of God' could also mean holiness, or Christ-likeness. We live in times of peril, with persecution and harm. In such a context we are called to be Christ-like. In our response to difficulties, in the way we live through those times, we are called to display a Christ-like character.



# Child Theology in Context

Keith White

Jesus' act of placing the child in the midst of the disciples was part of a process of deconstructing their not surprising human notions of what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. As he lived, walked and talked with them he was consistently seeking to help them identify, and then break down some false notions that they had in mind. The same process is at work in our discipleship today, and in an Indian context. Our educational system, our political system, our economic system, and our religious systems, are all geared to promote a certain kind of kingdom. CT helps us understand the Kingdom of Heaven better, helps us see it more clearly and directly, rather than through the lenses of traditional and contemporary earthly kingdoms and power structures.

The exercise yesterday (S1.6) of hearing the two presentations on the issues that millions of children in India face was extremely valuable. It sharpened our awareness of the context in which we are living and working. That is very important, because we cannot think of CT in the abstract. If anything CT is, and ought to remain, a practical discipline. And anything practical must by definition be set in and engage with its contemporary context. The model of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus offers and lives out is not just about a result or an end-product: the process is equally important. Both process and result must be lived

up with the child in our presence. As we will know a little child is anything but an abstract person and uninterested in the immediate context!

With that in mind, let us look at the various contexts in which CT will operate:

**Theological** – How theology was done? What are the models currently being used? How does CT relate to Systematic Theology? How will CT transform the theological institution?

**Church** – What is the primary model that our churches have adopted? Is it child friendly and conducive for the spiritual growth of the child? How can CT be introduced? How will CT transform the church?

**Ministry** – What is the goal of our ministries? Do children figure in its vision? How will CT challenge our ministry structures and activities?

**Religious** – Who are the religious leaders we revere? What is it that they seek to preserve, enhance and perpetuate? Where do children fit into their schemes? How could CT alter the priorities?

**Political** – What are the priorities of the Government? Do its services and activities affirm and work for the development of over 50% of its subjects? How will CT seek to influence such macro- structures?

# Group Tasks

## LETTERS ADDRESSING PARTICULAR CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

The task was for participants to elect to join a group dealing with what context was most on their hearts, and then for each group to write a letter to the South India Child Theology Consultation expressing your hearts' concerns and desires.

These were the letters that were read out at the end of the session:

### CHURCH CONTEXT

*Dear Theologians and Practitioners,*

*It is wonderful that we have spent many hours thinking and sharing about what Child Theology is and what it means to us. The challenge before us is receiving the children in the church as Christ demonstrated in Mathew 18. For when we receive children we receive Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirit.*

*Receiving and regarding children is always in the heart of God as we see in Deut 6:1-14 and Psalm 78:1-8. Plus God wanted the people of Israel to include children in all their feasts.*

*Very sadly, we in the church drifted away from understanding the heart of God which Jesus demonstrated. We do not include children even in ordinary worship let alone communion, baptism and membership etc. We keep children invisible and discriminate against them in every possible way. For we are very much adult centred and adult-oriented. We need to involve children in all the practices. For this to happen we need to become like children by emptying and humbling ourselves just as Jesus did.*

*Thanking you.*

*On behalf of the church context group*

*Prabhakar Samson, Santhosh Kumar, Mohan Kadambavam, K.J Andrew*

### MISSION CONTEXT

*We as practitioners working with children at risk to the believers as the Child Theology Consultation in Bangalore, ask you to see and consider the child among us. We are grieved to realise that there are those who work with the children who have often forgotten the child in order to build their name or reputation. We all intend to do what is good for children, but where is the child in our program policies and activities?*

*Therefore we ask that before the method or manner in which children are served is chosen, could we create a working environment in which children can be a part? Just as Jesus placed a child in the midst of the disciples to teach them how to live, we are learning that children can teach us how to walk with God. Children are created in the image of God, so we encourage you to treat with dignity and let them transform not only their families and communities but also how we do our work.*

*Dear brothers and sisters if this process seems difficult for you, we humbly ask that you walk together with children*



and us. We can learn together with God's great help and encouragement.

Finally, not forgetting that you once lived as a child, and that someone invested in you, we ask that you too walk with a child in your work with children.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

**Raja Solomon, Rajesh, Francis Doddamani, Joni Middleton.**

## CULTURAL CONTEXT

On behalf of the cultural context group of the Child Theology Consultation we would like to convey that we have realised that all children are same and their needs are the same. But the opportunities available for their developmental needs are highly stratified. It is sad to say that millions of our children are neglected.

Among the children, the girl child forms another highly discriminated against category. Practices like female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry death, bride burning, wife-beating, spousal abuse, attack the chances of their survival or living with dignity.

It is so sad that we see the church leaders playing an active role in fixing the amount of dowry since the church would get one tenth of that amount, which we call blood money.

Age, gender, caste and class present multiple layers of discrimination and make the life of a child or the state of children a very complex and complicated reality to deal with.

**Shalini Suren, H.R. Mondol, Shiby Thomas, Biju Eapen, Augusta Paul, Justus Obadiah, John K.**

## RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ!

We live in a time and place where many religions exist in close proximity with each other. India is a country that sees all religions as equal. However Christianity is seen with suspicion, therefore working with children is difficult. At present many Christian schools are incorporating other religious teaching in their schools, The question that we Christians face how to teach the children about Jesus in our situation?

After discussing we came up with certain possible solutions, First of all respecting the context the school should not force teaching Christian doctrines or scriptures. Instead the Christian teachers have the responsibility to live out a Christ like character. Christians are to take clues from the life of Daniel, Joseph and Paul how to live in a pluralistic context.

We also believe that presenting the positive gospel to the children is necessary and not attacking other religions. We must learn to be like Christ. We must teach our children to respect and tolerate other religions while being grounded/ committed to Christ.

**Ashish Chrispal, Daniel Koti, Anil Kumar, Vineeth**

**Swaroop, Dhanraj, Margaret John.**

## CHURCH CONTEXT

To,

*The South India Child Theology Consultation,*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.*

*We greet you in the name of Jesus Christ.*

*We thank God for the fellowship and privilege of meeting all of you and having frank discussions on Child Theology during these two days. We are also thankful to the organisers for giving us this opportunity to share our observations of the child in the context of the church.*

*During our discussions the group looked back over 2000 years of the church in India. The early church communicated the content of the faith verbally and every family practiced to the best estimates of the leadership of the church. The missionary movements recognised not only the great commission (evangelism) but also the great commandment (love thy neighbour – social action) and started educational institutions, medical units and established churches. The Sunday school movement has been the backbone of the church to educate children and young people.*

**But now we observe that:**

*Seminaries are not adequately equipping graduates in ministry to children.*

*Parents have shifted their responsibilities to the Sunday School teachers and school teachers.*

*Christian education curriculum is not revised periodically.*

*Lack of trained and committed volunteers for children's ministry.*

*The leadership of the church lacks the vision for children*

*The annual plans of the church do not contain children's program nor parental educational programs.*

*We do not consider the child outside the church, and do not network with NGO's*

*At this point of need we as a group recommend that this larger group (SICTC) forms forums to speak about children and sensitise the church. We need to disseminate the information to the grass roots level people and churches. We recommend that relevant material be translated into local Indian languages. We recommend that seminaries start Child Theology courses so that students and others can enhance their ministry to children. This consultation is a good opportunity to discuss these important matters for the benefit of the church.*

Thanking you.

Yours in Christ,

**John Philips, S. Daniel Paul, Solomon Praveen, Joshu Johnas, D. Joy, Nelson Shab, Sridhar, Jonathan K.**



# Group Task

## RE-FOCUSSING ON OUR OBJECTIVES

The groups were then asked to reflect on the process and content of the consultation up to this point and to consider the following two questions:

1. What were your expectations yesterday? Have they changed at all after having gone through the day, after having learnt together?
2. What are some salient lessons that were learnt?

The responses below were then used to guide the priorities for the rest of the consultation:

- CT taught us the importance of welcoming a

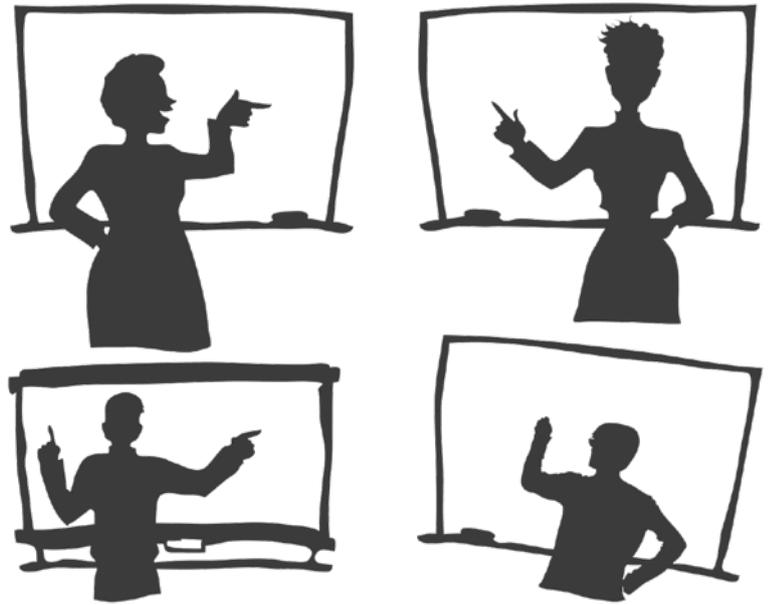
child, and that through this we welcome Jesus.

- How to relate CT to the positive aspects and dimensions of Indian families?
- Where will CT live? Among academic theologians only? Or will it spread to the activists as well?
- There is an element of curiosity present all through so far. We made some progress in our understanding of CT. The challenge is to approach God in a childlike manner and then to follow that in all our Christian activities – preaching, church, evangelism.
- The process of emptying ourselves is the most important lesson we learnt. It is not easy but it is necessary.
- The focus needs to be Jesus. We need to be Jesus-people and that should affect all we do. How does this relate to women's ministry? Are they inter-related at all?



# Child Theology – A Fresh Way of Doing Theology

Sunny Tan



The following is a representation of a Powerpoint Presentation.

## A GLOBAL TURN TO CHILDREN...

- 20th C. as a “Century of the Child”  
Child Development Theories develop; Children’s Program & Ministries Grew in USA
- Philippe Aries, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (1962)
- The UN’s Turn to Children  
1979 – “The International Year of the Child”; 1989 – “The Convention on the Rights of the Child”  
1990 – “World Summit for Children”; 2002 – Special Assembly on “A World Fit for Children”

## CHILD

Theological Reflection on Children also grew

- Children-in-Nurture
- Children-at-Risk
- Conceptions of Childhood
- “Biblical” view on Children
- Theology of Children
- Children’s Theology

## THEOLOGY

No theological reflection without children

- An Adult Task
- Thinking & Speaking of God & His Ways

- A Way of Reading the Bible
- Contextual Theologies
- Theologies for the Church and for Mission

## AN OVERVIEW ON THE EMERGENCE OF CHILD THEOLOGY AS A MOVEMENT:

### CHILD THEOLOGY CONSULTATIONS

Penang 1 - June 2002	Penang 3 - June 2006
Cape town - Feb 2004	Brazil - Sep 2006
Houston - May 2004	Ethiopia - Nov 2006
Penang 2 - June/july 2004	Ecuador - Mar 2007
Cambridge, uk - Sep 2004	

## THE CONTENT OF CHILD THEOLOGY

Child Theology is Theology. It is about a way of thinking and speaking about God and His ways. It is a theological method that recognizes and embraces children as “agent” for adult knowing and becoming. Child Theology serves as a corrective to current approaches to doing theology, doing church, and doing missions.

## CHILD THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

- Theology & Philosophy (19<sup>th</sup> C)
- Theology & Pietism (19<sup>th</sup> C)

- Theology & the Social Gospel (19<sup>th</sup> C)
- Theology & Scientific Materialism (19<sup>th</sup> C)
- Theology & Neo-orthodoxy (mid 20<sup>th</sup> C)
- Theology & Culture (mid 20<sup>th</sup> C)
- Theology & Anthropology (2<sup>nd</sup> half 20<sup>th</sup> C)

### “LIBERATION” THEOLOGIES

- Black Theology
- Latin American Liberation Theology
- Feminist Theology
- Womanist Theology
- African & Asian Theologies
- Indian Dalit Theology
- Korean Minjung Theology

### DOING THEOLOGY TODAY

- Reflecting on God in the Text (Past) and in the Context (Present)
- Reflecting on God in His Preferred Location Among “the Humble” (the weak, oppressed, the poor)

### A CORRECTIVE FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

- “For 2000 years theology has developed, often with a blind spot when it came to the place of children in the ministry of Jesus, in the life of the community of God, and as signs of the Kingdom.” (Keith White)
- “No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence

of burning children” (Rabbi Irving Greenberg on the Holocaust, quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, “Starting Over: New Beginning Points for Theology” in *Theologians in Transition*)

### A WORKING DEFINITION OF CHILD THEOLOGY

“Child Theology is an investigation that considers and evaluates central themes of theology--historical, biblical and systematic--in the light of the child standing beside Jesus in the midst of the disciples. The child is like a lens through which some aspects of God and his revelation can be seen more clearly. Or, if you like, the child is like a light that throws existing theology into new relief.”

### SEEING CHILDREN AS THEY ARE & NOT JUST IN TERMS OF WHAT/WHO THEY WILL BECOME

Theological Reflection with the Child-in-the-Midst-Method: An Experiment

Theological Reflection with the Child-in-the-Midst-Method: An Experiment

Invitation to Child Theology

- God welcomes only “the humble” to access Him
- Jesus came to reveal God and how adults are to be humble to access God

Children are regarded by Jesus as model of humility and also agent for adults’ knowing of God and His ways.



# Group Tasks

## CHILD THEOLOGY, AN EXPERIMENT

This group task has several stages:

- (i) Write down for yourselves and without consulting others: What is the gospel?
- (ii) Get together in twos / threes and discuss your answers. Try and put them together, so that you have an agreed statement.
- (iii) The twos and threes now join with others to form five groups. Each group is given a clean sheet of paper. The task is to write down how each group answers this same question: What is the Gospel?

### RESPONSES BY GROUP:

*Group 1: K.J. Andrew; Noel; Nelson; Mohan; John Philip; Jonas; Santhosh Kumar*

Gospel is the gift of God for every one who believes. Also it is the power of God for salvation. We need to believe, repent and turn to God to experience His love and righteousness which is demonstrated for us sinners on the cross.

*Group 2: Shalini; Margaret; Joni; Augusta; Leela*

Gospel is good news. It is a gift of God not based on our works or efforts. It begins with God. God came seeking us and met us in Jesus on the Cross. He offers forgiveness and freedom from the Cross. What a glorious hope of being with God and His people forever.

*Group 3: Francis D; Solomon Praveen; K. Vincent; Daniel Koti; HR Mondol; Justus Obadiab;*

Good news to mankind (John 3:16); Recognised our sinful life and God who wants to connect with me. It is a free gift, eternal life that Jesus provided for us. Relationship, Hope, Acceptance. It is obtained by confession and accepting by faith, confessing sin and accepting Jesus as our Saviour.

*Group 4: K. Jonathan; Raja Solomon; P.D. Samson; Dhanraj; John K*

The truth of salvation revealed to us through Jesus Christ only begotten Son of God who died for our sins.

*Group 5: Ashish Chrispal; Biju Eapen; Shiby Thomas; D. Joy; F. Anil Kumar; Vineeth Swaroop*

The good news is God's good message in the form of Jesus Christ to attain salvation which leads to the fullness of life. It is obtained by surrendering to Him by faith through grace.

(iv) Now you are going to receive a child into your group. It will not be an actual physical child, but one that you know from your personal experience and local knowledge. Use all your experience to try and understand what that child is feeling and experiencing. The children were as follows:

- A physically disabled 6 month old child who is dying.
- A Muslim girl child in a Muslim community.
- A 12 yr old child labourer in Karnataka.
- Teenage girl who has been trafficked.
- A girl in a rich Christian family.



(v) The next stage of the process is to reflect together in each group with a view to working out what will the gospel look like; what will it mean in real time; how will it be received, to/by the child that you have been talking about and welcoming?

*Group 1: K.J. Andrew; Noel; Nelson; Mohan; John Philip; Jonas; Santhosh Kumar*

The most important idea that gripped us was: The child could not understand anything. We need to empathise with the situation her parents are facing and through that process of grieving we share the love of Christ.

*Group 2: Shalini; Margaret; Joni; Augusta; Leela*

The most important idea that gripped us was: If there is no awareness of what she is missing, how to communicate the gospel. We felt that could not be an incident, event, but a process of friendship making, understanding her particular context of Islam and salvation as understood therein.

*Group 3: Francis D; Solomon Praveen; K. Vincent; Daniel Koti; HR Mondol; Justus Obadiah*

The most important idea that gripped us was: The need for survival was the most urgent issue the boy faced. Awareness of the larger context is necessary.

*Group 4: K. Jonathan; Raja Solomon; P.D. Samson; Dhanraj; John K*

The most important idea that gripped us was: The spiritual aspects of salvation were not the most urgent need that the child felt.

*Group 5: Ashish Chrispal; Biju Eapen; Shiby Thomas; D. Joy; F. Anil Kumar; Vineeth Swaroop*

The most important idea that gripped us was: She lacked fatherly love. Mother took care of her. She was in a dilemma as to what love meant.

(vi) Now each group must revisit their original written statement of the Gospel and revise it if necessary in the light of welcoming a particular child into its midst.

#### **GROUP 1: THE GOSPEL IS:**

Salvation for the parents and other caring adults is that the dying child, though conceived in sin, is created by God; sanctified by God and accepted by God in Jesus Christ as we read in Psalm 139, Jer. 1:4; and Job 1:20. For salvation or gospel means nothing to the child.

#### **GROUP 2: THE GOSPEL IS:**

We have an 8 yr old Muslim girl Salma who lives in a Muslim mohala with her parents, siblings and grandparents. We befriend her, show her love, receive her into our home and through her, her mother and family and build a friendly relationship. We listen to her and her family's joys and sorrows and share with them the love of Christ that we experienced in our lives.

#### **GROUP 3: THE GOSPEL IS:**

The love of God demonstrated through a practical life in receiving and accepting a little boy of 12 yrs who is

introduced to a loving God through Jesus Christ, who is willing to meet his needs and bless him through a simple step of prayer.

#### **GROUP 4: THE GOSPEL IS:**

The message of salvation has enabled Asha find deliverance from trafficking for sexual purposes through our risky rescue efforts. We then in love demonstrate the love of God to her through our life and wholesome relationship.

#### **GROUP 5: THE GOSPEL IS:**

The good news is that God loves her as his daughter and shows his love through Jesus Christ. Her longing for love can be fulfilled by receiving Jesus into her life.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE EXPERIMENT**

This task of this exercise was to help us welcome a little child into our midst. Not just any child but a particular child. As Jesus did, we sought to welcome a particular child into our midst. In the process whether we knew it or not, we have been brought closer to Christ. When we suffered with the children, we saw that heart of Christ. When we experienced love, we experienced the love of Christ. Isaiah 53 comes to mind when we see the suffering of children, as through them we see Jesus and his suffering more clearly. In our suffering and in our joy we experience Jesus. We feel and see Him more intimately and clearly.

And in welcoming the children and through this coming closer to Jesus, we find that our understanding of the gospel is thrown into a different light. We encounter it afresh, from a new perspective. And this is very close to the heart of what CT is all about: changing our ideas, attitudes and priorities as we stoop to welcome the child placed by Jesus in our midst.

## Devotional

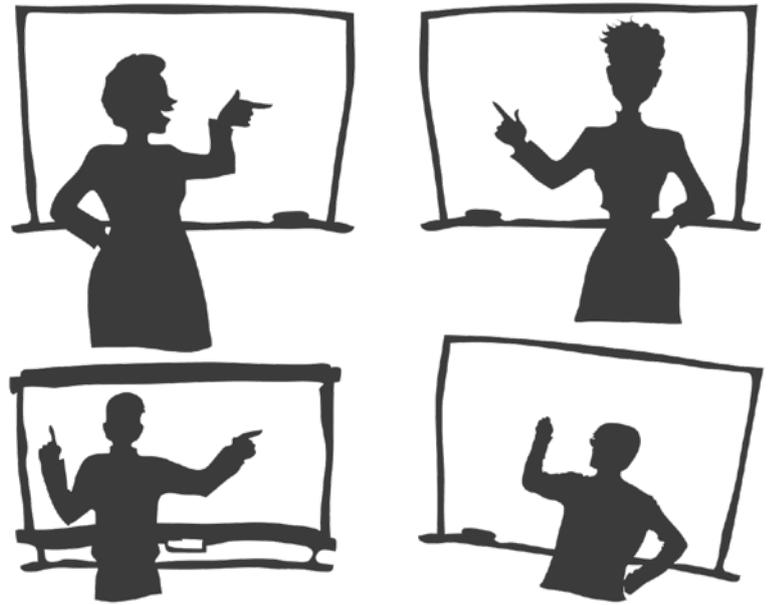
Margaret John

### II KINGS 5: 1-14

Margaret invited the participants to imagine the background of the slave girl in Naaman's household. She was given a name: Rhoda. The group imagined how she was taken captive and sold, her feelings of loss, loneliness and homesickness. And so it was that the story of Naaman's miraculous healing in the River Jordan was re-told through the eyes of a little girl. She was an agent of God's mission: a little one in the Scriptures not known to us by name, but great in God's Kingdom.



# Child Theology applied in the Indian context:



**T**hree responses to the discussion above were presented, two of them using Powerpoint . They focused on three areas:

## CHURCH AND MISSIONS

K Jonathan

“Bring children in to the assembly” (Deut 29:10-15; Deut 31:12-13; Josh 8: 34-35; Lev 12: 26). Children need to be taught the wonder works of the Lord (Deut 62 & Psalm 78). In Judges 2:10 we see how the next generation was not able to understand God because their parents did not tell them about God!

Our churches need to focus on children and express that in our Vision and Mission Statement and importantly include them into our plans and budgets. We need to have a child friendly church compound. We need to care especially for the children in difficult circumstances – but do we know such children in our church? We can train parents to care for their children and other children in the church. We can advocate for children in the church.

## PRIORITIES FOR THE CHURCH

- ‘Emptying’
- ‘Accepting’
- ‘Receiving’ child
- Discipleship - doing what Jesus taught and did.

## WHAT IS MISSION

- It is all about ‘His purpose and the doing of God in and for the whole universe’
- The purpose is redemption and rebuilding of His reign on the earth
- God’s accomplishing his Mission and it is in the heart of Church (Ecclesia)

## RECEIVING THE CHILD

God’s mandate: bring them in to the assembly (Deut 29: 10-15, Deut 31: 12-13, Joshua 8: 34-35, Lev 12:26-27, Neh 12:14); Instruction to teach (Deut 62;Jud 2:10, Ps78); God has chosen children: Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Maid, Josiah, Esther, Boy and Rodhe etc; God Himself became father and advocate for children; God hears the cry of children; Children can praise Psalm 8:2 Esther Mission; David says: “You made me trust in you even at my mother’s breast ... from my mother’s womb you have been my God” Ps 22:9-10; Psalmist: You have been my hope....my confidence since my youth, from my birth I have relied on you Ps71

## A CALL TO PRAYER AND ACTION(WE ARE ADVOCATES)

- Pro 31:8,9 speak up....
- Lamentation 2:19 Arise, cry
- Death Declaration of Jesus Christ
- Give me child – Rachel’s cry

## CHILD AND SOCIETY

Augusta Paul

A short sketch role play of a child from a rich background gave us a glimpse of the many things that he had yet suffered from loneliness, boredom, and lack of love.

A role play of a child from a poor labourer class gave us a glimpse of the pressure of older children to take care of her younger siblings. They are not in a position to attend school, play with their friends and 'enjoy' life.

The point that was made was that children are children, whatever background, they need love, respect and opportunity to be children.

### EVERY CHILD IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

- Every child bears the image of God regardless of his or her position in society.
- The needs of children are similar: love, security, belonging, and growth.
- Yet children get differential opportunities to survive, live and grow.

### HOW DO WE VIEW A CHILD?

- How we view a child is an important part of our worldview.
- This worldview is shaped by several factors:  
Culture: preference for a male-child; The Bible: God-given treasure, gift, Ps. 127, 128.

### AGE-RELATED ASCRIPTIVE STATUS

- Children may be idolized, pampered and spoilt.
- Children may be neglected and abused.
- Children in the contexts of plenty as well as poverty may experience various types of deprivations since their longings are similar.

### LUKE 2:40; 52

- Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and men.
- Such a holistic growth is extremely important in the socialization of every child.
- Nurturing a child resulting in a balanced personality development would depend on opportunities available.

### CHILDREN AT RISK (CAR)

- In our world 20% people hold 80% of the world's resources.
- The rest of the 80% of people hang on to the

remaining 20% of resources.

- Even in developing nations like India the gap between the rich and the poor is enormous and widening.
- Children are the worst sufferers of this inequity.
- CAR suffer from deprivations at home, neighborhood, school, church, recreation, and in every institutional structure.
- Their achievements in education, occupation and income are greatly hindered.
- They experience marginalization and exclusion from the mainstream.
- The deprivations are passed on to the next generation.

### CHILDREN AT MACRO LEVEL IN SOCIETY

- How do children fare in the plans, policies, programs, budgets, strategic actions of organizations, churches and the State?
- India has the largest number of children in the world: we need huge allocations in our budget for children's health, water, sanitation, education, skill training.
- How do the laws of the country and child protection policies of organizations handle the neglect and abuse of children?

### THE SHOCKING STATE AND TREATMENT OF CHILDREN: AWARENESS & INVOLVEMENT

- We need to raise our awareness level and be informed.
- We need to spread awareness about the state of the children in our churches, classrooms, places of work and at every level of decision-making, insisting on the rights of the children.
- We need to get involved individually and collectively in creating strong families, safe communities and child-friendly environments.

### LET JUSTICE FLOW LIKE A MIGHTY RIVER...

- The shocking state of children presents a picture of gross injustice.
- Child Theology should make every Christian and every church a prophetic voice crying out for justice on behalf of the children.
- We are called to be the 'Salt' and the 'Light' by Jesus with the child in the midst.
- May Child theology enable God's love to continue to flow like a never-failing stream...



## SEMINARIES:

Ashish Chrispal

Working with the seminaries is important for the future of the church and for the benefit of society. We know that some teachers and educators are the last people to learn of new trends and developments. Sometimes in theological colleges that is even worse. We often do not want to change because we are comfortable in our systems. In India we find that sometimes theological education is a closed door for new developments and innovation.

After having gone through this consultation what we are talking about is not just adding another course, but transforming the entire orientation of theological education. We need to bring the children back to the centre of the theological education, not least because 60% of India's population is under 35 yrs of age. This will require major changes. We will not be following the great commission fully if we are not going to be attending to this.

## Conclusion and Farewell

Still in a circle, the group bade farewell to each other.

Keith White promised that CTM would help the process in Indian in any way that it could. It would seek always to act as a servant. He passed on a traditional Maori farewell: Thank you. I came with an empty basket, and now my basket is full to overflowing!

Paul thanked every participant and sponsor, with special thanks to the steering group.

There was a prayer, and then the participants joined hands in a circle as they said The Grace.

A group of six was asked to explore how the process might be taken forward in India.



## Here are the photographs and brief bio-sketches of participants at the consultation.



My name is Santosh Kumar from Scripture Union, doing ministry with children in Schools, Hostels and Church Sunday Schools. I thank God for this opportunity to participate in the Child Theology Consultation. I want to know more about Child Theology.



I am Margaret John from West Bengal. Presently I am doing my MTh at SAIACS here in Bangalore. I am very interested in children, specially the potential they have to follow and know Jesus. It has always pained me to see the children being neglected not only in the world but also in the church and Christian

children's homes. I am excited about Child Theology since it brings two of my passions together: 'children' and 'theology'.



I am Daniel Koti from Hubli. I am married with 3 children. I was involved with the Pavement Project of SGM until 2005, which was working among street children. I am Pastoring a church with ministry to children. We provide education and care to more than 100 children daily to our Sunday

School with more than 50 children in two places.



I am K.J. Andrew from Bangalore. I work with children and people working with children through India Sunday School Union. I desire and pray that children may be helped to grow as Jesus grew in all the areas of their personality. I would like to learn about how Child

Theology can help toward this goal, and transform the church and society.



I am Vineeth Swaroop from Mangalore. I am doing my 3<sup>rd</sup> yr B.D. at Karnataka Theological College. I am interested in children's ministry because children are the main pillars of our church, they are the future strength.



I am V. Sathu. I minister with children particularly with the HIV affected children in the south part of Tamil Nadu. We are demonstrating God's love through action.



I am Mrs Mini Suna. I am working in the Bible Society of India, Bangalore. Though I work as a Computer programmer, my passion is to teach little children has led me to teach the Sunday School students of St John's Church. I love to teach the little ones and also in the process learn many things from them. I love to be in the company of little ones.



My name is John. I work at World Vision, Bangalore. I am working among children living with HIV/AIDS and I proclaim the gospel among the children. I have completed MPhil and now doing a PhD in Child Positive Behaviour.



My name is Solomon Praveen working as an Evangelist with the CSI Kothanur, Bangalore. I share the gospel with the children particularly. I would like to learn what Child Theology is all about.



I am Hafisua Rahaman Mondol. I came to know the Lord Jesus from a Muslim background. At present I am doing ministry among the people in various hospitals and help Bible Society in their hospital ministry. I worship in the City Harvest AG Church in Bangalore. I am also pastoring the Hindi congregation in that church.



My name is Dhanraj. I come from Chennai, I am the Director of Tambaram Community Development Society. I am doing spiritual and social ministry to glorify God. The special focus is on HIV infected and affected children. We also have a special concern for Dalit children, since children are the future of society. God loves children

so we are involved with them.



I am Arokiaraj and I work for Bible Society. I attend Christa Jeeva CSI Church. God has given me a burden for children and I would like to help them in their spiritual life and for their education so that they can be useful citizens in society as well as good children of God.



I am Noel Kotian and I am the Director of CEEFI. We are the Christian Education Wing of Evangelical Fellowship of India. CEEFI has been working in India for 49 yrs and producing Sunday School material for children, young adults and families in India.

We are currently producing fresh curriculum for Sunday School. Learning about Child Theology would help me to understand children better so that good and effective literature can be produced for their development.



I am F. Anilkumar serving at Karnataka Theological College. I have also been a minister in the Karnataka South Diocese for twenty years and I am actively involved in the field of Christian Education in college and the church.



My name is Sambooranam Samuel. I am working at the Karnataka Auxillary of the Bible Society of India. I am involved in the ministry of distributing the Word of God. Here we have the opportunity to meet spiritual needs of children. There are lots of opportunities to touch many people

in this ministry.



My name is Ashish Chrispal. I serve with the Overseas Council International helping and encouraging seminaries in Asia to look at the Theological Education from the perspective of the future, particularly taking Child Theology seriously in their training.

My name Leela Manasseh. God has placed me in the Bible Society of India to direct the department of Ministry and Resource Mobilisation. I am not married and dedicated to full time service for the Lord and committed to take care of my elderly mother and

widowed younger sister and her daughter with whom I live. I used to be involved in training those ministering to children for 15 years. Now I am resourcing the Resource leaders to start and establish Childrens ministries and particularly in reaching out to boys and girls who are school dropouts.



I am P.D. Samson and serve as a Consultant to Viva India and HCD course. I have been promoting the work of Viva India since 2005 in Theological Colleges in India and have succeeded in introducing the HCD course into many seminaries.



I am Joshi Jonas from Mumbai. I have risen from Sunday School teacher to a Christian Educator. I have dealt with Children Volunteer workers, Organisation leaders, Church leaders to train and provide consultations. To me this gathering is a bilateral dialogue between the practitioners and thinkers.



I am Justus Obadiah from Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu. I am working in New India Bible Institute, which is a part of New India Evangelistic Association. I am also Pastoring a church in Kanyakumari Dist. I am also in the leadership of two orphanages in our district which is under NIEA.



I am Geoffrey Kotian. I have 28 years of experience in Christian ministry. For the past two years I am involved in Pastoring a small congregation and helping poor children with tuition programs. I love my ministry among children.



I am John Philip Anchan. I am involved in children's ministry with Scripture Union in Karnataka. I have been a Sunday School teacher for 23 years in St Thomas Church and worked as staff at Shimoga for 3yrs. I now serve as a State Secretary for SU and Editor for the Karnataka Daily Bread and conducting School and Hostel missions and VBS.





I am Joni Middleton. I grew up in an Alaskan fishing village, the eldest daughter of Hippie parents. I am constant learner, looking for any opportunity to learn more and share it with everyone I meet. I work with women who are trafficked for sexual purposes. One of the great joys of my life is to listen to children talk about God and their experiences with Him.



Mohan Kadambavanam. I am a father of 4 children and 5 grand children. I work with AWANA Youth Program. For 20 years I have been serving the Indian church and mission agencies in training leaders who work with children or to work with children using the Scriptures and teach them to know God, love God and serve God.



My name is A Raja Solomon from Shadows working with churches for HIV and AIDS and children. Our organisation started to give care to HIV /AIDS sufferers in 1992, when I was inspired and did various training programs at national and also Micah Challenge programs. My dad devotes his time to care for

HIV patients and I work in Church mobilisation for care of HIV patients. I am both a practitioner and a theologian.



I am Jonathan Kodavaticanli. I work with Compassion India ministry for the past several years. I have a BTh in Theology and Masters in Sociology and Master in HCD. This gives me an opening to be available to churches and development practitioners to strengthen them with information

and skills for more active participation to be Child Advocates. May God help me and fill me with His Spirit and power in this field of Child Advocacy.



My name is Nelson Shah and living in Bangalore but originally from Gujarat. I have a passion to do something for children because children are the best way to fulfil God's great commission. We cannot think of the church without children. I love children because Jesus Christ has commanded us. Let

God's will be done in and through my life.



My name is S. Daniel Paul. I worship at the East Parade Tamil Church and I am a Sunday School teacher. As a teacher my desire is that children should not go without the message of the gospel. They have to be taught even about the persecution in the church so that their spiritual life will be edified.

Through their experiences children give a listening ear. I see an interest rising in them and pray that they will be grow closer to God, love the Bible and God very dearly.



I am D. Joy from Kerala ministering as a teacher in Bethel Bible College, Punaloor. I am also doing ministry among children. I have a wife and two children, a daughter and a son.



I am Shiby Thomas from Kerala. I am an MDiv final year student in India Bible College and Seminary in Kumbanad. I am also engaging in children's ministry under the college. It is my pleasure to be here at this consultation.



Keith White, married with four children and four grandchildren. He lives in a residential community in East London, UK, made up of hurting children and vulnerable young people. Keith lectures, teaches and preaches in different parts of the world about Child Theology and also Child

Developments. From 1997 he studied the life and work of Pandita Ramabai and so his theology and understanding of God's mission have developed in an Indian context.



My name is Jonathan Banger. I am the Assistant Pastor of the Richmond Town Methodist Church and have been so for 6 years. For most of my life I grew up in Bangalore. I am married to a wonderful person called Sharon and together we have 2 boys. The older one is 6yrs old and the younger is 3 months old. As a Pastor I work with all age groups, but have particularly focus on younger people.



My name is Shalini Suren. I am a mother of 2 and grandmother of 2. I live in Bangalore and Coordinate the Arpana Ministries in Tamil Nadu. I am here because I believe to be in Women's ministry we definitely need to be sensitive to children which is intertwined. I believe that children, youth and women are pillars of the church.



I am Rev Dr. K. Devaraj. I work at ACTS Academy in Bangalore. I come from a Hindu background. I discontinued education at the age of 9, but through the child care ministry of Christians I was educated and completed all my theological education and even got a PhD in Social Sciences from Tamil

University. Now I am serving as the Registrar of Acts Academy and Pastoring a growing church. My core passion for ministry is among the grassroots level in Bangalore for the past 23 yrs. Praise God.



I am Biju Eapen from Kerala. I have been involved in childrens ministry as well as teaching in a theological seminary since 2007. It is my passion to reach the unreached little ones and bring out child related issues before the church for their consideration. Creating an awareness among the people of God is a major concern of mine.



I am Caleb Rayapati. Founder Director of Harvest Ministries, a church planting initiative focussed on the Telangana dist of AP. Caleb also represents HARVEST-teaching and training Biblical wholism. This year, a corporate standard school has been established near Hyderabad

for the benefit poor and disadvantaged of the Telangana, currently providing free English medium schooling to 210 children.



Paul Joshua. A child of God, a husband to Sumitha and father to Sithara, Tharika and Pratheek, the son of (late) A. Bhakiaraj and Prema Bhakiaraj and brother to three siblings. After a stint in business I undertook theological training and now serve as an Elder at the Tamil Brethren Church and on the faculty

at South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS). I come to the study of Child Theology after

working with children at risk and hence would like to think of myself as a reflective practitioner.



I am Augusta Paul married to Thomas Paul. I teach Sociology and Religion at ICMIS, Bangalore. We worship at Richmond Town Methodist Church. We have three daughters, Keren, Ruhamah and Pearl, and one grand-daughter Elizabeth Aarti.



I am Sridhar Clement. I live in Bangalore. I am married to Mamtha, who is a staff nurse in Columbia Asia Hospital. God has blessed us with a son, Immanuel. I am basically from KGF but settled in Bangalore since 10years. I received my calling for ministry in 1998 and God is using me as an Evangelist

all over India. I am involved in preaching and training in churches and Bible Colleges. My vision is to reach Karnataka with the love of Christ.



I am Francis Doddamani. I am a Faculty at New Life College teaching Pastoral Theology and Counselling. I am the Founder President of Pastoral Care Ministries which focuses on family counselling and training young people in Karnataka. I am active in networking for missions in Karnataka. I serve as the Associate Pastor of Bangalore Bible Fellowship. I am married to Mary Smitha.



I am Biren Kumar Nayak from Orissa. At present I am teaching at New Life College, Bangalore. I also am a Pastor of a Oriya church in the city. I am married and blessed with a daughter.



# CHILD THEOLOGY

## INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES FROM SOUTH INDIA

Child Theology is an investigation that considers and evaluates central themes of theology - historical, biblical and systematic - in the light of the child standing beside Jesus in the midst of the disciples. The child is like a lens through which some aspects of God and his revelation can be seen more clearly.

In Child Theology, however, the primary focus is not the child or children but God. Jesus did not put the child in the centre so that the child could take the place of God for us. The child is not to be idolized or sacralised, a god made visible and accessible.

Yet, Child Theology acts as a corrective to the marginalization or making invisible of children in mainstream discourse. It argues that Christians must follow Jesus and put the child in the midst of our theologizing, because this is integral to our being faithful and articulate followers of Jesus.

Some of the distinctives of the process of doing Child Theology are:

- We draw from both practice and academic theology.
- We tend to prefer round tables to lecture rooms and lecterns.
- We seek to bring together and value equally participants, whether male or female, black or white, rich or poor, single or married, of high or low social status, theologians or practitioners.
- We engage with a wide range of theological material and sources.
- We distribute materials and reports widely and cheaply so that anyone can join the process.

The Child Theology Movement wants to bring people together to share ideas and practices in order to work it up into a more mature, relevant and transformational theology. As people work together theology is rescued from being private to individuals or locked up in religious cliques and becomes more a public language enabling communal action in the name of Jesus Christ. Child Theology is ready to learn from theology worldwide, whatever its particular origins or stance. We desire that local groups connect with international networks, and while doing so ensure that due attention is paid to specific contexts while at the same time engaging in a genuinely global conversation.

Child Theology Consultations are one way that we have been seeking to do just that. Such consultations (and their reports) are continuing to multiply around the world. This report in your hands represents the discussion that was had during one such a consultation held in Bangalore in February 2011. It takes seriously Jesus Christ who placed the child in the midst of his disciples, just as it takes seriously the painful yet promised filled context of South India, in which Christian discipleship is to be lived out.



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