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To become the child you were, in the fields and streets you once explored like a young heroine, a daring hero. Is that why Jesus summed up his teaching about eternal life in the symbol of a child? The gifts and graces of our early years are the clearest expression of the nature of God – and of heaven. Maybe, on our deathbeds, they craft the wings of our destiny, to carry us safely home, over the necessary deserts of darkness and light. And maybe, after all, it is not a bed of death, but a bed of life, when immense, unimaginable powers of transcendence are being released.

In a most moving theological poem, Karl Rahner holds that our childhood is not lived through, and cast away, like an outgrowth of a coat. Rather is it the perennial, eternal heart of our adult lives. We grow into the childhood we once lived through. When more, this childhood is what we fully recover, possess and celebrate in heaven. And death is the only moment of truth for this transition to take place. 'We do not move away from childhood in any real sense', writes Rahner. 'We move towards the eternity of this childhood, to its definitive and enduring validity in God's sight – a field which bears fair flowers and ripe fruits such as can grow in this field of childhood, and in no other, and which will be carried into the storehouses of eternity.'