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The Logic of the Spirit in Human Thought and Experience

Exploring the Vision of James E. Loder Jr.

Edited by

DANA R. WRIGHT *and* KEITH J. WHITE

Foreword by John S. McClure

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THE LOGIC OF THE SPIRIT IN HUMAN THOUGHT AND EXPERIENCE
Exploring the Vision of James E. Loder Jr.

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Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>List of Contributors</i> | <i>ix</i> |
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | <i>xii</i> |
| <i>Foreword by John S. McClure</i> | <i>xiii</i> |
| <i>Preface by Keith J. White</i> | <i>xvii</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | <i>xxiii</i> |

| | |
|--|---|
| Introduction: <i>Homo Testans</i> : The Life, Work, and Witness of James E. Loder Jr.— <i>Dana R. Wright</i> | 1 |
|--|---|

PART ONE—The Child Theology Movement and James E. Loder in Dialogue

- 1 Child Theology, Loder, and Holistic Child Development
—*Keith J. White* 33
- 2 Forgiving Constitutes the Person—*Haddon Willmer* 58
- 3 James E. Loder and Paul in Conversation: Discourses of Development and Disruption
—*Elizabeth Waldron Barnett* 78

PART TWO—James E. Loder and Christian Education Theory and Practice

- 4 *The Transforming Moment* and Godly Play
—*Jerome W. Berryman* 105
- 5 Baptizing John Dewey: James Loder's Pedagogy of Presence Theory and Practice—*Thomas John Hastings* 131
- 6 Pedagogical Implications of Loder's Theory of Transformation—*Lauren Sempsrott Foster* 143

- 7 *Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit: A Loder Legacy?*—*Dana R. Wright* 155

PART THREE—James E. Loder’s Relevance to Psychology, Counseling, and Sociology

- 8 The Healing of Memory as a Pathway to Transformation: A Case Study Presenting James Loder’s Counsel—*Mark Koonz* 205
- 9 Transformation of the Ego: A Study via Sudhir Kakar and James E. Loder—*Ajit A. Prasadam* 243
- 10 Walking Alongside Children as They Form Compassion: Loder and Lerner in the Role of Relationships and Experience as Interactive Developmental Process—*Wendy Hinrichs Sanders* 268

PART FOUR—James E. Loder and the Transformation of Christian Witness

- 11 A Tactical Child-Like Way of Being Human Together: Implications from James Loder’s Thought for Post-Colonial Christian Witness—*Dana R. Wright* 291

Loder Bibliography 333

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Contributors

xi

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Illustrations

Photo of James E. Loder Jr. in Later Life. Princeton Theological
Seminary ii

Child Theology Movement Logo xvii

Photo of James E. Loder Jr. as a Young Scholar. Princeton
Theological Seminary 10

Loder's Theological Interpretation of Talcott Parsons' Action
Theory 182

Damasio's Emotional Thought Diagram 277

PART ONE

The Child Theology Movement
and James E. Loder in Dialogue

1

Child Theology, Loder, and Holistic Child Development (HCD)

KEITH J. WHITE

Introduction

The original title of this paper was “Loder and Child Theology.” You will see that I have taken the liberty not only of changing the title, but reversing it. “Figure and ground transformed,” I imagine I hear James Loder saying! What’s more, there is an acronym tacked on the end that you may not recognize. I plead guilty, and do so willingly because I found I could neither write the first part the other way round, nor finish without the second. Perhaps you will judge that the ensuing silence would have been a better option. We shall see!

The paper is in two parts. In the first I reflect on some of the emerging themes in Child Theology that connect with the work of James Loder. In the second part I make a plea to you to imagine and suggest with me some possible practical implications for the interface between theology and what has been called “Holistic Child Development.”¹ HCD is closely related to Christian Education, the subject on which Loder was engaged directly and indirectly throughout much of his academic career. One of

1. For information on Holistic Child Development (HCD) see www.hcd-alliance.org.

the latent functions of the paper is to tell of my own debt of gratitude to Loder. Of course I am not a true apostle like some of those present at this colloquium, for I never met him in the flesh! I have arrived at Princeton for the first time too late. Like Paul I was “untimely born” in this respect. But the work of Loder has been of crucial significance to me in my daily life among children and young people, and in my writing about Christian education (in its broadest sense). I had resisted till the last a personal aspect to my paper, but on sharing a rough draft with a trusted friend, I realized that this would be as untrue to the facts as it would be to the work and example of James Loder.

All I knew of humanity through children, all I knew of theology, and all I knew of child development (and I freely admit that it all adds up to very little) came together in my book *The Growth of Love* (hereafter *Growth*).² And the fact is that I am not sure I could have written this book without the work of Loder. Now it is vital to emphasize that *Growth* is not Child Theology: indeed the book specifically points this out.³ It is an exploration on the theme of love that is always open to human experience, secular theory, and biblical theology. It was Loder’s diagram on page 75 of *The Logic of the Spirit* (hereafter *Logic*) that was of pivotal importance to me: that, and the observation of Thomas Torrance on the comparison between Barth’s theology and Einstein’s physics.⁴ In my opinion, what Barth had done in theology and Einstein had done in physics, so Loder attempted in his work—notably *Logic* and *The Transforming Moment* (hereafter *Transforming*)—a revolutionary new configuration of understanding the relationships between previously disparate or unconnected aspects of reality and theory. In Barth’s case we might say that the constant is God in Christ; in Einstein’s it is the constancy of the speed of light; and in Loder’s it is the constancy of the generative power and dynamics of the Holy Spirit.

As soon as I began to grasp this connection I saw at once that in much of my theoretical reflection I had been constrained by a rather Euclidean, two-dimensional world⁵ of the social sciences, where ego

2. White, *Growth*.

3. It so happened that I wrote it speedily while working with Haddon Willmer on our essay in *Child Theology*, and it was therefore necessary to keep the two processes apart, for the sake of clarity.

4. Loder *Logic*, 32–33.

5. For Loder’s exposition of the two-dimensional and four-dimensional worlds, see *Transforming*, chapter 3, 67–91.

development was one of the primary constants, implicitly or not. I had assumed that progress was the goal at every level, from the individual to the global, and that this progress was synonymous with human development, despite the scientific fact that we all die, that the planet on which we live is destined for destruction, and that we live between little and big infinities. That is, I had repressed or blocked out the Void (including death) and the Holy in myriad ways. By making the growth of love the central theme of my book, I was open to reality, because love does not run away from truth, or death, or the Void. Rather, it takes account of, and even embraces reality.⁶ But enough of that for now!

What follows are five of the themes emerging thus far in an enterprise called Child Theology that resonate with the work of James Loder. You will see from the outset that my thoughts are by nature tentative and exploratory. At most they seek to identify possible resemblances, connections and analogies. There is little or no sense of arrival or completion. And this is, I suggest, as it should be. The fact is that we are at the earliest possible stage in a conversation. We are trying to establish terms and frames of reference to see if we are talking about the same things by other names. We have arrived at a place of meeting by different routes, and we are inquiring as to whether our respective experiences and knowledge thus far can be communicated one to the other. My hunch, or intuition, is that we will in time, even if not at this stage in the process, find new light thrown on our paths, and even that we have been walking similar paths without knowing it. We shall see.

Five Emerging Themes in Child Theology and Connections with Loder's Work

I will start from the work that Haddon Willmer and I have been doing,⁷ rather than seek to encompass all that is going on under the banner of Child Theology worldwide. For example, Beth Barnett's paper in this volume (chapter 3) shows how she is working as a biblical theologian, exploring child and theology in the Pauline corpus. And in his paper (see chapter 2) Haddon Willmer connects his lifelong interest in forgiveness to Child Theology and Loder. Others are beavering away at differ-

6. I have in mind here particularly Rom 8:35–39.

7. We have been exploring Matt 18:1–14 together for over a decade. See our book *Entry Point*.

ent aspects of Child Theology. We ask: what are five emerging themes in Child Theology that connect to the work of James Loder?

The Child as Sign

This theme might sound so unexceptional as not to detain us, but it doesn't take long before its importance dawns on any who pause to reflect on child and theology. If, as we have done, you take the classic passage in Matthew 18:1–14 you will quickly see that theologians have treated the little child in very different ways.⁸ Some have focused on the child to the detriment of nearly all else. The little child in her vulnerability, connectedness, spirituality, humility, virtue and whatever else, is presumed to hold the very keys to the kingdom! The child in this way of doing things has become the focus of the story, and possibly even of theology. Child spirituality is a natural outcome, or companion, of the approach. Others have gone in exactly the opposite direction and seen the child as representing the disciples (present and future), the “little ones” who are like lambs sent into a world of wolves. The child has been brought in like a Power Point slide to illustrate a point, and can be dispensed with as soon as we have seen that she represents others (You might prefer the image of the husk and the kernel of a grain of wheat).

Child Theology has paused to reflect on the meaning of this child placed in the midst by Jesus as a sign.⁹ Please note, we are not trying to be dogmatic or doctrinaire. We are trying to do justice to Jesus, the text and the context, as well as to the child!¹⁰ And we have found that pausing yields dividends. There is, arguably, nothing quite like this action and teaching in the Gospels. There is a real little child, about whom we know nothing, including gender. There are disciples. And Jesus places the child among them, as well as in the midst of their argument about greatness in the kingdom of heaven. The child is there beside Jesus as some sort of sign, clue, key, or perhaps even catalyst. And it is Jesus, the teacher or leader of his disciples, who tells us what the child means or signifies. He interprets the sign, because like any sign the little child

8. I have tried to cover some of this ground in White, “He Placed,” 353–74.

9. An example of such reflection is White, “Children as Signs,” 41–59.

10. When using the word “child” it is necessary to bear in mind that what we understand and mean by child in the contemporary world is not identical to what it meant in the time of Jesus. Given that we are trying to see “child” as sign, this is a vital point. It is all too easy for modern readers to interpret the sign wrongly.

requires interpretation, by definition. Signs can by themselves mean many different things. A sign is not a carrier or communicator of a plain meaning. Jesus helps us to see what the child is signing. As his disciples we must tread carefully lest we read it wrongly and go off track.

Some of you will already have seen the creative connections with this theme and the argument of *The Transforming Moment*. There is little doubt that Jesus intended his action and accompanying teaching to be just such a moment: a disclosure, a convicting experience, and therefore a potentially “transforming event” (to use Loder’s term). But, if you have seen this link, you will be equally quick to point out that in no way did the disciples experience the incident as a transforming event. And this is where another term that Loder uses in *Transforming*, “*eikonic eclipse*,”¹¹ may be of relevance. He uses it to mean something typically precise: the erroneous way in which rationalist discourse cuts off reason from its generative sources. But the term may be of wider use when considering the child as sign (*ikon*) in this episode. For some reason the disciples neither have eyes to see what the sign revealed, nor ears to hear what Jesus was saying in relation to the sign. And this, sadly, can be taken to represent much, if not most, theological inquiry and church practice down through the centuries. We might therefore say that there has been an eikonic eclipse both in the case of the disciples present with Jesus as he placed the little child among them, and also in church history from Pentecost to the present day. Using Dewey and Piaget, Loder explains how they bring a frame of reference to the object of their study which rules out as much discontinuity as possible.¹² And that is a distillation, he argues, that lies at the heart of eikonic eclipse. So when Jesus introduces a radically new dimension of reality, the kingdom of God, and does so in this instance with a radically new sign, it would be understandable if the disciples were thrown back on to their traditional, existing frames of reference in order to cope with the threatening discontinuity. And perhaps theologians have done the same down through the centuries. Be that as it may, for whatever reason the sign of the child has generally suffered eikonic eclipse.

Loder offers further reflections on signs that are of general significance to Child Theology, as well as of specific relevance to an understanding of this passage. In *Transforming* he focuses on convictional

11. Loder, *Transforming*, 26f, 223.

12. *Ibid.*, 47.

experiences, like his own accident, and like the conversion of St Paul. Such experiences risk being discredited (marginalized) theologically on the one hand, or given canonical significance on the other.¹³ And this is where he shows an acute awareness of what is at stake with a sign. Bear in mind as you read this that Child Theology starts, as it were, in the middle of an argument about the kingdom of God.

. . . [t]here are important theological observations to be made. These experiences may be understood under a category of biblical theology such as “signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God.” This is a helpful category because it prevents the experiences themselves from being worshipped, and points to God of whose Kingdom they are signs. Moreover, relegated to the status of “signs,” they are prevented from being strictly private experiences, granting personal powers and divine privileges to the convicted person. This strips away the narcissism that accumulates around these events and confirms the experience as belonging not pre-eminently [*sic*] to an individual but to all who have eyes to see . . .”¹⁴

This statement puts very well one of the extremes that we have been seeking to avoid in CTM: the canonization of the child. I think we are all aware of the attraction and strength of what is often called the “Child Spirituality Movement.” It represents much careful observation and exploration, but it is always open to the temptation of placing the child on some sort of pedestal from which adults are deemed, *pace* Wordsworth, to have fallen. Loder points out towards the end of *Transforming* that “a child’s innocence provokes . . . religious longing,”¹⁵ and a “nostalgia for the more deeply repressed longing for the enduring face.”¹⁶ It seems to me that we must be careful to keep this nostalgic longing within proper bounds. Child as sign may be a helpful contribution to this process. We will explore it a little further in section 3 below.

Before leaving this matter, let me say that I wonder whether the work of Loder, at Princeton or in the wider Christian academy, has not itself suffered eikonic eclipse. Is he so impossible to locate in our existing theological and developmental categories that we tend to rule him out

13. *Ibid.*, 18, 19.

14. *Ibid.*, 19.

15. *Ibid.*, 177.

16. *Ibid.*, 166.

(generally that is, not among those here) by retreating into our preconceived frameworks? Is the discontinuity he brings far too threatening, I wonder? And am I alone in finding it hard very often to know whether he is writing about a sign or about substance?

Entry to the Kingdom of Heaven

The sign of the child is accompanied by the words of Jesus: “unless you change and become humble like the little children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁷ There is something inherently scandalous about this teaching that may well help to explain why it has not been given due attention. It is not long before the disciples ask Jesus, “Who then can be saved?”¹⁸ (This is a good theological question, if ever there was one!). The disciples take it for granted that they are already in the kingdom: the only thing to be settled is the pecking order! Jesus deconstructs (Loder talks of “rupture in the knowing context”¹⁹ and “conflict”) their whole understanding (if they could but take it in). They see things in terms of linear progress and development, or perhaps investment of time and energy in the hope of a return. Jesus challenges fundamentally their frame of reference, replete with the idea of high status as a reward for loyalty for the insiders, as distinct from the “others.”

Now let’s be clear, the whole idea of the Kingdom of God (to use the term more frequently used outside the Gospel of Matthew), and what it means to enter it, is far from easy theologically. People and denominations still seem to fall into errors very similar to that of the disciples. But given the action and teaching of Jesus, here and in his parables, and the centrality of the Cross to his mission, he brings a sweeping and comprehensive challenge to human systems and assumptions. Jesus has spoken the unthinkable to his disciples. He says, in effect, “You are outsiders, who make the very mistake that you see in the Pharisees, by thinking that you are the true, the only insiders.” But Jesus does not just challenge their rather parochial and personal thinking. He places their culture, tradition and hope under question.

17. Matt 18:4.

18. Matt 19:25.

19. Loder, *Transforming*, 37.

And this is where Loder, like Barth²⁰ and Kierkegaard (to name but two), is willing to be open to the scandal of the teaching of Jesus, and to the rupture of knowing that this scandal demands, if it is to be allowed to become active in the process of change. Loder is willing to be guided by the leading and logic of the Spirit, as the Spirit illuminates his understanding of the teaching, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He is, if you like, willing to walk by faith where this illumination leads. The transcendent God is God, and we are His creatures. Nothing we can do can contribute as much as a single brick to build a bridge across this infinite gulf. The kingdom of God is not, *pace* Harvey Cox *et al*, another way of understanding human progress, but almost exactly the opposite. Jesus specifically points this out very soon after this incident in Matthew's Gospel.²¹

Even allowing for the subtlety and mystery of the whole notion of the kingdom of heaven, it might be said that Fowler's *Stages of Faith* has more than a little to do with entry into it. And I think that we all know what Loder thought of that!²² But we must also take account of the full range of developmental theory, human longings, ambitions, schemes and not forget religion. Jesus is not making general points here, whether about the kingdom of God, or about the Gospel, although we may well find some universal truths or principles. He is talking specifically about entry. And the disciples need to unlearn most if not all of what they have assumed or learned about that. *Transforming* and *Logic* both have much to contribute to this particular theme.²³ The section in *Transforming* where Loder refers to H. R. Niebuhr's treatment of *metanoia* may be especially relevant here.²⁴ And *Logic* as a whole is a deconstruction of

20. It is one of the main themes of Barth's commentary on Romans that no human being has a possible place or position above any other when it comes to the matter of God's grace.

21. Matt 19:26, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"; Matthew 20:25 "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . not so with you."

22. Wright, "Loder," 13.

23. Loder, *Transforming*, argues that convicting experiences or moments, which can be taken as points of entry, are automatically resisted by well tried and tested processes. In *Logic* he argues that the Spirit is ceaselessly at work trying to deconstruct the false enterprise of the ego in order that God's grace might be received.

24. Loder, *Transforming*, 19–20.

every aspect of human endeavor that believes it can build its own way to God, and “gain entry to the kingdom” by its own means.

Like Loder, in taking Jesus at his word, CTM finds itself questioning much of the Christian establishment, with the challenge that those who see themselves not only as insiders, but as leading lights or exemplary organizations and churches, may need to consider seriously whether or not they are outsiders, in need of repentance. And this message does not guarantee a warm reception. “Don’t rock the boat” is one phrase that has been used by the leader of a Christian organization. Indeed, the underlying and controversial message of *Logic* is that much human energy, effort and achievement is based on what Loder sees as the falsely and inadequately founded, and ultimately vain, enterprise of the human ego.²⁵

The Child and Christ

There is in the story as told by Matthew a remarkable closeness between the child and Jesus that is more than mere physical proximity. At no point does Jesus attempt to draw any distinction between the little child and himself, and his words imply the opposite. By welcoming one such little child in Christ’s name one welcomes Christ (and the one who sent him, if we draw from the accounts of Mark 9:33–37 and Luke 9:46–48). Yet, the child is not Christ, and Christ is not the child. That distinction is critical in the account of the story, and of our theological understanding of it. But we are still confronted with a connection between them that seems too close for comfort.

Here we find all sorts of theological approaches being taken and the arguments are varied. Some immediately think of the birth narratives: Jesus the little child. They invite us to see Jesus especially in every child. Thus the child represents childhood, which is the theological state of all humans before God as distinct from adult, which is a human construction. And so on. But what is the meaning of the sign of the child in relation to Christ in Matthew 18? Does the context help us at all? One thing is clear and very important: Jesus does not look back to his own childhood, but looks forward to the Cross. He confronts the Void. Can it

25. While thinking about and preparing for this paper I had been rereading Barth’s second commentary on Romans, and the congruence of his message with that of CTM and Loder is uncanny.

be, therefore, that the little child is a reiteration of the call to his disciples to take up the Cross? Could it be that to embrace a child in an act of welcome or reception is to embrace the Cross?

We must, as always, be careful. It is not that the child is Christ or vice-versa, but that in welcoming the little child one welcomes Christ. The key is the action of welcoming or receiving the child. Earlier I referred to the way in which a sign can be worshiped, and quoted Loder on the risk of narcissism. The meaning of the child in the story is often taken to be that there are childlike qualities that the disciples should cultivate. Thus “change . . . and become humble like the little child” is seen to require spiritual commitment and discipline on their part. Without decrying the place of such discipline, it is vital to note that at no stage does Jesus hint at anything like this. Rather he gives the following statement: “when you receive a child in my name you welcome me.”

Note that we have moved from “little children” (plural, verse 3) to “child in my name” (singular, verse 4) in the words of Jesus. This is not a general call to get involved with children. Remember that the parable of the single lost sheep is just around the corner in Matthew’s account (verses 10–14)! What if the process of changing and becoming humble happens as an integral part of welcoming a child? We may need to pause to take this in. If such an interpretation is on the right lines, then the focus is no longer on spiritual development in myself, but on opening myself to receive a little child. Now surely the testimony of parenthood in general, and motherhood in particular, is that a full and healthy reception of a little child requires a considerable amount of change, all in the direction of stooping! So this may help us to understand the element of change that Jesus requires of his disciples.

But you reply, where is there any self-awareness of welcoming Christ in the process? The answer is that there isn’t any. The kingdom is not entered as a result of a conscious spiritual act, but as an unconscious by-product of a welcoming action. It is just like the story Jesus will tell of the eschatological judgment recorded in Matthew 25. There it is precisely the absence of this awareness of welcoming Christ in both contrasted groups that is the key feature of the narrative. In welcoming others we have welcomed the Son of Man. Such a reading of Matthew 18 is therefore not only of practical relevance, but also of consistent exegesis. The alternative notion—that is, of receiving a child as a means of achieving spiritual virtue—though not uncommon in church history, and possibly

current Christian education, is surely as repugnant as it is theologically unsound. The motive for welcoming a little child in the name of Jesus is not for any purpose other than love or compassion.

If we keep the concept of welcoming or receiving a little child firmly within the overarching concept of love and loving the child, then Loder has this to offer from his chapter in *Transforming*, “From Negation to Love”: “. . . to continue to love as one has been loved is the only way to abide in the transformation effected by His Spirit . . . the only way to participate in it is to give love as it was given.”²⁶ The disciples were still a long way from this practice, with the key word being “abide.” As the child stands among them they are not living in, or embracing, the present reality and situation. Rather, they are looking back to what they have done. But relating to Jesus is never a case of stopping to count, as it were, the credits, as if the metaphor of a balance sheet is in any way relevant, let alone adequate. And he does not ask the disciples to list the number of children they have received in his name. In the here and now a child stands before them. The kingdom is as fresh as the morning dew, the *manna* in the wilderness, green as a leaf. Welcoming and love are lived in the present with no reckoning on anything remotely related to greatness or littleness in the kingdom.

Before we move on it is worth noting that the “*I yet not I but Christ*” unity²⁷ and dialectic that is central to Christian theology and to the work of Loder may be helpful in understanding the relationship between the little child and Christ as in so much doing of Child Theology. Is there a strange, Mobius-type loop here, I wonder? What if the way in which Christ becomes part of me is by means of welcoming a little child? Certainly the disciples strongly resist acceptance of the real Christ, the Suffering Servant, who must be rejected and die an ignominious death. Does welcoming the child at least indicate a way in which some of this resistance might be overcome? We must move on, because Loder does not, so far as I am aware, explore this particular passage in this context or way, but we have made a mental note to revisit it.

26. Loder, *Transforming*, 180.

27. Loder, *Logic*, 120, 145.

The Child, the Cross and Negation

The themes of Cross and Negation are arguably two of Loder's most widely-acknowledged, yet neglected and misunderstood, contributions to human development theory from a theological perspective.²⁸ These themes remain underdeveloped, both in terms of practical research as far as I know, and also in terms of theology's relationship with the human sciences. Much more time is still spent working with Augustine's *Confessions* and his concept of Original Sin, than with Loder's theory of Negation, for example. Child Theology, to be serious, has been trying to understand sin, Original Sin, and all sin with particular reference to the child.²⁹ And this is no easy matter. But Loder draws our attention to possible ways forward. If you put together pages 91–94 and pages 122–24 of *Logic*—his analysis of child or ego development and the doctrine of Original Sin—there is an obvious invitation to consider these themes together. It is a tantalizingly brief reference to so influential a subject, but one that deserves theological attention. Another connection is the way that the development of an individual human being mirrors, reflects, or is congruent with, the development of the universe. And still another connection is the way that human civilization represents an extension of the vain attempt of the individual's ego to build an identity, a name, or to seek security and safety for itself by denying or repressing the Void (do I hear Karl Barth say "Amen!" in the background here?)³⁰ Echoing Ivan Illich's notion of the "ritualization of progress,"³¹ Loder refers to the way in which this "distortion of the human spirit is repeated as a widely exercised dynamic in socialization systems from the achievement-oriented family, to the public school classroom, and American business practices

28. Loder developed this theme in *Transforming*, 157–69 as well as in *Logic*, 91–94 and 122–24.

29. See Willmer, *Experimenting*.

30. "This world has . . . form and shape; and it possesses a law, a general pressure towards concreteness, to light-created light. This pressure towards enjoyment, possession, success, knowledge, power, rightness; this vigorous movement towards an attainable comprehensible perfection; this pressure . . . forms the mysterious pivot round which the whole world of human genius revolves . . . and . . . genius is . . . our beloved ego" (Barth, *Epistle*, 433–34).

31. Loder, *Transforming*, 166, referring to Illich, *De-Schooling*, chapter 3.

...”³² The key to understanding the source of much human and societal dynamics and structures is the little child in our midst.

Stooping to welcome one little child is, in a sense, a way of turning away from the lure and temptation of participating in the great human project, which is to build a reassuring and impressive home and a name for ourselves independent of God in Christ. And when we see this we can also recognize how easily the religious project can work in tandem with society, with scant recognition of the nature and dynamics of the kingdom of God and its transformational logic. It is also a reminder to anyone who would canonize this little child as a paragon of virtue, forgetting that the child who has passed the toddler stage has already begun, albeit unconsciously, to construct an ego against the Void. The disciples, of course, as human beings and as members of their oppressed nation, have done the same. The idea of the Kingdom of God that they have as their guiding framework is about a political restoration of power to Israel. And the sign and call of Jesus to the Cross works toward a negation of this negation of God’s will and the logic of the Spirit of Christ.

In our study of this incident as told by Matthew we have been increasingly drawn to the conjunction of the little child and the Cross. But this conjunction is so counterintuitive that we need faith even to begin to venture into such new territory. We did not come across it via the idea or metaphor of the face (see below), but rather by beginning to understand the little child placed by Jesus as a reiteration of the call to the Cross. Both involve turning, and becoming humble. But the Cross, in and of itself, is a call to total denial, loss and emptiness, whereas receiving the little child is a call that involves a degree of new life. We need to explore the twin calls to take up the Cross, and to become humble like little children in relation to Loder’s work. Intuitively it would seem to be exactly the sort of dynamic we might expect of the logic of the Spirit, with its paradoxes and negations that lead to life in Christ.

The scandalous reality of the Cross, with its horrendous void epitomized by the cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?,” is often rejected in practice by Christians and the Church throughout history. And likewise the idea of child and negation has largely been rejected (whether consciously or not), in human development and theological studies. I sense a hidden link or congruence here, yet to be uncovered and explored. The Cross is about Negation in its starkest form.

32. Loder, *Transforming*, 166.

What happens, I wonder, if we connect the Cross with “the triumph of negation” in the little child?

The Face

This last concern leads us naturally to the matter of the Face, because the argument about negation in Loder takes place within the context of the search for the Face that is the inevitable consequence of cosmic loneliness. This theme is developed on pages 118–21 of *Logic*, and on pages 162–69 in *Transforming* with particular reference to Jesus as the Face of God. As we worked slowly through Matthew Chapter 18 we were, of course, brought to the very same word *prosopon*: “See that you do not despise the least of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels always behold the face of the Father in heaven.”³³ This is not the place to attempt a biblical and theological exposition of such an important theme. But we do well to remind ourselves that the face described in the Servant Song in Isaiah 52 and 53³⁴ is the very stumbling block to greatness in the kingdom of God that Peter represents for Jesus and trips over himself.³⁵ Jesus will look at Peter face to face.³⁶ And we too are destined to meet that Face, face to face in the life beyond.³⁷ The reference in Matthew 18:11 bristles with questions for those who seek to understand it aright: Who or what are the angels, and what do they represent? What difference do they make to little children on earth? What about the orphans, many of them child soldiers or prostitutes, who cry into the Void and hear nothing but the hollow echo of their lonely weeping? Loder is one of many who have seen some of the profound implications of the child’s search for a face, and the fact that theologically speaking, all human faces represent but a dim reflection of the Face of the Father. Fathers and mothers may forsake children but the Lord is always there to welcome

33. Matt 18: 11.

34. “His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness . . . He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him . . . Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not . . .” (Isa 52:14; 53:2–3).

35. Matt 16:21–23. This exchange concludes with the words of Jesus, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

36. Luke 22:61.

37. 1 Cor 13:12.

and receive them.³⁸ This is the epitome, source and end of all acts of welcome and reception that lie at the heart of entry into, and the life of, the Kingdom of God. For no welcome is complete without the Face that greets you at the door, as C. S. Lewis, for example, portrays so vividly in *The Last Battle* at the end of time.³⁹

You will see from this short excursus that starting this way, with Child Theology, has led us to connect with some of the key themes in Loder's work. You might even imagine *his* face smiling and lighting up as we happen upon thoughts and insights that he had been mulling over for years. It is vital to be clear on one point: this reception is not about a simple affirmation of the status quo. The reception of the child in the name of Jesus brings change, even disturbance. There are avenues opening up in CTM that will necessitate new thinking through a sustained engagement with Loder's work. At the same time you will notice that there are themes in Loder that CTM has not yet actively explored. For example, little attention has been given to the Holy Spirit and the child, although there is every indication that this theme will prove rewarding when it commences.⁴⁰ And you may well have your own observations about what remains still to be connected. CTM would welcome any thoughtful contribution to the developing conversation that is beginning now.

Towards an Integrated Christian Education

Now let me turn to the second part of my paper, dealing with some other avenues that could open up as a result of the conversation between CTM and Loder. I guess that a few of these possibilities have become apparent already, but here are some suggestions. All the time we must bear in the mind that we risk talking only to the converted. Most theological study

38. Ps 29: "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord I will seek. Do not hide your face from me . . . Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me" (vv. 9–10).

39. Lewis, *Last Battle*, 144: "The others looked in the face of Aslan and loved him . . ."

40. There is, of course, the famous quotation by the prophet Joel: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions" (Acts 2:17). And in the 2011 CTM Nairobi conference there was some initial discussion of children. See the group discussion summary in White et al., *Now and Next*, 84–86 and the paper by Samuel, "Church," 87–100.

and Christian children's activity are being done in ignorance of Loder's potential contributions. It is the intention of CTM that we should give due weight, possibly most weight, to the matter of how we go about connecting with those thinkers like Loder whose work we sense is relevant to our mission. If a publication is a good way of doing this, let's consider it; but should we be thinking of research, lecture tours, consultations or what?

A key text here is Dana Wright's essay, "The Potential Contribution of Loder to Practical Theological Science."⁴¹ In essence Wright addresses the same concern as that which I intimated at the outset of our conference, and as I think we all realize, that the work and potential insights of Loder have not percolated into mainstream Christian discourses, whether theology, counseling, or human development. Much though we enjoyed meeting together and sharing our testimonies (see below), the gathering out of which this book emerged resembled a salt cellar rather more than a shaking of salt that gives flavor to the body of Christ. It is light hidden under a bowl.

Perhaps we should ponder why this is so before trying to remedy the situation. There are some formidable challenges in such an enterprise.

Some Obstacles to Overcome

First, Loder's work, like Child Theology, is radical, if not revolutionary in some of its dimensions and implications, despite (or because of) the fact that it is at the same time very traditional in dogmatic terms. We should not underestimate the tenacity with which humans and human institutions cling on to everything that would seem to offer them the illusion of keeping afloat in an existential situation which could be said to be worse than the moment after the Titanic had hit the iceberg. Loder, like Barth and Kierkegaard, never tired in pointing out the *krisis* represented by the utter creatureliness of human beings and the transcendent holiness and otherness of God who is God. In seeking to help individuals and institutions in many and varied ways Christians can so easily collude with the endemic, original strategy and tactic of humanity in believing that we can make a name for ourselves. We find security by what is in effect shifting the deckchairs on a ship that is doomed and sinking. This is a far from comfortable message, and it is not to be wondered that, like

41. Wright, "Afterword," 401–31.

the message of the Cross (and it is an essential part of the message of the Cross), it proves to be as scandalous to the Christian community as it is to Jews and Greeks.⁴²

Second, there is the whole question of language and the level of difficulty involved in learning Loder's work well. Put crisply, Loder's work requires translation and mediation before he can be understood. Some time ago I gave my first tutorial on the work of Loder. There were two students: both graduates with PhDs, and both senior academics in their respective fields. I recall it well, but for reasons that will become obvious, will not divulge any more details of place and people. Within a couple of minutes I was struggling with the most basic elements of Loder's thought. Some of us who gathered for the conference may have become so used to it that we fail to see how forbidding his work is to the uninitiated. He demonstrated, rather like Karl Barth, a quite remarkable knowledge of philosophical and scientific, as well as theological disciplines throughout his work. He went further and sought to connect and integrate them. But how on earth does this kind of interdisciplinary thinking get communicated, broken down, handed on? I needed to read *Logic* three times before I felt I had grasped most of it, and by the way, I was also writing a summary for my students! CTM is committed to open and inclusive gatherings of followers of Jesus. And so there must be the gift of interpretation. Perhaps we are being called to become Jim's interpreters while he still speaks in tongues!

Third, there is no apparent active community of scholars that is taking on Loder's work, putting it under the microscope, exploring it in relation to theological and contemporary developments.⁴³ There may be a rather loose network of interested scholars and practitioners, as this symposium testifies, but it is rather eclectic and linked by personal connections. There are no academic chairs related to Loder's work, and few courses being offered that feature his theory. This must, of course, include critiques of Loder's work, such as the possibility that he relies on a *tertium quid*, despite his aversion to such alien concepts.⁴⁴ Could this conference mark a beginning, I wonder, of a more sustained engagement

42. 1 Cor 1:22–23.

43. Wright, "Afterword," 408–9. Wright identifies human sciences, social theorists, theologians, and natural scientists, among others, who have not sufficiently analyzed Loder's work, connected the "dots" of his overall theory and joined them up.

44. *Ibid.*, 412.

with Loder's thought? The Board of CTM is open to suggestions about how this kind of engagement might be nurtured including, of course, this publication of papers and any recommendations that might emerge from it. Could we agree on say five key topics,⁴⁵ that "cut the world at its [relational] joints,"⁴⁶ and hold conversations on them?

If genuinely new thinking is to take root, it must be tested in and through research. And if we are to take Loder's work seriously as intentionally scientific, it needs to be both theological and practical research, in that the topics we might sketch out must be amenable to research.⁴⁷ CTM has post-graduates working on PhDs right now, and we believe that more will come on stream. Would the five themes I have briefly sketched out above be worthy of some further consideration, I wonder?

Fourth, if Wright is correct that Loder is a practical theological scientist,⁴⁸ then there is the very difficult task of trying to decide where he fits on the academic bookshelf.⁴⁹ This might seem an arcane task, but it is in fact the very opposite—not least if someone suggests "A" for Alchemy!⁵⁰ There may be other obstacles that I have not seen or mentioned, and if readers of this volume are aware of them, please let us know. Rather than try to cover a whole field of possible connections I have endeavored to narrow my remarks down to something reported to be developing fast around the world—namely, Holistic Child Development.

A Challenge to Holistic Child Development

Some of you may be aware of the attempt by HCD to stir seminaries around the world into action. The lead organization is Compassion International, and the relevant website is www.hcd-alliance.org. I think that the term has much in common with what is meant by Christian education, and whether you know of it or not, I would like you to imagine what might be meant by the term when used by Christians, and if there is

45. *Ibid.*, 420–30 for his list of sixteen possible challenges Loder's work poses for practical theology. My hope is that we could distil them to something more manageable and perhaps categorize them in families.

46. *Ibid.*, 417, Wright notes the origins of this phrase from Colin Gunton.

47. One effort to connect Loder to current research is the essay by Wendy Sanders in this present volume, chapter 10.

48. *Ibid.*, 403–8.

49. *Ibid.*, 410.

50. *Ibid.*, 405, 408ff.

sufficient agreement, how we might go about advocating and practicing holistic child development in a theologically rooted and grounded way. The people engaged in the process to date genuinely aspire to do what its name indicates. But what a task for Christians it represents, given all that Loder and CTM have helped to draw to our attention! Among the immediate and significant questions come to mind are the following: How does Christian theology relate to theories of child development and the social sciences? How do we go about teaching interdisciplinary thinking? Who can teach it? Why does it matter? If HCD comes to find Loder's work unhelpful, for whatever reason, then where can it turn? At the very least, surely, we must include one of Loder's texts, *Logic*⁵¹

The movement is, I believe, still looking for some sort of synthesis, rather than accepting inherent contradictions between the different discourses that make up the components of an integrated approach. The implicit metaphor is I think, mosaic. This image suggests that individual pieces retain their particularity, and do interact with or affect any other piece. The unity, whether conceptual or in practice, is not organic.

Jesus confronts HCD in and through the sign of the little child with a dramatic challenge to change. He calls us to consider that we might be fundamentally mistaken, or on the wrong tack—i.e., not just that we have made one or two minor errors, or slipped up occasionally, but that we are heading in completely the wrong direction. Of course we find it unthinkable that we might be outside the kingdom of God and getting further away in our striving for greatness in it! But hopefully we can see that there is a real practical problem here about process: the way any form of conceptual integration might be achieved. Furthermore, one notices that there was no one here at the Loder event from Compassion, World Vision, or any such Christian-based organizations committed to child development. Why not? This is a pertinent question, because it is not for want of trying! There seems to be a disconnect between what Loder was trying to do, and what organizations like Compassion need to do better—that is, integrate theology and practice. A bridge needs to be built, and this conference and CTM may have roles to play in its construction. My belief is that Loder, and those who understand the significance of his work, could be crucial partners in this constructive possibility.

51. See White, "Model," 166–206.

The task of integrating theology and child development, though difficult, is crucial. Yet there is serious resistance, and we need to understand why the prevailing frameworks of so much that pass for Christian engagement with children remain overwhelmingly secular. One finds Christian education students trotting out the basic terms and frameworks of Maslow, Erikson, Piaget and the like without a moment's thought. At a very basic level there is limited interdisciplinary integrity between Christian theology and social science theories. Loder has critiqued, with due respect, this lack of theological integration and has shown us a way forward. In *Logic*, for example, we see his model of how this integrative task might be understood in term of human development theory. And Loder's collaboration with physicist Jim Neidhardt in *The Knight's Move* offers an expansive integration between theology and the natural sciences.⁵² How might we take Loder's concern for interdisciplinary integrity further? How do we construct the outlines of a theologically informed and integrated curriculum that really makes a difference in practice?⁵³

Child Theology, as developed in the essay that Haddon Willmer and I are writing, is too narrow to infuse and accompany HCD, though it may prove to have other critical and visionary functions. But by talking about human development, Loder is more fitted to give HCD the theological accompaniment it so obviously needs. He works with the same kinds of theory of human development as those at HCD. Building on the five themes and suggestions I have made thus far I suggest here two possible lines of rapprochement with Loder and HCD.

A Basis for a Curriculum Based on a Lifetime

First, Loder is concerned with human development up to, and in light of, death. This existential focus gives his work a perspective and a challenge that HCD ducks, for HCD confines itself to children, and to that segment of a life. Thus, HCD does not ponder what child development develops into. Its work is in theory and practice too closely aligned to modern education, preparation for independent living, employability, citizenship and parenthood. And like modern education of children

52. Loder and Neidhardt, *Knight's Move*, provides us with a very useful coordinate as we seek to understand the way Loder goes about the interdisciplinary task. For this connection to human development see *Logic*, 17–45, esp. 44 n. 16.

53. For more insight into Loder's interdisciplinary method in relation to Christian Education theory see chapter 7 of this book.

generally, HCD remains insulated from issues and visions which only appear later in life. What is offered to children does not have the human breadth and depth that people enter into by living a life to the end. Older education in humanities, by introducing children to drama, poetry and sacred texts, expands child education all the way between little and great infinities. But most education is shaped by what the child is deemed to be able to take in and understand within her assumed conceptual ability. So, years ago in the UK, the Bible was taken away from children on educational grounds that they were not cognitively “ready” for it. The secular social forms of this kind of education are extensive. Education becomes training in skills for employability, and little else.

HCD, of course, is in principle dedicated to the well-being of the whole child. But it cannot give a good answer to its own concerns, because dealing with the child in the terms set by childhood only (i.e., segregated from life as a whole), does not make for well-being. When HCD deals with children in this segregated way it runs two risks. One is that it will tend to over-privilege, or even idolize, children, as argued above. The other is that it tends to see children as needing care, protection, and training from within a social management concept of society. Because it does not take a serious view of children as human beings with a lifetime to live, it cannot do justice to them as persons. Loder offers help, starting with a reshaping of curricula. Instead of a curriculum packed with studies of children and child-care, with a bit of child-ideology tacked on, the base and breadth would be holistically human. It would be a syllabus that illuminated and asked questions of the young adult students and the old, nearly dead teachers, as well as for the little children.

THEOLOGY AND WHOLENESS

The second connection to Loder is theological. In Christian contexts, holistic is a word that is used to express a double commitment. It indicates, as we have just noted, concern for the wholeness of the child, as that is seen in an everyday way of care for *mens sana in corpore sano*. But wholeness (we note the deep link with holiness) also makes a claim for the religious dimension of life that, it is hoped, must be respected by secular humanists, because this dimension is part of the whole. So HCD includes care for the spiritual development of children, and therefore for a distinctive and explicit Christian shape, texture and color in the whole training for and practice of child care. Though HCD is seen in this

way in Christian contexts, it seems, as argued above, that the Christian element (religion, theology) is rarely integrated with the main studies of child development, where secular theories dominate. There is some desire for this situation to be changed, but for various reasons nothing seems to change. Theology (in the widest sense) may be put along side development studies, but it does not begin to transform them.

Loder offers an example for effecting theological change without compromising the integrity of the other sciences. He raises key questions about how it could be done. He uncovers some methodological and substantial choices that affect any Christian HCD course. His work is structured throughout by the distinctive relationality of human and divine Spirit. This relational dimension is not for him an item of doctrine, a single piece of theological information disconnected from the secular. It is a way of seeing a complex and transcending reality, which time and again in a lifetime comes into view (darkly), in one way or another. It is even more than an observer's scientific theory. In Loder's vision, divine and human spirits converse in the deep turmoil of life, so that the teacher and student cannot insulate themselves from the Spirit's presence. The teacher, the counsellor, and the father confessor come together in practical experience where the steady course of education may be fundamentally disrupted by spiritual transformation.⁵⁴

We must take good note that Loder's theological understanding of human development can be grasped and shared only by those who are living in the relationality of divine and human spirit with the same sort of openness, courage and articulacy we sense in Loder himself. We must not make Loder the model and recruit imitative disciples. That would turn his work into nonsense. But he inspires us to be aware of, and persevere with, the holistic human requirements of doing genuinely holistic (holy?) child development, which most of us would find more than demanding: actually frightening and discouraging. Most education, like most of church and most of all human life, are so ordered that specified outcomes can be achieved without making people aware of their human limitations, or frightened by their own inability.

If Loder was deployed to shake up HCD et al, it might then produce a situation in which the participants and their organizations could and would notice the child in the midst as a sign of the Kingdom of God. At present, meanwhile, HCD seems not at all concerned with the kingdom

54. For example, see the case of "Helen" in *Logic*, chapter 3, 46–78.

of God, as God's great disturbance. On the one hand, they seem satisfied with the secular models and theories on offer and in fashion. On the other hand, they want to promote the future of the church in some way, but without any apparent need to embody a theological openness, curiosity, humility, or wonder Loder associates with life in the Spirit. Perhaps HCD is merely satisfied that the church gives them God's program and a place in it.

Conclusion

It has become clear to me, not least through the references to research at the end of Dana Wright's summary of Loder's life and work, that hundreds have been influenced by Loder in one way or another. Could we find a way of drawing together their testimonies?⁵⁵ In some ways that is what we have here at this event and in these essays. I am going to conclude with my own testimony. And, perhaps implicitly, each of those of us who attended this gathering and who contributed essays to this present volume is also testifying to what we know. Are we not all like the case studies Loder used to illustrate his thought? He always argued that these testimonies, along with his own stories of redemptive transformation, "belong to the church"! So why don't I give an example of how some of this has begun to come together for me?

As a sociologist and theologian, committed to living in a residential community of hurting children called Mill Grove, I have sought to integrate my faith, life, theory and practice. This lifelong vocation and practice has led me into two sorts of reflective activities: teaching and writing. In my teaching I have focused on children and childhood, and currently lecture on the HCD course in Penang. I started with the theological foundations, and am now working my way through how this foundational work relates to other aspects of child development. In my writing (probably best described as eclectic) I have been trying to draw together strands, and make sense of disparate elements of life and experience. One book is *Growth of Love* that I have already mentioned. It describes love that I have witnessed growing in and through many

55. As it happens, I did not mention this part of my paper at the Loder conference, although I sensed that testimonies were the very things called for. In the event Tom Hastings therefore demonstrated what could and had to be done without any prompting from me! See his highly personal essay in this present volume, chapter 5.

of those living at Mill Grove. And as I started with real human life and stories, and in this way, it was only when I discovered Loder that I was able to begin to make sense of the data of my lived experience. Accepted understandings of developmental stages were unhelpful to my work for all sorts of reasons. But in Loder I found someone so well versed in the theologians and theorists that I knew his work was likely to be relevant to much of my life and experience.

Putting together my experience, the corpus that makes up “child development theory,” and theology, I came to the conclusion that for love to grow there are five key elements or dimensions to the process: Security, Boundaries, Significance, Community, and Creativity. They resisted a meta-framework, such as stages in a progression, levels in a hierarchy. I knew this, and Loder confirmed it. But now I see that the final theme in the list, creativity, is both the beginning and the end of the process, as well as running right through it. Properly understood it bears the hallmarks of *Spiritus Creator*. I have used this combination of insights in my teaching and will be producing a course-book next year. I would welcome the comments and peer review of this work by some of those who have gathered for this event. It would be a practical way of taking the process forward.

In all this we must never forget that the key that unlocks the door to the kingdom of God is welcoming or receiving a little one in the name of Jesus. And that is what I have been seeking to do throughout my life. Notice, this is not just a “secular” receiving, however gracious and loving that may be. This is receiving in the name of Jesus. And it is in this “moment” (if we allow ourselves a Loderian and Barthian-laden word with which to close) of reception, that the negation of the ego is negated, by the responsive face of a human being, as a sign and perhaps even more, of the welcome that God in Christ has had in store for us from before the dawn of time, has been breathing into creation by the Spirit, and which awaits us at the end of the age.

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