

What Child Is This? A Rahnerian Interpretation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy

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Introduction

The child lies at the heart of the Christian educational vision of John Baptist De La Salle. The Christian educator, according to De La Salle, is called to be a minister who cooperates "with Jesus Christ for the salvation of children" (*M* 196).² To teach is "to touch the hearts" (*M* 139.3) of the young, especially those who are poor and abandoned, inspiring in them the spirit of the Gospel. De La Salle saw in poor children "a proximate incarnation of Jesus Christ,"³ and for this he was ahead of many in their perceptions of children in seventeenth century France. In a sense, it is the child as human person that had shaped the soteriology in De La Salle's writings, which in turn influenced his missionary conception of Christian education as a process of fostering discipleship. It is precisely this focus on the lived realities of children, particularly those in dehumanizing situations of impoverishment, which has sustained the prophetic edge of the Lasallian tradition to educate toward social justice and liberation of the young in contemporary times.⁴

Yet, what does not get sufficient critical attention is De La Salle's operative anthropology about children in his writings, and the need for rethinking in light of recent scholarship on childhood, theology, and education. My contention is that if the Lasallian educational mission is to take seriously the concerns of social justice and children's liberation – and by this, I mean promoting the human flourishing of children, protective of their vulnerability while engaging them as agents – it requires a more expansive anthropology that reflects critically the complexity of meanings constructed around the identities of children and childhood experiences today.

In this paper, I consider how twentieth-century German theologian Karl Rahner's theological conception of childhood as openness to mystery might be a productive key to conceptually unlock a more expansive anthropology that clarifies, balances, and deepens De La Salle's understanding of the child, while renewing the integrity of his Christian educational vision for children in today's world. I do three things: first, I draw on George Van Grieken's article "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,"⁵ which articulates De La Salle's operative understanding of children in his writings, particularly his meditations.⁶ My assessment is that while Van Grieken fruitfully draws out a positive anthropology of the child in general, he does not go further to wrestle with passages in De La Salle's writings that border on a deficient model of childhood. Though novel in his time, De La Salle's ideas about children in his writings would come across to contemporary readers as somewhat paternalistic and in need of greater nuance. To this end, I turn to exegete Rahner's essay "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,"⁷ with the aim of showing how his conception of childhood as mystery serves as a productive lens to re-read and revise De La Salle's operative anthropology. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on how Lasallian pedagogy as 'touching of hearts' might be re-imagined through a Rahnerian

interpretation of the child. This Rahnerian lens on childhood, I suggest, injects a fresh reading of salvation in De La Salle's educational vision. Salvation is interpreted as conversion to being children of God, where the 'touching of hearts' between teachers and students becomes an ongoing receptivity to the mystery of God's kingdom in and through their relationship with one another.

De La Salle in His Own Time: Contextualizing the Place of the Child in His Writings

De La Salle's writings served to form educators pedagogically and spiritually. As Nicolas Capelle correctly notes, he developed throughout his writings "a theology of the teaching profession; a religious rule to bind the teachers together as brothers; and teaching methods tested by the teachers."⁸ However, De La Salle's ministry to teachers was at the service of an educational mission that demonstrated a preferential option not only for the poor, but also for children (and specifically boys) through the establishment of gratuitous schools.⁹ As De La Salle wrote in his Rule in 1717, when the Institute of the Brothers was well along in its formative stages:

The necessity of this Institute is very great, because artisans and the poor, being usually little instructed, and being occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their family, cannot give their children the needed instruction, nor a suitable Christian education. It was to procure this advantage for the children of the artisans and the poor, that the Christian Schools were established.¹⁰

The child held a central place in De La Salle's educational vision, which he saw as procuring the salvation of the young. In fact, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the soteriology in De La Salle's writings had been shaped around the child, which in turn gave rise to his conception of teachers as "ministers" who "reconcile" the young to God through Jesus Christ (*M* 193.3). Yet, what has tended to elide attention is his operative anthropology about children to whom he devoted a life of service. In this regard, Van Grieken is helpful in articulating the vocation of the child in Lasallian pedagogy, given the contemporary interest in addressing the ambivalence toward (if not neglect of) children in Christian theology.¹¹

According to Van Grieken, De La Salle "knew children, related to children, spoke about children, and prayed for children as individuals who reflected God's presence and were growing and learning persons with a dignity of their own."¹² The young were frequently referred to as "disciples" (*M* 195.1) and as "the children of God himself" (*M* 133.2). De La Salle also spoke of children as "the most innocent part of the Church, and usually the best disposed to receive the impressions of grace" (*M* 205.3). The task of the Christian educator then, was to cultivate in them holiness, "so that they are no longer like children tossed here and there, no longer turned around by every wind of doctrine, by deceit, and trickery, whether through the companions with whom they associate, or men leading them into falsehood by their evil proposals" (*M* 205.3). As Van Grieken importantly points out, what De La Salle meant by 'innocence' was "rooted firmly in a deeper, longer faith perspective that looks beyond and behind the challenging and often disturbing realities prevalent outside, and sometimes inside, the classrooms of the time."¹³ In other words, while De La Salle affirmed the fundamental goodness of children as human persons, he was also realistic about their inclination to sin, intensified by the experience of

poverty in his day. De La Salle was sensitive to how poor children, in being “abandoned to their own will,” were susceptible to bad influence “because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable of much reflection” (*M* 203.2).

In the final analysis, Van Grieken distills a positive anthropology of the child in De La Salle’s writings. As he explains:

De La Salle gave children their due, recognizing both their limitations and their strengths, and setting their vocation in the midst of their experience. Children have a vocation to see themselves as part of the world around them, and they have a God-given right to be treated with a respect that reaches beyond their years, drawing them forward to live into the deeper version of their vocation as a child of God.¹⁴

I agree with Van Grieken’s assessment in principle. However, in my estimation, he does not engage sufficiently with the limitations of De La Salle’s operative anthropology, particularly how his language about children in some descriptions might be problematic for today’s readers as suggestive of a deficient model of childhood. To be fair, Van Grieken does acknowledge that the “anthropological foundation for De La Salle’s educational perspective ... may appear to be somewhat condescending or paternalistic,”¹⁵ with specific reference to a meditation that is worth citing here:

It can be said that children at birth are like a mass of flesh. Their minds do not emerge from the matter in them except with time and become refined only little by little. As an unavoidable consequence, those who are ordinarily instructed in the schools are not yet able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims (*M* 197.1).¹⁶

Elsewhere, De La Salle commented that the inclination to sin is much greater for children “because they have little use of their reason, and because nature is consequently more lively in them and strongly inclined to enjoy the pleasures of the senses” (*M* 56.2).¹⁷ How are we to make sense of these passages?

Van Grieken goes on to suggest that “given the popular movements of seventeenth-century France (Jansenism, Quietism, Gallicanism, etc.), and De La Salle’s own wide-ranging educational experience,” such passages “should still also be seen as remarkably insightful and direct.”¹⁸ Yet, how so? At one level, De La Salle was ahead of his time in hinting at what we would call today a developmental perspective to education. At another level, however, he also seemed to have subordinated childhood to adulthood with a less than positive construction of the child’s nature. Is childhood not good in itself with a distinctive value? Doesn’t childhood become a mere phase that we grow out of, as if to leave behind nature for a reasonable adult faith? My point here is this: as we retrieve and affirm De La Salle’s positive anthropology of the child in general for Lasallian education in the 21st century, we also ought to critically engage with its specifics which had been limited by the language in his context then. For example, to what extent was De La Salle’s language about the nature of children and their salvation caught in the pervasive influence of Jansenism in the French Church in the 17th century even as he resisted against it?¹⁹ Though child-positive, De La Salle’s operative anthropology is limited for our contemporary world. What is needed is a more expansive but nuanced theological framework

that rethinks the anthropological foundation of De La Salle's educational vision. To this end, I now turn to Karl Rahner to examine how he offers us a robust theological anthropology of childhood that revitalizes Lasallian educational vision and pedagogy for today's world.²⁰

Karl Rahner's Theology of Childhood: Revising De La Salle's Theological Anthropology of the Child

In his essay "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," Rahner situates the value of childhood within his anthropological turn to the human subject as oriented to God in experience. In this light, the child is affirmed as already a whole human person able to experience God as God is in their particular life-stage in history. He writes, "Childhood itself has a direct relationship with God. It touches upon the absolute divinity of God not only as maturity, adulthood and the later phases of life touch upon this, but rather in a special way of its own."²¹ In other words, while Rahner recognizes childhood as a stage of life in preparation for what is to come, he also significantly underscores its distinctive value as a good in itself that should not be subordinated to adulthood as "the goal and measure of life."²² Thus, as he further notes, "The strange and wonderful flowers of childhood are already fruits in themselves, and do not merely rely for their justification on the fruit that is to come afterwards. The grace of childhood is not merely the pledge of the grace of adulthood."²³ There is, then, the *this-ness* of childhood that is already graced as gift, lived particularly in time but remaining open to a future that lies hidden in God.

Noteworthy in Rahner's theological anthropological reading of childhood is its connection with eschatology.²⁴ For him, the experience of childhood is not provisional but primordial; that is, "a basic condition"²⁵ that endures the entirety of life as a whole. This primordality is to be understood in relation to God as Incomprehensible Mystery, as "the ineffable future, which is coming to meet us."²⁶ As he explains, "we do not move away from childhood in any definitive sense, but rather move towards the eternity of this childhood, to its definitive and enduring validity in God's sight."²⁷ So the child is not to be simply reduced to an image that adults have created for her or his future. Rather, the child is in the first place already created in God's image and likeness, and whose future is found hidden in God's free gift of eternal life through Christ in present history (which includes the existential experience of childhood). More than just being a biological phase of life and a social category, childhood is theologically "the beginning of openness to God."²⁸ "Childhood is openness. Human childhood is infinite openness," writes Rahner.²⁹

Theologically, then, Rahner locates the fully human experience of childhood within the revelation of God as Mystery through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as God's free offer of grace.³⁰ There is, in other words, no human activity outside of God's grace that is, in the first place, God's gratuitous self-communication in and through the Word made Flesh.³¹ Thus, *despite* and *because of* our human finiteness, the more-ness of God as infinite Mystery draws us in to reveal a more-ness to who we are as human persons such that we also remain a mystery to ourselves in relation with others. As Rahner argues, "childhood is, in the last analysis, a *mystery*."³² Seen in relation to the Incarnation, childhood as mystery has "a twofold beginning;" that is, childhood does not only mark the beginning of one's personal existence, but also the beginning of an ongoing surrender to the utter mystery of God in one's personal history. Childhood marks the beginning of entrusting ourselves in freedom to God as absolute Mystery,

who bears and carries us to full term, realizing who we already are as children of God. The important point here for Rahner is that childhood is not something that we grow out of, but a graced reality that we paradoxically mature in our recognition as persons in relation with one another, and in God's presence.

Reading Rahner's Insights into De La Salle's Theological Anthropology of the Child

Rahner's theological formulation of childhood, I suggest, serves as a productive lens to revise De La Salle's operative anthropology of the child in his Christian educational vision. By revision, I do not mean a complete dismantling and dismissal of De La Salle's conception of the child. Rather, I consider how Rahner's theological insights on childhood help ground a more nuanced anthropology that deepens the integrity of De La Salle's vision of Christian education, enriching it for the contemporary world that we are in. There are at least three ways in which this integrity is deepened:

First, Rahner's conception of the child's graced humanity affirms and strengthens De La Salle's emphasis on the intrinsic dignity of children that ought to be protected and attended to in educational practice. At the same time, in his insistence on the distinctive value of childhood, Rahner alters what might come across to us as a paternalistic and certainly anachronistic outlook of the child in De La Salle's writings. For example, on the one hand, De La Salle emphasized care for the child's dignity in his approach to discipline. He wrote, "For people, and even children, are endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons" (*M* 204.1). On the other hand, he also wrote that children's "minds are more dull because they are less free of their senses and of matter" (*M* 197.1), and for this reason, they "need someone to develop the Christian truths for them in a more concrete fashion and harmonious with the limitations of their minds, for these truths are hidden from the human mind. If this help is not given, they often remain all their lives insensitive and opposed to thoughts of God and incapable of knowing and appreciating them" (*ibid.*). One senses a tension here: while De La Salle affirmed the dignity of children, he still regarded the rational adult (and male) as normative of a full human being. His language would seem to underestimate the complexity of children's cognitive and affective capacities for meaning making even as it calls educators to take seriously where children are in the process of guiding them.

Rahner, I suggest, offers a more nuanced view of childhood that holds in tension its unique value without compromising the important need for nurture. Childhood is, as he describes, "a field which bears fair flowers and ripe fruits such as can only grow in *this* field and in no other, and which will themselves be carried into the storehouses of eternity."³³ Seen in this light, the Christian education of children is less about the transmission of Christian truths, and more about drawing forth life as whole human persons receptive to an experience of who God is in their contextual particularities. It also demands that we listen to the spiritual experiences of children, since the child is the human "who is, right from the first, the partner of God."³⁴

Second, Rahner's non-sentimental view of childhood complements the realism that undergirds De La Salle's socially sensitive conception of children. Rahner resists romanticizing the child even as he lifts up the distinctive value of the experience of childhood. As he writes, "Christianity cannot on this account regard the origins of childhood as a sort of innocent arcadia,

as a pure source which only becomes muddied at a later stage and *within* the sphere of human cares in which [one] can control and guide his own course.”³⁵ Neither does Rahner swing to the other end “to ‘beat the sin’ out of children due to interpretations that consider childhood the root of all selfishness.”³⁶ Rahner’s theological conception of childhood is not one of naïve optimism, but of hope placed in God’s grace that abounds when “children experience sin both in terms of acting and acted upon.”³⁷ This sense of Christian realism undergirds De La Salle’s response to the abandonment of poor children in 17th century France, which he described as follows: “The results of this condition are regrettable, for these poor children, accustomed to lead an idle life for many years, have great difficulty adjusting when it comes for them to go to work. In addition, through association with bad companions they learn to commit many sins which later are difficult to stop, because of the persistent bad habits they have contracted over such a long time” (*M* 194.1).

What Rahner reclaims for us here is De La Salle’s concern for the vulnerability of children. While children are not in fact the most depraved of human beings, they are certainly more susceptible to depravation.³⁸ De La Salle was mindful of the exclusionary effects of poverty to which children were socially vulnerable. However, where Rahner goes further theologically is his claim that adults are to become like children in their vulnerability to mystery “that we can be like children in being receivers and as such carefree in relation to God, those who *know* that they have nothing of themselves on which to base any claim to [God’s] help, and yet trust that [God’s] kindness and protection will be extended to them and so will bestow what they need upon them.”³⁹ It is this spirit of open surrender to God that Jesus holds up children as an example of faith for adults, saying, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14).⁴⁰ It is this vulnerable spirit of surrender to God as all-encompassing mystery that also grounds our resilience as children of God in faith. What Rahner points to, then, is a primary sense of vulnerability, which, as ethicist John Wall points out, “has to do, not with lack of agency, but with openness and relationality.”⁴¹ Childhood reminds us of our shared vulnerability as human persons in relation with one another. It is in light of this shared vulnerability that we recognize our interdependency, which in turn grounds our mutual responsibilities to one another. Reading back into Lasallian pedagogy, the Christian educator has the ethical task of protecting the child’s vulnerability by first remembering her or his own. The Lasallian educator’s vigilant care for children is understood within relations of co-responsibility that stem from recognizing childhood’s vulnerability as a shared human reality.

Third, Rahner’s point on the cultivation of child-like openness to mystery revitalizes the mystical dimension of teaching in De La Salle’s educational vision. Rahner speaks of “reverence for the child”⁴² because in the child, one beholds Christ’s presence. This theological connection is expressed in a different mode in his Christmas meditations. In “Christmas, The Festival of Eternal Youth,” Rahner writes of the Infant Jesus as the “one in whom the eternal youth of God breaks in upon this world definitively and victoriously.”⁴³ In the Christ Child is the incarnational mystery of God that “accomplishes his own presence in us.”⁴⁴ God comes to encounter us as a child. God has a childhood. One’s conversion to the enduring childhood of God in Rahner’s theology gets played in a different key in this meditation as eternal youth in Christ:

But what effect does this ineffable mystery have, which we call God? It brings us the youth of eternal life in the midst of our mortality, our blindness and our futility. Do you

believe this? Lord I do believe, help thou my unbelief! If you believe you have eternal life. And if you think that you do not believe have trust! ... The eternal youth of the immortal God has appeared as the true interiority of our own life.⁴⁵

Noteworthy is how this meditation finds an echo in one of De La Salle's imaginative prayers on Christmas:

Yes, my God, I believe that you became a child for love of me. You were born in a stable in the middle of the night and in the depth of winter. You were laid on hay and straw. Your love for me reduced you to an unheard-of poverty and need, and so extreme that nothing like it had ever been heard of till then. I believe, my Lord, all these truths that faith teaches me about your love for me ... Your infinite wisdom judged that it was much more advantageous for me to give me in your adorable person the example of the life I should lead in order to attain true glory ... This is what I resolved to do ... Help me, I beg you, O my God, in my weakness.⁴⁶

De La Salle's reflection here on the Christ Child as the revelation of God's kenotic love finds its re-articulation as spiritual childhood in Rahner: "He who has the courage to accept and to preserve the pure spirit of childhood within him, and to carry it with him throughout his life – he it is who finds God. And he who accepts in this sense the childhood that is in his brothers and sisters has already found God." One hears an echo of this reverence for the child in light of the Incarnation in De La Salle's spiritual reflections on the Christ Child as the revelation of God's self-emptying love to be with the poor. In an evocative meditation on the Epiphany, De La Salle writes:

Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them. Love poverty and honor the poor after the example of the Magi, for poverty should be dear to you who are responsible for the instruction of the poor. May faith lead you to do this with affection and zeal, because the children are the members of Jesus Christ. In this way this divine Savior will be pleased with you, and you will find him, because he always loved the poor and poverty (*M* 96.3).

I lift up here the prophetic dimension in De La Salle's contemplative insight that has a contemporary relevance: like the magi, Lasallian educators must be challenged to be seekers on a journey of conversion to the poor child in Christ. Conversion to the poor child in Christ calls educators to be in solidarity with children, in resisting and transforming structures that keep them in dehumanizing situations of impoverishment. Rahner's formulation of childhood as "infinite openness" to mystery thus reclaims and deepens the prophetic mysticism in De La Salle's spiritual vision of education.

Re-imagining the Lasallian Metaphor of 'Touching Hearts' through a Rahnerian Lens

For De La Salle, teaching is a spiritual art of 'touching hearts', where children are "a letter which Jesus Christ dictates to you, which you write each day in their hearts, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, who acts in you and by you through the power of Christ" (*M* 195.2). The accent here is on the relationality between teacher and student grounded in faith. Seen through

the Rahnerian lens on childhood, the child as “letter” is already oriented toward God in “infinite openness,”⁴⁷ as an embodied person with “a capacity for learning and for inspiration, and an identity all their own.”⁴⁸ The process of educating as ‘touching hearts’ becomes an awakening to God’s grace already present in the encounter between teacher and student. The Lasallian educator then, bears the responsibility as witness through whom the child experiences concretely God’s gracious goodness. Not only does Rahner’s theological interpretation of childhood reinforce the essentially relational nature of teaching as profoundly sacred in its ordinariness, he also emphasizes De La Salle’s conception of the Christian school as a culture of encounter, a social womb that carries the child into the fullness of who s/he is as God’s beloved child.

The Christian school fosters a culture of encounter through accompaniment, which is a central theme in Lasallian pedagogy. As De La Salle writes, the Christian educator is to be “a good shepherd,” who knows the uniqueness of each child individually, and is “very alert to whatever can harm or wound” (*M* 33.1). Through guidance in a spirit of prayer, the Lasallian educator instructs to correct and encourage the child who could be a “weary and exhausted traveler” (*M* 37.1) in a shared journey of faith in life. In Rahnerian terms, Lasallian accompaniment is recast as participation in the divine life of God who calls us to partnership in *this* life. The child as human is, as Rahner asserts, “right from the start, the partner of God.”⁴⁹ In this regard, children are welcome as a blessing, and the Lasallian educator walks with them as partners toward the reign of God in the here and not yet. In this partnership with God, the teacher is also learner in being invited to change and “become as children” (Matthew 18: 5).⁵⁰

In other words, the ‘touching of hearts’ between teachers and students becomes an ongoing receptivity to the mystery of God’s kingdom in and through their relationship to one another. It is to recognize in one another their mutual human vulnerability interwoven with a shared sense of agency. What Rahner offers for the Lasallian educational mission is a contemporary theological foundation for the child as vulnerable agent, dependent on and interdependent with others. Seeing children as vulnerable agents calls the Lasallian educator to take seriously their witness as living participants in our communities, beginning with an openness to “listen to as many of their stories as possible, to be changed [anew] by their different refrains.”⁵¹ S/he is also tasked to be critically conscious of and resist the many forces that continue to threaten and scar the dignity of the human as child.

“A child’s vocation may be seen, through De La Salle’s education vision and practice, as a sort of apprenticeship to life,” writes Van Grieken.⁵² True, and Rahner’s language of mystery in his theological anthropology of the child cautions us against the notion of apprenticeship as mere preparation for economic survival in the workplace, according to the design of adults. As Hinsdale points out, Rahner’s insistence on the intrinsic value of childhood as mystery “stands in sharp contrast to the market anthropology of late twentieth century capitalism, which regards children as commodities or consumers and evaluates their worth according to cost-benefit analyses.”⁵³ The challenge then, is for Christian schooling to remain open to the task of humanization in this apprenticeship to life, where salvation is to allow us to be touched by gracious mystery, and be drawn into conversion to live fully as children of God – teacher and student alike. It is to allow the child to interrupt and remind the ‘I’ and ‘we’ as educators of our profound relationality in the Body of Christ, and that Christ’s body had come to encounter us in the Incarnation as a child.

As Wall notes, “Christianity insists on the brokenness of human relations, including those of children, but also the possibility nevertheless, again including children, for recreating human relations anew. Nothing could be closer to the heart of a religion that begins in the world-transforming birth of an infant.”⁵⁴ Rahner’s theological conception of childhood calls us to be attentive to the newness that children bring. It refreshes for us who share in the Lasallian mission that what is revolutionary about God’s faithfulness to creative love is God’s humble beginning in the smallness of a child who promises newness. Present to God as mystery in the child and as God’s child, the Lasallian educator learns to touch the hearts of those they teach with curiosity, courage and creativity.

Endnotes

1. Alfred Pang Kah Meng is a doctoral student in theology and education at the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College.
2. John Baptist De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC, ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC (Landover, Md.: Lasallian Publications, 1994). Specific references to De La Salle’s are hereafter cited in text as *M*, followed by the meditation number and section standardized in the anthology.
3. George Van Grieken, FSC, “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 363.
4. In this paper, I use children and the young interchangeably to refer to persons under the age of 18.
5. George Van Grieken, FSC, “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).
6. Textual material is drawn from the *Meditations for All Sundays of the Year* and *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Both sets of meditations are published in the anthology listed in footnote 1.
7. Karl Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” [orig. 1963] *Theological Investigations* (vol. 8), trans. D. Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1977), 33-50. This author retains Bourke’s original translation in English for direct quotations. Where ‘man’ and ‘he’ are used, they refer to the human being.
8. Nicolas Capelle, FSC, “The religious institute of Catholic education: the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the twentieth century,” 68.

9. Luke Salm, FSC, *The Work is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* (Romeoville, Illinois: Christian Brothers Publications, 1989), 57. “For De La Salle and the Brothers gratuity of instruction was a fundamental principle. This not only provided a quality education for the poor, but also guaranteed that no distinction would be made in the school between those who could afford to pay and those who could not.”

10. Cited in Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 47.

11. For examples, see Todd David Whitmore, “Children: An Undeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching,” in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, ed. Maura A. Ryan and Todd David Whitmore (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 161-185; David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2005); and Mary Ann Hinsdale, “ ‘Infinite Openness to the Infinite’: Karl Rahner’s Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 406-445.

12. Van Grieken, FSC, “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” 361.

13. *Ibid.*, 363.

14. *Ibid.*, 368-369.

15. *Ibid.*, 369.

16. Cited in Van Grieken, FSC, “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” 369.

17. Cited as footnote in Van Grieken, FSC, “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” 370.

18. Van Grieken, FSC, “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” 369.

19. For a historical discussion of De La Salle’s relation to Jansenism, see Alfred Calcutt, FSC, *De La Salle: A City Saint and the Liberation of the Poor through Education* (Oxford: De La Salle Publications, 1993), 65-69.

20. See Van Grieken, FSC, “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” 369. He notes that De La Salle’s notion of childhood would resonate with Karl Rahner’s, but does not develop how.

21. *Ibid.*, 36.

22. *Ibid.*, 34.

23. Ibid., 37.
24. Hinsdale, “‘Infinite Openness to the Infinite’: Karl Rahner’s Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child,” 423. As she notes, “the experience of childhood in Rahner’s thinking is ‘eschatological’ as well as existential, since it enables us to appreciate the relationship of earthly life to eternal life.”
25. Ibid., 47.
26. Ibid., 37.
27. Ibid., 36.
28. Hinsdale, “‘Infinite Openness to the Infinite’: Karl Rahner’s Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child,” 425.
29. Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 48.
30. For a fuller discussion, see Karl Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” [orig. 1960] *Theological Investigations* (vol. 4), trans. K. Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 165-188. In particular, he explains, “Grace is God himself, the communication in which he gives himself to man as the divinizing favour which he is himself. Here his work is really *himself*, since it is he who is imparted. Such grace, from the very start, cannot be thought of independently of the personal love of God and its answer in man. This grace is not thought of as a ‘thing’. It is something that is only ‘put at man’s disposal’ in that act of ‘letting oneself be disposed of’ which is the proper gift of the freest grace, the miracle of love” (177).
31. See Karl Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,” [orig. 1959] *Theological Investigations* (vol. 4), trans. K. Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 54: “Man always lives by the holy mystery, even where he is not conscious of it. The lucidity of his consciousness derives from the incomprehensibility of this mystery ... the freedom of his mastery of things comes from his being mastered by the Holy which is itself unmastered.”
32. Ibid., 42. Italics his.
33. Ibid., 36.
34. Ibid., 38.
35. Ibid., 40. Italics his.
36. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 123. A significant aspect of the theological anthropology of children is their nature in relation to Christian understandings of sin that this paper is not focused on. For a historical discussion on the doctrine of sin and the tensions within it in relation to children, see also Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 78-100.

37. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 124.
38. John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 45.
39. Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 41.
40. *Ibid.*, 41.
41. John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 39.
42. Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 38.
43. Karl Rahner, "Christmas, The Festival of Eternal Youth," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 7), trans. D. Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 121.
44. *Ibid.*, 125.
45. *Ibid.*, 125.
46. Cited in Calcutt, *De La Salle: A City Saint and the Liberation of the Poor through Education*, 289.
47. Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 48.
48. Van Grieken, FSC., "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 380.
49. Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 38.
50. Cited in Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 50.
51. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood*, 129.
52. Van Grieken, FSC, "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 378.
53. Hinsdale, "'Infinite Openness to the Infinite': Karl Rahner's Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child," 443-444.
54. Wall, "Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility," *Children's Voices, Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education*, ed. Annemie Dillen-Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010), 265.