

ARTICLE

‘The Whole Nature of the Child’: Children and Youth at the Lambeth Conferences¹

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Abstract

This article examines the ways the Lambeth Conference resolutions discuss children and youth. It is a contribution to the work of identifying historical Anglican theological perspectives on children. Opening with a brief definition and review of theologies of childhood, it then presents chronologically (1857–1998) and briefly analyzes the resolutions which name ‘children’ or ‘youth’; it closes with an analysis of how the Lambeth resolutions map onto three basic claims shared by the reviewed theologies of childhood.

Keywords: baptism, childhood, children, family, Lambeth, theology of childhood, youth

Introduction

Theological attention to humanity is not complete without theological attention to children. ‘Childhood’ is defined and experienced differently across time and space, but it is an experience that all Christians who live to adulthood have shared.³ However, sustained theological attention to the child has been rare in Western Christianity, and ‘childhood has had to borrow its senses of meaning and humanity from [adults, who are] thought to embody them in some fuller, more advanced, or more important way’.⁴ Only recently have theologians and scholars taken up this necessary work with more focus and curiosity.⁵

Few scholars have addressed historical Anglican theologies of childhood. This paper offers one piece towards that larger work by turning to the Lambeth Conferences and looking for what their resolutions say or suggest about children

¹This opening phrase is taken from Resolution 11 of the 1908 Lambeth Conference.

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³As Marcia J. Bunge and Megan Eide say, ‘Although the definition of a child can change across time and place, their presence does not’ (‘Introduction: Strengthening Theology by Honoring Children’, in Marcia J. Bunge [ed.], *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2021], pp. xiii–xxv [xiii]).

⁴John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), p. 1.

⁵Bunge and Eide, ‘Introduction’, pp. xiii, xiv.

and young people, specifically in the instances where 'children' and 'youth' are named.

Since the 1990s, more scholars in many disciplines have written about children. The interdisciplinary field of childhood studies has grown to include work in history, law, literature, philosophy, sociology and anthropology.⁶ There have been many Christian books on and for ministry with children since Luther's *Small Catechism*, but this wave in the last thirty years has included theologians who write about children with more concrete and sustained attention, drawing on the new scholarship regarding children in other disciplines.

Some write *theologies of childhood*, which offer questions and answers about the nature of children in relation to God, and about what children and adults owe each other. Both of these topics also involve the question of what the church should be or do in relation to children.

In a related but distinct field, other people write *child theology*, which offers ideas about God and humanity from the experience of childhood. In the same way that womanist theology starts within the experience of Black women and then turns to offer conceptions of God and critiques of theologies and the Church,⁷ so too child theology starts within the experience of the child and then turns to speak more broadly about God. These theologies start from experience but expand to include all of creation. Child theology asks 'how honoring children might reframe and readjust our thinking about other major themes in theology'.⁸ For child theology, 'the focus is not the child or children, but God'.⁹ The best summary of this field can be found in the 2021 collection, *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives*, edited by Marcia Bunge.

But I'm interested here in the former approach: theologies of childhood. These theologies 'articulate informed and robust understandings of children and adult obligations to them' and 'build on wisdom from the Bible, Christian tradition, human experience, and insights from the sciences and the humanities'.¹⁰ These can be theologies that are stated directly ('Children are X, we owe them Y') or are implicit in what adults are saying about children, or implicit in what adults are doing with or to children ('We need to share the love of God with children or they won't know it', 'We need to keep children from going down dangerous paths', 'Children are like little angels', 'Children need punishment to understand their sins', 'Children in church should be seen and not heard').

⁶Marcia Bunge, 'The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood', *The Journal of Religion* 86.4 (2006), pp. 549-79.

⁷'Womanist theology is a form of reflection that places the religious and moral perspectives of Black women at the center of its method. Issues of class, gender ... and race are seen as theological problems ... This form of theological reflection cannot be termed "womanist" simply because the subject is Black women's religious experiences ... This kind of analysis is both descriptive (an analysis and socio-historical perspective of Black life and Black religious worldviews) and prescriptive (offering suggestions for the eradication of oppression in the lives of African Americans and, by extension, the rest of humanity and creation).' Emilie M. Townes, 'Womanist Theology', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57.3-4 (2003), pp. 159-76 (159).

⁸Bunge and Eide, 'Introduction', p. xv.

⁹Keith J. White, 'An Introduction to Child Theology', in Marcia J. Bunge (ed.), *Key Topics in Child Theology Series* (London: The Child Theology Movement Limited, 2006), p. 3.

¹⁰Bunge and Eide, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

We find pieces of theologies of childhood in a few places: in practical and pastoral theology, where complete theologies of childhood have recently been written; in liturgical theology; in work describing the practice of ministry with children; and in recoveries of historical theologies of childhood.

Practical Theologies of Childhood

Many of the recent theologies of childhood are written within practical and pastoral theology. Practical theology ‘describes a theology intending to be both true and useful’ and ‘must be recognizable both in terms of the adequacy of its description of a particular context or situation of human experience, and in terms of its description of God and God’s activity’.¹¹ There are three recent books which attempt a complete practical theology of childhood, by Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Joyce Mercer, and Pamela Couture; and a work of pastoral theology for the family with children by Herbert Anderson and Susan B.W. Johnson.

Miller-McLemore’s *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* is written for ‘the thoughtful lay reader’,¹² and is ‘about how adults think about children (a descriptive task) and about how adults should think about children (a prescriptive task)’.¹³ She proceeds from the perspective of feminist maternal theology; her three sources are ‘Christianity, feminism, and psychology’.¹⁴ She begins with a brief overview of historical changes in how adults see children,¹⁵ then surveys what psychology offers to our view of childhood, in particular how psychology corrects Christianity and how Christianity may correct psychology.¹⁶ She arrives by this at ‘three fundamental Christian imperatives’:

First, children must be loved for their own sake . . . Christians see [this love] as a gift, a grace ultimately promised and bestowed by God. Second, children must be received as harbingers of God’s kingdom . . . Finally, to cause a child to stumble and fall is a fate worse than death.¹⁷

She briefly considers different approaches to understanding children as sinful and fallible from psychology and broadly from the Christian tradition; she uses Scripture and a brief criticism of ‘market logic’ to consider children as a costly gift; picking up Christian feminist theology she notes how children have and have not been a concern in feminism and feminist theology, and what these disciplines offer in our view of loving children.¹⁸ Finally she considers what both feminism and

¹¹Joyce Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Children* (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 11.

¹²Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), p. xxvii.

¹³Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, p. xxv.

¹⁴Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, p. xxi.

¹⁵Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, pp. 1-23.

¹⁶Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, pp. 25-55.

¹⁷Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, p. 55.

¹⁸Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, pp. 57-81, 83-104 and 105-35.

Christianity can offer about 'children as agents' and 'children as ends in themselves'.¹⁹

Mercer's *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* is also situated in feminist practical theology and is an even more thorough exploration. She arrives at five basic theological claims of a feminist practical theology of childhood:

1. Parenting is a deeply religious practice of gift stewardship, involving care and nurture of children as divine gifts.
2. Welcoming children means welcoming those who care for them.
3. Children are already fully human, whole-yet-broken people.
4. Children are part of the purposes of God, given to the world and the church so that God may be welcomed.
5. The suffering of children must be acknowledged and addressed, as Christ's church seeks its transformation so that children may flourish.²⁰

Mercer arrives at these claims by way of detailed case studies interpreted with both a sociological and theological lens, in-depth biblical interpretation focusing on Mark's Gospel and the work of theologians Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. She also draws on work from the fields of social work, education and ethnography. Each of these claims is elaborated and supported by her study, and she extends them into a vision of 'liberatory Christian ecclesial practices',²¹ which the whole book elaborates in her chosen context: North American churches at the start of the twenty-first century in mainline congregations. In her closing chapter she demonstrates how her five claims are or are not lived out in worship and discipleship with children in congregations.

Another significant book is Pamela G. Couture's *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty*. Couture is 'a practical theologian who is particularly concerned with the practices of care and counseling in the church'.²² She uses the disciplines of pastoral care, pastoral theology, practical theology and biblical study to expand on four claims, the second and fourth of which are that '[c]hildren's poverty must be overcome by [adults] building relationships with vulnerable children. This work of care is a means of finding God', and that '[t]hrough this work of care – by practicing the means of grace and the work of mercy and piety – the church can genuinely transform itself and influence society and culture'.²³ This particular book is also informed by her work with the United Methodist Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty, the Candler Congregational Studies Project, and the Family, Culture, and Religion Project. The result is 'a practical theology of children and poverty based on a social ecology for pastoral care'.²⁴

In *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families*, Herbert Anderson and Susan B.W. Johnson approach the care of children in and through the pastoral care of families. The book is one in a series on 'Family Living in Pastoral

¹⁹Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, p. 137.

²⁰Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 244.

²¹Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, pp. 244-45.

²²Pamela G. Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 20.

²³Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God*, pp. 13-15.

²⁴Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God*, p.93.

Perspective' and is centered in pastoral theology; its aim is to identify 'what children need, what families must provide for the sake of children, how families struggle with their childrearing tasks, and what society and the church must do to support families in their care of children'.²⁵ They do this first by setting out their own slender theology of childhood, critiquing earlier conceptions and drawing on Christian tradition and psychology. The majority of the book is situated in pastoral theology and offers conceptions of the Christian family as it relates to children and their care. The book closes with a theology for families, a vision of what the state and 'society' owe children, and finally an exploration of how 'the church fulfills its purpose when it becomes "a sanctuary for childhood," including changes in its prophetic witness, its conception of initiation, and its worship'.²⁶

Theologies of Childhood within Liturgical Theology

A rich source of partial theologies of childhood is work on liturgical theology and practice. We find rich fragments especially in work focused on baptism, the Eucharist and confirmation. One such collection was edited by Ruth Meyers for the Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church in the United States, and is called *Children at the Table: A Collection of Essays on Children and the Eucharist*.²⁷ This includes the so-called Boston Document: 'Children and Communion: An International Anglican Consultation Held in Boston U.S.A. 29–31 July 1985',²⁸ which states:

Before questions are raised with regard to educational or psychological models, we wish to affirm on theological grounds that children of all ages are included among those for whom Christ died, that children of all ages are recipients of his love, that children of all ages are equally persons in the people of God, and that children of all ages have an active ministry in Christ among his people and in the world. We see no dogmatic or other credible basis for regarding some who are baptized as eligible to receive communion while others are not.²⁹

The other two essays with the most substantial theological consideration of children are 'Infant Communion: Reflections on the Case from Tradition' by Ruth A. Meyers and 'The Communion of Infants and Little Children' by Leonel L. Mitchell. They arrive at different understandings of children. Meyers argues that the 'capacity for faith' is 'present at birth, [and] develops and is given expression as the person interacts with her world'.³⁰ Quoting the catechism, she says that baptized

²⁵Herbert Anderson and Susan B.W. Johnson, *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 1.

²⁶Anderson and Johnson, *Regarding Children*, pp. 112–29.

²⁷Ruth A. Meyers (ed.), *Children at the Table: A Collection of Essays on Children and the Eucharist* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1995).

²⁸This Consultation describes itself in part as a result of a resolution in the 1968 Lambeth Conference as well as the changes in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

²⁹The 1985 Boston Consultation, 'Children and Communion: An International Anglican Consultation Held in Boston U.S.A. 29–31 July 1985,' in Meyers (ed.), *Children at the Table*, pp. 127–40 (132).

³⁰Ruth A. Meyers, 'Infant Communion: Reflections on the Case from Tradition,' in Meyers (ed.), *Children at the Table*, pp. 146–64 (160).

infants 'share citizenship in the Covenant, membership in Christ, and redemption by God'.³¹ Infants should receive the sacrament of the Eucharist because it 'offer[s] the means by which infants . . . can be nurtured in their faith'.³²

In contrast to Meyers and all the other authors in this literature review, Mitchell comes to a different conclusion about children. He says that since baptism and Eucharist theologically 'comprise a single whole',³³ children who are baptized are 'grafted into the body of Christ'³⁴ and therefore should not be denied communion, even though like 'idiots' or 'the mentally handicapped' they are unable to 'comprehend' and certainly not to give a statement of their faith.³⁵ He goes on to say that 'the participation of children in the eucharist is a sign primarily not to the children but to the gathered community' and 'the primary reason for communicating infants is not for the benefit of the infants but for that of the church'.³⁶

Related discussions and arguments with theological claims about childhood include *Young Children and the Eucharist* by Urban T. Holmes³⁷ and *And Do Not Hinder Them: An Ecumenical Plea for the Admission of Children to the Eucharist*, edited by Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz for the World Council of Churches.³⁸

Theologies of Childhood from Ministry with Children

There are also those who have not attempted specifically a theology of childhood, but whose practice and writing on the practice of ministry with children offers a particular theological view of the child.³⁹ Children's participation in liturgy is here, too, a fruitful place to look.

Maria Montessori's little 1933 book, *The Mass Explained to Children*,⁴⁰ is a striking distillation within the Roman Catholic tradition of her understanding of children and their relationship to God in the Eucharist. She corrects those who 'imagine that the child is incapable of good without their exhortation or example';⁴¹ in fact, 'spiritual impulses are alive in them which may be atrophied in the grown man'.⁴² And while '[w]e are bound to help children by teaching them what they need

³¹Meyers, 'Infant Communion' p. 160.

³²Meyers, 'Infant Communion', p. 161.

³³Leonel L. Mitchell, 'The Communion of Infants and Little Children', in Meyers (ed.), *Children at the Table*, pp. 165-87 (171).

³⁴Mitchell, 'The Communion of Infants', p. 175.

³⁵Mitchell, 'The Communion of Infants', pp. 173-74. Christian discussion of (assumed able-bodied) children and disabled people of all ages often involves theological interpretation of (in)ability, dependence and verbal expression.

³⁶Mitchell, 'The Communion of Infants', pp. 174-75.

³⁷Urban T. Holmes, III, *Young Children and the Eucharist* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972).

³⁸Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, *And Do Not Hinder Them: An Ecumenical Plea for the Admission of Children to the Eucharist* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

³⁹Bonnie Miller-McLemore's article 'Whither the Children: Childhood in Religious Education', *Journal of Religion* 86.4 (2006), pp. 635-57, examines how much writing on religious education is not actually focused on children themselves, which perhaps is why this literature review does not include Westerhoff and others who are otherwise frequently cited.

⁴⁰Maria Montessori, *The Mass Explained to Children* (Kettering, OH: Angelic Press, 2015).

⁴¹Montessori, *The Mass Explained to Children*, p. 1.

⁴²Montessori, *The Mass Explained to Children*, p. 2.

to know about religion . . . we should not forget that the child can help us, too, by showing us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven'.⁴³ She presents this instruction to be offered outside of the Mass, since the child today, like 'the Faithful' in the early church, goes to mass not for 'instruction' but 'to be united to Jesus Christ in the most intimate offering of the soul'.⁴⁴

Around the same time, in her book *I bambini viventi nella Chiesa*,⁴⁵ Montessori wrote that the liturgy 'may well be called "the pedagogical method" of the Church [for all ages]', and 'to find life-giving spiritual nourishment the child has only to open the windows of his soul to the light of the liturgy and all its embodiments of divine grace'. This, she clarifies, requires that adults 'make the liturgy accessible to children', not by changing the liturgy, but by 'the teaching of the liturgy as the illustration of Christian doctrine', beginning with children as young as three.⁴⁶ Montessori's detailed descriptions of practice with children show children as capable of grasping the dignity and solemnity of the religious life, and of comprehending and participating in recollection and life with God.

Sofia Cavalletti continued and extended Montessori's work in the method called the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd; her understanding of children can be seen in the practice of this method and in her writing *The Religious Potential of the Child*, for example.⁴⁷ She understood the child to be 'a "metaphysical" being', a person who, 'more than any other, has need of love because the child himself is rich in love'. She quotes Montessori's early collaborator Adele Costa Gnocchi: 'God and the child get along well together'.⁴⁸ Observing that '[t]he world of the child's religion is different from that of the adult',⁴⁹ Cavalletti's goal is not for the adult to expect the child to have an adult view of God, but rather for the adult to 'remind himself that he is the "unworthy servant" of the Gospel', and to 'create specific conditions so that this relationship [between God and the child] may be established, but to withdraw as soon as the contact occurs'.⁵⁰ The responsibility of the adults of the Church is 'to initiate the child into the Christian mystery', for this itself 'is to initiate the child into the mystery of life'. She continues, 'To bar the child from the religious experience, to preclude the possibility of his receiving the Christian message, is to betray the child's most profound exigencies, to block his access to the full knowledge of the reality in which he finds himself immersed'.⁵¹ Montessori and Cavalletti were both devout Roman Catholics, as their teaching shows; Catechesis has become a global practice in at least four other Christian traditions.

⁴³Montessori, *The Mass Explained to Children*, p. 2.

⁴⁴Montessori, *The Mass Explained to Children*, p. 4.

⁴⁵Montessori's 1929 book was in 1965 released in an English collection called *The Child in the Church*, with additional articles by others, translated and edited by E.M. Standing (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2017).

⁴⁶Montessori, *The Child in the Church*, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁷Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children* (trans. Patricia M. Coulter and Julie M. Coulter; Oak Park, IL: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications, 1992).

⁴⁸Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, p. 44.

⁴⁹Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, p. 47.

⁵⁰Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, pp. 52-53.

⁵¹Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, p. 177.

Theologies of Childhood from the Christian Past

And finally, still others are doing the background work and bringing to light what Christian individuals or movements have offered theologically about children – both the riches and paucity of the Christian tradition. The collection edited by Marcia Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought*,⁵² is the most notable and thorough text; it includes essays on John Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Menno Simons, Schleiermacher and Horace Bushnell, as well as seventeenth-century missionaries to New France and eighteenth-century German Pietists. The essays in this collection address many aspects of childhood, including 'the distinctive qualities of infants, stages of childhood development, ... differences between adults and children, approaches to discipline, responsibilities of children to their parents' and 'levels of accountability for wrongdoing'.⁵³ Each essay also addresses some basic theological questions about 'our views of children and our obligations to children', including most essentially 'the nature of children' and 'the responsibilities and obligations of parents, the state, and the church to nurture children'.⁵⁴

Another varied collection with a different approach is *The Church and Childhood: Papers Read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*,⁵⁵ edited by Diana Wood. Although these essays do not each directly address the theological questions in Bunge's collection, they offer rare and detailed glimpses into the 'history of Christian, and ecclesiastical, ideas and images of childhood', which is 'shot through with ambiguity'.⁵⁶ These 31 essays show specific ways in which '[o]n to the bodies of children were mapped the hopes, fears, and fantasies of adults'.⁵⁷

Marcia Bunge has noted that the 'current literature still lacks a full account of past theological perspectives on children and our obligations to them' and that a fuller account can both correct current misconceptions of Christian understandings of children and also 'prompt more serious theological reflection on children'.⁵⁸ Bit by bit the Church is hearing more of a full account, for example in Natalie Carnes' article 'We in Our Turmoil: Theological Anthropology through Maria Montessori and the Lives of Children',⁵⁹ or in 'Children and Moral Agency' by Cristina L.H. Traina,⁶⁰ which picks up and builds on questions from Miller-McLemore's book using Noma Arpaly and Lisa Tessman.

In what follows, I will offer another glimpse into past theological views of children, this time from the Lambeth Conferences.

⁵²Marcia Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001).

⁵³Marcia J. Bunge, 'Introduction', in Bunge (ed.) *The Child in Christian Thought*, pp. 1-28 (13).

⁵⁴Bunge, 'Introduction', p. 8.

⁵⁵Diana Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood: Papers Read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994).

⁵⁶Janet L. Nelson, 'Introduction', in Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood*, pp. xix-xxiv (xix).

⁵⁷Nelson, 'Introduction', p. xxii.

⁵⁸Bunge, 'Introduction', p. 7.

⁵⁹Natalie Carnes, 'We in Our Turmoil: Theological Anthropology through Maria Montessori and the Lives of Children', *The Journal of Religion* 95.3 (2015), pp. 318-36.

⁶⁰Cristina L.H. Traina, 'Children and Moral Agency', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29.2 (2009), pp. 19-37.

The Lambeth Conference

Lambeth is an especially interesting place to look for fragments of theologies of childhood because it has had a global reach; it has met for 156 years with so many different members; and it has produced these necessarily restrained yet pointed resolutions.⁶¹

The first Lambeth Conference met in 1867, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was a gathering of Anglican and Episcopal bishops from around the world, and was an expression of 'mission' as they understood it,⁶² as well as a response to controversy.⁶³ While it was not intended to be the first of anything, it became the first of fifteen⁶⁴ gatherings of bishops from what is now the Anglican Communion. The Lambeth Conferences themselves have helped 'create and facilitate the modern Anglican Communion'.⁶⁵ And while Lambeth was never intended as a magisterium or doctrinal legislator⁶⁶ and still does not hold that role,⁶⁷ it has had an apparent 'vocation to articulate the boundaries of Anglicanism',⁶⁸ and 'there is an enduring sense that Conference resolutions are more than an ephemeral expression of the corporate episcopal mind'.⁶⁹

So any Anglican priest or parishioner, looking for clues about what our tradition has expressed on a particular topic, might reasonably search through Lambeth's history. The resolutions of the Conferences touch on liturgy, education, family planning, human rights, ecumenical relations and work, political action and responsibility, and many other subjects; they are both direct and indirect pastoral and theological offerings for all Anglicans.

Only eight resolutions are categorized by the Anglican Communion in their online archive as dealing with children and youth, from the years 1968, 1988 and 1998.⁷⁰ However, children show up in the conversations at Lambeth as early

⁶¹Other potential Anglican sources for (fragments of) theologies of childhood would be in the curricula recommended by national or diocesan bodies across the Communion; in what Anglican clergy or lay leaders write for newspapers in response to current events regarding children; in Anglican books for parents; in what official Church publishing houses publish for use by children or their ministers; or in seminary syllabi related to parish or hospital ministry with children.

⁶²Ephraim Radner, 'Christian Mission and the Lambeth Conferences', in Paul Avis and Benjamin M. Guyer (eds.), *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), pp. 132-72 (132).

⁶³Gregory K. Cameron, 'The Windsor Process and the Anglican Covenant', in Avis and Guyer (eds.), *The Lambeth Conference*, pp. 234-58 (234).

⁶⁴In 2022 the fifteenth Lambeth Conference met, postponed from the scheduled 2020 gathering due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁶⁵Paul Avis and Benjamin M. Guyer, 'Editorial Preface', in Avis and Guyer (eds.), *The Lambeth Conference*, pp. viii-xiii (ix).

⁶⁶Stephen Pickard, 'The Lambeth Conference among the Instruments of Communion', in Avis and Guyer (eds.), *The Lambeth Conference*, pp. 3-22 (3).

⁶⁷Norman Doe and Richard Deadman, 'The Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference and the Laws of Anglican Churches', in Avis and Guyer (eds.), *The Lambeth Conference*, pp. 259-93 (260).

⁶⁸Cameron, 'The Windsor Process', p. 234.

⁶⁹Doe and Deadman, 'The Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference', p. 260.

⁷⁰The Anglican Communion Document Library', The Anglican Communion, available at: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library.aspx?author=Lambeth+Conference> (accessed 19 December 2016).

as 1897, running around the corners of at least 41 resolutions between 1897 and 1998.⁷¹ I have chosen to look at those resolutions which specifically name 'children', a 'child', or 'youth'.⁷²

Rather than attempting to falsely harmonize such a range of voices and times, I will give a chronological overview of the resolutions that mention children or youth; I will then offer a brief critique using the resources in the literature review above. The chronological overview will show a particular trend: that the Lambeth Conferences begin by speaking of children in terms of their place in the Christian life and Christian Church, often as an immutable group – and the Conferences end most recently by using phrases that imagine the actual life of children, speaking of them as full agents in the life of God in the world.⁷³ The critique will show how Lambeth's resolutions map onto three basic statements of a theology of childhood.

Chronological Presentation of Resolutions

Lambeth 1897

The Conferences of 1867 and 1888 make no mention of children or youth. The first mention – of 'the child' who might be baptized as an infant – comes in a single resolution in 1897 (48).⁷⁴ Concern is expressed in terms of the clergyman's decision to baptize the child and the responsibility of the clergyman in that urgent circumstance, rather than describing the potential experienced outcomes for the child. In this resolution, the adults in the Church have an obligation, but a situation renders it ambiguous. The expressed concern is less for the potential outcomes for the child and more about the adult's decision-making.⁷⁵

⁷¹Beginning in 2008, the Lambeth Conference did not produce contained resolutions, but narrative reflections. These are such a different format that I have chosen to focus on the continuous format from 1897 to 1998.

⁷²This might be expanded to include 'girls', 'boys', 'sons' and 'daughters' (there are a few resolutions which use these words), as well as 'young people'. However, I chose my terms to capture the broadest categories and to specifically aim for all people under the age of 18 (the current global legal definition of 'child'). This does leave out some interesting resolutions that might be discussed in terms of theologies of childhood, such as 1908 Resolution 4 and 1920 Resolution 71. I have also decided to leave out three resolutions which describe all humans, including adults, as 'children of God'; these are 1948 Resolution 2 on 'the Christian Doctrine of Man', 1978 Resolution 1 on 'Today's World' and 1978 Resolution 34 on 'Human Relationships and Sexuality'. While this might offer some interesting ideas for child theology, I'm interested here in theologies of childhood, that is, concerning people under the age of 18.

⁷³This is not to say that the earlier authors were not concerned with the actual lives of children – only that the expressed focus of these anxieties and the solution to them was not expressed with a description of children or the outcomes for children.

⁷⁴The reference numbers in parentheses throughout the rest of the paper are the numbers of the resolutions cited, not page numbers. These are available on the Anglican Communion's Document Library. Lambeth Conference, 'Resolutions Archive from 1897', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127725/1897.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

⁷⁵This could be because the creators of the resolution took for granted a shared view of outcomes, but this seems unlikely as elsewhere shared views are still expressed.

Lambeth 1908

Lambeth 1908 mentions children in 6 out of 78 resolutions. Baptism is discussed once more (62),⁷⁶ but the emphasis here is on education and Christian discipleship, both in secular schools (11, 13), Christian schools (15) and family life (19, 67).

The first of these resolutions explains that it is a Christian duty ‘to make it clear to the world that purely secular systems of education are educationally as well as morally unsound’, not attending to ‘the whole nature of the child’ and therefore ‘leave many children deficient in a most important factor for that formation of character’ (11). The Conference follows this up with encouragement to look for places where ‘the state’ allows ‘for training our children in the faith of their parents’ (13) and to establish Church-maintained secondary schools ‘for children of the English-speaking race in all parts of the Anglican Communion’ (15). These two emphasize the church’s obligation to children in the form not just of ‘formation of character’ but in presumably a Christian view of other academic subjects. This second resolution also brings race into the theological picture. The Church’s global obligation does not extend to all children in the (new) Anglican Communion, or even all children in the Church in the Anglican Communion, but primarily ‘children of the English-speaking race’. Race narrows the theological obligation to children.⁷⁷

The need for ‘religious instruction’ includes the home, as the Conference ‘lay[s] special stress on the duty of parents in all conditions of social life’ to attend to such instruction in the home (19). This is also one of the reasons why Anglicans are ‘warn[ed] . . . against contracting marriages with Roman Catholics under the conditions imposed by modern Roman canon law’, since they must ‘promise to have their children brought up in a religious system which they cannot themselves accept’ (67).⁷⁸ The child’s need for instruction activates parents across class and personality to attend to them. The potential life of a Roman Catholic child with an Anglican parent is not described, but the conscience of the parent is explicitly at stake.

Resolution 62 returns us to baptism and the clergy’s decision-making. It encourages priests to baptize Eastern Orthodox children ‘in cases of emergency, provided that there is a clear understanding that baptism should not be again administered to those so baptized’. The baptism of children is clearly important, and again the risks and outcomes as regards the child’s life or soul are not described; the priest is given guidance for their decision.

⁷⁶Lambeth Conference, ‘Resolutions Archive from 1908’, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127728/1908.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

⁷⁷The concept of ‘race’ has developed and shifted over time; see Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) for the continuities within Christianity.

⁷⁸Resolution 4 does not mention ‘children’ or ‘youth’ and so is not in the scope of our analysis; but it should be noted that it asks ‘that Christian parents be urged to encourage signs of vocation in their sons’. Here, too, the focus is the child’s future role in countering ‘the serious decline in the number of candidates for Holy Orders’, rather than the present effects of the child’s present spiritual life.

Lambeth 1920

Two resolutions out of 80 mention children in 1920. Resolution 68⁷⁹ is in the larger category of 'Problems of Marriage and Sexual Immorality' and is 'an emphatic warning against the use of unnatural means for the avoidance of conception', the use of which 'threatens the race' with 'evils' and incurs 'great dangers'. Children are named as one of the two 'governing considerations of Christian marriage'; the first is 'the primary purpose for which marriage exists, namely the continuation of the race through the gift and heritage of children', and the second is 'the paramount importance in married life of deliberate and thoughtful self-control'. While one might reasonably imagine that 'race' here means the human race, other resolutions in 1920 suggest that the implied first-person plural ('our race') is not all of humanity but something more narrow. For example, in 1920 we find resolutions which mention 'conditions of labour ... among the weaker races' (78), 'injustice to the indigenous or native races' (6), 'colour prejudice among the different races of the world' (7), sharing the Gospel with 'every race and individual' (32), 'difference of race and language' and the connected 'freedom of development of races side by side' (35), 'the ferment produced among primitive races' and a government's 'subject races' (41). This distinction – the human race or one specific race – is important for clarifying what theology of childhood may be suggested here. In this case, since 'race' is everywhere else used to describe some subset of humanity, we can guess that the children here are valued in part as the continuation of a particular race.⁸⁰ In this resolution, then, the Church says children are a 'gift and heritage' for a larger purpose that does not particularly concern their souls or their life with God. Their mere existence here is an accomplishment or goal for adults within a certain Christian vocation.

Resolution 77 is the first time that children are mentioned in connection to broader social action; it is part of a series of resolutions on 'Social and Industrial Questions'. The Conference says that '[m]embers of the Church are bound to take an active part, by public action and by personal service, in removing those abuses which depress and impoverish human life' and this may be done 'with other citizens and organisations' (including, presumably, outside the Church). It singles out three issues, one of which is 'the better care of children, including real opportunity for an adequate education'. In this resolution, the Church's adult members have a responsibility for children both in and outside the church, to advocate for them and work for their 'better care', as they are part of that 'human life' which the Church is to help protect.

Lambeth 1930

The Lambeth Conference of 1930 takes a different angle and in 4 out of 75 resolutions concerns itself with how a child is situated within the Christian family.

⁷⁹Lambeth Conference, 'Resolutions Archive from 1920', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127731/1920.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

⁸⁰Perhaps they meant a white race, like the idea of 'the Anglo-Saxon race' that was popular at that time; perhaps they meant each child within 'their own race', as it were. If the latter, this would connect to the judgment of mixed-race relationships in 1930 Resolutions 23 and 24.

This Conference includes a set of resolutions entitled ‘The Life and Witness of the Christian Community: Marriage and Sex’ (9–20).⁸¹ Three of these discuss children.⁸² In Resolution 12, ‘the Conference emphasises the need of education’ as regards ‘all questions of marriage and sex’. This includes children, their parents and the clergy. Children need ‘definite information . . . given in an atmosphere of simplicity and beauty’; they need this ‘before the child’s emotional reaction to sex is awakened’. Children’s parents are ‘directly responsible for this’ teaching and need ‘the best guidance that the Church can supply’. This care of children and youth is so important that it prompts a need for more education of the clergy (in moral theology) and more study by the Communion’s councils, as well as efforts to better understand and share the literature that already exists. So here, children have a *before* and *after* in their sexual lives: a *before* without emotional reactions to sex (perhaps a kind of innocence?) and an awakening that puts them at risk unless they already have the information they need. They need parents and the Church for this information. This education of children is so important that many adults are to be mobilized in its service – not just parents but all the clergy, their seminaries, leaders in councils and ‘the responsible authorities in diocese or parish’. Children’s moral needs mobilize Christian adults.

Second, begetting and bearing⁸³ children is the primary purpose and product of marriage (13), as Lambeth had affirmed ten years prior. For although ‘sexual instinct is a holy thing implanted by God in human nature’, ‘the governing considerations in that intercourse’ should be attention to this primary purpose (‘the procreation of children’) as well as ‘deliberate and thoughtful self-control’, which is so important in ‘married life’ (13). As in the prior Conference, the child is, regardless of its life, a goal for a certain Christian vocation; it is a product in the God-given constellation of a family with married parents of opposite genders.

Third, the Conference ‘affirms’ that ‘the glory of married life’ is ‘the duty of parenthood’; it affirms ‘the benefit of a family as a joy in itself, as a vital contribution to the nation’s welfare, and as a means of character-building for both parents and children’; and affirms ‘the privilege of discipline and sacrifice to this end’ (14). This resolution also positions children as an essential part of what a ‘family’ is, and now includes both the experience of both the parent and the child. Both the child and parent may share in the ‘joy’ of a family, as well as its character-building discipline and sacrifice.

Lambeth 1930 also includes a resolution entitled ‘Youth and Vocation’ (75).⁸⁴ It is not a call for youth, but rather for ‘those qualified to represent youth’, to help stir up ‘a new measure of devotion to Christ and his Church’ for ‘the great tasks before the Church today’. Here, young people are a potential (not actual) source of energy and effort in the Church, persons who might choose later to take up the work of the Church.

⁸¹Lambeth Conference, ‘Resolutions Archive from 1930’, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127734/1930.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

⁸²Resolutions 15 and 16 comment on the related topics of birth control (acceptable when done ‘in light of . . . Christian principles’ – quite a change!) and abortion (a ‘sinful practice’ viewed by the Conference with ‘abhorrence’).

⁸³I use these words because the resolution says ‘the procreation of children’ not ‘the care of children’ or ‘the raising of children’, which are separate activities and not necessarily connected.

⁸⁴This could be read as an extension of 1908’s Resolution 4 on vocation.

Lambeth 1948

The Lambeth Conference of 1948 returns us, with 9 resolutions from a total of 118, to all three of these topics from prior years: education, baptism and family.

Of a set of resolutions called 'The Church and the Modern World – Education' (27–35),⁸⁵ two mention children. The first affirms the Church's 'gratitude to Sunday and day school teachers and youth leaders' who have continued teaching 'in the face of increasing difficulties' (30). It notes 'the responsibility of individual clergymen and parishes' in this work. The second turns to the world outside the parish and 'recognise[s] the great influence of films and broadcasting both for good and for evil' while sharing the 'anxiety of many teachers and educational authorities lest the films shown to children should undermine sound educational influences'; they hope for some to be made which are 'wholesome' (34). Here, children require the work of many adults to be brought up in the church, both ordained and lay. This work may extend to correcting or filtering the media of the non-Church world; children need 'sound' and 'wholesome' 'influences'.

In a set called 'The Church and the Modern World – The Christian Way of Life', one resolution also speaks of education, saying that 'education should be more than a training for a livelihood' or 'citizenship' and 'should be based upon the fact that every child is a child of God created by God for citizenship in heaven as well as on earth' (46). This seems a more general echo of Lambeth 1908's concern with 'the whole nature of the child' and 'the formation of character' (11), but here it specifically names every child, not just Christian children or English-speaking children.

In the set called 'Baptism and Confirmation' (100–112), three mention children. All three concern the seriousness of baptism and the adult responsibilities related to it, 'while deprecating the hasty adoption of any policy which would lead to the widespread exclusion of infants from baptism' (104). 'Parents and guardians' have 'a major share in the responsibility for the Christian nurture and education of their children' (104); to be godparent is a 'responsibility' and they should attend to 'the seriousness of the promises they make on behalf of the child' and 'continue diligently in prayer for their godchildren throughout their lives' (107); and clergy are to often remind parents and guardians of these things (104) and to work with their fellow ministers to make sure that baptisands 'not resident in his parish or on his Membership Roll' are 'linked up with the life of that congregation' (108). Here, as in 1897, the resolution describes adult responsibilities and decisions around the baptism of a child; the experience of the child is not suggested (as in the other 1948 resolutions discussed above and below). But as in 1930 Resolution 12, the need of a child mobilizes ongoing action in many adults in the Church.

A further set of resolutions are called 'The Church's Discipline in Marriage' (92–99) and three of these mention children. One repeats the 1908 warning against marrying Roman Catholics and the risk of having one's child 'brought up in a religious system which' one cannot accept (98). The adult conscience as regards the child is specifically at stake. The other two resolutions focus on divorce – and like Resolutions 13 and 14 from 1930, children are invoked as one of the moral weights which should sway adult behavior and conscience.

⁸⁵Lambeth Conference, 'Resolutions Archive from 1948', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127737/1948.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

Divorce hurts children, who need ‘a true home life’ (which only a hetero married couple can provide), and so the Conference ‘earnestly implores those whose marriage, perhaps through no fault of their own, is unhappy to remain steadfastly faithful to their marriage vows’ (92). And since divorce hurts children, the Conference ‘urges that there is a strong case for the reconsideration by certain states of their divorce laws’ (97).

Unlike previous resolutions, here the experience of children themselves is elaborated in emotional language.⁸⁶ Resolution 92 invokes ‘the tragedy of children deprived of true home life’ and explains that ‘the welfare and happiness of children’ depends upon ‘the faithful observance of this divine law’. Resolution 97 says that divorce has ‘brought untold suffering to children’. As we have seen, this is unique up to this point. Resolution 97 could be understood as advocacy for children by the Church. As in 1920 Resolution 77 and 1948 Resolution 34, this is intended for the good of *all* children from the view of the Church.

Lambeth 1958

Five resolutions from the Lambeth Conference of 1958 out of a total of 131 mention children and return the focus squarely to the family.

One set of resolutions is called ‘The Family in Contemporary Society – Marriage’ (112–119),⁸⁷ and the three that mention children and youth return us to the question of families and procreation that was addressed in 1930. In one, the Conference ‘records its profound conviction that the idea of the human family is rooted in the Godhead’, with the result that ‘the procreation of children’ (among other things) ‘must be related, consciously and directly, to the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying power of God’ (112). The second ‘welcomes, with thankfulness, the increasing care given by the clergy to preparation for marriage . . . in instructing youth’ and urges ‘special attention should be given to our Lord’s principle of life-long union as the basis of all true marriage’ (114). A third resolution returns us to the question of ‘responsible parenthood’ and says that ‘the responsibility for deciding upon the number and frequency of children has been laid by God upon the consciences of parents everywhere’. Such planning ‘should be the result of positive choice before God’ and ‘requires a wise stewardship of the resources and abilities of the family as well as a thoughtful consideration of the varying population needs and problems of society and the claims of future generations’ (115).

As in 1930, here children are significant in that they are points in the constellation of the family foregrounded by marriage; the marriage, the family and the creation of children are aspects of Christian (adult) life which should be brought under the purview of God and therefore of the Church’s wisdom. Even as youth they are to be prepared for this type of family life. The third resolution is unique in that it gestures towards the experience of *future* children and adults as regards the adults’ conscience.

⁸⁶The accuracy of these descriptions is of course debatable. See, for example, ‘Parental Conflict, Marital Disruption and Children’s Emotional Well-Being’, *Social Forces* 76.3 (1998), pp. 905–36.

⁸⁷Lambeth Conference, ‘Resolutions Archive from 1958’, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127740/1958.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

The concern for family continues in the next set called 'The Family in Contemporary Society – The Christian Family' (121–124). The one which mentions children brings up 'the crushing impact of secularism on family life', proposing as a solution 'a return to the discipline of family prayer' and especially that fathers 'should take their due place' alongside mothers and children as worshippers (122). Children are significant as part of the appropriately worshipping family, and again need Christianity in response to 'secularism'.

Finally, one last resolution in 1958 is called 'The Family in Contemporary Society – Migratory Labour'. It takes a clear stance on a social ill and 'condemns those systems of migratory labour that break up family life by enforcing the unjustified residential separation of man and wife, or of parents and children'. While evoking the effect such a separation might have on children, this resolution is most centrally a reinforcement of 'the family as the God-given unit of human life and society' (127). It is another example of the Church advocating for a change in all of society for the good of all children according to its Christian understanding of what is needed.

Lambeth 1968

The 1968 Lambeth Resolutions mention children in 4 out of 69 resolutions.⁸⁸ Children are again a group for whom the Church and Christians should advocate. For the first time we see resolutions naming the current spiritual and religious lives of youth.

This happens first in Resolution 14,⁸⁹ entitled 'West Africa'; children are some of the 'many innocent' people being killed and are one of the motivations for change and Church aid. Children are grouped with adults in the category of innocent victims and the Church's role as regard to these children (and adults) is to advocate not only to the Church's own Christians but also to governments and 'voluntary organizations' for the good of these children.

Children are also invoked in Resolution 22, which is a response to Pope Paul VI's encyclical, 'Humanae vitae'. The Conference 'reaffirms the findings' of the 1958 resolutions on family and children already discussed above, and quotes them in the resolution. The lives of children are part of a global and ecumenical conversation.

In two further resolutions for the first time we hear about the spiritual and religious lives of 'young people' as communicated by the youth themselves: a resolution which 'values the initiative shown by young people in witnessing to their faith in Christ; and urges that they should be encouraged to do this in their own way and through their own media, and that the Church should have regard to their concern' (28). Another 'recognise[s] the need to involve them more directly in

⁸⁸Resolution 25 does not say 'children' or 'youth' but it should be noted that this resolution prompted a significant discussion and consideration of both children and childhood among Anglicans, as it recommended 'that each province or regional Church be asked to explore the theology of baptism and confirmation in relation to the need to commission the laity for their task in the world, and to experiment in this regard'. The Episcopal liturgical resources named in the literature review above describe themselves as being prompted by this resolution call.

⁸⁹Lambeth Conference, 'Resolutions Archive from 1968', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127743/1968.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

decision-making, in both secular and ecclesiastical society' because of the 'value of their informed insights' (29). Unlike the resolutions on 'vocation' from 1930 and 1908, which ask for adults to raise up youth to become clerical adults, or to communicate on behalf of young people, these 1968 resolutions note young people's contributions that already exist, and move for the actual involvement and voices of young people as they are, in manner and media that they choose. These children and youth are Christians who are part of the Church, to whom the Church should listen.

Lambeth 1978

One resolution⁹⁰ out of 37 in 1978 mentions children or youth, this time again in the context of Anglican-Roman Catholic marriage. Children are mentioned when, having received the 'report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission', the Conference endorses the Commission's recommendation 'that, as an alternative to an affirmation or promise by the Roman Catholic party in respect of the baptism and upbringing of any children', a written assurance of the couple's knowledge of the Roman Catholic partner's obligations is acceptable instead (34). The resolution also notes a change in Roman Catholic understanding about 'a decision as to the baptism and upbringing of any children' and continues to say that 'equality of conscience ... in particular with regard to the baptism and religious upbringing of children' is important 'for its own sake' as well as for relationships between Churches. The expressed importance here is still the parents' conscience as it relates to the child's baptism and 'religious upbringing', rather than the child's experience of the Church and God. Here also the future child – the child not yet conceived, but imagined between these two engaged people, perhaps discussed in pre-marital counseling – is drawn into a global ecumenical negotiation.

Lambeth 1988

Five resolutions out of 73 in 1988 mention children or youth: one regarding the baptism of children, two in the context of crises and two about youth in and out of the Church.

Resolution 26⁹¹ concerns 'Church and Polygamy'; the children in view are the children of 'a polygamist who responds to the Gospel and wishes to join the Anglican Church'. The father 'may be baptized and confirmed with his believing wives and children' on certain conditions. Like other resolutions about child baptism, this one concerns the behavior and belief of the child's parents. However, since it goes into some detail about the hoped-for conditions in this child's family, we get a glimpse of what the Conference finds acceptable in the child's life too: this can only be done with 'the consent of the local Anglican community'; and the father 'shall not be compelled to put away any of his wives, on account of the social deprivation they would suffer', which suggests that the children, too, are not

⁹⁰In this year are two resolutions which refer to all humans as 'God's children'. My reasons for not including these are given above in note 72. Lambeth Conference, 'Resolutions Archive from 1978', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127746/1978.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

⁹¹Lambeth Conference, 'Resolutions Archive from 1988', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127749/1988.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

to be put away or suffer in this way. Interestingly, there is no comment on how the children shall be raised, or if their baptism hinges on their level of exposure to other religious traditions – that is, what if the father wants to baptize his child by a non-believing unbaptized wife? This lacuna reminds us that the main concern is for the father in the scenario, as indeed the resolution states.

Two resolutions from 1988 continue the trend of attending to children in terms of social and global crises. Resolution 28 is entitled 'Sexual Abuse' and 'expresses' the Conference's 'deep concern about the frequency of domestic violence and the sexual abuse of children'. It encourages 'Christian leaders to be explicit about the sinfulness of violence and sexual abuse whether of children or adults' and to 'provide support' for both 'victims and perpetrators'. The 'value of the human person' – child or adult – comes from 'being made in the image of God'. Similarly, Resolution 39, called 'South Africa', 'Reaffirms its belief that the system of apartheid in South Africa is evil' and singles out for condemnation 'the detention of children without just cause', before going on to recommend courses of action for the Church and church leaders, including to calling 'upon the Churches to press their governments' to institute sanctions, offer aid, and more.

Each of these resolutions attend to the particular lived experiences of named groups of children in the world who experience ongoing crises to which the Conference has chosen to turn its attention. This includes children in and outside the Church. As in 1968, 1958 and 1920, children are described as being one sort of human whose life has value. The resolutions highlight the experience of these children and describe the Church's advocacy: to speak and exert moral pressure on the state as well as adult people of the Church.

Resolutions 48 and 67 concern youth in and outside the church. In 'Mission to Youth', the dioceses are asked to consider the work already happening with youth, including 'youth involvement in the life of the diocese and provinces and at every level', 'occasions or venues for meeting . . . for young people who have no contact whatever with the Church or the Christian faith', the 'proportion of diocesan and parish budgets' for youth ministry, and relationships with 'local schools and state education authorities' (48). Dioceses should consider how their resources – 'the skills and gifts of local Christian teachers, youth leaders, young people who have a ministry among their peers' – are being used. In closing, dioceses are asked 'what opportunities for encouragement and training in Christian witness are being provided', which suggests the young people themselves are to be encouraged in mission to their fellow youth by 'Christian witness'. In this resolution another step is taken towards a more full picture of the lives of young people. It is not just the home, the parish and the world, but 'every level' of the Church; instead of just 'Anglican youth', it includes young people who have had no contact with the Church; it specifically names the money (not) spent on the ministry of and with youth; and instead of imagining a wholly Christian education system, it includes the other major force in young people's lives – school and all its authorities. And as in previous years, the energy and time of adults are mobilized by the needs of young people.

Resolution 67 notes and 'endorses . . . the establishment of a Youth Network and the holding of the first International Conference of Young Anglicans' in January of that year and 'urges each diocese' to keep up this 'momentum'. Here is one concrete

step related to Resolution 48 above, expressing a commitment to the leadership and participation of youth.

Lambeth 1998

The Lambeth Conference in 1998 continues this trend. Like 1968 and 1988, it is explicitly concerned with the physical and ministerial lives of children and young people in a detailed way. Four resolutions out of 107 mention children and two explicitly focus on them.

The first, 'Justice for Women and Children', asks each member Church to attend to 'the ways in which women and children are affected and victimised by' the various 'systems' and 'criminal elements', and to work against these abuses 'through co-operation with existing groups,' including secular and governmental groups, in addition through raising awareness (1.3).⁹² As in previous resolutions, this one names a group of children both in and out of the Church itself; the Church's obligation is not just to affect its Christian members but to advocate for these children, including in governmental and secular spaces.

The resolution on 'International Debt and Economic Justice' describes children as we heard of them in the 1958 resolutions: an example of the most vulnerable and the moral weight which propels us to act. It expresses the 'urgent' need 'for debt relief for the poorest nations' by saying, 'Children are dying, and societies are unraveling' (1.15). Here, too, children are a reason that the Church should engage in political and social action.

Another, called 'Young People', picks up the attention to children's own lives in the world and Church, noting 'that the adult world has created children of war, children abused by neglect and sexual exploitation, and children who are victims of aggressive advertising' (2.8). Children are 'signs of the Kingdom among us'; 'Their presence and ministry in the church is essential for the whole family of God to be complete.' It affirms the work already done in ministry 'with children' (emphasis added) and resolves that bishops should commit themselves 'to ensure that the church is a safe, healthy, and spiritually enriching community for children and young people' and also 'give more attention to the furtherance of ministry to children as a recognition of their importance to God and as a foundation for all future ministry'. It calls for meetings of clergy with youth, and that 'teams of adults and young people' who will 'be trained for holistic ministry to young people outside the church', and that liturgy should be considered with young people in mind. Here, the Church has an obligation to share 'God's love in Christ' with children and youth in and out of the Church, which mobilizes the adults, requiring them to consider and even change their habits and patterns. This love is not shared only in instruction or in filtering outside influences but by 'holistic ministry' and making the Church 'safe' and 'healthy'. Children's and youth's current opinions and wisdom are to be actively sought out, even as they are also the foundation of future ministry; they are present members, not just potential.

⁹²Lambeth Conference, 'Resolutions Archive from 1998', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/76650/1998.pdf> (accessed 28 January 2023).

This view is reinforced in the resolution 'On Transformation and Renewal', which mentions in a sub-point that the Church seeks 'transformation in the lives of children and youth, who form most of our growing churches' (5.4). Each of these resolutions attends to the lived lives of children, expressing openly their vulnerability in the adult world and their imagined (transformed) spiritual lives separate from a particular adult theological goal.

Conclusion: Theologies of Childhood at Lambeth

In closing, I will pick up three basic statements of a theology of childhood and note how these Lambeth resolutions map onto them.

These statements are not from specifically Anglican theologies of childhood. Of the sources named above in the introduction, only the liturgical theologians speak from a clear place in the Anglican tradition. The practical and pastoral theologies of childhood are not written from any one specific tradition, but from a variety of Christian sources.⁹³ Perhaps this is in part because there are so few specific historical resources that offer clear theologies of childhood. Since these three statements below are shared by theologians who each draw broadly on the Christian tradition and the Bible, they seem a reasonable place to start when considering the Anglican theological perspectives on children in the resolutions.

1. 'Children are already fully human, whole-yet-broken people'

This is one of the essential theological claims and commitments that Joyce Mercer arrives at.⁹⁴ Children are 'not understudies for a real humanity that can only be found in adulthood' and '*as children* [they] already bear the image of God'.⁹⁵ Building on her exploration of Rahner and Barth, she concludes, 'Children are not angels or devils, but as full human beings manifest all the "gray areas" and ambiguities of adult human beings, who are complex and multifaceted'; and furthermore, our Christian resources 'for understanding human persons as "*simul justis et peccator*"' and for using the 'categories of grace, sin, sanctification, and redemption' are 'appropriate', too, to use with children.⁹⁶

Bonnie Miller-McLemore concludes that '[c]hildren need, from women and men of faith, care that respects them as persons, regards them as capable of good and bad . . . and views them as agents'.⁹⁷ She arrives at an understanding of 'the imperfect, even potentially volatile, child in an imperfect, volatile world', in contrast to previous conceptions of the child as innocent or deprived.⁹⁸

⁹³For example, Mercer is a minister in the Presbyterian Church, is part of 'the progressive side of the Reformed Christian faith' (p. 9) and uses Karl Barth and Karl Rahner for her conception of the moral nature of children. Couture is an elder in the United Methodist Church, and uses 'Wesleyan theology' (p. 48) as well as minjung theology (p. 62) to speak of our responsibility to children.

⁹⁴ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 244.

⁹⁵ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, pp. 251-52.

⁹⁶ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 156.

⁹⁷ Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, pp. 164-65.

⁹⁸ Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, p. 122.

Anderson and Johnson, considering the newborn, say that ‘the greatest wonder of all is that *every newly born child possesses already the fullness of being human*. Children are not simply incomplete adults. From birth, we are as fully human as we will ever become . . . the child already has the value and depth of full humanity’.⁹⁹ Using sociologist Floyd M. Martinson, they note that viewing children as ‘depraved’ or as ‘incomplete’ are expressions of ‘indifference’ to children. They argue that the former led to a hyperawareness of sinfulness at the expense of the full humanity and dignity of children, while the latter lead to the practice of ‘protect[ing children] from society in order to be prepared to function *in* society’.¹⁰⁰

We see mostly hints and suggestions of what the Conference members believed about the nature of a child. In these contained resolutions, we can highlight the glimpses related to children’s ‘whole-yet-broken’ personhood.

First, two resolutions speak directly to it; in 1920, children are named as part of the ‘human life’ which is to be protected from ‘abuses which depress and impoverish’ it.¹⁰¹ In 1988, children are included in the affirmation that the ‘value of the human person’ comes from ‘being made in the image of God’.¹⁰²

Second, we see that the child is at risk somehow – as adults are – without the right religious instruction and formation. The need for this instruction is discussed in 7 out of our 41 resolutions.¹⁰³ Formation also happens for both children and adults in the duties of family life.¹⁰⁴ The child may also be at greater risk when exposed to certain secular influences which can ‘undermine’ this instruction,¹⁰⁵ or which, like secularism, can have a ‘crushing impact’ on the appropriate spiritual life,¹⁰⁶ or which are internal and can make receiving instruction less effective.¹⁰⁷ In secular schools, ‘our’ children ought to have space to be ‘trained . . . in the faith of their parents.’¹⁰⁸ Part of why marriage to a Roman Catholic is so troubling is that the child is to be ‘brought up in a religious system’ which the Anglican cannot ‘accept’.¹⁰⁹

Fourth, we see a side of how the child’s full humanity is valued in how the Conferences speak of the child’s life in the Church.¹¹⁰ Speaking only of the child’s future contributions or future spiritual life at the least values the adult more than the child, and at most raises questions about how complete or full the child is as a

⁹⁹Anderson and Johnson, *Regarding Children*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰Anderson and Johnson, *Regarding Children*, pp. 13-16. Janet Nelson, in her ‘Introduction’ to the volume *The Child in the Church*, notes that one of the themes that emerged from the papers gathered was of ‘the child’s dual role as passive object of ecclesiastical concern and active religious subject’ (p. xx).

¹⁰¹1920 Resolution 77.

¹⁰²1988 Resolution 28.

¹⁰³1908 Resolutions 13, 19 and 67; 1930 Resolution 12; 1948 Resolutions 34 and 98; and 1958 Resolution 122.

¹⁰⁴1930 Resolution 14.

¹⁰⁵1948 resolution 34.

¹⁰⁶1958 Resolution 122.

¹⁰⁷1930 Resolution 12.

¹⁰⁸1908 Resolution 12.

¹⁰⁹1908 Resolution 67.

¹¹⁰A question for further thought is what value we place on a child when we speak of them as ‘the continuation of the human race’ or of their ‘procreation’ as being the purpose of marriage. In what way does this value their humanity? In what role do we place them in the family and the human family?

child.¹¹¹ One resolution does this in 1930,¹¹² but it is followed by five resolutions in later years that speak of children's and youths' 'initiative . . . in witnessing to their faith in Christ',¹¹³ their valuable 'informed insights' in questions of human welfare,¹¹⁴ the 'skills and gifts' that some youth have in ministry,¹¹⁵ and the young people who are members of growing churches.¹¹⁶

2. Christian adults are to be mobilized by the needs of children in and outside the Church

This is an essential part of Miller-McLemore's theology of childhood. She writes, 'The practice of raising children belongs to all Christians, and not solely to parents or to mothers'. 'Children are not private property' but 'need a more generic kind of social mothering' beyond biological parents and which 'depends upon the willingness of nonbiologically related adults to adopt children as a primary responsibility'.¹¹⁷ Following our own adoption into the divine family, 'Christians are called to transcend common biological loyalties and extend the same generosity of spirit toward children not their own'.¹¹⁸

This is essential for Mercer, too, who goes deeper on how to understand this responsibility and also extends it beyond only a mother or biological parents. She uses the language of gift stewardship to describe this responsibility of both parents and the whole Christian community, noting that the status of child-as-gift 'comes not from some idealized sense of awe and wonder, innocence and ease in relation to adults, but from their creation as children of God',¹¹⁹ and that this includes the often heavy and challenging work of caring for 'our' children and 'others' children.¹²⁰ It also includes addressing the suffering of children and requires the 'transformation' of the Church itself.¹²¹

Anderson and Johnson focus first on the responsibilities of adults within the Christian family, which they understand can take a diverse variety of forms. The family is responsible to the child for 'safety', 'the enduring, irrational involvement of at least one adult in care and joint activity with the child', 'developmentally appropriate expectations and behavior', 'role models for being an adult and for belonging to a family' and 'respect for personal boundaries'.¹²² The Church's responsibility is to become 'a sanctuary for childhood', one that will 'support the vocation of being a parent throughout its ever-changing roles' and 'continue to

¹¹¹'There are some of those who think that the child's only value for humanity lies in the fact that he will some day be an adult. In this way they detract from the true value of childhood by shifting it only into the future. This cannot be justified.' Montessori, *The Child in the Church*, p. 6.

¹¹²1930 Resolution 75.

¹¹³1968 Resolution 28.

¹¹⁴1968 Resolution 29.

¹¹⁵1988 Resolution 48.

¹¹⁶1998 Resolution 5.4.

¹¹⁷Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, p. 165.

¹¹⁸Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, p. 167.

¹¹⁹Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 245.

¹²⁰Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 66.

¹²¹Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 244.

¹²²Anderson & Johnson, *Regarding Children*, pp. 49-56.

intervene when children or families experience extraordinary problems and needs' and 'advocate for systemic change where families are endangered by social conditions'.¹²³

Couture also speaks of adult responsibility, arguing that '[c]hildren's poverty must be overcome by [adults] building relationships with vulnerable children'.¹²⁴ The words 'shared responsibility' are 'words of judgment, consolation, and liberation';¹²⁵ this is part of the prophetic call to care for the orphan, which is an actual task.¹²⁶

We see this same belief – that Christian adults must act for the needs of children – in almost every year of the Lambeth Conference.

Children within the Church are to be cared for 'in the midst of great challenges',¹²⁷ with careful and serious thought by their parents,¹²⁸ godparents,¹²⁹ and clergy,¹³⁰ with concern at every level of the Church.¹³¹ The Conference has fallen short of this vision when it has confined itself to Christian 'children of the English-speaking race'.¹³²

Christians also are to take on the work involved with caring for all children, outside the Church. In the resolutions, this includes providing education,¹³³ defining and shaping the child's family,¹³⁴ supporting just systems of labor,¹³⁵ preventing harm and building safety,¹³⁶ opposing war and segregation,¹³⁷ and working for economic justice.¹³⁸

In the resolutions, interpretations vary and change over time about what is actually best for children. For example, earlier resolutions are concerned with eliminating the possibility of divorce, but children are no longer invoked in the discussion after 1948. The topics addressed also suggest a shifting perception of what is most urgent, or perhaps what is related to the work of the bishops in the Church. For example, there is a significant difference from discussing 'unwholesome' films that may hurt children,¹³⁹ to discussing child prostitution.¹⁴⁰

Starting in 1908, the Lambeth Conferences have also encouraged Christians to work with the state or try to change the state to get children what they need.

¹²³Anderson & Johnson, *Regarding Children*, p. 113.

¹²⁴Couture, *Seeing Children*, p. 14.

¹²⁵Couture, *Seeing Children*, p. 16.

¹²⁶Couture, *Seeing Children*, pp. 75-77.

¹²⁷1948 Resolution 30.

¹²⁸1930 Resolutions 14 ('the duty of parenthood as the glory of married life') and 12; 1908 Resolutions 13 and 19; 1948 Resolutions 104 and 108; and 1958 Resolutions 115 and 127.

¹²⁹1948 Resolution 107.

¹³⁰1897 Resolution 48; 1958 Resolution 114 and 122; 1988 Resolution 48; and 1998 Resolution II.8.

¹³¹1998 Resolution II.8.

¹³²1908 Resolution 15.

¹³³1920 Resolution 77.

¹³⁴1948 Resolution 97.

¹³⁵1958 Resolution 127.

¹³⁶1988 Resolution 28, 1998 Resolution I.3.

¹³⁷1968 Resolution 14, 1988 Resolution 39.

¹³⁸1998 Resolution I.15

¹³⁹1948 Resolution 4, one resolution out of 118 that year.

¹⁴⁰1998 Resolution I.3, one resolution out of 107 that year.

Christians can work within the law to get children what they need,¹⁴¹ can try to change the law,¹⁴² or work for reform,¹⁴³ and pressure government.¹⁴⁴

3. The sacraments and community of the Church belong already to the children in the Church

This is a more narrow aspect of the responsibility of Christian adults to Christian children. This claim follows those we have explored above and of course will take different shapes in different Christian traditions, including in different branches of the Anglican tradition.

Of the works reviewed in the introduction, Mercer's *Welcoming Children* explores most thoroughly how church practices do not always act out church beliefs, and how children can be trained in a church entirely different from the one in which their parents worship—even when it is the very same parish. Speaking of the responsibilities of adults described above, she says, 'Adult support includes active work to apprentice children in the identity of Christian discipleship as an alternative identity'.¹⁴⁵ And, 'for children to gain an identity as members in the community of practice, they must have access not only to its edges but also to its core, in the form of access to its centrally defining practices'. For '[i]f children only participate in the less central, less identity-defining practices, then children have little chance of learning – and of being formed and transformed in – an identity through their participation in practices'.¹⁴⁶

Anderson and Johnson add in their vision of the church 'a sanctuary for childhood', that it 'will welcome children as full participants in the life of God's people' and 'the formation of faithful children will have new direction and urgency'.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, '[w]hen child membership [in the religious community] is only provisional . . . the catholicity of the believing community is diminished and its witness to a new view of childhood is muffled, because being human is still defined by criteria of adulthood'.¹⁴⁸

For Anglicans and Episcopalians, the 'apprenticing' that Mercer speaks of can include elements like participation in appropriate ways in the sacraments,¹⁴⁹ as well as access to other central activities and wisdom of the Christian community. Indeed, the Lambeth resolutions that mention children or youth show a real concern that children have access to what they need in the Church.

¹⁴¹1908 Resolution 13.

¹⁴²1948 Resolution 97.

¹⁴³1920 Resolution 77.

¹⁴⁴1968 Resolution 14, 1988 Resolution 39, 1998 Resolution I.15.

¹⁴⁵Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 255.

¹⁴⁶Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p. 201. Her closing chapters explore this issue with many detailed case studies, focusing on North American mainline churches.

¹⁴⁷Andrew and Johnson, *Regarding Children*, p. 113.

¹⁴⁸Andrew and Johnson, *Regarding Children*, p. 115.

¹⁴⁹In an Anglican context, this could include not just receiving baptism or receiving the Eucharist, but also praying (looking, smelling, tasting) as a congregant at weddings and funerals, and participating in the rite of reconciliation in developmentally appropriate ways. Cavalletti's lessons on confession have been successfully adapted in Anglican and Episcopal contexts for this last purpose.

We see this in the resolutions about baptism. Seven of our 41 resolutions address baptism and four of them emphasize children's access to it: 'baptism should not be deferred' even when the 'Christian training' of the child is not easily accomplished;¹⁵⁰ baptism should be offered to 'children of members of any Church of the Orthodox Eastern Communion in cases of emergency';¹⁵¹ the Conference 'deprecate[s] the hasty adoption of any policy which would lead to the widespread exclusion of infants from baptism';¹⁵² and baptism should be extended to the children of a polygamist under certain conditions.¹⁵³

Access also includes education and other support that helps children interpret and fully participate in the sacraments and the community of practice (to use Mercer's phrase). The resolutions about baptism also emphasize the need for the child to have 'Christian training',¹⁵⁴ to be 'brought up in the faith and practice of the Church' and to receive 'Christian nurture and education',¹⁵⁵ to be blessed with the prayers of their godparents,¹⁵⁶ and to be (with the clergy's help) 'linked up with the life' of the parish in which they live.¹⁵⁷

Seven additional resolutions discuss religious instruction and formation. Getting children this instruction in the midst of secular education and secularism,¹⁵⁸ and this teaching continues even in 'increasing difficulties'.¹⁵⁹ Youth also need to be taught about marriage before the marriage itself.¹⁶⁰ Education is also needed for adults (clergy, parents, teachers) so that they can better teach and involve students.¹⁶¹

Later resolutions also express concern about children having access to the community in terms of decision-making – that 'the church should have regard for their concern',¹⁶² and that they should be involved in 'decision-making'.¹⁶³

Theological attention to humanity is not complete without theological attention to children. In these 41 resolutions we see a glimpse of attention paid to children, and what questions and convictions are possible to find even in that glimpse. 'Childhood' is an experience that all Christians who live to adulthood have shared; with care we may be able to understand it well as Christians, and perhaps even to welcome children as Christ would have us do.

¹⁵⁰1897 Resolution 48.

¹⁵¹1908 Resolution 62.

¹⁵²1948 Resolution 104.

¹⁵³1988 Resolution 26.

¹⁵⁴1897 Resolution 48.

¹⁵⁵1948 Resolution 10.

¹⁵⁶1948 Resolution 107.

¹⁵⁷1948 Resolution 108.

¹⁵⁸1908 Resolutions 13 and 19, 1958 Resolution 122.

¹⁵⁹1948 Resolution 30.

¹⁶⁰1958 Resolution 114.

¹⁶¹1930 Resolution 12.

¹⁶²1968 Resolution 28.

¹⁶³1968 Resolution 29.