

A black and white photograph of three young girls. The girl in the foreground is smiling broadly and making a peace sign with her right hand. Behind her, another girl is also smiling and making a peace sign. A third girl is partially visible in the background, also smiling. The image is positioned on the left side of the cover.

HCD 505

M.A. IN HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Theological Foundations for Holistic Child Development

KEITH WHITE

AN INTRODUCTORY SERIES FOR THE *MASTER OF ARTS IN HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT* PROGRAM

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Glossary of Terms

HCD Curriculum is a plan for delivering the Master of Arts in HCD program at MBTS. The curriculum includes the teaching contents, standards, experiences, selection of teachers, students' competencies, and related teaching-learning issues.

HCD Syllabus is the teaching outline of an HCD course and contains statements of the teaching learning process, goals and objectives, study units, course requirements, assessment, etc.

HCD Study / Course Text contains the principal reading materials for the course. These materials can be in any form, i.e. hard-copies, electronic data, audio-visual references, etc.

HCD Study / Course Guide includes materials given to students to guide them through the learning process, e.g. outline of the lecturer's presentation, case studies, activities, question and answer sheets, etc.

HCD Introductory Series are books which introduce an HCD subject in a "nutshell". They are short commentaries on a particular HCD subject and each book contains the underlying teaching principle, a teaching outline, and bibliography.

Preface

This booklet describes what Child Theology is and what it offers not only to students studying this particular module, but the rest of the HCD course. The content explores some of the implications for participating seminaries. It also argues that Child Theology represents a unifying framework and foundation for HCD with contributions and challenges to each module. Child Theology welcomes and thrives on the contributions and challenges from the real life situations of students and the rest of the course: the "wisdom of experience".

Introduction

Traditional theology in seminaries is usually done without serious or sustained reference to children.

It is one thing to ponder what came first, the chicken or the egg, but quite another to ask what is the chicken and what is the egg when two things are closely linked. It so happens that HCD and Child Theology have grown together from the start like the two species that make up lichen. They are not the same thing, but they have contributed to each other's life and growth.

Compassion International has been a sponsor of both and this is greatly to its credit, not least because Child Theology is working for a long-term paradigmatic shift, and is not amenable to the usual forms and statements of "learning objectives"

and "outcomes". The booklets and Child Theology Reports that are now available worldwide in both hard copy and electronic forms are partly the result of Compassion thinking and resources.

There are four questions that shape what follows:

- 1) What is CT (and what it is not)?
- 2) What are the content, and processes, of HCD theological foundations?
- 3) What evidence is there thus far of some of the contributions and challenges that CT brings to the whole of the HCD course?

4) What are the sorts of contributions it makes and challenges it brings to seminaries and other bodies involved and engaged in the whole process?

Because Child Theology seeks to be a servant and serving ministry please think hard about how it can serve HCD, the faculty, students, seminary and partner organisations more effectively. It is a learning process and CT is on a sharp learning curve, so it is listening acutely in order to serve more faithfully and effectively its Lord and Master.

What is Child Theology?

Traditional theology in seminaries is usually done without serious or sustained reference to children. So if you have a theological component of any course relating to children there is a serious gap between the theology and the subject. Normally the lecturer, the textbooks, the journals and the content will have little connection with the real world in which children and families live and with which they wrestle. So how should we begin to bridge this gap? Child Theology is a serious response to this challenge.

What Child Theology Is

Thankfully, there are now booklets in the CTM series that help to answer this question, notably one from an Asian perspective: *Child*

Theology for the Churches in Asia: An Invitation, by Dr Sunny Tan. You may also find it useful to read *Child Theology: An Introduction* by Prof Haddon Willmer and Dr Keith J. White.

A working definition of Child Theology might go something like this:

A process of theological reflection starting with the question: "What does it mean for us today to respond to the teaching and example of Jesus when he placed a little child in the midst of his disciples so that they could be encouraged to change and become lowly like little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?"

It is essential to notice that the focus and method of Child Theology as it grapples with this question is a deliberate and concentrated theological activity. There are a

range of other possible responses to the question at the heart of this definition, but whatever else it is, Child Theology is theology. And this theology is overtly criticised, reshaped and deployed in Church and Mission under the impact of the child placed in the midst by Jesus. It starts with Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and He will be the Omega of Child Theology. It takes Him very seriously. Ultimately it is about Him and the Father who sent Him: not about a child or children.

The child placed by Jesus is beside Him to serve as a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven. So the child (about whom we know nothing except that he or she was little and lowly in status) is only to be the object of attention, care or veneration insofar as that is inherent in being a sign of the Kingdom of God. Child Theology starts with Jesus and asks what light children throw on God, the

Father, Son and Holy Spirit and His way of doing things in His world (that is, the Kingdom of Heaven). This light immediately exposes the way the disciples are thinking and behaving, and their fundamental misjudgement of Jesus and the Kingdom. Put simply, if not crudely, Jesus was telling them that they had got the Kingdom of Heaven all wrong! It wasn't just that they were a bit off course: they were on completely the wrong track.

Child Theology seeks always to have the child placed by Jesus in the midst of conversations and reflections, but it is concerned with every aspect of God's mission, and involves the whole community of God. It will lead us all to see that in welcoming children we welcome Jesus, and the One who sent Him.

What Child Theology Is Not

Others could give a valid answer to the question in the definition without so much theological concentration. For example some might respond to teaching of Jesus by *caring for the child at risk* set in the midst by Jesus. They see the child as given to them to care for, and going about this care in such a way that they become like children, because they are really with children, and so enter the Kingdom of God. There might be implicit, or incipient, or potential theology somewhere in this important and urgent process. But Child Theology is aiming for, and judges itself by a different criterion: the achievement of plausible explicit theology.

Theologies of childhood and *biblical frameworks for children's ministry* start with children and ask what theology and/or the Bible has to teach us about children; and

spiritualities of childhood ask what children have to teach us and how we can nurture them. These are significant and valid processes and tasks, and Child Theology depends upon and welcomes conversation with such related disciplines and studies. It is eager to learn from them and invites the critiques and challenges of other disciplines and studies with the view to arriving at new places for all engaged in such conversations.

Child Theology as Theology

Child Theology is uncompromising in affirming that whatever else it is: it is theology. Yet in saying this, it is aware that this is for some a rather tarnished word: they prefer to use a term like "biblical studies". Some see "theology" as something academic specialists do, especially lots of "liberal Christians"! For

others it verges on a waste of time. They reason that the needs of children around the world are so desperate that there is no justification for spending valuable time debating what seem like arcane issues. What matters is a basic biblical understanding, framework or commission. The rest we can leave in God's hands. However laudable this may seem (and we do well to ponder the fact that the Good Samaritan did not engage in much theological reflection in the story Jesus told!) this is not ultimately a sustainable or responsible position. It starts with theological ignorance and possibly caricature, and is liable to continue with unfounded confidence and assurance. (Someone is providing the theology

for such activists, whether they are conscious of it or not.)

As one who lives daily with children at risk of depression, bullying and harm, I fully understand this latter point of view. For the avoidance of doubt I am a practitioner, having lived in community with hurting children and young people virtually all my life. I understand the pain and the urgency of responding. But it will not do to dismiss theology in such a terse way. All Christians are theologians in that we talk (and/or sing) about God in one way or another. We speak and think (*logos*) about, from, to, with, and for God (*theos*). The only question is what sort of theologians are we: good or bad?

Child Theology is tenacious in the angle of its approach and the specification of outcomes. This approach is as already said, respects the experience and voice of the subject by letting the child speak, not to do something to or for the child; and the outcome is somehow theological. The outcomes will be fresh and more accurate readings of the Scriptures, a reformation of systematic theology with a child in the midst, new readings of the history of Church and theology (as for example in Marcia Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought*, and also *The Child in the Bible*), and new understandings of Church and Mission, and new operative theology (that is theology in action in our daily lives, individuals and corporate).

Child Theology and Biblical Studies

Most theology is a discipline for the few and more concerned with words and formulations, than with action.

So what is the relationship between theology and biblical study? They are different but related. This means they can choose to talk to each other, help each other, or fight each other! One close form of relating positively is when theology depends on and derives from the biblical studies, or the Bible, read with the help of various aids. What it does then is to establish patterns of understanding built up from the whole corpus of Scripture and in the light of various historical and social contexts. Thus we can begin to talk of what we mean by God, Jesus Christ, creation, sin, salvation, church and eschatology. We cannot

derive God from a single verse or book of the Bible. There has to be sustained and informed reflection on the whole counsel of God: Old Testament and New, and involving the whole community of faith around the world and through history.

Another way of relating theology and biblical studies is for theology to have the initiative. It takes the theme of God as found in the life of the church and the world, to discern and order the questions and visions that are found through this practice and to attempt to think them through in ways that are

worthy of God. This kind of theology may be carried on with varying degrees of attention to the Bible. Sometimes it goes directly to the Bible to find what the Bible says on specific issues; sometimes it is nourished by a general, maybe very serious, regular and devout reading of the Bible, which then influences theology as it is mediated through the sensibilities, imagination and practice of individuals and communities.

Whatever way is taken, it should be agreed, in the light of centuries of experience, that theology and biblical studies cannot be defined

and managed according to any rigid recipe. Freedom and elasticity of thought is essential in both theology and biblical studies. Conservative biblical Christians sometimes make the mistake of thinking freedom and elasticity is the property of those they reject as liberals – but they then fail to recognise the truth about their own good practice. Conservative biblical Christianity is (like every other form of Christianity) selective in its reading of the Bible, and often inventive, imaginative, sometimes fantastic – for good and ill. Elasticity is inevitable and imagination desirable.

The very processes of selecting and interpreting Scripture both involve theological activity. This is why the course spends important time on “hermeneutics”: how we should

attempt to read the Bible responsibly, faithfully, consistently and accurately. We have to be asking ourselves all the time: Is this reading of the Bible worthy of God? What god does it witness to? Christian faith implies that we read the Bible as witness to Christ and in the spirit of Christ, not any other spirit. But what exactly is that spirit? So theological investigation and discernment is essential to the plainest of Bible reader – if the Bible reader will not engage in thinking theologically he does not treat the Bible in a way that is worthy of God in Christ by the Spirit. He is no better than the man who supposed God would guide him if he opened the Bible at random and put his finger on a text. He lighted upon the verse: “Judas went out and hanged himself”. Perturbed he tried again. This time he arrived at the

words: “Go thou and do likewise!” God does not bless those who prefer gambling to reasoning.

It cannot be denied that the way much theology is done in seminaries communicates to ordinary Christians that it is a discipline for the few, and that it tends to be more concerned with words and formulations than with action. However we cannot allow it to be falsely defined in this way. It reflects western philosophical traditions and it is understandably a problem to ordinary Christians seeking faithfully to live out their faith in the real world. Part of what Child Theology does is to establish a process that dispels the myths surrounding theology and the theological process, and to model a fresh, but convincing and valid method.



The Process and Content of Child Theology in HCD

"We start where we are, and scrutinise what we are doing and why."

Let me share with you what we actually cover on the HCD course, and how we go about things from the perspective of students who have already engaged with the course. The process and content have required much careful deliberation, and are constantly being revised (re-formed) in the light of experience.

Process

Here are some student reactions from Asia and South America. The roots in (local) Asian theology and experience struck many chords:

"Tears rolled down my cheeks as I listened to Ramabai's story: she is a symbol of strength to all women...the unreachable in India".

"Today as we took off our shoes in the classroom for worship, I was challenged to feel the presence of

God...it taught me to hold on to the Indian culture. It is one of the best ways to reach India”.

The method of teaching stirred hearts as well as minds:

“Psalm 8 reminds me of my recent trip to Mt. Kinabalu. If ever I go there again, I will stand at the summit and read aloud the whole Psalm to let the people know how majestic our Lord’s name in all the earth is!”

“I never thought studying theology could be so much fun! I never saw Child Theology before. I feel kind of excited as if I have discovered something brand new. I feel as if I want to do something and to tell many people about Child Theology...I hope many churches, Christians and key leaders will soon realise the role of children in healing and restoring Indonesia”.

“What has impressed me is the way that you taught us: you didn’t want to describe Child Theology to us, but to encourage us to find the definition for ourselves”.

“It’s a great method (using pictures and telling stories) that I love and also hope the children will love this method too”.

“I love Ramabai’s kindergarten method and really want to try it in the place where I live...If God uses children to elaborate the idea of entering the Kingdom of Heaven...the kindergarten role model should be the answer to the churches and Christian ministries...I am very excited by this idea”.

“After this week of Child Theology I am more convinced that God has placed this burden for me to hold the hand of the child and walk with them”.

“Our process of learning was a refreshing change...your process of teaching was entirely new: it was fun and exciting. One wants to learn more, read more...Last week was really a learning experience. It was life changing. It made me think of my priorities”.

Comments on the whole course:

“Putting the child in the midst is the key to the Kingdom. This Kingdom is the key to how we live. It’s God’s way of living, God’s way of doing things. A child should influence the way we do theology. When you are a Christian you are a theologian. We are part of God’s mission to change the world. It might be to plant a mustard seed in one child or to allow a child to plant one seed in me. This is God’s way of doing things. While I am on earth I am a Child Theologian”.

"I have learned so much, possibly more than any of the students as we have been in conversation. My understanding of Asian cultures, of families, of God and of children has deepened. What a privilege!"

Course Content

The theological foundations for HCD are in five sections and span the traditional breadth of theology.

Section One: Operative Theology

We begin with what might be called the "Text of Life", and reflect theologically on that. It is a surprise to most students that we take a shared understanding of our current situation, life and work (the text of our lives) in the light of God's word so seriously. You could call this contextualisation if you like. But it is possibly more

fundamental and essential than this. We start where we are, and scrutinise what we are doing and why. We try to find out where we got our theology from and how. (Hymns and songs play the most important role in this for many. For others it is the Bible stories that they were told as children.) It is right to start where we are for if we believe in God's providence, we are where He has placed us, until He chooses to move us on! This is the first stage of the hermeneutical circle. We will return to the place where we started at the end of the course, but by then things will have changed! When we revisit our operative theology at the end of the course, it is our hope that by means of our study, prayer and conversations, it may have been reformed with the help of God's Spirit.

This approach is to be contrasted with professed or conventional

theology where people may point to what others say, believe, or confess. We are not starting with what we ought to believe, but with how we actually live, and what we believe judged on the basis of our current lives and priorities. It is not easy to do this, and needs a trusting context. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his "Outline for a Book", in *Letters and Papers from Prison* set an uncompromising example in this. Like his brother the Apostle Paul, he wrote in prison and under the shadow of death. What people really believe is found in what they do, and how they live, as much if not more than what they will say if you ask them what they really believe. So Jesus told His disciples that it was their love for one another that would demonstrate to others that they were His true followers (not their statement of faith, spirituality, devotion or commitment to mission).

A British nineteenth century theologian, F. D. Maurice, argued that many Christians in his day were what he called “practical atheists”, although they were orthodox and pious in word and church practice. He said they were practical atheists because they had been squeezed into the contemporary world’s mould and way of thinking. Their social practice in early capitalism in no way showed they thought that God was the one Father in heaven which meant all people were brothers and sisters. This is a besetting sin for all Christians everywhere and throughout time: if we do not realise it, it is because we are drifting with the flow rather than fighting our way against the stream and the tide.

Section Two: Historical Theology

The second section of the course is the study of how Church, denominations and doctrines developed around the world, and where we sit on the Tree of Christianity. We seek to discover how biblical studies and theology developed historically and why. What did Christians before us believe and why? What was the Church like, how did its Mission develop? What are the sources of denominationalism? So we trace the sources of what we believe. And in doing this we discover what other Christians have believed around the world. How universal or culturally specific is theology around the world? What is available to us now in terms of theological resources, guides and suggestions? What problems are bequeathed to us that we must tackle and what problems have been shown by history to be not worth bothering with?

Section Three: Biblical Theology

Thirdly, we seek to find ways of doing justice to our reading and interpretation of Scripture, as well as our knowledge about it. We study the Scripture in order to understand God’s will, nature and saving actions. This is reading Scripture theologically, (the categories of God’s will, nature and saving actions constitute a theme, which can be the focus for a system, so this is a way of doing systematic theology with the Bible) and thus to work towards a practical and ethical theology. In doing all this, we somehow have to weed out what is not God’s will in Scripture.

But there is something else quite different: We might also read Scriptures without that kind of managerial systematic question. We might read the text with a more passive openness to the whole of it, to open ourselves to all sides of it,

in its strangeness, and to feel our way into it. Bonhoeffer insisted his students meditated on the Bible, and differentiated it sharply from all work with commentaries, preparations for sermons and systematising theology (see *Life Together*). This kind of reading lets the Bible go free from our control, including whatever systematising theology we espouse, so that we are taken into “the strange new world in the Bible” (Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*).

As evangelicals we may like to think that we read the Bible like this, but mostly we don't: we are scared lest our orthodoxy is disturbed, and some of us are so concerned that the Bible will support and not upset the teaching we want to give children that we bowdlerise not so much the narratives as the theology in the Bible.

Section Four: Systematic Theology

Fourthly, we explore the great doctrines that are at the heart of a Christian understanding of God, the world and Jesus Christ. These usually include: the nature of the Triune God; Creation; Sin; Redemption; Anthropology; Church; Mission; Eschatology; and so on. Here we have a real challenge because of the absence of children in most systematic theology that has been done so far around the world. We draw from core writers and texts, and constantly find we are placing the child into questions and situations where our mentors have neglected her.

Section Five: Applied Theology

Finally, we come full circle and work at how we are going to put our theology into practice. As this is a whole section of the course, it

means that we spend roughly one fifth of our time seeking to establish God's will and vision for those whom we serve, and begin to establish priorities and tasks that bring our life and work more closely into line with His will, and the prophetic visions in the Scriptures. As noted earlier, it is our hope and intention that the *Operative Theology* of the students (as well as the faculty) will be challenged, refined, extended and enriched during the module.

Summary

All the time we are asking how the child placed by Jesus in the midst of the disciples throws light on every aspect of theology. So for example what difference does it make if we have a child in the middle of our thinking about sin? Because the Child Theology that has been done

over the generations has not been part of the mainstream of theology, there is much work to be done in reforming understandings and conclusions of the theologians and Church leaders.

This framework for doing theology is not new, but it does offer a simple way of working whether students have a prior knowledge of theology or not. The youngest student so far is ten years' old and he seemed to grasp much of what was going on! So we might ask of the students, what is current, unquestioned and implicit *Operative Theology* as you go about your daily life and work, and how have you derived it? Where do you sit on the "Tree of Christianity"? Why is that so? Are you sitting on a Western or an Asian branch? Does it matter? What have you to learn from other Christian traditions? How are your answers to these questions formed by *Historical Theology*? What is the

quantity and quality of your *Biblical Theology*? What are the principles of interpretation that you use? Have people of all cultures, men and women and children, lay and ordained been involved in this work? Next, what is your *Systematic Theology*? Who are those you look to for your major bearings and categories? And finally how do you go about putting theology into practice? How effective is your *Applied Theology* at the intersection between the needs of the world, and God's will and Mission?

We set about the task as groups that we call churches, and as a community. Much theology is second hand and borrowed. Asians, Africans and others outside of Europe and North America are asking why they cannot derive local theologies without depending of Western formulations and gate-keeping. A guiding principle of the course is that as far as possible at

least 50 per cent of the reading and teaching material is by theologians from the continent in which the course is being taught.

A Working Example: The Doctrine of God

Child Theology is so new that it needs to try many experiments to work out how to proceed. It is making discoveries and mistakes. Like a little toddler it often falls over. But toddling is a good time for such spills, because you can always get up and try again comparatively unscathed. In the Consultation reports you can read of some of these experiments in different contexts. One we have tried recently in Quito, Ecuador concerned the doctrine of God.

Let me be frank with you about the doctrine of God: many Christian

sermons, books and hymns and songs celebrate the Almighty God, who reigns in majesty, and is Lord of all. Praise God we can do this. But this is only part of what the Bible reveals to us of God. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Son He is despised and rejected. In the world He is weak.

A simple image I have used for much of my ministry imagines for a moment God as headmaster and the world as a school. Each room is a different nation or people group. We look round the rooms and find blood spattered on many walls; death; suffering; hunger and thirst; bullying of the weak by the strong; girls undervalued and marginalised. We could go on. We go into the headmaster's study and he tells us that he is in complete control: simply trust him. It will all turn out when the new school is built and the old has been done away with.

What do we say in response? Surely we cannot accept this explanation. The headmaster is not in control whatever he might say and however much we would like to believe him. And thus it is with the world. Compassion International knows this to be true, if any organisation does. Millions of children suffer. There is any number of chilling up to date statistics to illustrate how desperate the situation is. This is not God's will; this is not His way. Whatever we may mean by God being in control, it is not how it is in the sin-wrecked world we know. And we have to have a strong theology of God; a real, robust theology that is able to grapple with the realities of the world where He is weak. It will be a theology of the Cross, not simply of power and authority of the sort we know from earthly kings and emperors. The Kingdom of Heaven is in earthly terms

upside down, inside out and back to front.

He is a God who suffers; whose heart is broken. But He persists in His grace and mercy to do something effective in and for this world. It seems to us that this is not enough or is still unfinished. Believing He has called us to be partners in His redeeming Mission, the predominant question is: How can we live with God in the real world? For many it is virtually impossible. Atheists and Buddhists and many in the Chinese and Japanese traditions largely dispense with God, or find incredible the Semitic (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) profession of faith in a historically active God. They fail to see how He holds all things together in His order, which is ultimately morally satisfying and happy. Hindus hold on to God in the plenitude of gods and goddesses so many, that divinity reflects the multiplicity of

life and not its happy resolution; and in the end for them, salvation is release from being not the achievement of the meaning of being, which is the Christian hope.

Any follower of Jesus Christ in Asia is bound to confront this choice and tension, along with others. It is not an easy one, for the traditional Asian ways which are profoundly different from what is on offer in the biblical history of God are not mere ideas, but are lived and transmitted in powerfully embracing ancient and living persisting cultures. Many in Asia make much use of Fate, acceptance, and luck, as well as confinement to

this world, than the Bible does. Early Christians attacked features of ancient Greek religious culture, sometimes as it appeared in Gnosticism, because they would not accept Fate or the stars as a help to solving the human problem – and some think these traditions were western forms of Eastern wisdom.

We know that millions of children are suffering in the world right now. What we are doing may sound impressive but it is a drop in the ocean. We proclaim God as Almighty Lord, but where is the convincing evidence of this in the real world today? Perhaps we

survive theologically by keeping things in separate compartments. And if so we must not let this happen in a holistic child development course of all things.

Child Theology wrestles with this. It does not have easy or ready answers. We will not let go of God on the one hand, and the real world on the other.

I hope this has given you a flavour of the theological foundations part of the HCD course. Now we move to see how it relates to the rest of HCD.

Contributions and Challenges of Child Theology to the HCD Course

“The Child Theology component draws from questions, experiences of children, cultures, understandings and constructions of childhood”.

Can I begin by saying that I believe in a community of scholars, and that HCD should model conversation between students and also lecturers? The Child Theology component draws from questions, experiences of children, cultures, understandings and constructions of childhood. It begins with seeking to understand operative theology and ends with practical and applied theology.

I can put this another way by saying that it is not in some Ivory

Tower where the ghosts of Augustine, Luther and Calvin provide ready-made courses for Asian twenty-first century students. It is a living course, not a one-way delivery of received wisdom.

What is the challenge of Child Theology to the other parts of the course? What is its confession or profession of faith? Child Theology does not intend to challenge in a negative, provocative criticism, but represents rather a way of presenting the faith that encourages

and invites contributions and reflections from a variety of perspectives. It invites students and faculty to bring their cultures and insights of children to theology and the Bible.

The questions of Cutting Edge practitioners continue to resonate with the participants. I keep the originals asked at the Cutting Edge conference in De Bron by my side, and students are asked to underline individually and then to discuss in groups which are the questions that

go to the heart of things from their experience and point of view. The process depends on the openness of students and teachers to the real world of children including not only the beauty of their beings and swiftness of their growth, but also the abuse, neglect, illness and poverty which are, sadly, the anguished lot of so many.

So what about the challenges that it has to offer? Let's look at the three core components of the course through a theological lens.

1. *Holistic*

An attractive word but what does it mean? How would we know if the course was holistic? Do we mean a mosaic of modules that in some way cover every aspect of childhood? Or do we have in mind an integrated whole where every part contributes to an embracing vision and model? If the latter,

what is the organising principle? Is it a psychological theory of child development? Perhaps we mean something closer to a sociology of childhood? Or is it a theory of leadership or management?

Many people who have secular humanist view of human wholeness see the individual human being as the measure of all things.

I put it to you that the organising principle is that the course is Christian and what makes it a whole is a theological understanding of children in God's sight (i.e. theology of childhood as key): as part of God's mission, creatures of His creation, living in a fallen world, loved by God in Christ Jesus and signs of His Kingdom.

We rightly speak of theological foundations, for these provide the

shape and support for the whole edifice. In this we seek to understand not only children in a fully rounded way, inspired by the Scripture and the teaching and example of Jesus, but also Church and Mission. This is where Child Theology builds on and expands the work of theologies of childhood.

Christian holism has to be theological because in Christian faith things only come together in God. If we can grasp or even glimpse this, we will see that it makes it possible for preachers and activists to be unwhole, or imperfect, but still to have worth. We should never despair of our significance.

So what do we mean by holism? Simply to adopt a set of secular disciplines doesn't do this. Is this the way to achieve a genuinely Christian holism? It is

comparatively easy to arrive at a course that resembles a mosaic. But if that is so, theology is but one part of the mosaic, and the key to, or foundation of, the whole is somewhere else. Colossians 1 is a useful model for clues about the nature of Christian holism. It speaks of one God, who enters history in Christ, and through Him, brings all things together. Note that His is not just the nice things. But sin and suffering. His mission produces the kind of holism which is not fully realised on earth. Meanwhile we must wrestle to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

2. *Child*

Such a simple word, but what do we mean by it? Perhaps we follow child development theory and see it as describing the period in a person's life before adulthood,

whenever that is deemed to begin. So childhood is a time of vulnerability, learning, training, care in preparation for independence. Education is a key in such an understanding for it helps the process of moving from childhood to adulthood. And church will be seen as mainly for adults, where children are church members in waiting!

But however popular this view is, it is not how God sees children and childhood. Rather than adulthood being the goal of education and the norm of human life, God sees us all as children. Jesus teaches us to pray "Our Father". It is not that God does anything but rejoice when there is maturity and growth, but that this does not change the fundamental Father-child relationship.

So as students and teachers of HCD, we are not learning about

"others" but also about ourselves. And as we live alongside and seek to help children it may well be that they have much to teach us of God's ways and His kingdom. Children are God's language, signs of the Kingdom of heaven. They must never be seen simply as objects of our attention, care and love, however much they need such love.

There is a global market that sees all children as potential consumers, and key agents in the consumption patterns of their families. We must be fully alert to this: as wise as serpents. A theological understanding of children and childhood will provide a base for the critique of this massive and growing predator.

Theology is a vital aid in keeping a biblical perspective on children and childhood.

3. *Development*

The word “development” is confident, rational, managerial, industrial, scientific, and technological. It has enormous power and we all benefit from it. But what do we mean by the word? What is the relation between development on the one hand and accidents and mistakes on the other? Accident is a major part of life all through childhood. Development assumes intentionality, order, progressive stages, and building. But the reality of life has a strong element of falling over, crashing, spontaneous, unplanned, and disconcerting, what seems to people as backwards, and regression. Is falling in love, for example, a phase of development or a blowing apart, what the Bible terms a “new creation”?

Whereas arranged marriages are a social device that many cultures think wise, not least because they save people from disastrous accidents of falling in love and thinking love is more important than order, respect for the child means being open to letting accidents happen – the rights of the child are not to protect the child from the disasters of life but to ensure it has the space to live as a human being. (This of course is not what is generally thought to be the meaning of rights, for they impose on others to ensure that the enrighted person runs into no kind of danger.) Education and general mass management of children needs order, frameworks, stated outcomes, assessment and progression. You can't have *Emile* on a mass scale. There is validity in order. But it is insufficient. The intelligent child, including street children, sees that it doesn't all add up. What eludes the grasp of

development theory? To what extent should students of HCD be concerned with that which lies outside this neat theory?

In the book, *The Growth of Love*, I join many others in probing and questioning much of development theory. We must be particularly careful because we have the word in our course title! Let me share with you a very simple, but dramatic example from the work of James Loder. Most child development theory starts in the womb and concludes somewhere undefined between say 16 and 25. It starts with embryos and ends with what are hoped to be mature adults, citizens and potential parents. The theory is about helping children to progress in maturity of every sort.

So far so good: we all hope that children will develop. But what about the really important things

like love, spirituality, loss, imagination, sisterhood, and the questions about the meaning of life, and of death? If we see life as starting somewhere after “little infinity” and ending at the threshold of “big infinity” what does cognitive development as helpfully described by Piaget, contribute to the process of connecting with God’s grace in Jesus? At best what we proudly parade as development is revealed to be almost exclusively about personal and social human functioning. It has avoided the really important questions, and always tends to prefer reason to love. In short it is, on the theological diagram, at best going round in circles.

Psalm 8 is a telling cornerstone in Child Theology because it is quoted by Jesus to affirm that the cries of children (actually of all ages) have validity and strength, irrespective

of cognitive ability and learning. Spiritual truths of the Kingdom are revealed to babes and suckling: that is the Father’s pleasure. What is more: the Father has hidden these truths from the wise and learned (Matthew 11: 25-26). So we must be careful in our course not to assume that child development is about helping children to become wise and learned in human terms while not addressing their spiritual gifts. (I say “gifts” because it reminds us that we have much to learn from them as well as to teach them.)

Three Principles Child Theology offers to the HCD Course

The HCD course at MBTS has had several core elements and they have been taught in different ways, by various lecturers, and in different sequences. But what holds the course together? What is the

ultimate foundation and framework? The following three principles derived from the process of Child Theology are offered as foundational, not in the sense of providing a dogmatic shape to the course, but of informing each constituent part as well as the whole.

We can turn this around by saying that no part or discipline of the whole HCD course is allowed to proceed without the scrutiny of these principles, and that the whole course is based on them. Anything less than this would hardly be a convincingly Christian course of study or way of doing things. So child development theories, management and leadership, church and mission are all subjected to the spotlight of these principles.

1. *Taking Thoughts Captive for Christ*

If the course is Christian, and praise God, it is, then every part of the course must be taken captive to Jesus Christ. We must be grateful for the insights of those many wise non-Christians who have contributed so much to our understanding of children, but we must never be deluded into thinking that they can do our work for us. Theology demands that we still have work to do in testing every part of the course theologically, as well as the links between the different modules, and then seeing that the whole course genuinely merits its title.

2. *Child in the Midst*

I think by now that many of you realise that Child Theology has its roots in the incident when Jesus placed a little child in the midst of His twelve disciples. What if other

people whose main occupation is doing something other than theology started to think about what they do with “the child placed by Jesus in the midst”? Other members of the faculty who are contributing parts of the course don’t do much theology. So what would happen if they did thinking with a child in the midst? This is an invitation to all my colleagues to develop their own work in the light of this, and then to see what happens.

So Child Theology offers this model to all parts of the course: listening carefully to Jesus as He places the child in our midst. Child Theology has a long way to go before it can say that it has demonstrated its relevance in the practical and particular situations of those who work in holistic child development and responding to children in need. It is likely that other parts of the course have hard and pressing

questions to ask of Child Theology in the process. In this way a conversation may well develop within a community of scholars. This leads us to the third principle.

3. *Reformation*

“Semper reformanda” (always reforming) is part of our Western Protestant heritage. It means that we have never arrived with the final word.

Child Theology constitutes a process that is beginning to reform parts of theology and the Church.

Let me give an example. In the letter of Paul to the Colossians, which we noted earlier, is so important for our understanding of the nature of God in Christ and the purposes of God in the world, but Paul refers little if at all to children.

So we must ask the question: if the whole is only realised in God, Christological, Trinitarian way, is it enough simply to say we have Colossians pattern for holistic Christian theology. Is it the last word?

What Paul doesn't do in that text is to put the child in the midst of his theology. This is what Child Theology suggests is a pressing

task. What difference might this make?

One of the dangers of Colossians is that it is rather other-worldly: seek those things that are above etc. Children on the other hand are very down to earth. Colossians is quoted often for a kind of theology of God as Creator who brings everything together. The vulnerability and

uncertainty represented by the child is marginalised if not erased.

So every part of our theology, psychology, theory, management, must be open to disturbance, shaking by the realities of the lives of children. If ever we get to the stage when we think we can do without the child in the midst we have for sure erred and strayed from the way of the Cross.

Contributions and Challenges of Child Theology to Students, Seminaries and Christian Organisations

By now it should have become clear that this module will challenge, as well as equip and inspire, every student that grapples with it. But the challenge, equipping, and inspiring do not stop there. The seminaries that host the module and the sending organisations are also involved and affected.

Seminaries have a vital and formational role in shaping and informing the Church. Most Christian leaders pass through seminaries for good or ill! And

HCD should come to any participating seminary with a health warning: this may seriously damage the way you do things! It will not leave you unchanged and unscathed! You may think that it is another specialist subject to be tacked on to your child ministry department, but be warned: it goes right to the heart of your enterprise.

Jesus seeks to place a child right in the midst of your seminary. And He does this not to provide a comforting object of admiration

and comfort, but to challenge what you stand for: your priorities, and to shed light on all that you are doing in His name. The principal of a theological seminary in the Philippines put it crisply to me: you are offering the child as a new hermeneutic. I reminded him that in fact Jesus had offered the child as this over 2000 years ago, and all that we were doing was trying to follow His lead!

In time, every part of what you do will be reformed. That includes the

way you do things (the process) and the content, including your historical, biblical, systematic, and practical theology. And Jesus is longing for you to do this. And the Church and children are waiting.

And we can ask this of every part of Compassion International too. Do not think that Child Theology is simply a tool, and part of a course. It will shine light on every part of your endeavours. Much of this light will make the way clearer, but some of it will be like a searching beam revealing that which must be rethought and changed. All the time Child Theology is asking whether we have made the question posed at the outset central to all our study and work: What does it mean for us to change and become like little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? That ray of light: that searchlight beam must be thrown on every aspect of our study and work.

And if we really hear the question it is radical and subversive. Just pause for a moment: is it really possible that we (yes, us) our outside the Kingdom of Heaven? The disciples baulked at this, and we will do the same. This was the starting point for me. I revisited the foot of the cross, and Jesus reminded me that I brought nothing but my sin and empty basket. I thought I was bringing a lot more, but in the Kingdom everything is by God's grace. There is nothing hoarded on earth, nothing gained.

A long term objective of Child Theology is to sow seeds that will germinate in every part of the world and the Church so that in time the whole of the Christian understanding of God, His Word, His Church, His Mission, will be reformed. Children will no longer be marginalised, but at the heart of His life and worship beside Jesus.

Conclusion

Initiatives whether Christian or secular to help children in the world, including rescue, community development, education, evangelism and so on, have developed largely in the absence of sustained theological reflection. There are some exceptions, for example, the work that Scripture Union has done relating to sin, the gospel and salvation and evidenced in statements and literature.

A major reason for this absence is the fact that very little sustained Child Theology has been done. Where it exists it has been done largely by individuals and has not reached the mainstream of theological education and the Church. Whereas the influences of theologies of the poor, women and indigenous peoples on mainstream theology are there for all to see, we

What does it mean for us to change and become like little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

cannot yet say the same for Child Theology.

So let us assume that Child Theology in various ways, including through students of HCD finds its way from the margins to the mainstream, what contributions might it make to the world of children?

- Rethinking education
- Reconfiguring “parenting” and “care”
- Reconsidering rights
- Rediscovering key doctrines of Creation and Sin and Salvation and offering them to the world that is trying to make sense of realities without them
- Politics moving from short term expediency to longer term visions considering children and children’s children

- Seeing children as partners in God’s mission in “reconciling the world to Himself”.

By God’s grace and in His time, we have an HCD course and program of which Child Theology is a core and non-negotiable component. It is not special pleading to argue that this is a jewel in the crown of the course and that it gives it foundations, coherence and an organising principle. HCD began in a theological seminary and is part of a theology degree. That is appropriate and will remain so for the reasons given. As such it has no desire to dominate or control, but to serve.

This introduction is offered in that light and that spirit. To do anything else would be to remain deaf to the teaching of Jesus, and blind to His action of placing a child in the midst of His disciples as a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Appendix A

1. Biblical Theology

Biblical theology to a large degree is simply a special case of historical theology – the Bible requires to be read like any other book, or any other piece of history – and certainly this is good practice in Biblical theology. But the Bible is close to the authoritative revelation – and Christians attend to the Bible with more respect than to most of what they find in historical theology. Some simply identify the Bible with the word of God, but this is problematic – are the genocides of Joshua to be followed, because the story says God ordered them? That is one question. Another sort of question is what it means that the living God, who is beyond all human grasp, speaks in a standing human word. It is worth remembering Barth's insistence that the Bible is not the word of God as a holy Scripture, but only as God speaks it by the Spirit – God's voice is always a living voice; God's word is always what God speaks here and now – we cannot simply treat words spoken in the past as God's word, but must wait for God to speak them now.

God's word is in Christ, living, then in Bible, and in preaching (in broadest sense).

2. Indigenous Theologies

Does this solve the problem? Even if all the theology in Penang were Asian in one of the possible senses of that word, would it not still be second hand and borrowed for most if not all its practitioners? What is the real objection to being indebted for our theologies or to agreeing with other people? In this globalised mixed up world, more and more things are hybrid – as Christian theology has always been, except when people like the German Christians have tried to eliminate the Jewish element in it or the Hebraists try to get rid of the Greek components. Undoubtedly, everyone needs to be persuaded in his own mind, and in that way authentic, but that is different from subsuming ourselves into some vague collective concept like being English or being Asian.

Appendix B

A Teaching Syllabus for *Theological Foundations for Holistic Child Development*

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is intended to provide biblical and theological foundations that shape and inform the students approach both to the whole of the HCD programme, and also to their own lives and ministries. It provides a theological grounding that aims to keep the child in the foreground of all theological reflection following the example of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 18. It covers a selection of major doctrines, hermeneutics, exegesis from the perspective of those committed to being alongside children and young people.

It contains much that is of practical and theological relevance for Christians working alongside children, young people and families, at whatever level of operation, but is also designed for pastors, church leaders and theological trainers. The purpose is not simply to focus on children and childhood, so much as to allow God's mission and purposes to be better understood with "a child in the midst". In most Christian activity, including churches, families and communities, children are present, but even where they are not, holding a child in the midst provides vital clues to God's way of seeing and doing things. It enables students to engage coherently at a deeper and more appropriate way with the Bible in their ministry.

COURSE RATIONALE

The way Jesus did things and related to people is as important as what he did and said: his actions and his teaching go together and complement each other. This course seeks to model itself on the ministry of Jesus, in terms both of content and process. The group dynamics are integral to the course, creating experiences that can be built on and developed in a range of pastoral situations.

Much of the resource material accompanying this course is Asian in origin. This is because the course was pioneered in Malaysia and among predominantly Asian students. In different parts of the world it is necessary to discover equally appropriate indigenous or culturally relevant texts. Students are encouraged to apply theology in their work and in critiquing contemporary movements, theory and practice.

COURSE GOAL

As a result of this module the students will be able to:

1. Use theological approaches and insights to understand their world
2. Think theologically about children, their significance, values, humanity and need
3. Enter into and actively participate in God's creative and redemptive work in the world and specifically among children with greater knowledge and understanding
4. Listen actively and empathise
5. Work as part of a team, aware of ethnicity and gender
6. Be able to think reflectively about process as well as content
7. Review and critique differing interpretations of particular biblical passages relating to children, showing in the process a critical awareness, and consistent contextualised hermeneutic approach
8. Exegete specific passages of the Bible using a variety of individual and group methods
9. Make connections between theological insights and their ministry so that theology becomes functional in making informed ministry decisions
10. Facilitate their Christian community's engagement with the Bible in a range of situations
11. Relate to children as partners in God's mission.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

The MBTS passing grade is 70% of 100 marks.

1) Course Participation and Reaction Papers

By the end of the week the students will have completed two elements, **course participation** and **reaction papers** produced each day. On the basis of what I have seen, I would be happy to recommend that each student be accredited with the maximum percentages for both of these. I have been impressed with the level of individual participation, the willingness and ability to work in groups, the level of note-taking and informed interaction during the classes. I have also marked the reaction papers (pass/fail) each day. A tick on the relevant sheet denotes a pass. (20% combined total)

2) Review of Books/Papers

The task is clearly set out in the assessment framework sheet. There will be two reviews, or a comparative review of two papers/ theologians. I suggest a maximum of 1,000 words for each review, or a total of 2,000 words for a comparison. Each student has a copy of the relevant source material. They must show a fair and working knowledge of:

- the paper(s) they are evaluating

- the theological context (with particular reference to theological and hermeneutical issues covered in the module)

how such insights can be used, or need to be modified, in particular cultural contexts of ministry with children. (20% combined total)

3) Exegesis

There are models given in the course material. Students need to demonstrate an ability to set the biblical text in context (using the Bauckham categories/my lecture notes), a use of commentaries or the work of others on this text, and the capacity to draw out points of practical relevance. The exegesis must be fair, and free of personal bias, while at the same time related to contemporary cultural and social issues that the student encounters in his/her ministry. I suggest a maximum of 2,000 words. (Total 20%)

4) Term Paper

This requires the students to do reading/literature searches beyond their reader. They need to show a good grasp of the main theological insights of a theologian, or group of theologians (e.g. women writing on children; black writers etc.), and to demonstrate how this/these writer(s) add to our theological awareness. The subject

will have been chosen because it relates to concerns/work of the student, and will be related to this ministry. There must be an evaluation of the theological, social and cultural relevance of the material being reviewed. In short, it is this term paper that will give the clearest indication of the student's ability to understand theological foundations for children's ministry, and the work of one of the major contributors in this field. I suggest a maximum of 3,500 words. (Total 40%)

SUMMARY

The whole module has been geared to this assessment framework, and students have been given the tools to do the job. They must not duplicate work done in class (e.g. passages already worked on together).

Each evening there will be a brief "reaction paper" that highlights the three main points of relevance to the student from the day's study. There is also some assigned reading for the evening, or another task. The reaction papers will be handed in at the beginning of the next day, and the reading will be discussed in groups the following day. The papers are personal and belong to the student.

ASSIGNED READING AND TASKS

MONDAY

Keith J. White, *"A Little Child Will Lead Them"*

Cutting Edge 2001 Questions (*Explain why you personally find these questions so important in your life and work.*)

Marcia Bunge, "Introduction" to *The Child in Christian Thought*

TUESDAY

Dr Mahathir: *"We must be more critical of ideas from the West"*

Amirtham: *"New Emphases in Theological Education at Arasaradi"*

Hwa Yung: *Mangoes or Bananas? Chapters 3 and 4.*

WEDNESDAY

Judith Gundry-Volf: *"To Such belongs the Reign of God", "The Least and the Greatest",*

Dawn DeVries: *"Towards a Theology of Childhood"*

THURSDAY

V. Fabella (ed) *We Dare to Dream: Doing theology by Asian Women* (3-63)

Chun Hyun Kyung: *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (47-73)

Creative exegesis: Write your own version of "Josh's story" (See separate assignment sheet.)

FRIDAY

The reaction paper at the end of the course is your opportunity to reflect on the whole of the course so far. What are the main new insights and challenges to your work? This paper is to be handed in before leaving the classroom. Time will be made available for this during the afternoon class.

It is recognised that many students will not be able to purchase, or in some cases even read these texts in libraries. This list is therefore indicative of the textbooks that accompany and inform the course. A reader will be provided for each student with material that is adequate to fulfil the course reading requirements. The Child Theology Movement is committed to providing reports and booklets as cheaply as possible worldwide to enable all participants to obtain source material other than the reader.

STUDY TEXTS

Bunge, Marcia (ed) *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001)

Bunge, Marcia (ed) *Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008)

Child Theology Movement Reports

- Penang One* Report of Consultation (2002)
Cape Town Report of Constulation (2004)
Houston Report of Consultation (2004)
Penang Two Report of Consultation (2004)
Cambridge Report of Consultation (2004)
Prague (Praha) Report of Consultation (2005)
Penang Three Report of Consultation (2006)
Sao Paulo Report of Consultation (2006)
 (Portuguese and English)
Penang Three Report of Consultation (2006)
Addis Ababa Report of Consultation (2006)
Australasia Report of Consultation (2007)

Child Theology Movement Booklet Series

- Haddon Willmer & Keith J. White, *Introducing Child Theology*
 Haddon Willmer, *Experimenting Together*
 Sunny Tan, *CT for the Churches in Asia: An Invitation*
 Grenz, Stanley *Theology for the Community of God*
 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994)
 McGrath, Alister *Christian Theology: An Introduction*
 (Oxford: Blackwells, 2001)
 White, Keith J. *The Growth of Love: Five Essential Elements of Child Development* (Abingdon: BRF, 2008)
 Yung, Hwa *Mangoes or Bananas?* (Carlisle: Regnum Books, 1997)

METHODOLOGY

An Example of the Process of Child Theology in HCD

This example is based on a course taught at the Alliance Graduate School, Manila Philippines 16-20th October 2006, with variations from a course taught in Mindanao, Philippines 23-27th October 2006.

What follows is a diary kept by the facilitator (Keith) of this course concentrating on the details of the process.

DAY (SECTION) ONE

OPERATIVE THEOLOGY (REFLECTING THEOLOGICALLY ON PRACTICE)

8. 30 a.m. *Welcome from member of AGS Faculty*

The room was set up for a formal lecture with the assumption that the students would sit in rows facing a lecturer.

Keith and the students rearranged the room to form a circle. Keith introduced the course by saying that “the way we do things is as important as what we say”. He invited the group to pay attention to process all through, and to reflect on every aspect of the way the course was run as well as the content.

For the next hour students arrived in twos or threes. Each time new students arrived the circle was widened. The final group size was approximately 30 students.)

The circle was maintained throughout the morning. A time-keeper, administrator and carer for the lecturer were appointed and relevant authority devolved to them.

In pairs around the circle the students were asked the following three questions:

1. What contact do we have with children day by day and in what capacity?
2. What powerful memory do we have of our own childhood?
3. What is our story of meeting and following Jesus?

Pairs were invited to share some of their conversations and answers, but care was taken to reassure every person that nothing would be shared unless they were willing for their contributions to be passed on to the whole group. (The boundary between what is personal (private) and what is available to be shared with the whole group must be clear to all and maintained throughout. Such boundaries are vital in any ministry with children and young people.)

Twenty minutes before the end of this session the group was asked what they would like to know about

the lecturer. (So the students had begun to function as a group, and had experienced something of how the course was structured: they could now from that vantage point reflect on what they wanted to know about the facilitator of the process.)

We completed this session with information about the shape of the week and the work expected of them, notably the course Outline, and the Reaction Papers. (The process of welcoming students and group formation had come before the content of the course.)

10.00- 10.30 a.m. Coffee Break

Keith introduced the thought that “as followers of Jesus Christ, we are all theologians”. Theology is speaking about God and this we do sometimes by word, and often by our lives and the way we do things. (St Francis had talked of “preaching at all times, using words only if you had to”!) We tried to take the first steps in identifying our “operative theology”. (This is trying to work out from how we live, what we do, our priorities, our relationships, what is the theological framework underpinning everything. It is not to be confused with the formal statements of belief by our organisations or denominations. Much of “operative theology” may be completely unconscious to us: seen better by others than by ourselves. If we can identify at least some of this theology then it can be exposed to the light of God’s

word, in the hope that by His Holy Spirit it can be reformed so that it conforms more closely to His way of doing things as revealed uniquely in Jesus Christ his Son.)

The pairs were asked to share where they thought that they had got most of their theology from. This led to a lively discussion of choruses/songs/hymns; family; pictures and art; literature; nature; theological books; sermons; people and their questions; children; The Bible.

The CD, *I Dream of Peace* by Adrian Snell introduced and put on quietly as the group split into pairs. (All through the course appropriate mood music accompanied some of the processes. Part of the intention of this is to free up discussion, and to minimise the sense of being in an institution of formal learning.)

The Cutting Edge Questions were then introduced: every student had a complete set, and students underlined the questions that were most relevant to them. The morning closed at 12.00 noon with every student being invited to consider praying one of the Cutting Edge questions as their own prayer.

12.00 noon – 1.30 p.m. Lunch

1.30 p.m. The whole class had moved to a new and larger classroom.

Five tables were placed in the room and the five “churches” were formed. They were each given photocopies of Chapter Five, *Unfinished Business*, and asked to read through them and consider a possible name for their group. The churches were informed that later in the week they would be asked to work out a vision/mission statement for the church and then a logo.

These groups (churches) become the primary settings for the learning process throughout the course. Some churches form into relaxed and comfortable working groups without much effort. Others struggle. It is important to see that this mirrors real life, in that we are often part of groups or teams that do not find it easy to function effectively or creatively. (Although students are encouraged to work it out if at all possible, the facilitator must reserve the right to move students who find that they are being unduly marginalised, or those who dominate a group in such a way that others feel they are being bullied.)

The groups reported to each other (for the first time) and this gave Keith the opportunity to affirm the significance of listening as a mode of acceptance and affirmation. (The facilitator must model listening attentively and actively throughout the course. An important way of doing this is to encourage students to listen carefully and respectfully to each other as

individuals and groups. So the teacher will never insist that students listen to him/her, but rather to demonstrate the primacy of listening to students.)

2. 30 p.m. (In Churches)

The facilitator asked the students to find a way of sitting comfortably in their groups, so that they could listen to a story read out aloud. So the groups as well as the individuals needed to adjust their seating. It was pointed out that these were real churches, not just role models. This was because they were made up of followers of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, who was present where two or three were gathered together in his name.

Keith then read our loud chapters 16 and 17 of I Samuel: the story of the anointing of the boy David by Samuel, and the battle between the boy-king and the adult warrior, Goliath. (We have found that this is the first time almost all the students have ever listened to this complete sequence of the story.)

The groups were then asked to discuss the story together and to suggest the main point of the story. This is the ultimate goal of exegesis.

3.00 p.m. Coffee Break

3.30 p.m.

Keith invited the churches to consider the story as a whole group, pooling what they had discovered, and asking for help where they needed it. (The process of exegesis is of course critically important.) First they shared what background they had about context and history. Then he went through the story using the notes in the Reader, but not available to the students as yet (because the course reader was still being photocopied during the day). How far, and in what ways, does the story inform our Operative Theology?

4.45 p.m.

The three evening assignments of the students were confirmed:

1. Reaction paper of not more than three points summarising the main insights of the day
2. Reading Marcia Bunge's Introduction to *The Child in Christian Thought*;
3. Reading Keith J. White's paper "A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

5.00 p.m.

The end of the day was called by the timekeeper. (The boundary of time-keeping is an important one. Although many of the students had arrived late for the start of the day, the facilitator set an example of keeping carefully to the agreed framework.)

Materials handed out during the day:

1. Course Outline
2. Cutting Edge Questions (and also the Scripture Verses listed at the same conference)
3. M. Bunge's "Introduction" to *The Child in Christian Thought*
4. Keith J. White's "A Little Child Shall Lead Them".

DAY (SECTION) TWO

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

8.30 a.m.

Reaction Papers were gathered in (Keith read each of them during the day, made personal comments on each one, and returned them to the students by the end of the day.)

Some letters from *Children's Letters to God* were read to the class.

Keith also announced an art exhibition at an SM Mall with a picture, *Jesus with the Children*, by Josey Velasco. (This attention to what is happening locally, informed by the students is part of the process of contextualisation.)

The churches were invited to reflect together on the previous day and to pray in their churches simultaneously. (Keith played the piano quietly while

this was happening.) The whole group joined together in the Lord's Prayer in our own languages.

9.00 a.m.

The group worked on a Tree of Christianity, using the white board. The reference material included a paper by Keith J. White and a section of A. McGrath's *Christian Theology*. When we came to the end of the world picture we then focussed on the Philippines and the group was invited to contribute from personal learning. (During the next break a student volunteered to get books from the library on Filipino church history and these books were offered as a resource to the students throughout the day.)

10.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. *Coffee Break*

10.30 a.m.

The churches were invited to imagine where and how children fitted into the story of Christianity, using Bunge's "Introduction" (read last night as part of the assignment) as a resource. It provoked lively discussion in the groups, and a question summed up the whole session: "What exactly are we looking for when we look for children in the story of Christianity?" The whole group pondered this. Comments included the fact that the histories of Christianity were being re-written with a

child in the midst; Bible translations and commentaries had marginalised children, and there was a task to be done to remedy this.

11.00 a.m.

There was an exegesis of Matthew 16-21. This was aided by a map on the white board. Keith then went through the story inviting the group to walk with Jesus in their imaginations all the way from Hermon to Moriah. (Resource material: Keith J. White's "*A Walk with Jesus*")

12.00 noon – 1.30 p.m. Lunch Break

1.30 p.m.

Students were invited individually to reflect on the walk they had done with Jesus, and to dwell at one place and to experience the presence and leading of Jesus. The churches were asked to remain silent during this time so as to make space for this personal (Ignatian) meditation.

2.00 p.m.

Each church was asked to continue work on its vision, mission statement and logo. (Music from Adrian Snell during this session.)

2.45 p.m.

The evening reading assignments were given out. (The material was all by Asians: Mahathir; Hwa Yung; Amirthan.)

3.00 p.m. – 3.15 p.m. Coffee Break

3.15 p.m.

Keith told the story of Ramabai.

4.35 p.m. A short break

4.45 p.m.

A time for questions about Ramabai (this was full of questions, and clearly Ramabai touched the hearts of Filipinos as she has done other Asians).

DAY THREE

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

8.30 a.m.

Keith read further from *Children's Letters to God* and drew attention to the book, *Doing Theology in the Philippines* with its first chapter stressing that all Filipino Christians are theologians. This was confirmation of one of the points made on the first day of the course.

8.45 a.m.

Students led the whole group in the singing of three hymns, *How Great Thou Art*, *Great is Thy Faithfulness* and *Blessed Assurance* followed by a prayer. Reaction papers were handed in. (Keith read all of these and handed them back during the afternoon. One student was concerned that no one had replied to the question: To become a committed follower of one religion was it necessary to cut off all links from other religions? Keith did not identify the student but raised the point further during the day. It was a question that arose in Asia, and deserved much careful thought.)

The groups were asked to discuss the most important insights gained, or questions arising, from the evening reading assignment for Day Two. These were relayed to the whole group. The general theme of these responses was that Asian Christians and churches had not managed to develop sufficiently indigenous ways of doing things.

9.45 a.m.

Keith introduced the paper *Outline for an Exploration of Hermeneutics*, linking the first part of the paper with the tree of Christianity, and emphasising that different churches around the world had different perspectives on the interpretation of The Bible.

10.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. *Coffee Break*

10.30 a.m.

We continued and completed the paper on Hermeneutics. The passage used to demonstrate how the process worked was Psalm 23.

11.15 a.m.

The groups were asked to read, ponder and discuss Psalm 8 using the process outlined. It was pointed out that this was not a randomly chosen Psalm, but contained the passage referred to by Jesus at the end of his walk from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem. Keith then walked through some of the challenges of the Psalm with them including the meaning of verse 2, and Calvin's commentary on it. We linked this with the popular song, *I Believe*, which contains the words "Every time I hear a newborn baby cry then I know why I believe".

12.00 noon – 1.30 p.m. *Lunch Break*.

(Some groups elected to stay together to continue discussion of Psalm 8.)

1.30 p.m.

The groups elected one of their members to represent the movement and theme of Psalm 8 with a single line or shape.

The course requirements were circulated to the students and Keith went through them to check that everyone understood what they meant.

2.00 p.m.

We went through some of the events, stories and themes involving children in the Old Testament, using the paper "Old Testament and Children". It was stressed that there are many hard questions arising from these (for example Abraham and Isaac; the book of Joshua where God orders that all people in certain cities, including children should be killed). It was also noted that the "children of Israel" include those of all ages. (The students had already read the paper "A Little Child Shall Lead Them", and those who had attended Dan Brewster's class had explored some of the children in the Bible.)

2.30 p.m.

We then looked briefly at some themes in the New Testament using the paper "Jesus and Children", noting some of the material in the letters where children and childbirth provided important metaphors or examples (adoption; creation groaning in travail like a woman in labour).

3.00 p.m. – 3.15 p.m. *Coffee Break*

3.15 p.m.

Keith read John Chapter 6: 1 – 71. He then asked the groups to discuss and enter into the story by identifying

with the boy who offered the loaves and the fishes to Andrew. He provided a map on the whiteboard to assist in reconstructing where the boy might have come from and why he might well have listened to the conversation about the bread of life the next day.

4.30 p.m.

The churches were given time to complete their work on their logos, mission statements and straplines.

4.55 p.m.

The evening reading assignments were confirmed as Gundry-Volf and Dawn DeVries.

5.00 p.m. *Close*

DAY FOUR

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

8.30 a.m.

One of the churches (Koinonia) led a time of devotion and worship with songs, reading and prayer.

9.00 a.m.

The churches discussed the reading material from last night and summarised the main points for the whole

group. The question asked was “When did the light come on as you read the two writers?” It has become clear that not every student completes the reading each evening, and those who have not tend to rely on those who have. One of the emerging themes was how special children were in the life and teaching of Jesus and how blind Christians had been to this. Keith commented that he had been reading for the first time some works by Filipino theologians, and although they stressed context, there was usually no mention of children at all in their systematic theology.

9.45 a.m.

Keith introduced systematic theology by saying that it was concerned with those truths that came out of a sustained and careful study of the whole of Scripture in the light of contemporary knowledge and context. We began our scanning of the work of Stanley Grenz with a thought about God as subject, rather than object. This meant that we must take our shoes off, and kneel so we became small like a child. We were on holy ground.

10.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. Coffee Break

10.30 a.m.

For the rest of the morning we went through the summary of Grenz all the time introducing children into

the equation: God, Creation, Anthropology, Fall, Christology, Redemption. Examples were given continuously and there was lively attention and interaction.

12.00 noon – 1.30 p.m. Lunch Break

1.30 p.m.

(Pine Gutierrez joined us for much of the afternoon and was invited to share about the work of the Christian network concerned with children in the Philippines.)

Keith then introduced the Integrated Framework as the first step in applying theology to our everyday lives and work. The Framework was an attempt to bring together systematic and biblical theology on the one hand with child development theory and practice on the other. By using two hands it was possible to make it memorable and practical.

3.00 p.m. Coffee Break

3.20 p.m.

All the churches by now had produced excellent logos and vision statements. These were displayed on the walls (and Keith took photos of each).

The exegesis in this session broke new ground for the course. The groups were each given a passage of

Scripture dealing with the birth or boyhood of Jesus and asked to read and ponder the passage with the question in mind: "What does this tell us about Jesus, the Christ?" It was pointed out that this was an exercise in Christology. Because the groups were dealing with different passages, but the same question, there was lively interest in the feedback to the whole group.

4. 30 p.m.

Keith explained what Creative Exegesis was as preparation for this evening's task. We also went through the course requirements again for clarification.

4.45 p.m.

More course material was handed out and the students now have nearly all the reader. (This has been a mammoth task for the administration of the seminary and they have risen to it admirably.) With each section Keith gave a brief introduction to any special features (e.g. by Asian women; the copy of an actual page from Ramabai's own book with here underlining, the illustrations in Koyama)

5.05 p.m. Close

DAY FIVE

APPLYING THEOLOGY

8.30 a.m.

Menchit Wong joined the course and was welcomed into one of the churches for the rest of the day (she was the second visitor in the week). One of the churches led a time of worship and devotion. Keith then invited the whole group to consider whether each person would be willing to pray "Spirit of the Living God, Fall afresh on me. Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me..." This was essential if we were to change and become like little children. But he warned against singing these words lightly. He then led those who wished to sing it from the piano.

Reaction papers and the Creative Exegesis were handed in. During the day Keith made comments on each of the reaction papers and returned them to the students. The Exegesis papers were passed on to the AGS.

Keith then explained how important this final day was. Without it we would be doing part-theology. This was the link between reading and digesting the Scriptures and applying what we were learning in our daily lives. He quoted Romans 12: 1&2. "In view of all this (i.e. all that we have been privileged to learn of God's holiness, love and mercy) I beseech you to present

your bodies and souls as a living sacrifice to God for this is your reasonable service (i.e. what you are ordained to do, just as little children are ordained to praise God, Psalm 8:2)." He also described how the Latin Mass ended with the words, "*Ite, Missa Est*", and suggested that the best way of understanding them was thus: "Go, for the real mass will now take place in your daily lives as you present your bodies as living sacrifices." (Several times he reminded the group of Day One and prompted people to consider how much their insights and thinking had changed in a week.)

9.00 a.m.

The churches were given their first task of the day. On this occasion it was not to discuss their overnight reading or exegesis, but to consider the question "What is Child Theology?" The groups put their thoughts on to paper for Keith and also selected the key points to share with the whole class. Most of the elements in the definition contained in the reader were mentioned except the emphasis on the way of doing things (the process), So we reflected on the way we had been doing things during the week and the distinguishing characteristics of the course.

9.30 a.m.

The start of the main set of tasks for the day was to portray in pictures (or any other medium except words) a child-friendly church, based on the theology of each of the five (distinctive) churches. (This task is described in full on the page, Children and the Church.) Before the students started Keith read from Exodus 12: 21-28. In the Jewish tradition children are not only present at times of worship, family and community, but also key players in the ceremonies. "When you children ask you, 'What does it mean?' tell them..." Materials had been made available by the seminary including Manila paper, crayons, scissors, glue and sticky tape. Some churches supplemented these materials with what they had brought.

10.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. Coffee Break.

(Most churches chose to continue with their task during this break: the task was beginning to consume them.)

10.30 a.m.

As the work continued, with increasing joy and animation, individual students came to see Keith to clarify and agree the title and shape of their term paper. In each case Keith sought to check what theological reading would inform the paper, and how the insights would be applied in practice. (The pictures were all

creative and warm, but Keith noticed an absence of the natural world in “church”.)

11. 00 a.m.

With the artwork on the tables the churches were then asked to commence the tasks set out in the paper, *Toward a Child Friendly World*. This began with each group doing an exegesis of the three passages (from Isaiah, Zechariah and Revelation). They were then asked either to introduce into their picture of church aspects of these eschatological visions, or to start a new sheet. Groups differed in the course of action they took. These visions began to bring animals, water, trees, birds and more colour into the pictures.

11. 30 a.m.

The groups were then asked to consider how sin had disrupted church and the world, and to make a list of the ways in which it had done so. Having done this, the churches were asked to rethink this list from a child’s point of view. What were the concrete realities for children (rather than general terms like violence or poverty)? Then the churches were asked to say what they felt was the ugliest, most terrible effect of sin. Most talked of forms of child abuse or trafficking. At this point the task should have been to represent the disruption of sin by adding these on the emerging

pictures, but the churches had come to value their work so much that they were resistant to this. Why spoil such hard and beautiful work?

11.55 a.m.

At this point Keith suddenly asked the whole group to consider whether this very reaction helped them to understand better how God felt about sin and its effects on the work of art that He had created. And just before the lunch break Keith read Matthew 18: 1-9, leaving nothing out and trying to imagine how Jesus spoke the hard words about cutting off limbs, and lucking out eyes.

12.00 noon – 1.30 p.m. Lunch

1.45 p.m.

It was time to work from where we were to the point where we finally said goodbye. The churches were asked what resources there were to do something about the disruption of the world, and beginning the process of re-creating it in the image God intended as portrayed through the prophets we had read. He asked whether the groups had included the Bible as a resource. Significantly two had not done so (despite the work of the whole week) and none had listed the Ten Commandments. Keith shared how he had tried to

persuade churches in the UK to read the 10 Commandments to the children at least once or twice a year, but had not yet convinced a single church to do so regularly! We underestimated the resources God has entrusted to us.

2.15 p.m.

The remaining sets of material were given out along with pages to help divide the material into five sections. The time came for the final Reaction paper. Rather than reflect on a single day, this one was an opportunity to ponder the whole course, and students were invited to consider how they would respond to the question “What strategies would you recommend for changing the world into the likeness of the new creation?” Keith asked every person to respect the silence and space of everyone else. (He drew attention to the fact that there was silence in heaven for half an hour!) He said that he would be undertaking the same exercise, because Child Theology was a never-ending process.

2.40 p.m.

The Reaction papers would not be passed to Keith on this occasion but were between the individual student and God. Students were encouraged to keep the papers and to use them as a record of what they had promised or pledged at the end of this course. There was a time

now when we went round each of the five churches looking at the pictures, logos and mission statements they had done (some continued to work on their pictures right through the day!). We also took photos of each church. There was then a group photo around a picture of three children on Smokey Mountain, Manila (borrowed from AGS main hall for the day!).

3.00 p.m.

The students organised a time of celebration about which Keith knew nothing. There were songs, games and some wonderful food. Certificates of attendance were handed out. The Academic Dean of AGS came into the class to thank Keith, and the class gave Keith a present. Keith thanked the three members of the group who had volunteered to help him all through the week, as administrator, personal helper and time-keeper. He also thanked Beth on behalf of the class for her remarkable work during the week to provide every student with a reader/course book from scratch.

4.30 p.m.

Keith thanked every student for contributing so enthusiastically to the course. There had been genuine respect for each other and that would be critical in applying Child Theology to our engagement with children from this moment on: every child was (like the

one lost sheep) so valuable that if they got lost it was worth leaving everything else until they were found again.

4.50 p.m.

Keith sent the students out into their daily lives again first with an acted drama in which a person came into the church leaving their burdens outside, and then collecting them at the end of the service: nothing had changed. This contrasted with a person who brought their burdens into the service and left them at the foot of the cross. Worship showed that Jesus had taken our burdens on to and into his body on the cross, so even if nothing had changed in the world outside, we had been changed by realising He knew, He cared, He had done something, and He was with us and would never leave us.

He finished with two readings. The first was from John 17 where Jesus prays for his disciples. Keith emphasised that these were the words of Jesus but said that as the teacher for the week this was also his prayer for the students. The second was from 1 Thessalonians 5: 12- 24. Keith noted that this was the benediction used at the very first graduation service of HCD students in Penang. And then he said, *“Ite, Missa Est”*.

5.00 p.m.

The course was over. The pictures were taken down and were to be stored or displayed at the Compassion Office in Manila. (The storage of the students’ work is an important reminder for our work with children: drawings are not just about amusing ourselves: they represent something of ourselves, and sometimes have great significance.)

Variations on this example in Manila from Mindanao

1. The group in Mindanao was the biggest ever to take the course (seventy).
2. This meant there were different dynamics, and different challenges and opportunities.
3. There were seven churches (yes: seven, the same number as the churches in the book of Revelation!). The smallest church had seven members and the largest twelve. We were at the limits of communication within each church given sound and space. We needed to use a microphone for the first time.
4. We met in a hotel and the room was also used as our restaurant (this made for some fine interaction over meals and meant that there was no rigid distinction between “work” and “breaks”).
5. We had to move from one room after three days to a smaller room.

6. There were three administrators assigned to help during the course, and the worship sessions in the morning were organised without reference to Keith.
7. Because dynamics (the way we do things) are so important in this course it is important to consider what the maximum/optimum size might be.
8. The materials provided for the drawing sessions were much superior to those in Manila and this allowed much greater expression and creativity.
9. But we followed the same course and Keith used the detailed notes from Manila as his main guide. They proved invaluable.

DAY ONE

The programme started in the afternoon, and so the day's work had to be compressed. There was one question of introduction: What memory do we have of our own childhood? The rest of the day was possible to follow with only minor variations.

DAY FOUR

The Christology session was much better than in Manila. There were seven passages from the New Testament, one for each church. In addition to the Gospels there were Colossians 1: 1-23 and Hebrews 1: 1-14. The churches were asked to write letters addressed to all the other churches based on the main point of the

reading they had as it concerned the person and nature of Jesus the Christ. They were also asked to put the main point into some tangible form using the materials provided. The groups loved this task, and one church accompanied their picture with a Christmas Carol.

DAY FIVE

The church was asked to extend its representation of church to include the visions of Isaiah etc, rather than draw a separate picture. The final Reaction paper was in the form of a letter to God. This was personal to the person writing the letter, and was therefore not shown to the facilitator.

UNITS OF STUDY

The course is divided into five sections. This means that it can be taught conveniently over the period of a working week, or at greater intervals.

SECTION ONE

OPERATIVE THEOLOGY (THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON PRACTICE)

(Reference Book: H. Willmer *Experimenting Together...*)

We begin with introductions. During this session students are encouraged to share and reflect on their lives and practice with particular reference to seeking to discover the operative theology underlying what they think and do. This includes individual and group work, an introduction to theology, and the first encounter with biblical interpretation and exposition.

SECTION TWO

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

(Reference Books: M. Bunge (ed.) *The Child in Christian Thought*; Sunny Tan *Child Theology for the Churches in Asia: an Invitation*)

During this session groups of students are formed (these continue throughout the module), and there is a description of the development of church history, with particular reference to the situations of the students using a “tree of church history”. The handling of

Scripture (hermeneutics) is explored within this context. A primary issue is how emerging Asian theologies relate to Western theologies, traditions and denominations. Students may have their first exposure to Asian theologians, male and female at this point, including Pandita Ramabai.

SECTION THREE

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

(Reference Book: M. Bunge (ed.) *Children in the Bible*)

Students will be engaged in exploring The Bible throughout this day, with overviews of the Old and New Testaments, and individual and group exegesis.

SECTION FOUR

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

(Reference Books: S. Grenz *Theology for the Community of God*; Haddon Willmer: *Experimenting Together: One Way of doing Theology*)

Throughout the day students encounter the outline of systematic theology using the work of Stanley Grenz, including God, Creation, Anthropology, Sin, Christology, Redemption, updated and challenged by the insights of others, Asian and Western.

SECTION FIVE

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

(Resources: the materials and reflections of the week coupled with detailed exploration of the biblical visions of the community, and kingdom of God.)

This day is the culmination of the whole process and is designed to help students clarify how their lives and work will be affected and transformed by what they have done and learnt during the rest of the course. Practical theology is concerned with what it means to do things God's way in our lives. Farewells and sending out: "Go out into the world in peace."

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The **Master of Arts in Holistic Child Development** is a unique partnership in Asia between the *Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary* and *Compassion International* to provide graduate-level training for leaders and practitioners in children at risk ministries. The goal is to equip Christians to become competent and passionate leaders and trainers in holistic child development programs in the life and ministries of the Church.

CORE COURSES

1. Child, Church and Mission
2. Childhoods in Cultural Contexts
3. Poverty and Marginalization of Children
4. Child Development and Functioning in Families and Communities
5. Theological Foundations for Holistic Child Development
6. Intervention Strategies for Children at Risk
7. Self Care of the Caregivers
8. Children's Agency: Participation and Protection

For more information, contact us.



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*“...we are asking how
the child placed by Jesus
in the midst of the
disciples throws light on
every aspect of
theology”
– Keith White*