

Dear Colleague,

A number of people linked to the Child Theology Movement have been asking about recent developments and so here is a brief update of news. You are receiving this because we have your electronic contact details on our database. If for any reason you do not wish to receive further communications, please let us know.

Vision

The vision to which the directors are committed for the rest of the life of CTM Ltd remains that discussed, prayed over and agreed at New Haven in March 2007.

It is expressed in the following aims and goals:

Fifteen Years' Aims

“In response to Jesus’ action and teaching when he put a child in the midst (Mt 18:3), the primary aims of CTM are to re-examine and explore Christian theology and practice as a whole in the light of the child and to ensure that this theology informs every aspect of the church’s life and mission, including that which relates to children.”

Five Years' Goals

“In the next five years we commit ourselves to focus on achieving:

- (1) A growing community of Christians engaged in rigorous theological reflection, using a CT process, with particular reference to seminaries, denominations, churches, NGOs, families and children;
- (2) A particular priority for Africa, Asia and Latin America;
- (3) CT informing and being informed by a significant part of Christian children’s ministry in these areas and elsewhere.”

The directors plan to meet in London in March 2009 to review progress and plans, and we would be delighted to hear thoughts and comments of those who are part of the growing movement. For your information I believe there are now more than 400 people on the CTM database.

Directors

The directors comprise those listed in the November 2007 Newsletter:

Marcia Bunge (USA), Shiferauw Michael (Ethiopia), Wendy Strachan (Australia), Sunny Tan (Malaysia), Haddon Willmer (UK), and Keith White (UK).

We are planning to extend the board with representatives from South America and South Asia.

Publications

Reports

There are now eleven consultation reports published by CTM and available via the CTM website or from CHILD, Malaysia. The most recent reports are: Brasil (2006) and Australasia (2007). The Brasil Report is the first bi-lingual record of a consultation. We would like to do more, but have found that the production of such documents is a major challenge to our limited administrative resources! Further reports are being prepared at the moment. The intention of these reports is that each circle that is convened across the world should be able to learn from those who have met before in different cultures, and contribute their own footprint for those who will come after them. We have decided that once a report is sold out, we will make it available in a readily downloadable form on the CTM website, rather than reprint hard copies.

Booklets

Marcia Bunge is the editor of the series of CTM booklets launched in 2004. The three published so far are:

An Introduction to Child Theology – Haddon Willmer and Keith J. White

One Way of Doing Child Theology – Haddon Willmer

Child Theology for the Churches in Asia: An Invitation – Sunny Tan

The intention is that these booklets should be accessible worldwide both because they are priced within the means of most people, and also because their style is simple and precise.

The first booklet has sold out and has been reprinted. Booklets in the pipeline include an African perspective on Child Theology, a comparison of Child Theology and theologies of liberation, feminist and local theologies, forgiveness.

We invite and welcome proposals for future booklets. Please contact Marcia Bunge via our website.

Books, Publications and Research

The Child in the Bible general editor Marcia Bunge was published by Eerdmans earlier this year. It is a fitting sequel to *The Child in Christian Thought*. It comprises 18 chapters each focussing on a biblical theme, book or collection of books, with a child in the foreground of the author's attention. One of the common experiences of several writers was the discovery that much in their specialist biblical field had remained invisible until the light of the child in the midst illuminated the texts.

Marcia Bunge's article, "The Child, Religion and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood" published in the *Journal of Religion*, October 2006, Volume 86, Number 4, is available online, and has proved to be a reliable guide charting how Child Theology relates to other perspectives on children.

The collection by John Collier is ready for printing as I write. It is called *Toddling to the Kingdom*. It is a compilation of highlights from CT consultation reports, and will be printed in and distributed from Penang. CTM is most grateful to John for his tireless work as honorary company secretary of CTM, and his initiative and effort in bringing this idea to fruition. We also thank Compassion International for its enthusiasm for and support of this publication from the outset.

A proposal has been submitted for a future book the child and theology. The idea is that there should be a collection of papers presented by theologians from the five continents exploring various theological sub-disciplines, methodologies and themes (for example doctrines, OT, NT, hermeneutics etc) with the child placed by Jesus in the midst. At present we are exploring the possibility of holding a conference in London in 2010 or 2011 at which the draft papers will be presented.

Haddon Willmer and Keith J. White are still working on their SPCK book under the working title, *Reception Class: an Essay in Child Theology*. It will comprise six chapters and they are now working on the final three. Progress is slower than hoped, but the authors are conscious that they are entering new territory and it is taking much time and thought trying to get appropriate theological bearings.

The current edition of the Indian theological journal, *Dharma Deepika* (Issue 28, Vol. 12, No. 2 July-December 2008) was designed as a companion to the November South Asia CT consultation held in Secunderabad. It has a number of substantial papers and CTM is working with the Mylapore Institute of Indigenous Studies to facilitate distribution of material and copies. The papers include "From Invisibility to Indispensability: Sketches for an Indian Child Theology" by Paul Joshua, and "Child Theology and Christology" by Haddon Willmer.

A number of publications in the general area of children and theology have appeared and those connected with CTM have been active in support and encouragement. An example of this is *Children of God: Towards a Theology of Childhood*, Edited by Angela Shier-Jones, Epworth, Peterborough, 2007.

Bill Prevette completed his PhD in 2008 and Haddon Willmer was one of his supervisors. It was a study of partnerships and relationships between faith-based organizations and evangelical churches in Romania between 1990 and 2004, especially as they responded to children at risk. Bill makes some interesting use of insights gained from Child Theology.

Consultations and Consultancy

Two consultations were held in 2008, the first in Uppsala, Sweden (May), and the second in Secunderabad in India (November). The Swedish meeting brought together people from Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden, and we established the first contacts with the Kindertheologie Jahrbuch group in Germany. The Indian consultation brought together

people from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka. Work on the reports of these consultations is far advanced. The total number of CT consultations in the world so far is 14.

The next event planned is a one-day conference in London in March 2009, and there will be a conference in Finland in 2010 in connection with the “Church at Play” movement there.

If you would like more information on any of these, or would like to suggest additional venues then please let us know. CTM is committed to facilitating open discussions and reflections around the world wherever Christians (practitioners and theologians; male and female) are willing and ready to consider seriously the implications and imperatives of the action of Jesus in placing a child in the midst, and his accompanying teaching.

In addition to consultations that we have jointly sponsored we have been pleased to sit alongside groups and organisations giving theological input by way of comment and teaching. These have included Compassion International (Bolivia, January), World Vision International (Monrovia, April), Masters Course in Holistic Child Development (Penang, June), The Global Children’s Forum and Cutting Edge (Wheaton, July), Churches Consultative Group on Children’s Ministry (London, November), Jubilee Memorial College and Madras Christian College (Chennai, November).

Website: www.childtheology.org

In the light of all the energy and effort expended in publications and consultations we have not been able to improve and update the CTM website at the rate intended. But we now have plans to develop it as a key and pivotal hub of the movement. Among the resources we hope that it will provide are:

- Consultation reports
- Booklets
- Bibliography
- Book Reviews
- Updates on the movement
- Scope for discussion
- Links with other key sites
- Multi-language facilities
- A method of ordering publications online

We would welcome ideas about how the website could be improved, and also offers of help!

Organisation and Finance

It is little short of a miracle that CTM continues to thrive while operating on little more than a shoestring of a budget. We are grateful to organisations and individuals who have supported us financially and administratively. This includes Ted Jordan our honorary auditor and accountant, John Collier our honorary Company Secretary, Sunny Tan and

colleagues at MBTS in Penang, Mill Grove, and Dan Brewster and Menchit Wong of Compassion International. We wish to place on record the invaluable work of Vicki Brody at Valparaiso who has done so much to keep our database up to date, and stocks of CTM publications in the USA recorded.

CTM seeks to operate with the very minimum of running and operating costs. The executive is voluntary, and nearly all the expenditure goes directly on the costs of holding consultations, producing publications and maintaining the database and website. The bulk of our slender funds is needed to ensure that there are people attending consultations who would have been unable to do so without bursaries or some form of financial support.

The major donor to date has been Compassion International: CTM values greatly the way CI has seen the long term and foundational importance of Child Theology, not only for its organisation and children's ministry, but for the reformation of church and theology as a whole.

Strategic Development

When the directors meet in March 2009 there will be at least three major proposals for them to discuss.

The first is an ambitious plan *to develop Child Theology throughout the continent of Africa*. This will be breaking new ground not only in this great land, but also in the world, and we hope that it will provide a working model of use to other countries and continents.

The second concerns *the establishment of a Child Theology Institute* which would drive and monitor the development of a robust and coherently argued understanding of Child Theology worldwide. This will be based, we hope, in South East Asia, but will serve the world. It is therefore closely related to the Africa proposal.

The third will be an *evaluation of the prevailing methods and processes* in use since the inception of CTM, notably the distinctive CT consultations. They have created networks around the world, and have provided much information and experience for CTM. But what are the best ways of achieving our goals? And how are we to develop our capacity to deliver what we set out to do, and to gain resources to make it possible?

Closing Reflection

If you put the words "Child Theology" into Google and Yahoo search engines you get 1,400 and 12,700 responses, and this is a fair representation of the way this whole theological perspective has begun to take off worldwide. Although we coined the exact phrase, its use is now beyond the control of CTM. We welcome this mushrooming of interest and study, and seek to develop and nurture connections and links with all

engaged in this whole area. At the same time it is vital that we continue to explore, study, and communicate what we believe is distinctive about Child Theology as a theological perspective and discipline.

This is not only a matter of content, but also the way that we do things. We seek to embody as well as to teach what we understand Jesus to have meant when he placed a little child in the midst of a theological discussion among his disciples.

It is therefore quite remarkable that CTM should have arisen at the very time in world history that there existed a technology allowing people to communicate across continents without the domination of a central hub or bureaucracy. This has its particular opportunities and challenges and we hope that CTM can rise to both.

Because there is no membership we invite all who are connected to CTM as a movement to respond to this newsletter before the directors meet in March. I give you my word that we will listen to your voice.

Christmas Greetings

On behalf of the directors of CTM it is my privilege and joy to wish you a very happy Christmas. Perhaps we have not yet adequately explored the implications of Child Theology for understanding the Incarnation, or vice-versa, so this Christmas provides a further opportunity for us, like Mary the mother of Jesus, to ponder the events and meaning of the first Christmas deep in our hearts. Last week I preached on three occasions in the biblical record when God placed a child in the midst of a particular historical situation: Moses among a slave people crying out for liberation; Jesus among that same people now subject to Roman rule; and the little child beside Jesus captive to a false idea of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the third episode that has given us a framework for understanding the other two events. But it may be that this Christmas we will find light shining from the baby in the manger into any number of currently unlit areas of our lives, ministries, families and churches.

I look forward to hearing from you and journeying alongside you in 2009.

Shalom,

Keith

Keith J. White,
Chair of CTM