NEW PERSPECTIVES ON FAITH FORMATION IN ADOLESCENCE

by

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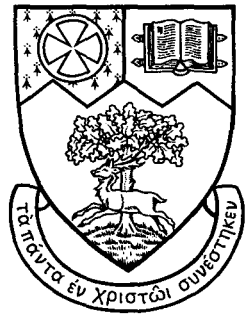

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ABSTRACT

"'New Perspectives in Adolescent Faith Formation"

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Churches have often struggled to nurture mature and lasting faith among their young people. This is generally due to a lack of understanding about how beliefs form in adolescents and therefore the ability to shape ministry accordingly. This thesis proposes that adolescents form and mature their beliefs by interpreting significant life experiences. This thesis also offers suggestions for the practice for ministry based upon this understanding of belief formation. These suggestions are intended for church-based youth ministries and draw in part upon practices observed in summer camp ministries.

Acknowledgements

A sincere thank you to my wife Nyssa, who was both supportive and accommodating during the writing of this thesis. Additionally, a special acknowledgement is needed for Dave Whitecross, pastor of St Andrew's in Fergus. On many occasions I would run ideas by him and his responses were always appreciated. Lastly, thanks to the faculty of McMaster Divinity College – and in particular my supervisor, Lee Beach. Many hours went into discussing and reviewing the content of this thesis. Thank you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

Introduction

Description of Topic

Though the church strives to nurture mature faith among church going adolescents, it must be noted that this goal, in many cases, is not being met; the faith of many North American teens is best described as nominal.[1] A faith that means little is also more easily discarded. It is also observed that up to half of young people walk away from faith after their teen years.[2] Such realities require a response if the church is to take its role seriously as a disciple making ministry. One response might be to labour more intensively in the area of youth ministry and discipleship. However, the creation of more programming may not address these issues. If the programming churches offer youth is simply more of the same ineffectual discipleship efforts that produce teens with a nominal faith, the church will end up working harder, yet producing the same results.

Some analysis on adolescent faith formation comes from researchers who identify trends in post-Christian culture that mitigate against Christian faith formation.[3] The authors of such studies believe that identifying why adolescents leave the church will help the church to prevent such leaving from happening. However, addressing the factors that mitigate against faith in young people is only able to explain and perhaps insulate against the loss of faith. Even if the factors that contribute to the loss of faith in young people are identified and responded to, this does not, by default, promote faith. Such studies will play a role in understanding the dynamics of faith formation, but more is required. There is a need for an understanding of how adolescents

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[1] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 27–28, 118–171.Smith and Denton describe the general features of teenage beliefs. They note many teens practice a faith that has little meaning for their everyday lives. The state of teenage believe in North America will be addressed more fully in chapter one.

[2] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 21.

[3] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 12–19. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 112. These authors identify some of the struggle faith formation encounters in post-Christian culture.

form a mature and committed faith and for this understanding to inform the practice of youth ministry in North America.

As this thesis's aim is to articulate the process by which young people form faith, most of the sources consulted will be from authors and studies that bridge the theological and psychological. However, another topic that will be brought into this conversation is the Christian summer camping movement. Among studies that report on the state of adolescent faith in North America, a surprising observation is made: Christian summer camps are found to be a setting in which young people discover lasting faith.[4] In contrast to church-based youth ministries that often simply maintain the status-quo, summer camps are consistently able to nurture mature faith among adolescents who either attend or serve as staff at summer camps. Two questions arise out of this observation: first, what is it about the summer camp environment that leads young people to a lasting and committed faith? Secondly, what can the local church learn about faith formation from observing summer camps? Both of these questions will be addressed in the latter portions of this thesis and the insights provided will be related to the goal of informing how faith formation can better be approached by the local church.

Faith formation, for the purposes of this thesis, refers to the process of becoming committed to one's faith and the subsequent process of seeking harmony between faith and lived experience.[5] Some of the seminal thinkers on faith formation include Godron Allport, Paul Tillich, Henri Nouwen, Karl Rahner, Benedict Groeschel, James Fowler, James Loder, Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich.[6] Each of these authors are conversant in the fields of theology,

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[4] Penner et al., "*Hemorrhaging Faith*," 99. 52% of committed Christians who attended a Christian summer camp as a child, report their faith coming alive in this setting.

[5] Although closely related, there is a difference between faith formation and belief formation. This difference will be articulated in the first chapter.

[6] The work of William James on religious experience is a forerunner to these works, however what James did was distinct from the direction these authors go in and less germane to this thesis. See James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

spirituality, and the social sciences. To understand the dynamics of faith formation, a brief review of the work of these authors will be helpful.

In his 1950 book *The Individual and His Religion,* psychologist Gordon Allport explored the various influences that produce religious sentiment. One of his main conclusions is that subjective religious sentiment is borne of the human drive to make meaning out of emotions and reason.[7] He believes this process of making meaning moves a person through faith stages, until they reach a mature faith which is characterized by the identification and removal of immature faith assumptions.[8] Allport also believes the process to mature faith is contingent upon reconciling the doubts and affirmations that accompany the life of faith.[9] Thus, as an individual responds to a natural drive to make sense of their personal experiences, they will sample a range of beliefs and then adopt the particular belief which helps them to best make meaning of their experiences.[10] Allport also believes that this drive for belief is divine in origin; while he does have a psychological approach, he believes the desire to make meaning from experience comes from the God of the Bible.[11]

Shortly after Allport, Paul Tillich wrote *Dynamics of Faith.* Tillich draws from diverse fields of study to explore what faith is and how people relate to faith. His significant claim is that faith is a state of holding an "ultimate concern," and is an act which comes from the center of a person's personality.[12] Tillich argues that "ultimate concern" does not come about through the reasoning process of the intellect.[13] Unlike Allport, Tillich believes that it is the will of a person that is responsible for adherence to a particular belief. Tillich believes the intellect and the will

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[7] Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, 18.
[8] Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, 57.
[9] Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, 122.
[10] Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, 102.
[11] Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, 136.
[12] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 28.
[13] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 42.

partner as a person chooses one set of beliefs above another.[14] Finally, he argues that faith as ultimate concern comes about through encountering, and responding to, that which is holy.[15] This experience for Tillich does not need to be ecstatic as encounters with the divine can come through the practice of the sacraments. [16]

In 1974, Henri Nouwen offered a spirituality of faith formation in his book *Reaching Out.* Nouwen does not believe faith formation is a matter of progression, as though individuals were conquering obstacles in the faith life. Rather, he argues that the content of faith is a matter of where a person is situated in a series of three polarities.[17] People develop Christian spirituality as they convert loneliness into solitude with God,[18] as they give up hostility for hospitality[19] and as they give up their personal idols in prayer.[20] Underlying these three movements is Nouwen's conviction that paying attention to the inner life will remove obstacles which prevent the faith life from deepening.[21] Nouwen argues that solitude allows a person to be open to God, that hospitality allows a person to experience God, and prayer leads a person from illusion to spiritual reality or true beliefs.[22] Nouwen calls prayer the first and final movement of the spiritual life, for unlike Allport and Tillich, Nouwen would say right belief is a matter of revelation.[23] In Nouwen's thought, a person would become more engaged in Christian spirituality as they pursue these three movements in their life. For Nouwen, deep engagement in Christian spirituality is synonyms with mature faith practice.

In 1983, a collection of Karl Rahner's essays was published under the title *The Practice*

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[14] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 44.
[15] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 66–74.
[16] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 66–74.
[17] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 182.
[18] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 199.
[19] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 218.
[20] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 253.
[21] Nouwen, "Wounded Healer," 132.
[22] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 249.
[23] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 249.

of Faith. In this volume, Rahner emphasises the role which mystical encounters between the person and the divine play in the life of faith. According to Rahner, such transcendent experiences instigate and sustain the life of faith.[24] Rahner believes faith in modern times can no longer be sustained by cultural influence, rather faith is the result of a person's response to God's grace. [25] While this volume covers a wide range of matters pertaining to faith, the theme of mysticism is a theme which he returns to consistently. Rahner argues that the mystical experience is something which is given to the Christian by God, though it can be something which it is possible to overlook.[26] He believes some people do not rightly interpret certain experiences as mystical and therefore do not feel as though God is present in their lives. Rahner emphasises the need for identifying and re-interpreting past experiences which could be mystical in nature and therefore be seen as signs of God's presence in an individual's life.[27] Hope is another important theme (among many) in Rahner's writing. In his eyes, hope is one of the three basic essences of Christianity, along with faith and love.[28] In Rahner's view, experiential signs of God's presence in one's life incite the individual to hope, and hope in turn leads the individual into the practice of faith.[29] Therefore, part of the ministry of faith formation, according to Rahner, is to help individuals observe and respond to God's presence in their lives.

James Fowler's approach to faith formation was not to describe the process by which one selects the content of their beliefs, but rather to describe how a person will relate to their faith over the course of their life. In 1981 he detailed his findings in his book *Stages of Faith*. Fowler discovers that adolescents tend to initially take the content of their belief from the community in

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[24] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22.
[25] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22.
[26] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 78.
[27] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 84.
[28] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 200.
[29] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 258.

which they live.[30] He also observes that adolescent beliefs are absolute; teens typically cannot think in nuanced terms about the faith which they hold. They perceive that the tenants of their faith are all absolutely true and therefore any contradictions are regarded as serious threats.[31] In this type of thinking, a contradiction signals an inconsistency that thus negates the entirety of the belief system. However, Fowler goes on to observe that it is possible for belief to mature past the fragile adolescent stage (although this does not always happen). He observes that some people are able to move the authority for the content of their belief from an external source and transfer this authority to themselves.[32] This transfer of authority to determine the content of belief causes for a time the individual to deconstruct and analyze the content of their belief system. However, after this deconstruction, the maturing believer gradually gains the ability to accept faith paradoxes while still valuing their belief system.[33] The ability to hold paradox means that belief can be sustained without requiring shielding from certain aspects of reality.

Contemporary to Rahner, Benedict Groeschel published an exploration of psychology and faith formation in his book *Spiritual Passages*. Groeschel seeks to preserve the transcendent impetus in the life of faith, while also accounting for psychological aspects of faith. He concludes that spirituality exists in a social context and therefore the social context will affect how individuals relate to spirituality.[34] Groeschel argues that the best way to understand faith formation is through the traditional three way spiritual path of *purgation, illumination* and *union*.[35] Purgation is the removal of attitudes and practices that are contrary to scripture.[36] Illumination is traditionally seen as the process of unlearning where defence mechanisms and

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[30] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 158.
[31] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 173.
[32] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182–3.
[33] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 198.
[34] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 99.
[35] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 73–87.
[36] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 104.

rationalizations contrary to the life of faith are undone.[37] Lastly, *union* is the awareness of God in one's life.[38] Groeschel argues that the three way path reduces faith related anxiety and distortion, and thereby allows individuals to experience greater knowledge of God's presence.[39] As previous authors have observed, this knowledge of God's presence is the essential ingredient in a mature, lasting faith.

In 1989, James Loder published *The Transforming Moment*, in which he explores how people are transformed through "convictional knowing."[40] Loder describes a process of learning which will lead individuals into a type of knowing which is transformative. In Loder's thought, the Holy Spirit uses an objectifiable process to bring transformational knowledge into a person's life.[41] This process which Loder identifies for faith formation is akin to common learning process, save that the learning is faith related and deeply personal. Loder's process starts with some kind of conflict, which produces a desire to scan for solutions. As potential answers present themselves, the individual ponders which insight is the best fit to the problem at hand. Loder's fourth stage is uniquely in the hands of God, where an "ah-ha" moment occurs and God imparts a resolution which fits the situation. Lastly, the faith-learning is completed as the individual seeks to apply faith insight to his or her life.[42] While this process might seem over-simplified, Loder emphasises that it is a thoughtful and prayerful process which leads individuals to understand themselves, the world, God and evil from a Christian perspective.[43] Loder's intention in writing is not only to articulate how faith learning happens, but also to help ministry practitioners identify which stage a person is at and then to lead them forward toward

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[37] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 120.
[38] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 163.
[39] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 118.
[40] Loder, *The Transforming Moment,* 93.
[41] Loder, *The Transforming Moment,* 106.
[42] Loder, *The Transforming Moment,* 3–4. The remainder of the book is purposed to unpack the process that Loder initially proposes.
[43] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 196.

convictional knowing and therefore, mature faith.

Finally, *The Critical Journey* by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich offers its own conception of stages in the life of faith, and identifies means through which individuals are able to move from one to the next. They propose six stages with higher stages naturally being more mature stages. In the author's conception, faith begins with the "Recognition of God." The second stage is the "Life of Discipleship" where individuals discover how to inhabit the life of faith. The third stage is the "Productive Life" where great concern for the practice of ministry is central to faith. Stage four is the "Journey Inward," where the believer examines their faith closely; most often as a result of crisis. The fifth stage is the "Journey Outward" where the believer discovers a profound new trust in God and a new confidence in faith. The sixth stage, "The Life of Love" is marked by compassion and wisdom as the believer lives out of his or her Inward and Outward journey.[44] As the concern of this thesis is with adolescent faith formation, the first two stages are most relevant. Hagberg and Guelich observe that young believers rely upon an external source of authority in the first two stages of faith.[45] However, individuals must take responsibility for their faith to move into later, more developed stages. Hagberg and Guelich identify the crucial roles of risk taking, responsibility and crisis as means by which individuals come to own their faith for themselves.[46] The authors suggest that guiding young people both toward and through such experiences will help young people to refine their faith to the point where they can take ownership of their faith for themselves.

The main thrust of this thesis will be to articulate a process of faith formation among adolescents and to propose a practical course of action for supporting young people through this

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[44] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 17. This one page is a diagrammatic summary of the book's six stages.
[45] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 46.
[46] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 65–66.

process. Faith formation often requires an environment that promotes faith experience and accompanying interpretation of that experience. In this partnership of experience and interpretation, an individual's faith experiences allow interpretation to have personal meaning and in turn, interpretation gives personal significance to faith experiences. The result of the movement between experience and interpretation is a deeply committed faith. Through comparing faith formation theories and practice at Christian summer camps, summer camp is observed to be an environment that is centred around faith experience and accompanying interpretation. The theorists mentioned above have described the essential role of experience in the life of faith. Camps as live-in ministry environments are uniquely positioned to take advantage of faith-nurturing experiences in two regards. Firstly, by creating an environment which will allow campers to be open to faith experiences[47] and secondly, by being able to aid campers in interpreting their faith experiences. While summer camp is a unique environment, there are features of this formative environment that both can be and therefore ought to be, transposed into local church youth ministry. Summer camp was traditionally designed to be an environment which would nurture maturity in both personality and belief.[48] It continues to inhabit this role in contemporary times through being a Christ-centered environment featuring counsellor-camper friendship, corporate prayer and worship, though the inspiring awe of the natural setting, a practiced sense of mission and refining mentor figures (among other features).[49] This thesis will also show how in practical terms faith formation practices of summer camps can be incorporated into local church youth ministries.

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[47] Note: the term faith experiences used here does not exclusively refer to ecstatic experiences. Prayer, compassion or thanksgiving are three examples of faith experiences which are both

[48] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 140–42. Venable and Joy, *Camping Experiences*, 5–8.

[49] Venable and Joy, *Camping Experiences*, 5–8.

Methodology

This research project is within the domain of practical theology. Practical theology seeks to interpret situations from a Christian perspective and thereby provide a faithful ministry response to the situation at hand.[50]

Theologian Emmanual Lartey has set forward a method of practical theological investigation which is adapted from the pastoral cycle.[51] Lartey begins with defining a situation. After defining, a thorough analysis of the situation is undertaken. This analysis will require interdisciplinary perspectives in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Following the situational analysis, a theological analysis is pursued. This theological analysis reflects on how Christian theology would understand the situation at hand. In order to articulate a faithful response to the situation at hand, both the situational analysis and the theological analysis then are brought together in dialogue. Each refines the perspective of the other until a point of harmony is reached and an appropriate response is set forward. The course of action outlined in the response is the goal of practical theology and as such this response concludes the investigation.

With regards to this proposal's thesis, the situation being examined is the process of adolescent faith formation. The first chapter will look at the situation of adolescents who have grown up in church are giving up the faith either in high school or university. One of the conclusions of this survey will be to identify the need for a more accurate picture of how a mature and committed Christian faith forms in young people. The second chapter will examine the body of literature on faith formation and reflect theologically on the various emphases presented by faith formation thinkers. The goal of this is to articulate an accurate understanding

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[50] Farley, "Interpreting Situations" 1–26.
[51] Lartey, "Practical Theology as Theological Form," 75.

of faith formation. A secondary task of this chapter will be to defend the use of psychological insight in the understanding of faith formation. Chapters three and four will analyze two specific contexts of faith formation; church based youth groups and Christian summer camps. Each of these settings of faith formation will be brought into dialogue with the findings of chapter two. In the fifth chapter, a practical response will be set forward. This practical response will highlight the ways in which youth groups can learn from faith formation practices of summer camps, as well as suggest viable means of partnership between church based youth programs and summer camp programs.

Such a structure follows Lartey's suggestions, with the exception of a theological analysis preceding situational analysis of both youth groups and summer camp. The rationale for this is that faith formation as a general process must be understood before examining specific situations in which faith formation occurs.

Outline

Chapter One: The Need for a New Look at Adolescent Faith Formation

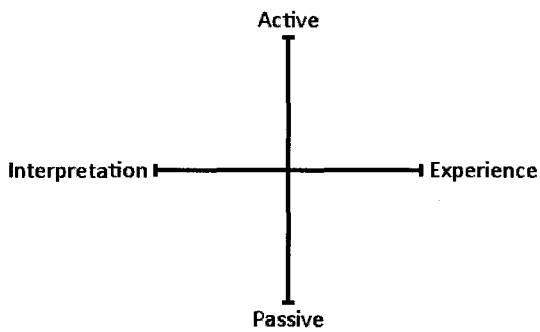
The first chapter will introduce the problem of waning faith commitment in young people. This chapter will argue that the church has not adequately responded to this problem as the church has not taken the time to consider how beliefs come to be formed and held as important in a young person's life. Rather than responding to perceived needs set forward by former church attendees in surveys and statics, [52] or attempting to minimize cultural threats to faith, there is a need for the articulation of a paradigm of faith formation that accurately reflects how faith is indeed formed in young people.[53] Such a paradigm will enable youth ministers to

[52] Penner et al., "*Hemorrhaging Faith*," 113. The authors of this study respond primarily to self-reported survey data as they make recommendations. There is need for broader consideration.
[53] Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey*, 22–3. Jacober asserts that youth ministry will benefit greatly from the interdisciplinary approach of practical theology. Rambo, *Understand Religious Conversion*, 16. Rambo argues that

create or encourage opportunities where faith can be nurtured, as opposed to creating potentially inert programs from old ministry models that no longer support faith formation.[54]

Another task of this chapter will be to show the effect of the current thinking and practice around adolescent faith formation. A key source in this task is Christian Smith and Melinda Denton's *Soul Searching.* This book argues that many teens are open to spirituality and indeed, many are open to Christian spirituality.[55] However, most teens who identify as Christian have a belief in God which is reminiscent of popular culture: God helps us to be happy, and good people go to heaven when they die.[56] This is problematic as the faith nurture the adolescent has received has not produced a belief system that Christ is significantly involved in. Even excellent books on faith formation tend to be a to-do list of practices as opposed to offering a transposable model of faith formation. For example, Powell and Clarke's *Sticky Faith* identifies many good practices for faith formation, but the authors fail to articulate why these practices are good, or how they fit into an overarching strategy.[57]

Chapter Two: A Paradigm of Faith Formation



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many theories of faith formation have not been able to set forward a comprehensive understanding of how individuals actually come to commit to a faith system.

[54] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207–8. Zylla argues that ministry models are unhelpfully rigid, whereas ministry paradigms are applicable across the breadth of experience in the faith life.

[55] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 31. In a study of US adolescents, the authors find 75% of teens profess to be either Catholic or protestant Christian. And 59% regularly attend church at least once a month (p. 37)

[56] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162–3.

[57] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 88. Here as an example, the authors comment that expressing doubts or frustrations is helpful to teens as they think about their own faith. The authors do not however, comment on why this is, or how such conversations might fit into a larger picture of faith formation.

The second chapter will set forward a specific paradigm of faith formation. This paradigm holds that faith is formed as individuals move between faith experience and interpretation of this experience; both actively on the part of the individual and passively though divine initiative. Experience and interpretation are passive as an individual observes the environment in which they find themselves or receives various forms of mystical union with God.[58] Experience and interpretation are active as the individual responds for themselves and takes initiative in the faith life. The diagram above demonstrates how these four poles relate in matters of faith formation. The four poles are arranged to make four quadrants. According to this paradigm, the content of each quadrant affects the content of the three remaining. Additionally, the content of all quadrants combined directly informs the beliefs an individual holds and behaviors with which he or she fills her life. (See diagram above)

By way of example, a person who has a passive experience of God's love experienced unexpectedly while (for instance) in prayer, has had an experience which impinges on the remaining three quadrants. This person must make sense of this experience in (for instance) personal bible study within the active-interpretation quadrant. This person must decide what their interpretation of this event means for their behaviour; should compassion become a greater part of their life in the active experience quadrant? Lastly, this person will also want to wait on God in prayer, in the passive interpretation quadrant; he or she will want to know how God might desire to refine his or her character through this experience.

This paradigm also serves to explain how faith can be mis-formed or abandoned. If activity in a particular quadrant is mistreated, the remaining three are affected. If a person's set of experiences does not allow them to hear another's insight for themselves (active

[58] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22. Rahner argues that a Christian can only be a Christian if they have first had some kind of transcendent experience of the divine.

interpretation), this person might then not realize God's presence (passive experience) and therefore this person may treat fellow Christians coldly (active experiences) and finally close themselves off to the Spirit's rebuke in their life (passive interpretation).

This paradigm is based on the work of the authors mentioned in the literature review, as well as a handful of key additional sources. From the field of experiential learning, John Dewey argues that both empirical observation (experience) and reason form the basis for any type of learning.[59] This assertion about learning in general will also be made of learning as it pertains to the content of faith. There are points of harmony with these ideas from theological writers as well. In *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, Richard Osmer argues that there are a set of meaningful emotions which teach about the spiritual life.[60] Similarly, James Lee argues that theology "derives its content from religious experience rather than the other way around."[61] Lawrence Kohlberg suggests that beliefs require equilibrium between an individual's understandings and an individual's environment. [62] Lastly, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) holds that a client's patterns of belief and actions stem from how the client has interpreted their experience.[63] These insights will be brought into conversation with one another to unpack and understand how individuals come to hold one belief above another.

This chapter will conclude with an examination of the validity of including theory from the social sciences in theology. This section will argue that describing a process of faith formation does not circumvent Christian theology, divine agency or human autonomy.[64]

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[59] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Education," 11.
[60] Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 286–87. Osmer argues that desolation, guilt, peace and joy teach about the Christian life.
[61] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Education," 537.
[62] Kohlberg and Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher," 1059.
[63] Craske, *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy*, 41. Craske argues that belief is a product of interpreted experience.
[64] Anderson, et al, *Christ Centered Therapy*, 113–17.

Chapter Three: Faith Formation in Youth Groups

This chapter will examine the faith formation of adolescents in the church context. It will bring the youth group experience into dialogue with chapter two's paradigm of faith formation in order to highlight areas of strength as well as areas of weakness. A foundational premise of this chapter is built on is Kenda Dean's assertion that the youth ministry as is typically practiced in North America cannot adequately support faith formation.[65] She is not alone in her convictions. This chapter will also be in conversation with Willow Creeks's *Reveal* study. The *Reveal* study discovered that church programming is only able to play a limited role in the faith formation of congregation members.[66] Why this is and how the church ought to respond will be addressed.

The relatively ineffective nature of church-based youth programming is a result of some of the intrinsic characteristics of church-based youth ministry. Because church-based youth groups ministries generally do not take place in adolescent every-day life, but at a distance, the instruction offered may not be immediately applicable or may not be able to be immediately put into practice.[67] Thus in the maturing faith life, teens must recall and apply theory (theology) initially taught in abstraction from relevant situations, as relevant situations arise in the teen's life. Further, such application is done by teens without the ability to immediately consult mentors or perhaps fellow Christians. Another problem exists in that youth groups are usually not a teenager's primary community outside of their home life. Adolescents hold multiple conceptions of self at the same time.[68] The conception of self which is sustained into adulthood is usually the conception espoused by the group to which the adolescent feels the strongest sense of

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[65] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 35.
[66] Wright, "What We Can and Can't Learn from REVEAL," 103–113.
[67] Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus*, 55.
[68] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 154.

belonging.[69] If a faith community is not a primary community, it becomes difficult for faith to form to the level of long term commitment. Part of the response to these characteristics of church-based youth groups will be to show that faith education without accompanying experience does not lead to a mature faith.[70]

The local church youth group is not purposeless however; youth groups provide sustained nurture in close proximity to an adolescent's normal every-day-life. The critiques of this chapter do not undermine youth group ministries, they simply demonstrate the need for additional faith experiences which are instructive and immersive. An excellent example of such intensive and immersive experiences are Christian summer camps.

Chapter Four: Faith Formation at Summer Camp

Summer camps have been observed to be a place where adolescents discover lasting faith.[71] Through interaction with the faith formation paradigm of chapter two, this chapter will argue that summer camps are able to teach faith not as an abstract construct, but also through lived experience.[72] This chapter will briefly describe the origins of the summer camp movement; a movement which sought to nurture maturity in a controlled social context.[73] This chapter will also describe what modern Christian camps have become and the typical ways in which Christian spirituality is nurtured in these environments.[74]

This chapter will also describe key features which support faith formation in summer

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[69] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 53.
[70] Sherr et al., "The Role of Community Service in the Faith Formation of Adolescents," 50.
[71] Burkhardt et al., "Directions ACA Report," 14. Penner et al., "*Hemorrhaging Faith*," 97. Presbyterian Church USA, "Church Camps and Retreats," 2.
[72] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 545. Lee argues that religious experience is the most important goal of religious instruction and further, that religious experience can be taught (though not through traditional didactic means). Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 269. Smith and Denton observe that teaching religious practices leads to faith commitment. Camps are places which build religious practice into the structure of each day.
[73] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 63–101.
[74] Badke, *The Christian Camp Leader*, 49–79. Here is an example that discusses the role of role model relationships and bible study in the camp context.

camp settings. Some of these features include the unfamiliar environment,[75] isolation from external cultural messages,[76] experience of uncommon solidarity around a central purpose,[77] a micro-culture which upholds certain values and defines what is possible in the context,[78] and the unavoidable conflicts which refine a person's perspective.[79] The purpose in discussing these features is in two parts; first to demonstrate how camp embodies the paradigm of chapter two, and second to show that youth group as traditionally envisioned is not able to be a complete source of faith formation.

Chapter Five: Ministry Implications for the Local Church Youth Group

This chapter will begin with a discussion of how to use theory for the shaping of ministry practice. In that this thesis is concerned in large part with theory, there is less space available to describe the many nuances of how this theory may be implemented. In response, a discussion on the pastoral cycle will articulate a process by which the ideas of this thesis can be worked with in order to shape the practice of ministry.[80] There after each quadrant of the belief formation paradigm will be addressed with an eye to discerning what implications could be drawn for the practice of ministry. For example, it will be argued in the "active experience" quadrant's discussion that it is important to help adolescents discern how their emotions fit into the faith life. Teens need to connect Christian theology with their emotions if they are going to find meaning in such theology. This chapter will also suggest two initiatives that could facilitate activity in all quadrants of the belief formation paradigm. The first of these initiatives is a partnership between the local church and Christian summer camp ministries. Summer camp

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[75] Dunning, *God of Adventure*, 71–96. Dunning argues that unfamiliar situations engender openness to new learning.
[76] Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 29–31.
[77] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 129.
[78] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 22–36.
[79] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 30.
[80] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 25.

participation is a viable means of compensating for the faith formation deficiencies of the traditional youth group. Youth group leaders could select a particular camp and forge a partnership whereby teens from the youth program participate in the camp context for a period each summer. Such a partnership would provide teens with an experience-based religious education as they live and labour in the camp ministry environment. Among the various benefits of such live-in environments is the trust and (ministry appropriate) intimacy that is fostered between an adolescent and the camp-based Christian community. Such community has the potential to offer and nurture Christian belief as teens are able to "try out" belief in a community they feel at ease within. The belief convictions fostered in the camp environment can then be built upon and matured in the church-based youth ministry setting throughout the year. A second initiative could be to regularly run a short-term international mission trip with the core members of a local church youth group. The fundraising and preparation commitments of such an undertaking could be spread over a year and provide the opportunity for members to spend consistent and purposeful time together in the completion of fundraising and preparation goals. Such a group could also include camp-like features such as youth facilitated scripture studies, prayer, worship and specialized retreats. With the incorporation of such an undertaking, local church youth groups could create in-part, something of the potent faith formation environment of summer camp.

Conclusion

Churches in North America have struggled to nurture spiritual maturity among young people in contemporary times. For the church that seeks to be faithful to scripture, this waning commitment to Christian faith among young people calls for a response that is nuanced and appropriate to the North American context. Part of this response will be to consider the role of

personal experience in the faith formation of young people. Another part of this response will be to grapple with how young people reason about the experiences they have had. This thesis will examine the role of experience and reasoning in faith formation and relate these findings to the practice of church-based youth ministry.

Chapter One – The Need for a New Look at Adolescent Faith Formation

Introduction

The church is called to make disciples (Matt 28:19), but among adolescents and young adults, the church in North America has not been doing very well at fulfilling this charge. A disciple of Christ is one who is in the continual process of recognizing truth concerning the God of the Bible, and responding to this truth by allowing God to take control of their lives.[1] This process of recognizing and responding to theological truth is also the process of coming to hold particular beliefs and acting in accordance with these beliefs. Unfortunately, the church in North America has not fully understood how belief forms in young people and as such is in need of new thinking in the area of making disciples among young people.

In past times, the North American church has been able to nurture belief among adolescents through religious instruction, often held in the context of church sponsored youth groups. Such efforts seemed to be effective in promoting Christian belief as the culture at large was functionally supportive of the values and beliefs taught by the church. However, in a pluralistic culture, the traditional approach of youth group based religious instruction is insufficient to nurture committed Christian faith among young people. As such, a new and more accurate paradigm of belief formation is required.

This chapter will address what belief is, how ministry practices are envisioned and the current state of youth ministry in North America. These three discussions must come into conversation with one another in order to respond to the deficit in youth ministries' ability to promote mature Christian faith. A discussion about the nature of belief will distinguish how belief differs from faith. Delineating the differences between these aspects of spirituality will

[1] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 4.

help to focus this thesis' discussions specifically on belief when appropriate and specifically on faith when alternatively appropriate. Addressing how best to envision ministry will inform how practices of ministry are chosen and how they are implemented. Lastly, discussing the current state of youth ministry in North America will highlight why the practice of ministry needs to be re-envisioned.

Defining Faith, Belief and Religion

Prior to addressing theory and the practice of faith formation in young people, it is appropriate to spend a moment considering what faith is. Faith is how a person integrates and relates to their beliefs, practices and desire for an ultimate reality. Beliefs are the suppositions of faith, practices are enacted implications of belief and desire is the compulsion for union between the individual and their ultimate reality. To elaborate upon this construal of faith, a few key thinkers must be consulted.

Philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich argues that faith is the state of holding an ultimate concern.[2] Tillich elaborates on this idea by explaining that an ultimate concern is a concern held by an individual that will ultimately inform all others concerns that the individual holds.[3] In Tillich's thought, there are a wide range of concerns that could hold the ultimate position in a person's life. Such concerns need not be supernatural in nature; an ultimate concern could also be a philosophical construct. For example, the hippy movement of the late 1960's could constitute a sort of faith. Though it was not formally organized, the movement had a loose set of beliefs, practices and desires surrounding the ultimate concerns of those who identified as hippies. Faith as ultimate concern can also be seen at an individual level. Another example of a non-supernatural expression of Tillich's envisioning of faith could be what is commonly called

[2] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 1.
[3] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 30. Tillich argues that idolatrous concerns (concerns that cannot be reconciled to the ultimate concern) cannot stand up to the ultimate concern of a person.

"the travel bug." The desire to experience foreign people and places is driven by an ultimate concern; perhaps the sense of awe an individual experiences in the novelty and therefore beauty of such foreign places. It is worth noting that people will surrender great amounts of time, energy, comfort and finances to experience the awe that comes with travel. This surrender is given as individuals who love to travel have understood this surrender is necessary to connect with their ultimate concern. Regardless of what people hold as an ultimate concern, they will relate to their ultimate concern in more or less a "religious" manner. [4] Therefore for Tillich, it is not the content of the ultimate concern which constitutes faith, but rather it is the high regard with which the individual relates to their ultimate concern that constitutes faith. In this construal, belief is the content of faith while faith itself is the act of holding an ultimate concern.

While ultimate concerns have varied contents, the process by which individuals come to select one concern above another is more or less static in Tillich's mind. In his perception of faith, individuals will come to choose an ultimate concern through the interplay of their lived experience and their personality.[5] The personality for Tillich involves in large part a person's reasoning processes and their will.[6] Once the individual has arrived at an ultimate concern, an individual will relate to the content of their ultimate concern in two primary ways. First, he or she will mentally accept the content of their faith and therefore surrender to the meanings that are embedded in this content.[7] Secondly, the individual will come to regard the content of their faith as holy.[8] Therefore, to have faith is to have a set of ideas and assumptions that carry personal meaning about the world each particular individual finds themselves in. By extension then, the act of faith is the choice to accept and surrender to one set of ideas and assumptions and to hold

[4] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith,* 4.
[5] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 5.
[6] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 42.
[7] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 8.
[8] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 14.

these ideas and assumptions above all other considerations.

If Tillich's conception of faith is correct, it follows then that faith (though not the specific content of faith) is a universal human phenomenon. People must, by definition, hold an ultimate concern. And as Tillich argues, if people relate to their ultimate concern in a universal pattern, then everybody holds some sort of faith. There is good reason to accept Tillich's views on faith as there is general agreement on the topic coming from other significant thinkers in the field of the psychology of faith. William James, a seminal thinker about faith and religious experience, describes faith as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men [sic] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."[9] James uses a loose definition of "divine" which essentially refers to a set of understandings and meanings that an individual would perceive as universally authoritative (of course, this does not mean such perceptions are accurate). An example James uses of non-theistic faith is that of the "healthy-mindedness" philosophy of his day.[10] James devotes a chapter of his book to argue that proponents of "healthy-mindedness" and its pursuit of happiness, are essentially embodying and propagating a faith system.[11] In James' view, religious sentiment can be observed in all individuals who take meaning from experiences that they have felt to hold universal importance.

More recently, James Fowler has sought to articulate the difference between faith, religion and belief. Says Fowler, "Faith, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence."[12] He goes on in subsequent discussion to say that faith is the human desire that seeks to form images of an ultimate

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[9] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 36.
[10] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, vii. James gave *The Varieties of Religious Experience* initially as a series of lectures in 1901.
[11] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 101. Here, James argues that proponents of healthy-mindedness ignore the existence of evil on the grounds that it is incompatible with their ultimate concern (to use Tillich's phrase) of personal happiness.
[12] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 14.

environment.[13] Where faith is desire for an ultimate environment, Fowler argues that belief is best understood as a person's conception of this ultimate environment. [14] For Fowler then, religion refers to the ways a person lives or behaves in relation to their conception of this ultimate environment.[15] Thus, James, Fowler and Tillich, each in their own way reach a consensus as to what faith is. Collectively, they agree that faith is intrinsic to human existence, further, they all regard faith as the human drive to connect with transcendent reality. Belief is the set of understandings about this ultimate reality and the individuals' connection to it, and religion is the way that an individual acts out their beliefs.

It is important for this thesis to establish and emphasise that faith is a universal human impulse for the reason that conclusions gathered from the study of faith could then be applied to all individuals regardless of the content of their faith. To understand how an individual comes to their faith will have implications not only for how a Christian comes to faith from another ultimate concern, but also how they nurture faith and why it is that some choose to abandon the Christian faith for alternate ultimate concerns. It is worth noting that the thought of Tillich, James and Fowler is echoed in the writings of others who do not write explicitly from a faith perspective. One such author agrees that individuals naturally seek an "ultimate environment," though he prefers the term "spirituality" to faith.[16] Psychologist Helmut Reich defines spirituality as the relationships that individuals form with others, nature and that which the individual considers to be transcendent.[17] Reich goes on to note that a key feature of any spirituality is "the subordination of self to what is considered transcendent."[18] In Reich's view, there are different

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[13] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 27.
[14] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 27.
[15] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 27.
[16] Reich, "What Characterizes Spirituality?" 125–26.
[17] Reich, "What Characterizes Spirituality?" 125–26.
[18] Reich, "What Characterizes Spirituality?" 126.

depths of spirituality, but any relationship between an individual and a transcendent entity is of a spiritual quality.[19]

In the argument for faith (or spirituality) as a universal phenomenon, the objection could be made that some transcendent relationships are not supernatural and that the faith of individuals in relation to non-supernatural transcendent entities show that not everyone properly has a faith. While it is well true that according to the definition of faith being argued for here, some faiths are not supernatural, it remains true that in some regard the faith drive still connects individuals to a transcendent reality.[20] Such non-spiritual transcendence can be observed for example in an outdoors-enthusiast who holds a spirituality of camping; such an individual could derive meaning from connection with nature and the subordination of one's self to nature in the minimalistic camping style common among nature lovers. Another such non-spiritual transcendence could be seen in the astronomer as he or she derives meaning from studying the vastness of the universe and infers personal meaning about the seeming insignificance of petty desires or troubles. These and other similar examples demonstrate that regardless of the label that is given to the desire, the desire to connect and subordinate oneself to a larger reality is a basic human drive, no matter the specific language used to describe it. It is however fair to say that the ultimate concern of wilderness canoeing will have dramatically different meanings for a person's life than the ultimate concern of Jesus as messiah.

Another objection to the idea that human beings all share a desire for faith is the observation that people exhibit differing convictions and behaviours in relation to their faith. For example, it could be said that some people hold a private faith and others are militant about the

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[19] Reich, "What Characterizes Spirituality?" 127.

[20] Reich, "What Characterizes Spirituality?" 127. Reich argues here that there is such thing as natural spirituality (non-supernatural) and can be seen for example in the principle of equality for all people. Such an ideal is transcendent in that it is perceived by individuals who hold this belief to be a universal truth.

faith they hold. Others are action oriented while still others prefer more cerebral pursuits in their faith life. The argument is therefore made that if faith does not appear in an observable uniform pattern in individuals, faith cannot be a universal desire among human beings.

Turning to Tillich once again, he makes the statement that faith is "an act of the personality as whole [and] it participates in the dynamics of the personal life."[21] Tillich goes on to say that faith as an act of the personality (a person's reasoning and will) comes from both the conscious and unconscious elements of a person's consciousness.[22] This means that while faith is in part an act of the will in that it comes from the conscious mind, it is also in part driven by compulsion in that it comes from the unconscious mind.[23] Therefore, a person's personality can be expected to be seen in how he or she relates to faith. Other research has also shown that Jungian personality preferences play a role in how individuals relate to the life of faith. A person's preference for introversion over extroversion will have implications on how they think about or act out their faith.[24] For example, individuals with a judgement preference will gravitate toward planned faith expressions where individuals with a perception preference gravitate toward spontaneity in the faith life.[25] Thus, variation in the way individuals prefer to relate to the transcendent does not mean the drive for faith is no longer universal, it simply means an individual's drive for connection with the transcendent, as Tillich would say, is an act of the personality. Therefore it should be expected that a person's personality preferences would be observed in their faith.

This initial discussion about faith has shown that faith is the basic human drive for meaning that comes from connections with the transcendent and that is a universal impulse that

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[21] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 5.
[22] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 7.
[23] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 5,8.
[24] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, Kindle Locations 479–495.
[25] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, Kindle Location 547.

can be observed and conclusions from such observations can be applied universally. The next section of this chapter will look at the current understanding of how beliefs are formed in individuals and will argue for the need to revisit the Christian community's operating assumptions about belief formation.

By way of definition, as this thesis proceeds, it should be noted that in the broader Christian community the phrase "faith formation" generally refers to the process of deepening one's commitment and surrender to the theology of scripture and the God who reveals himself in scripture.[26] Such a definition supposes belief formation as part of the faith formation process. However, for the sake of congruence with the thought of Tillich and others a distinction will be made between belief formation and faith formation. Belief formation is a part of faith formation, but the two terms are not interchangeable; faith formation is not part of belief formation. In that this thesis is primarily concerned with how belief forms as opposed to how people relate to their faith, the terminology of belief formation will be used to refer to how people come to hold the beliefs they do.

Understanding Ministry Models & Paradigms

Ministry is labouring to draw people into a consistent (as opposed to intermittent) interaction with God's love.[27] Part of this task is to help people to believe God's love is worth interacting with. Another part of this task is structuring ministry efforts such that they promote the aims of ministry. At this point, the attention of this thesis must turn from discussing belief to discussing the practice of ministry.

A significant problem in the North American church is the observation that adolescents

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[26] Matthaei, "Rethinking Faith Formation," 57. Here Matthaei offers a general definition of faith formation that could be agreed upon by most writers in the field. The phrase "faith formation" in Christian education does not generally conceive of faith as a human drive, rather "faith" holds the place that this chapter argues "belief" ought to hold.

[27] Miller, "Fear, Hate, John's First Letter, and the Task of Ministry," 5.

and young adults have a tenuous connection to church life and Christian faith. This drop in church participation during adolescence and young adulthood is a very strong indicator that Christian belief is not holding the place of "ultimate concern" in young people's lives. If Christian belief were of ultimate concern, then it would follow that young people's decisions would reflect the beliefs and concerns of their innermost person. To properly address this situation it is crucial that attention be given to the current practice and thinking about belief formation and a new, more accurate paradigm of ministry must emerge as a result. Such a paradigm ought to be faithful to what is known about how belief forms and it ought to be able to incorporate critical practices that recent research has come to emphasise.

In the attempt to find a new paradigm of ministry it is important to consider the idea of paradigms. Phil Zylla considers the topic in his article "Contours of the Paradigmatic in Henri Nouwen's Pastoral Theology." The conceptualization of paradigms that Zylla is particularly interested in is that which is represented in Henri Nouwen's thought and writings. In Nouwen's thinking, it is important that ministry practice flow out of an accurate understanding of a person's inner life; those who can articulate the movements of the inner life are able to help another remove the barriers that prevent the Spirit from entering.[28] Ministry ought to be based upon a sound understanding of the human person and arranged in such a way that it is faithful to both the witness of scripture and the realities of inward processes. The paradigm this paper pushes for is an integration of both elements. Such a paradigm will explain something of the process by which individuals come to hold belief and it will also provide a way forward in the practice of ministry.

Zylla argues that there are four levels of conceptualization regarding the practice of

[28] Nouwen, "Wounded Healer,"132.

ministry.[29] The first level is the preceptual level and consists of core convictions or values that direct the practice of ministry.[30] A ministry precept could be seen in the high value placed on prayer as an attitude and practice which by extension drives and empowers ministry. Precepts can also be core convictions about how ministry happens; they need not necessarily be primarily spiritual in nature. One such precept followed by contemporary church-based youth groups is to make youth programming exciting and attractive to young people in the hope that they will attend for the games and by extension, be present to engage in a teaching session at the close of the event.[31]

The second level of conceptualization Zylla gives is ministry models.[32] Models are ministry structures that develop when precepts are put into practice.[33] Using the example of youth groups given above, a group might choose to feature a rotation of events that have proven popular with the church's adolescent members. In this model the group attracts adolescents primarily through strategic activities, then transitions from high energy games into a worship and teaching time at the close of each event. Zylla also notes that models are highly contextual; they shift in relation to the best means to implement a precept.[34]

After models come paradigms. The paradigmatic conceptualization of ministry consists of a flexible set of core convictions that can be transferred between contexts.[35] Where models tend to set themselves up as formulas to be followed, paradigms are general sets of understandings that inform ministry practice. Zylla goes on to mention four features of a paradigm which will be addressed later in this chapter.

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[29] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207.
[30] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207.
[31] Mueller, "Attractional, Sending, and Engaged Church," 123–24.
[32] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207.
[33] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207.
[34] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[35] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.

The last level of ministry conceptualization is the construct. Zylla refers to constructs as the tested and settled groupings of paradigms that are cross-cultural and trans-generational.[36] The youth group example used thus far could be said to be operating in an evangelical construct. That scripture ought to be taught is a settled conviction which has been persevered through time and culture. While paradigm conceptualization does change with time and culture, constructs are groups of tested paradigms used by the church through history.[37] Zylla mentions that most academic writing on the practice of ministry stops at the paradigmatic level.[38] The reason for this is that the construct is removed from the practice of ministry to such an extent that it seems best to fall under the jurisdiction of systematic theology.

One of the key ideas Zylla seeks to express in his essay is that the paradigmatic, as envisioned by Henri Nouwen, is the preferable guiding perspective for ministry.[39] While precepts are essential to ministry, they lack the how-to required for ministry. While models are also essential to ministry, they are contextual and constantly require refinements. The paradigm in contrast, as a grouping of core convictions, "invites a nuanced integration of all the givens or assumptions being made within the context of that community."[40] Paradigmatic conceptualization informs models and refines precepts, and is therefore the optimal mode of conceptualizing ministry.

Zylla offers four characteristics of Nouwen's paradigms which can be imposed on ministry paradigms in general. He observes that good paradigms are simple, yet not simplistic.[41] The paradigm is a general set of understandings that can accommodate the many nuances of

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[36] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[37] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[38] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[39] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[40] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[41] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 209.

ministry without needing to expressly articulate a specific response to them. Zylla moves on to observe that ministry paradigms are able to hold multiple core insights in paradox without breaking down.[42] An example of such paradox that models cannot account for is interplay of human and divine agency in the spiritual life. That God chooses us and we choose God is difficult to base a model of ministry around. However, this truth can be expressed in a paradigmatic approach to ministry. A third characteristic of ministry paradigms Zylla offers is that the paradigmatic is not required to provide conclusive answers to difficult ministry questions.[43] A paradigm offers a way forward while allowing for difficult questions, where as models necessarily have to either stall or ignore questions which arise in while following their process. Lastly, Zylla observes that ministry paradigms are flexible and relate faith to the intricacies and complexities of life.[44] Whereas models tend to serve as ministry formulas that ought to work if correctly envisioned for specific situations, a paradigmatic approach allows a general set of ideas to be applied in varied contexts without breaking down.

For the sake of illustration, an example of paradigmatic conceptualization and paradigm shifting currently at play in North America is the emergence of the missional church conversation. Until recently the church in North America conceived and viewed itself as a moral compass and chaplain to the culture at large.[45] Arguably, this care-taking role was an appropriate paradigm of ministry given the culture disposition of North America over the past few hundred years. However, in a post-Christian context the church has begun to conceive of itself in a new light; as a "body of people sent on a mission."[46] In this new paradigm the church views itself as being sent out to proclaim the good news of the gospel in a missionary fashion, as opposed to

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[42] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 209.
[43] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 209.
[44] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 209.
[45] Hunsberger, "Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," 78.
[46] Hunsberger, "Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," 81.

attracting and caring for congregants. Thus, the North American church at one point organized itself in many different ways (models) however it was primarily expecting the culture to come to the church for renewal (paradigm). Conversely, in the new paradigmatic conceptualization, the church is beginning to see itself as sent out as missionaries to the larger culture (paradigm) and there are various ways it organizes itself to facilitate this sending (models).[47]

Evaluating North America's paradigm of youth ministry

As this thesis is primarily about proposing a new paradigm of belief formation among adolescents, it will be beneficial before a new paradigm in proposed to give an overview of the current general paradigm of youth ministry in North America.

The church-based youth group has traditionally been envisioned as Christian education for youth.[48] In this conceptualization young people would be gathered and instructed about Christian living from the bible with the expectation that this instruction would by extension strengthen their Christian commitment and lifestyle. In the past century (particularly the 1990's) youth groups seemed to realize that young people are more likely to be present for the instructional portion of a youth event if youth gatherings also included attractional elements that young people enjoyed.[49] Thus it was common place to have groups that sought to bring young people into a worship and teaching time through sports and games. This type of conceptualization of the youth group could be called an "attractional / instructional" paradigm. In this paradigm the core practice of belief formation is the bible message and the games play a supporting role of ensuring youth attendance for the message. Such a paradigm could look something like figure 1:

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[47] Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church,* 33–35. The authors point out that the missional conversation is not about providing a new "how-to" for outdated evangelism methods. Rather, it is way of understanding and organizing the church to make its own contextual practices for sending the church.
[48] Neufeld, "Postmodern Models of Youth Ministry," 195.
[49] Neufeld, "Postmodern Models of Youth Ministry," 195–96.

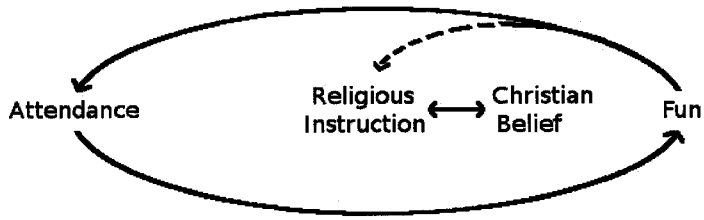

Figure 1.

A significant 2005 study published under the name "Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers" reveals that generally the attractional / instructional paradigm of the last century remains the primary conceptualization of youth ministry in the present century. In this study researchers found that competing recreation and scholastic influences regularly detract from a young person's church or youth group involvement.[50] Hence, youth groups continue to feel the need to make events attractive to young people. Researchers also found that most religious teens did not have personal religious practices such as prayer, opportunities for compassion or personal devotional readings as part of their church experience or personal lives.[51] However, it was found that 85% of church-going teens have attended a Christian youth group at some point.[52] If religious practices are not present in young people's lives, yet youth group attendance is relatively high, this suggests that the approach to religious instruction in youth groups has not translated into a committed Christian faith among young people. Other research in *Soul Searching* supports the view that traditional religious instruction does not hold the shaping value that is supposed of it. A key theme that *Soul Searching* uncovers is that teens are very inarticulate about the faith they hold.[53] This is problematic as the inarticulate nature of young people's faith entails that indeed, faith is not actually something that

[50] Smith and Denton, "Soul Searching," 28.
[51] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 46. The authors offer a list of religious practices and accompanying statistics that represent involvement. One statistic that stands out from the rest is that only 27% of religiously involved young people participate in interactive scripture studies.
[52] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 51.
[53] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 27, 267. The authors identify in the book's opening and concluding remarks that teen's inarticulate faith is a problem for sustained faith.

motivates or informs young people's lives. One Christian learning theorist proposes that to "[know] anything is to indwell it and to reconstruct it in one's own terms without losing the essence of what is being indwelt."[54] If young people cannot speak about the faith they hold, this means that the language and interpretation given to articulate their faith has not connected with them and therefore has failed to offer an avenue through which young people can commit to Christian belief or have Christian belief inform their lives.

Another part of the problem of traditional attractional / instructional paradigm of belief formation is the fact that 81% of church going teens interviewed by *Soul Searching*'s researchers had never talked with their youth pastor about personal faith questions or faith related problems in their lives.[55] This means that only 19% of young people are engaged in dialogue purposed to aid the young person to understand for themselves how faith connects with their lived experience. In such dialogue young people are verbally engaged in constructing meanings from their faith experience that will impinge on their beliefs and behaviour. However, in the attactional / instructional mode of church-based youth group, such active dialogue often does not occur. The unfortunate truth of *Soul Searching's* research is that belief formation that centers on a Christian message delivered in a youth-group is generally not enough to lead young people into a committed Christian faith.

An important thinker in the area of belief formation among young people is Kenda Creasy Dean. In her book, *Almost Christian*, Dean argues that in general, the practice of youth ministry in North America cannot vie with competing cultural-based belief messages. Says Dean:

> Critiques of youth ministry in postmodern American churches abound. Most forms of youth ministry were conceived more than a century ago (e.g., Sunday school and youth groups); surely it is unrealistic to expect them to adequately

[54] Loder, *Transforming Moment*, 25.
[55] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 64.

> support today's teenagers, who must withstand pressures of globalized, postmodern culture.[56]

Dean argues that culture at large functions as a force of belief formation in young people's lives and currently serves as a force against Christian faith formation.[57] That modern culture is a force against Christian faith formation is likely not a new revelation to most people. However at the time that youth groups and Sunday schools were initially envisioned, there was a functional harmony between the message of the church and the values of the culture in that culture accepted the values of the church.[58] In contrast to such earlier times, Dean is adamant that in contemporary times Christian belief cannot be formed in young people solely through church programs and church instruction where the young person is passively sitting through religious instruction.[59] Young people will need to discern among competing claims what their ultimate concern will be; in such an environment, awareness of competing beliefs creates alternatives to Christian belief.[60] However, Dean does not suggest argumentation as the response to competing claims, rather she suggests young people need to participate and experience Christian faith in order to form Christian belief.[61] In Dean's view, Christian belief (as with any belief) cannot simply be expounded upon in a classroom or youth group type setting if teachers and ministers expect young people to hold Christian belief as an ultimate concern.

There is plenty of evidence to validate the findings of *Soul Searching* and Dean's convictions regarding the inability of traditional forms of youth ministry to nurture Christian

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[56] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 35.
[57] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 12.
[58] Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 131–32. Stone comments that under Christendom the church "enjoys" public acceptance. This acceptance affected through the modern period. Stone does not give a date for the modern period's end, but it could be argued that modern thought persisted in North America perhaps even past the 1960's. The period after modern thought is post-modernism. Stone refers to post-modernism as post-Christian (Stone, 145).
[59] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 117, 123.
[60] Frost, *Exiles*, 5–6. Frost mentions how pluralistic culture has been a source of grief as congregations dwindle due to competing truth claims from broader culture.
[61] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 125.

belief in contemporary times. The *Life and Mission Agency Project*, a study by the Presbyterian church in Canada reports that church school enrollment has declined from about 110,000 children in 1963 to about 19,000 children in 2008. [62] This drop translates to an approximate 80% decline over the past half century. Such a rate of decline appears to be consistent across mainline denominations. The Anglican church in Canada saw confirmations (which is likely a more accurate depiction of belief commitment than church school attendance) decline from approximately 35,000 in 1958 to approximately 5,000 in 2000, which is an 86% decrease.[63] It must be noted however, that there is good reason to argue that the decline in church participation seems to have leveled off in Canada over the past few decades. Church attendance in Canada experienced a steep decline in the middle-to-late portion of last century. In 1957, 53% of the population regularly attended church and in 1975, 31% of the population regularly attended church.[64] Despite this initial steep decline in adult church attendance, in 1990 attendance was 24% and in 2000 attendance was 21%.[65] Interestingly, in the 90's, church attendance among adolescents went up three percent from 18% of Canadian teens attending regularly in 1992, to 21% of Canadian teens attending regularly in 2000.[66] This statistic could indicate the bottom end of the exodus of young people from church life. However, even with this slight boost in attendance among teens, there are many adolescents who will never the less give up the faith either during their teen years or shortly after. A study from the United States claims between 40 and 50 percent of adolescent church attenders will give up their faith during their college years.[67] Still another claims 59% of young people in the United States have at one point stopped

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[62] Haynes, "Life and Mission," 7.
[63] Clarke and Macdonald, "Anglican Church of Canada Statics," 5.
[64] Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 37.
[65] Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 37.
[66] Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 36.
[67] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 15. This study does not indicate if these adolescents gave up the faith permanently or temporarily in college.

regularly attending church.[68] The statistics mentioned here affirm in particular, Dean's assessment; the way youth ministry is commonly conceived of in North America is insufficient to nurture sustained Christian belief among adolescents and young adults. As North America has exited Christendom, the practice of youth ministry has not revised itself or responded to how young people form belief in pluralistic culture.

There is a body of research already in print that seeks to reform the current practice of youth ministry. The offerings of such studies are of great value. Among its recommendations, *Soul Searching* suggests that churches ought to emphasise teaching and articulating the faith as opposed to primarily seeking to entertain youth.[69] Another points out that young people need to be involved in intergenerational-worship.[70] Still another points out that hypocrisy in the church is the leading cause of people leaving their faith,[71] while mentors and a sense of relationship with God keep people in the church.[72] A Canadian study, *Hemorrhaging Faith*, insightfully points out that transitions are key points where faith can be lost in young people's lives and churches should have a plan for supporting teens between Jr. and Sr. High.[73] Another study observes particular characteristics of church life set themselves up as hostile to faith. One example of a characteristic is that the general mistrust of science can be detrimental to Christian faith and calls for an appreciation of scientific discovery.[74] However, these conclusions in and of themselves will not be enough, if implemented, to make up for the deficiencies in North America's current practice of youth ministry.

The selection of reforms used as examples above could still be implemented into a model

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[68] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me,* 24. This study does not indicate if these adolescents gave up church attendance permanently or temporarily.
[69] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 267.
[70] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 97.
[71] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 59.
[72] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 35.
[73] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 110.
[74] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 132–33.

of ministry that is operating in the attractional / instructional paradigm. If Jr High students were retained into Sr High without incident, it is still possible that they will not be playing an active role in their own belief formation. If intergenerational worship is implemented, it is still possible that a teen will be inarticulate about the faith they hold. Even if a mentoring relationship were organically established, it is possible that the mentor might be more of an instructor as opposed to a dialogue partner with the student. The old attractional/instructional paradigm of belief formation can be practiced in a variety of ways – the structure of this paradigm may not change, even if the insight referenced on the previous page is included. However, no matter how much insight into belief formation is offered, a paradigm that focuses on church-based religious instruction to form belief is insufficient in modern pluralistic culture. This assertion is of course not to minimize at all the insight such studies provide, this is rather just to emphasise that there is still a need to reconsider the current paradigm of belief formation. The insight such studies provide needs to be arranged into a paradigm of belief formation that is theologically responsible and also makes use of what is known about how young people develop commitments to faith. [75] A new paradigm of belief formation must be able to be both theologically sound and at the same time recognize that people come to faith in a particular social context that either opens the individual up to faith or closes the individual off to faith.[76]

Conclusion

The end results of young people receiving belief nurture through youth groups operating in the attractional / instructional paradigm have not been encouraging. While it is probably true

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[75] Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey*, 13, 77. Jacober's argues in this book for a "bilingual approach" to youth ministry where youth workers are conversant with theology and psychology. She argues that the truth of theology arrives in an adolescent's life in a particular social context which either helps them to be more open or more closed to the truth of scriptures.

[76] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 88–99. In this chapter Groeschel argues that the social sciences can help ministry practitioners understand how people grow in faith. It is also at the same time that faith is not a product of psychological conditioning.

that the attractional / instructional paradigm and its central focus on religious instruction was at one point a viable way to nurture belief due to the larger culture's acceptance of Christian values, the truth is such a means of developing faith is no longer a viable avenue of belief formation. Where once the broader culture allowed religious instruction to excel in this format, in contemporary times, committed Christian faith is unlikely among young people who are passive in the process.[77] Drawing on Zylla's distinction between models and paradigms, a new paradigm is needed that will be more than a revised model or practice based in old paradigm thinking.

What might this new paradigm of belief formation to look like? One resolution in particular seems to be of great importance as this question is considered. As the *Hemorrhaging Faith* study reflects on what conclusions can be drawn from its pages, the authors state:

> We need to create environments where youth and young adults can better experience the love of God and answered prayer by helping them to recognize "God events" in their lives. To do this, we need to better understand the spiritual formation of young adults from childhood onwards.[78]

This statement in particular gets at much of what this chapter has identified as lacking in the current paradigm of ministry. It has been noted that young people tend to be inarticulate and passive under the current paradigm of ministry. It has also been noted that this flaw is largely a result of a lack of understanding about belief formation. In thinking of a new way to understand belief formation the function of religious experience and the question of what this experience means in the life of faith will be critical

[77] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 42–45.Hirsch observes that passivity in churches stalls church growth and faith formation. He advocates for participatory worship and teaching.
[78] Penner et. al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 111.

Chapter Two – A Paradigm of Faith Formation

Introduction

This chapter will address two aspects of belief formation. First, this chapter will articulate the process through which a person comes to hold their religious beliefs. The second task of this chapter will be to offer a brief defence for including insight from the social sciences in the conclusions stated in the first portion of this chapter.

In chapter one, it was argued that youth ministries have not been as effective as hoped for in terms of nurturing mature faith in young people. This difficulty is a result of misunderstanding the process of how a person forms religious belief. If a youth ministry understands how people form beliefs, they could tailor ministry to meet the need. Conversely, as is currently evident in North America, if youth ministries do not understand how people form belief, they will struggle with nurturing mature belief in young people. Through interaction with a number of sources, a process through which young people form religious beliefs will be articulated. This process will be articulated in such a way that it will be able to include the many diverse experiences and patterns of reasoning that combine to create religious belief.

In the first part of this chapter, there will be interaction with perspectives that come from the social sciences. Such an approach has been relatively uncommon in theological writing.[1] Part of this hesitation to interact with the social sciences might come from the feeling that non-theological insight has no place in theological discussion. As such, the second part of this chapter

[1] Browning, "The Revival of Practical Theology," 134. In this article, Browning recounts how the relatively new field of practical theology established itself in the early 1980's. At the heart of practical theology is the integration of theology and practice as informed by the social sciences. Due to the relatively recent introduction of commentary from the social sciences into ministry practice, some hesitancy around their influence may still persist.

will argue for the necessary inclusion of the social sciences when considering belief.[2] In short, Christian belief should (of course) be considered from a theological perspective in that Christian belief is concerned with a transcendent God. However, Christian belief should also be considered from the perspective of the social sciences as belief also relates to emotions, cognitions and behaviour.

Essential insights for a paradigm of belief formation.

Getting a picture of how people come to hold the beliefs they have can be most helpful in understanding the overall topic of faith formation. There are several essential sources whose insights can be brought together for this purpose. Some of the thinkers that will be encountered in this chapter have attempted to describe the means by which individuals come to own one set of beliefs above another. However, none are able to provide a comprehensive enough vision that could accommodate the breadth of experiences that people move through in their own belief formation process. Some theories are too linear; as though beliefs are created in individuals moving through a step-by-step process. Others are too dependent on situational variables such as a skilled teacher. Some insights were not intended to comment on belief formation, though general themes of these theories are still quite helpful. Other's concepts are too general and therefore unable to inform the practice of ministry except through asserting general principles. Though there are wanting characteristics in each, the pooled insight provided by these sources is able to provide a paradigm of belief formation that can demonstrate how individuals come to hold the beliefs they do, regardless of the content of these beliefs.

A beginning perspective in the quest to understand belief formation is the realization that beliefs do not stem from one single, clear source. Belief does not rise solely out of well-argued

[2] Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey*, 148–49. Jacober draws inspiration from the two natures of Christ to argue that people are also fully human (biological) yet spiritual (though not divine). Thus, the interplay of both ought to be considered in faith formation.

philosophy or other supporting proofs. Lines of argumentation can be a part of belief formation, but belief is more accurately seen as arising out of the tensions, paradoxes and polarities of life.[3] Philosopher and theologian Jean Vanier chooses to characterize human existence as the constant movement from order to chaos and from chaos to order.[4] This observation is much more than poetic sentiment; Vanier goes on to say "In human beings, there is constant tension between order, and disorder, connectedness and loneliness, evolution and revolution, security and insecurity."[5] These tensions inform how individuals understand the world in which they live by pushing individuals to form meanings that are better able to make sense of these tensions without collapsing or becoming absurd. The personal meaning or philosophical truth such tensions lead a person to form are subjective in nature.[6] Beliefs are not objective deductions about the world that surrounds individuals; if they were, everyone would in theory arrive at the same meanings and conclusions.[7] Rather, belief comes from seeking to respond to and make sense of the tensions, paradoxes and polarities of an individual's life within the individual's understanding. Thus, a paradigm of belief formation ought to be structured to reflect that role of paradox in belief.

Henri Nouwen offers good insight into the nature of polarity in the Christian life. He suggests that there are three basic tensions that the Christian life exists between and these tensions shape Christian spirituality (and belief).[8] These three polarities are: 1) The relationship with self that exists between the poles of loneliness and solitude; 2) The relationship with others that exists between the poles of hostility and hospitality and 3) The relationship between oneself

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[3] Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen and Spiritual Polarities*, Kindle Locations 373 – 410.
[4] Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 12.
[5] Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 12.
[6] Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 15.
[7] Kierkengaard, "Fear and Trembling," 106. Kierkengaard states that the act of faith is a paradox that can be initiated by reasoning, but must, to be a genuine act of faith, come from the will.
[8] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 181.

and God that exists between the poles of prayer and illusion.[9] The book *Reaching Out*, where Nouwen elaborates on these poles, is not primarily purposed to articulate the process by which an individual comes to belief. However, Nouwen does observe that an individual's interaction with each pole has profound effect on how a person understands and engages the life of faith.

In the case of loneliness and solitude, Nouwen sees that loneliness often draws a person into an often painful analysis of their lives; loneliness is a place where one's questions, problems and concerns are laid bare.[10] However in solitude, where the individual is not pained by their aloneness, the concerns of loneliness are converted into acceptance and inner unity with people and God.[11] Thus, while it is true that Nouwen sees one pole as being preferred over the other, he recognises that both exist and both, in tandem, shape the life of faith. Nouwen also sees movement between these polarities. While the positive end is, in a sense, the goal, he suggests that the mature Christian will accept the realities of their loneliness, hostility and illusion.[12] Such acceptance, in turn, creates desire and availability to become at peace in solitude, to become hospitable and to become prayerful.[13] It is in the midst of these tensions that understanding is produced and belief is refined in the Christian life.

While Nouwen's insight is excellent for describing how Christian belief forms, it will be more helpful to consider the process of belief formation in wider contexts. Nouwen's theories are a theological perspective on how Christian belief comes to be held. However, how should ministers respond if an individual does not feel compelled to exchange their illusions for prayer? In such a situation (which likely occurs with some frequency), Nouwen's ideas can no longer be used to move a person toward Christian maturity and the ability of the minister to nurture belief

[9] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 182.
[10] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 199.
[11] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 202.
[12] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 282.
[13] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 282.

ceases. However, if a minister could understand why an individual's compulsions did not lead them to surrender their illusion for prayer, the minister could adapt a response to the new circumstances and the nurture of Christian belief could begin again. As such, the emphasis both Vanier and Nouwen place on polarities will be carried forward in this thesis, however the specific content of these polarities cannot be used for the discussion at hand.

The polarities that will be suggested here are first, the interplay between a person's experience and how a person comes to understand their experience and second, the individual's personal agency in belief. At some points in belief formation, the individual is wholly responsible for what he or she comes to believe. At other points however, belief comes passively as ideas are introduced and confirmed by processes that an individual has little or no control over. First among these two polarities is experience and interpretation.

The poles of Experience and Interpretation in Belief Formation

Christian education theorist James Loder observes "theology, in contrast to the human sciences, has concentrated on *what* to believe and has paid relatively less attention to *how* one comes to believe what is theologically sound."[14] This important observation by Loder describes very well the current landscape of belief formation efforts in youth ministries across North America. As observed in the first chapter, the assumption that religious instruction is able to function as the critical ingredient in a young person's belief formation process has not proved to be a correct assumption. For those who labour in church-based discipleship, the *how* of belief formation is an area of understanding sorely in need of attention. In Loder's perspective:

> Most of the theological answers to *how* [belief forms] have either been subtly turned into questions of *what* or they have been relegated to the Holy Spirit. However, of all doctrines central to Christianity, that one is the most ill-defined, fraught with mystery, and lost in confusion. *How* the Holy Spirit teaches,

[14] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 20. Italics original.

comforts, afflicts, and leads into 'all truth' is largely a theological blank.[15]

In Loder's thinking, if ministers are able to understand *how* the Holy Spirit forms belief, they will then be better able to partner with the Spirit in this initiative. Therefore Loder gives a proposition for understanding in-part how the Holy Spirit teaches belief. He looks to the scientific method and supposes that the process of coming to know something "scientifically" is also generally true of coming to know anything at all, including belief.[16] He therefore proposes a five step process by which individuals "learn" belief. Loder calls the learning that is arrived at through this process transformational knowing.[17] In Loder's mind, belief formation begins with a conflict which the individual cares greatly about; Loder is careful to point out that knowing does not come from events for which individuals have little concern. Rather, it is based upon something that is of personal significance.[18] After this conflict, there is an "interlude for scanning," where the individual entertains various interpretations and or potential solutions in an attempt to resolve the conflict.[19] After a period of consideration, Loder proposes that an "act of the imagination" occurs where the individual comes (divinely or otherwise) to an appropriate understanding or course of action in relation to the initial conflict.[20] A brief fourth stage occurs when the individual decides whether or not he or she will allow the insight to settle the conflict. Loder sees this act of selecting insight as also being an act of surrender or release; a person gives portions or all of their life to the idea they have selected.[21] The last step in Loder's process is interpretation. This is where the individual considers what meaning the insight will have upon

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[15] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 20. Italics original.
[16] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 29.
[17] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 40.
[18] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 37.
[19] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 37–38.
[20] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 38.
[21] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 38–39.

their future action and understanding in relation to similar conflicts.[22]

Loder's proposal is certainly insightful and in many cases very appropriate for describing how belief forms in individuals. He anticipates some criticism that might come against his work should it be argued that his knowing process is too scientifically based and does not allow for the Spirit to act outside of a physical process. In response to such an accusation, Loder also argues that knowing can be intuitive; that the Spirit brings emphasis to knowing that an individual already possesses, but "does not yet know the content of that knowledge."[23] In other words, Loder makes space in his transformational knowing theory for revelation that can be accessed without a specific conflict to initiate the knowing process.

Loder's thought makes room for paradox as he specifically points out that transformation is a result of both human and divine agency at the same time. In this regard, his insight remains widely applicable in ministry contexts. It is furthermore worth pointing out that Loder views the divine/human partnership as being present throughout his progression of stages. Loder sees Christ present in allowing or orchestrating dissonance, in keeping the individual invested in the solution, in the revelation of the insight that leads to a solution and in the acceptance of the solution into the individual's beliefs.[24]

However, even as Loder is a source of formidable insight, it seems appropriate to suggest that Loder's transformational logic is not yet a full picture of the *how* of belief formation. Loder's proposal can be adapted into a model that is useful in appropriate situations. However, in the quest for a paradigm of ministry that attends to the *how* of belief formation, Loder's proposal does not fit into a paradigmatic approach as mentioned in the first chapter. Recalling Zylla's paradigmatic emphases for ministry, good ministry paradigms are able to

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[22] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 39–40.
[23] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 50.
[24] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 185–196.

transcend context, are non-linear, make space for paradox and are applicable to the varied experiences of the spiritual life.[25] While Loder's transformational logic is not bound to specific contexts in the sense that conflict is a ubiquitous human experience, it is bound to a particular context in the sense that conflict serves as the starting point for the larger belief forming apparatus. Loder's proposal is not able to lead individuals forward in belief formation during the variety of other experiences of the spiritual life, for example experiences of joy or hope. Further, Loder's view of belief learning is very linear and does not make space for variation. It seems as though Loder assumes the Spirit is bound to one particular method of leading individuals to truth. It is preferable in a paradigm of belief formation to have an understanding that would allow for human partnership with the Spirit in any situation, not only the linear problem-solving of Loder's proposal.

A significant perspective that Loder does bring forward which will be essential in addressing the *how* of belief formation, is the realization that belief comes to a person through a learning process.[26] Loder suggests that the *how* of belief formation can be articulated as a process that can be replicated. In other writing by Loder, he argues that the process of forming a belief is not only repeatable, but in fact, occurs in anyone who holds beliefs; which is of course, everyone. In a discussion of a particular case study he comments on the process by which people come to hold deep conviction and belief of a religious nature. Loder remarks that we are all constituted "so as to sustain and give expression to… powerful transforming experiences. We are made for these events just as surely as we are made for language, mathematics, and physics…"[27] He argues that just as humans undergo a learning process which leads to understanding in language or mathematics, so to do humans undergo a type of learning process

[25] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207–09.
[26] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 29.
[27] Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 59.

which leads individuals into particular beliefs. To build on this point, it could be said that beliefs are made up of a series of cognitions. In the case of Christian belief, such cognitions would be the tenents of Christian theology; cognitions such as "Jesus died for our sins" or "God is love." It must be that these cognitions came to be held through some learning process, for at one point or another, individuals who hold such cognitions decided/discovered/learned they were indeed true.

Loder also comments that the learning process that creates belief takes discipline, just as the learning process which leads to mathematical insight also takes discipline.[28] In order to learn, refine or change belief, individuals must engage in existential reflection.[29] Such reflection does indeed take self-discipline and therefore not everyone will persevere in the belief formation process, just as not everyone will persevere in higher level mathematical learning. Just as reasoning can become more nuanced with maturity, beliefs also have the capacity to become more nuanced as life progresses.

Finally with regard to Loder, it is important to make note of the fact that as he proposes his particular step-theory of belief formation he consistently refers to the fact that the process of Christian belief formation is guided and indwelt by Christ.[30] An in-depth look at the integration of Christ in the belief formation process will be undertaken later in this chapter, however in ending this discussion on Loder, it is important to represent his thought as one who strongly believes in Christ, as opposed to a naturalist thinker who is attempting a reductionist approach to belief.

If Loder is correct in saying that learning is the basic vehicle of belief formation, further discussion on the nature of learning will bring more understanding into how people come to hold a particular belief. The question of "how do people learn" is classically divided into two camps.

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[28] Loder, *Logic of the Spirit*, 73.
[29] Loder, *Logic of the Spirit*, 75.
[30] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 185. Loder, *Logic of the Spirit*, 13.

The first camp could be represented by René Descartes who proposed that genuine knowing comes from reason and logic.[31] In this first camp, knowing is a state of equilibrium in the mind where for something to be known, it must be understood, its interior logic discerned and it must fit in with other logical constructs held in the mind. The second epistemological camp could be represented by David Hume who rejected Descartes' rationalism in favour of empiricism. In Hume's view, "logical" thought progressions lead to unfounded hypotheses such as "God."[32] In reaction to the concept of God, Hume argued that knowledge could only come through the senses and not reason. [33] Further, if reason could not be used in knowing, theoretical speculation into causation could not produce knowledge. It was observation, as opposed to deduction, that would produce genuine knowing about causation.[34] Thus, epistemology in the early modern period was divided up into those who believed knowledge came through reason and those who believed that knowledge came through the senses.

In the early 20th century, educational theorist John Dewey sought to overturn the classically held dualism of rationalism and empiricism.[35] Part of his resolve in this was his conviction that certainty in knowing ought not to be the organizing principle of learning.[36] He observed that the "correct" answers often change given new circumstances and therefore he proposed that the intrinsic human desire for knowledge is not motivated so much out of a need to define reality, but rather integrate reality into lived experience.[37] In light of this realization, Dewey proposed that learning takes place in two stages, which when combined constitute a complete learning process. In Dewey's mind the first stage is "primary experience," which is an

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[31] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Learning," 8.
[32] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Learning," 8.
[33] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Learning," 9.
[34] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Learning," 9.
[35] Hunt, "Dewey's Philosophical Method," 29.
[36] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Learning," 11.
[37] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Learning," 11.

experience that is interpreted by the senses, but not yet reflected upon with higher thinking.[38] The second stage is the "secondary experience," which occurs when the mind reflects on the primary experience to organize, interpret and otherwise understand a particular primary experience.[39] While Dewey holds that the learning process must begin with experience, he also notes that not all experiences are educative. Some experiences, he postulates, can be mis-educative.[40] This is important to note as the learning process ought not to be seen necessarily as an automatic function that proceeds from experience. Experience could lead to mis-education (incorrect learning) if the learner is disengaged, if the experiences being reflected upon do not relate, or if the interpretation given to an experience is ultimately incorrect.[41] Dewey also argues that experiences have differing capacity to generate new learning. In his view, experiences must be of a high quality in order to produce learning.[42] The quality of an experience is determined by the effect it has on later experiences; if a particular experience is able to alter how individuals interact with subsequent experiences, the experience offers a high potential of learning and is therefore of high quality.[43] Because Dewey believed that experience is the starting point of education, he therefore argued that education that does not stem from experience is of a lower quality; learning that focuses memory and recalls various ideas and facts is not how humans learn best, nor have much motivation for.[44]

One of the essential perspectives that arises from Dewey's theories is that personal experience is an essential ingredient in any genuine learning. Even in abstract fields of study, it

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[38] Hunt, "Dewey's Philosophical Method," 26.
[39] Hunt, "Dewey's Philosophical Method," 27.
[40] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 13.
[41] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 14–15.
[42] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 16.
[43] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 16. Dewey also argues that the quality of an experience is determined by whether or not the learner enjoyed the experience. The case could be made however, that significant learning can occur as a result of disagreeable experiences, just as it occurs from enjoyable experiences.
[44] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 14–15.

could be argued that a student must experience a concept's truth though understanding, as opposed to simply reciting a formula, if genuine learning is to take place. In the pursuit of a theory of belief formation, the inclusion of experience is essential. This experiential focus entails that the means by which someone arrives at a conclusion is equally as important to assess as the correctness of the conclusion.[45] This observation is consistent with Loder's claim that how a person arrives at a belief is equally important to understand in teaching theology as the correctness of the theology itself. In theology, as with any other learning, it would seem that a student is unable to understand exactly how correct a particular conclusion is without having been in a situation in which the conclusion is experienced to be correct. The other essential perspective Dewey provides in the search for the *how* of belief formation is the necessity of thoughtful reflection. In addition to experience, "secondary experience" guides a learner from the experience into various possible "correct" conclusions or interpretations. Such secondary experience could come in the form of one's own thought, or by adapting the thought of another into one's own thinking. In order to be a Christian, a person must be restricted to a set of beliefs.[46] Therefore, there must be space made for guided reflection in a paradigm of belief formation. Experiential education theorists suggest that teachers lead students through discussions, processing memories, recalling personal highlights and otherwise generally aiding learners to answer the question "what did your experience mean?"[47] Such practices could also be used to promote theological meaning, otherwise known as belief.

Related to the process of forming beliefs is the process of moral reasoning and moral

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[45] Crosby, "Philosophical Foundations of Experiential Learning," 20.
[46] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Kindle Location 611.
[47] Stringer and McAvoy, "The Need for Something Different," 70.

development.[48] The relationship is seen by observing that beliefs inform behaviour and therefore moral behaviours reveal the beliefs of the individual. To believe that everyone has intrinsic value means treating everyone as such. To believe that what coercive power does is legitimated by desired ends give licence for such power to be wielded. As such the study of moral behaviour requires some formulation of the thought processes that precipitated the behaviour. In the late 1960's and early 1970's psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg engaged in novel research into the nature of morals reasoning. He reasoned that adolescents were capable of philosophical thought and of doubting either their own or other's philosophy.[49] He also drew on the work of Jean Piaget and observed that cognitive structures (ideas & beliefs) were not "wired in, but are general forms of equilibrium resulting from the interaction between organism and environment."[50] He theorised based on these two precepts that moral reasoning must be derived from personal subjective philosophy that has reached equilibrium between viable doubts, reason and environment.[51] The idea of subjective philosophy was essential to his theories, for moral reasoning (though some might argue otherwise) is subjective.

Kohlberg developed six stages of moral reasoning out of his research and theorising. His first two initial stages are in what he termed the "Preconventional Level."[52] In the first stage people behave in the boundaries of what they can get away with while avoiding punishment. The second stage is governed by reciprocity; individuals will behave well not out of concern for others, but out of the expectation that others will repay kindness with kindness. The second

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[48] Walker et al., "The Consolidation/Transition Model in Moral Reasoning," 187–88. Weiss, "Understanding Moral Thought," 852–53. The opening pages of each of these papers introduce the concepts of moral reasoning and moral development. Moral reasoning refers to the cognitive process by which an individual judges what is right and wrong. Moral development refers to the process of maturing in cognitive abilities such that an individual is able to engage moral reasoning at a higher level. Such higher levels of moral reasoning will better aid an individual in judging moral right from wrong.

[49] Kohlberg and Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher," 1054–55.

[50] Kohlberg and Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher," 1058.

[51] Kohlberg and Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher," 1059.

[52] Kohlberg, "Claim to Moral Adequacy," 631.

grouping of stages, which Kolhberg calls the "Conventional Level" includes the third and fourth stage.[53] In the third stage individuals behave well in order to gain approval and in the fourth stage individuals behave out of a sense of duty to authority and respect for a societies' rules. The last grouping of stages is called the "Postconventional" or the "Principled Level."[54] In the fifth stage individuals judged moral right from wrong based upon what a society as a whole valued. The sixth and final stage judges moral right from wrong based upon universal ethical principles. In this stage moral reasoning is flexible based upon what is just or equitable for all people.

Kolhberg's levels of reasoning are not as relevant to this thesis as much as the thinking behind the levels is. Kolhberg thought that people would progress from one level to another when they realized an inherent inconsistency at their current level of moral reasoning. [55] For example, someone might move from five to six when he or she realizes that a whole societies' moral vision could be corrupt and therefore he or she needs to come up with a set of universal principles that would apply regardless of what any given society felt was morally acceptable. Kohlberg also recognized that individuals generally would not be inclined to reason at more than one stage higher than their current stage.[56] He theorized this inability to reason higher than a single level greater could be due in part to IQ or developmental considerations if a person was not yet an adult.[57] He also recognized that apart from IQ or developmental considerations, people could not reason at levels they had not yet been exposed to and put into practice.[58] If an individual had no context or experience of a higher level, he or she would not reason at the higher level. However, if new reasoning or experience were to become available, individuals

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[53] Kohlberg, "Claim to Moral Adequacy," 631.
[54] Kohlberg, "Claim to Moral Adequacy," 631–32.
[55] Kohlberg, "Claim to Moral Adequacy," 633.
[56] Kohlberg, "Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," 671.
[57] Kohlberg, "Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," 671.
[58] Kohlberg, "Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," 675.

could move higher up in moral reasoning levels. In this way, new reasoning or new experience created disequilibrium and the need for a new philosophical structure.[59]

Kohlberg's research is able to comment on the way people form beliefs, just as it comments on the nature of moral judgement. Actions are based upon beliefs and therefore the same line of reasoning that describes the process behind a person's moral judgement can describe the process behind a person's beliefs. Kohlberg rightly points out that new ways of thinking stem from new experiences or lines of reasoning that have caused disequilibrium in a person's cognitive structures. New belief is developed through creating disequilibrium and the accompanying opportunity for new ways of thinking. Therefore Kohlberg's idea of equilibrium will also be incorporated into this chapter's paradigm of belief formation.

To continue to examine the role of experience and interpretation in belief, it is prudent to look at the role religious experience plays in individual's particular beliefs. Some excellent insights on the role of experience in belief formation are offered by James Michael Lee in his article entitled "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience." Lee opens his essay observing that religious experience is a broad phenomenon in human beings. Experiences that are religious or transcendent in nature are also widely varied; such experiences can be as simple as observing the beauty of nature or as intense as mystical union.[60] However, Lee also observes that religious experience is not limited to one particular strain of theology; rather, such experiences are reported by a variety of people throughout history, even those with apparently conflicting theology.[61] This observation leads Lee to conclude, "it would appear that theology is fundamentally shaped by, flows from, and derives its content from religious experience rather

[59] Kohlberg, "Claim to Moral Adequacy," 633.
[60] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 537.
[61] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 537.

than the other way around."[62] He elaborates on this assertion by arguing, among other points, that theology is learned. More specifically, theology is learned through a process that theology itself cannot fully comment on, for it is best explained through learning theory.[63]

Lee goes on to observe that if theology flows from religious experience, a problem arises in the teaching of theology. Theological instruction alone can only teach truth as a "construct," not as lived experience.[64] Therefore there must be an accompanying religious experience in an individual's life if theological education is to inform a person's actions and beliefs. In Lee's view, genuine knowledge of God comes through experiences of God. This type of understanding cannot be facilitated by human means. Lee feels this is an important insight not just for Christian education, but also for a Christian spirituality, saying "God, in his many manifestations is primarily to be experienced, rather than to be defined."[65] He then goes on to propose a distinction between religious instruction and theological instruction, saying the former is what is required for belief formation, but the latter is in essence, what the church defaults to in the course of ministry.[66]

Having acknowledged the basic inability of human ministry efforts to effect genuine religious experience, Lee observes that God generally (though certainly not always) reveals himself in individual's lives when four teaching elements are structured together in a particular manner.[67] The elements include the teacher, the learner, the subject matter and the environment. In Lee's conception, the learner, placed in a suitable environment, interacts with the subject

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[62] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 537.
[63] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 543. Granted, Lee does not comment on the theology of God's self-revelation in an individual's life. However, it does appear that such a theological discourse is not within this paper's scope. Additionally, Lee's use of the word "construct" is his own – it is not intended as a reference to Zylla's ideas from chapter one.
[64] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 545. Theological instruction cannot create subjective religious experience and therefore must teach theology as a construct.
[65] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 547.
[66] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 548.
[67] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 550–51 .

matter and the teacher until a particular learning or experience is achieved. [68] A diagram of Lee's arrangement of these four elements is seen in figure 2.

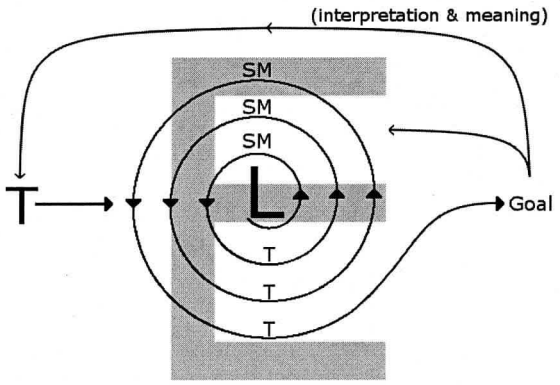

Figure 2

In this arrangement, the teacher is indicated by the letter "T", the learner is indicated by the letter "L", the environment is indicated by the large letter "E" and the subject matter is indicated by the letters "SM." In the process of facilitating religious experience according to Lee, the teacher will create or shape a particular learning environment. The teacher attempts, as much as possible to shape the environment such that the environment lends itself to supporting the learning process at hand. Subsequently, in a series of interactions between the teacher, the learner and the subject matter, the learner (ideally) arrives at the desired goal. Lee is careful to note that in teaching religious experience, the educator cannot be sure this process will be effective.[69] This is because belief rooted in a religious experience cannot be programmed or produced through a formula.

There are a few other essential notes Lee makes about his diagram and the four elements that comprise it. He chooses to include two "feedback" lines and does so to stress the point that

[68] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 550.
[69] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 550.

the learning which takes place via religious experience affects both the teachers and the learners.[70] He comments that as the learner and teacher move toward religious experience, the religious experience should be viewed as a blend of cognitive, affective and "lifestyle elements."[71] It should not be a surprise that thought processes, feelings and habitual behaviours play a role in what the learner comes to regard as a religious experience and therefore, while religious experience can be parsed into constituent parts, the human elements coalesce in partnership with divine initiative to create religious experience. Lee also points out that religious experience is not simply a product, but also a process.[72] In one sense the goal is the desired experience, but in another sense, the goal is also the process of learning and opening oneself up to God and experiences of God. Finally, Lee observes that the environment can only facilitate or enhance religious experience.[73] While the teacher chooses and shapes a particular environment to aid instruction or help the learner to be open to God, God also holds the right to introduce or withhold religious experience in any setting.

One important perspective Lee offers in the pursuit of understanding belief formation is that the interplay of experience and reason is an at-length process that eventually arrives at a belief. Kohlberg's equilibrium may not be arrived at quickly. Arguably, it takes a protracted processes such as Lee's proposal to allow the various elements of a person's experience to interact with their reasoning faculties and distill into a belief. Lee also alludes to the fact that the process to equilibrium may not necessarily start with experience. Where Dewey felt that experiential learning starts with experience and ends with reasoning, Lee sees that experiential learning as it pertains to belief is a process that visits both poles repeatedly over time until belief

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[70] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 553.
[71] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 557. Lee uses the term "lifestyle elements" to refer to habitual practices and experiences.
[72] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 557.
[73] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 558–59.

results. Lee does comment that theology flows from experience,[74] however this comment does not preclude that a reasoning process cannot be the catalyst for belief. If a reasoning process initiates a belief that is later confirmed by experience, the belief still flows from experience in that it was confirmed by experience. Indeed, such is the case in Lee's diagram as seen in figure 2. The learner first encounters theoretical subject matter before engaging experiences that confirm the subject matter's truth. It is therefore less important to distinguish which event happens first in belief formation; the more important event is the interplay between experience and reasoning, and the eventual arrival at equilibrium.[75]

An issue for this thesis found in Lee's paper is that he writes with the intent of describing a way forward for belief formation in formal religious education. However, the aim of this chapter is to describe how belief is formed in general, not simply in formal educational settings. Therefore Lee's diagram cannot serve as a final picture of belief formation, even though it astutely incorporates experience and reason into the belief formation process. The final paradigm will need to be able to show how belief forms in all settings, not just settings with a teacher and specific learning goals.

Based upon the discussion of sources this far, it can be confidently stated that belief is in part formed in the polarity of experience and interpretation. Experience refers to knowledge gained, either objectively or subjectively, from participating or observing any event that could or does have theological implications. Interpretation refers to the objective or subjective reasoning that an individual applies to their experience in order to arrive at a theological or personal meaning. Creating personal meaning is the act of giving certain value to elements of lived

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[74] Lee, "Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 537.

[75] Craske, *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy*, 51. Craske sees the interplay of cognitions and experiences as reciprocal. Behaviour is the result of the interplay between the two. This is a foundational premise of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

experience.[76] Interpretation then, is the process of giving more value to certain experiences and less value to others. And having a set of values that determines which experiences a person will seek, constitutes a world-view or belief system.[77] In other words, a person's values will determine their ultimate concern, and as was argued in the first chapter, to hold an ultimate concern is to be in a state of faith.[78] Therefore, the basic polarity that informs the process of belief formation is the individual's movement between experience and interpretation.

The poles of Activity and Passivity in Belief Formation

Having explored the polarities of experience and interpretation, we will now consider the question of an individual's personal agency in belief. The question must be asked, in what ways is an individual responsible for the content of their belief?

To begin, John Dewey thought that genuine experience must have an active and a passive component.[79] He believed that learning happens as an individual acts upon an environment, and the environment in response acts upon the individual.[80] Experience is active as something is tried out and experience is passive as something is undergone.[81] For example a young person learns a stove can be hot as they actively try placing their hand near a burner. In feeling the heat they have passively undergone a learning experience. Thus, the movement between experience and interpretation also must include a movement between activity and passivity. In the process of belief formation, a similar dynamic is at work and must therefore be addressed

The essence of Dewey's ideas on activity and passivity in learning are echoed by theologians. In Karl Rahner's book *The Practice of Faith*, he opens his first chapter with a

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[76] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 24.
[77] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 60.
[78] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 1.
[79] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 139.
[80] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 140.
[81] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 139.

discussion of why it is that anyone would be a Christian? While Rahner goes on at length to qualify this statement, he none-the-less remarks that Christians are Christians because at some point each has decided, "I would like to be [a Christian]."[82] This is a fairly simple line of reasoning, but in making this observation, Rahner sets the individual up as the agent behind their choice in beliefs. This is to say, the individual is *active* in discerning what ought to make up the content of his or her beliefs. However, in the discussion of how individuals arrive at Christian belief, Rahner also underscores the great importance of mystical encounters to the life of faith. Christian mysticism is a loose term which has been used to connote visceral desire, intuitive knowing and extreme experience with the divine.[83] Mysticism can also refer to a way of life which is focused upon spiritual meditation, contemplation and often various forms of asceticism.[84] Yet in its simplest terms, Christian mysticism refers to any stream of thought that concerns itself with the human experience of the immediate presence of God.[85]

In Rahner's thinking, the mystical encounter with the divine is a catalyst for Christian belief. This is especially true of Christians in modern times who can no longer rely on the surrounding culture to affirm and thus socialize individuals into Christian belief. Rahner insists "...the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all."[86] For Rahner, Christian mysticism refers to "a genuine experience of God emerging from the heart of our existence."[87] Elaborating, he goes on to say:

> ... the ultimate conviction and decision of faith comes in the last resort, not from a pedagogic indoctrination from outside, supported by public opinion in secular society or in the Church, nor from a

[82] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 3.
[83] Winger, "Clarity in the Midst of Confusion: Defining Mysticism," 331–32.
[84] Winger, "Clarity in the Midst of Confusion: Defining Mysticism," 334.
[85] Winger, "Clarity in the Midst of Confusion: Defining Mysticism," 336.
[86] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22.
[87] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22.

> merely rational argumentation of fundamental theology, but from the experience of God, of his Spirit, of his freedom, bursting out of the very heart of human existence and able to be really experienced there, even though this experience cannot be wholly a matter for reflection or be verbally objectified.[88]

For Rahner, the Christian does not hold a particular set of beliefs primarily because he or she has reasoned his or her way to faith. Rather, the Christian chooses to respond to God as a result of inward experiences initiated by the divine.[89] Rahner does admit that indoctrination through social means could produce Christian belief, should for whatever reason God withholds transcendent experiences of himself.[90] However, he is quick to emphasise that the knowledge of God (or belief about God) is most profound when it comes through subjective experiences initiated by God himself.[91] Genuine knowledge of God is entirely dependent upon God's self-revelation (be it mystical or scriptural) as the finitely bound human cannot comprehend divine infinitude except in the event that God should choose to reveal himself to the human.[92] If genuine knowledge of God is dependent on God's self-revelation, then Christian belief is formed *passively,* as an individual cannot compel God to act. Therefore, while Rahner begins his book arguing Christian belief is something that is actively chosen by individuals, he also observes that individuals in large part are passive in their belief forming process. The importance in highlighting this is that any paradigm of belief formation must recognize that in part (but only in part) individuals are products of the particular set of experiences they have had in their lives, over which they have had little or no agency. This does imply that in a certain perspective individuals cannot be held totally responsible for the particular set of beliefs they hold. Though

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[88] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22.
[89] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22, 83–84. In the latter reference Rahner speaks of the "mysticism of everyday life." He argues that mystical encounters, regardless if they are ecstatic or otherwise, reveal God and thus enliven the life of faith.
[90] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 61.
[91] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 62.
[92] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 248.

much could be said about the age-old tension between freewill and determinism, it will suffice to point out that scripture writers (John in particular) held both views as equally true at the same time.[93] Like scripture itself, this chapter's paradigm of belief formation must make space for this paradox. It is true as Loder, Dewey and Lee affirm, that belief comes out of an individual's active participation in the process. However, it must also be affirmed at the same time that individuals cannot actively engineer for themselves any belief; their personal beliefs must be rooted in a set of experiences that were, in essence, thrust upon the individual.

Rahner's insight on passive belief formation has implications for belief that is not Christian. Just as the Christian is compelled to respond to mystical experience, other beliefs are also responses to experiences that are perceived as transcendent. Abraham Maslow observed that some experiences can have a transcendent quality, though may not necessarily be Christian in nature. [94] Maslow postulates that transcendent experiences (which may or may not be genuinely divine in nature) give belief an emotional satisfaction.[95] Such experiences in his studies led people to find personal meaning in diverse avenues such as political beliefs, philosophies, appreciation for the arts, academic pursuits and other such pursuits/constructs that engender deep loyalty from individuals.[96] In that the paradigm of belief formation ought to describe all belief, not simply Christian belief, Maslow's observations are important. According to Maslow's research, sincere belief of any stripe came at one point from an experience where a person felt a connection with something (not necessarily divine) that was greater than them.[97]

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[93] Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 313. For example, John speaks of the Father giving Jesus disciples (John 6:37) or the disciples being chosen by Christ to bear fruit (John 15:16). These verses can be contrasted where John speaks of people's evil preventing them from coming to Christ (John 3:19) or people being blind to Christ as they willfully refuse to see (John 9:39–41).
[94] Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 59–68. Maslow describes 25 characteristics of experiences that have the potential to create belief.
[95] Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 43.
[96] Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 28.
[97] Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 59.

Agency in one's beliefs can also be seen through the perspective of the traditional three-fold path.[98] The first stage is purgation, where the believer *actively* cuts out practices contrary to scripture's teaching. The second stage is illumination where the believer *passively* learns to enjoy prayer, and *actively* engages prayer. The third stage is union, where the believer is *passively* drawn deeper into God's presence. In the early 20th century, Evelyn Underhill proposed an additional initiation stage, which she called the "awakening." In this stage an individual *passively* becomes aware of the divine presence and call in their lives, often for the first time.[99] In Underhill's thinking, the awakening experience is not a result of an individual's own reasoning process, but is entirely initiated by the divine.[100] In the perspective of this three stage progression, the beliefs and how a person engages the Christian life is for the most part, dependant on God as the Christian passively responds to his self-revelation. However, in this perspective the Christian must also act upon beliefs in the first and second stage in order to move forward in the Christian life. The understanding of agency in belief presented here demonstrates that belief is only in part something that other humans, or even one's own self, can have meaningful agency in forming.

The essential insight that the discussion of activity and passivity brings forward is that belief is not dependent on initiatives or situations that people have complete agency over. It has been argued above that the primary polarity of belief formation is experience and interpretation. However, it must also be recognized that while this is true, there is room in this primary polarity for divine agency, for personal agency and for aspects of socialization. Hence, the need for a modifying polarity that creates space in the process of belief formation for an individual to be

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[98] Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian*, 76–81. First written about by St. John of the Cross, the three-fold way is a relatively common means of envisioning Christian spiritual growth.
[99] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 135.
[100] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 122.

active in forming their belief, as well times where the individual is passive as external forces act upon his or her beliefs.

There are many essential considerations that these sources have brought forward and which this proposal about belief formation is compelled to address or incorporate. Vanier and Nouwen observed that belief formation is not simple or linear. It exists in paradox and amid the tensions or polarities of everyday life. Loder argues that beliefs are learned in the same manner that any other cognition is learned. Dewey argues that learning occurs when truth is both experienced and understood. Kohlberg observes that in situations of multiple perspectives, the perspective that offers the greatest harmony between experience and interpretation is the perspective an individual will hold as true. Lee argued that the tenents of experiential education ought to be applied to religious education if students are going to internalize the theology they learn. Rahner saw that the responsibility for creating religious experience relies upon God and the responsibility for internalizing theology relies upon the human person.

A new theory of belief formation

Having concluded the above survey, the paradigm that is able to incorporate this pooled insight is seen in figure 3.

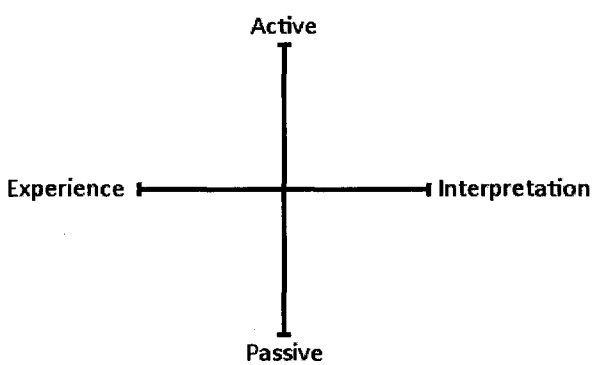

Figure 3.

In this arrangement, the primary polarity is laid on the X-axis of the diagram. The process

of forming belief is the process of moving between experience and interpretation. The secondary polarity is laid on the Y-axis and indicates that the individual can either be active or passive at either end of the primary polarity. In this construal, a quadrant system is created where the various situations that nurture belief can be placed. At the moment in which each quadrant's content is able to achieve a note of harmony with all other quadrants, belief is formed. The content of the "interpretation" quadrants become held as belief and the contents of the "experience" quadrants support and affirm this belief.

The "passive-experience" quadrant contains experiences that the individual had no personal agency in creating. These experiences include both experiences of an ultimate environment and experiences that can lead to critical reflection about an ultimate environment. Two examples of experiences that fit in the "passive-experience" quadrant could be one's mystical awakening or perhaps experiencing the death of a loved one. Such weighty experiences as these would require a person to form a new equilibrium between thought and lived experience as they move forward in meaning making.

In the "active-experience" quadrant are a person's actions and emotions. Actions refer to how an individual chooses to respond to the interpretations (or beliefs) they are holding. For example, the act of volunteering at a food bank could be a response to thinking that showing compassion is meaningful. The affect is also put in the quadrant based on the observation that emotions are not responses to stimuli, but responses to how people *think about* stimuli.[101] For example, the experience of hopefulness belongs to this quadrant as hoping requires personal agency.[102] Hoping in turn plays a role in belief formation as an individual will hope for what he or she believes will happen.

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[101] Craske, *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy*, 40–41. According to CBT theory, individuals can change how they feel based on how the interpret their experience.

[102] Capps, *Agents of Hope*, 53. Capps views the act of hoping as an experience that requires "an investment of self."

In the "passive-interpretation" quadrant are ways of thinking about experiences that have come from external sources. Such external sources include God, peer groups, cultural values, mentors, teachers, or any other means of discovering interpretation that an individual did not arrive at on their own. Activity in this quadrant may insert, affirm or refute conclusions arrived at in the "active-interpretation" quadrant.[103] Activity in this quadrant can also inform how a person feels about their belief system based upon other's affirmation or dismissal of currently held beliefs. Activity in this quadrant could be seen in the tendency of often younger Christians to adopt the teaching of a particular charismatic leader.[104] Activity in this quadrant can also be seen in studies that show a parent's influence on a child is the most important predictor of what a child will ultimately believe for him or herself.[105]

The final quadrant is the "active-interpretation" quadrant. This quadrant represents a person's own reasoning about their experiences. Even if they are adopting patterns of reasoning from others, it is still in this quadrant where an individual chooses which external reasoning will be internalized and which will be rejected. It is in this quadrant that a person decides whether one's beliefs are at equilibrium or in a state of disequilibrium with one's experience and interpretations. Activity in this quadrant will ultimately draw on all the other quadrants as a person makes a decision about their beliefs.

There is no set course through this paradigm or steps that ought to be followed. It may seem intuitive that experience should come before interpretation, as Dewey argues. However this is not necessarily the case in belief formation. People can reason abstract from experience and

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[103] Fowler, *Stages of Faith,* 171–73. Fowler states that many people rely heavily on conforming their belief to that of their social situation or authority figures they respect. This is to the extent that external interpretations can at times over shadow an individual's own interpretive process. Some individuals however are eventually able to internalize the authority for their beliefs; at such a point the influence from this quadrant lessens.

[104] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 46.

[105] DeHart, "Impact of Religious Socialization in the Family," 75. This study noted that even in secularized Europe, a parent has greater influence than larger society in the child's belief formation process.

come to subsequent experiential confirmation at a later point. [106] This can be seen in those who first reason their way to Christ through the scriptures and through their own considerations only to later experience confirmation of their understanding through the presence of Christ. Due to its lack of linear process, the paradigm actually becomes better able to represent the variety of real life situations that nurture belief.[107]

Even though there is no set way through the paradigm, there is an end. The goal of the paradigm is to come to a point of equilibrium. As Kohlberg observes, beliefs rely upon an equilibrium between the individual and his or her environment.[108] When dissonance occurs in any one of the four quadrants, equilibrium may be disrupted between the quadrant in question and the remaining quadrants. Thus, activity in one quadrant will cause (like a chain reaction) activity in the remaining three quadrants. If the activity in any one quadrant is of sufficient magnitude, the ripples created from this activity in the other quadrants will break the individual's sense equilibrium in belief and begin the collapse of the current belief. In the wake of this collapse, the formation of a new, more viable belief that is able to restore equilibrium to the paradigm will be sought by the individual. The apparent desire to resolve disequilibrium in a person's cognitive structures, is an intrinsic drive.[109] It is not a matter of preference that leads a person to resolve conflicting ideas, rather, humans possess an urge to maintain a set of understandings and values that are consistent with one another and with one's own experiences.[110] However, stating that the resolve of disequilibrium is a drive does not ultimately

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[106] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 8. Fiddes notices that interpreting experience was the means by which the early church arrived at accepted orthodoxy. However, he also suggests that early Christians could reason from scripture prior to subjective experience.
[107] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 209. Zylla argues that a paradigm works best if it is able to be flexible enough to relate to the complexities of real life.
[108] Kohlberg and Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher," 1059.
[109] Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 3.
[110] Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 11.

circumvent the action of the will in choosing belief.[111] Just as people are able to control other urges and drives (for example sex and hunger), a person can maintain a certain amount of dissonance in their belief system by force of their will. This is especially true if particular experiences or ideas have proven to be of great importance in an individual's life. In order for an individual to rearrange their cognitive structures, the disequilibrium must be of a magnitude great enough to challenge settled vales and meanings.[112] This is true of all belief, not simply Christian. Not only does significant disequilibrium cause individuals to move out of Christian belief, but it must also be true that significant disequilibrium is necessary to move into Christian belief. Granted of course, the disequilibrium that would move someone into Christian belief would be greatly different in nature from that which would move him or her out of Christian belief.

Because the poles in the paradigm flow into one another, some situations are able to fit into more than one quadrant. For example, corporate bible study can conceivably involve activity in all quadrants. As the members of the group offer each other their reasoning and values, each participating member is invited to see their own experience in a new light. As each member of the group engages the study, they will potentially enjoy the study, thus creating personal meaning as they reinforce the idea that bible study is important. Perhaps they will also encounter God in the text as the Spirit shows them their need for God, reveals their guilt from sin, and gives peace or leads into thankfulness and joy.[113] Finally, the group will be able to reason for themselves if there is harmony between their lived experience and the ideas they encountered during the bible study. The ability for some situations to fit into more than one quadrant does not

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[111] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 41–42. Tillich argues that the reasoning intellect gives the will the ability to choose belief. Therefore the content of belief is still for the most part, chosen by the a person's will.
[112] Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 27.
[113] Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 287. Osmer believes certain emotions come from God's Spirit and are particularly suited for interpretation and subsequent meaning making. These emotions include deprivation, guilt, peace and joy.

weaken the paradigm. Rather, it simply means that some situations are dynamic and are able to facilitate activity in more than one quadrant over the course of an individual's engagement in the situation.

Beliefs change not only on a macro level, as seen in conversion, but beliefs also change on a micro level as they become more finely tuned. For example, a person could believe that God is love and therefore believe that Christians ought to accept others unconditionally as opposed to judging others. However, as disequilibrium occurs in such a person's life, such a person might come to believe that discernment and boundaries with others can exist in the Christian life without violating the idea that God is love. Such a person has not changed the core belief that God is love, rather they have experienced a subtle change in how they feel they ought to respond to their belief. Thus, beliefs are heuristic; provisional beliefs persist until the event of disequilibrium causes beliefs to be refined and a new provisional belief is established.[114] Stating that beliefs are heuristic does not necessarily mean that a general set of beliefs cannot be absolute. For example it could be an absolute truth that Jesus was the son of God, however what this truth means to an individual's life could vary over the course of his or her life.

Many good examples can be given to show how individuals move through this paradigm to create belief. One such example can be seen in the autobiography of Carl Jung. Though it is argued by some that his beliefs do not represent Christian orthodoxy,[115] he writes his autobiography with the purpose of explaining why he has come to hold the beliefs that he does.

At a young age, Jung developed a fear of Jesuits. He felt them to be frightening on account of their long black robes and the fact that his father seemed to regard them with a respect

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[114] Allport, *The Individual and his Religion*, 57.

[115] Ulanov, *The Living God and Our Living Psyche,* 31. Ulanov suggests that Jung's theology is not standard Christian theology. She does however give him a sympathetic treatment by saying his insight is none the less essential for Christian ministers to engage.

that he interpreted as fear.[116] In this it can be seen that Jung had an experience that he was essentially passive in. His encounter with Jesuits was not of his own control; they simply walked by his house. Jung interpreted for himself that they were to be feared on account of their robes, and this interpretation seemed to be affirmed by his father. In Jung's young life, both his own interpretation and the interpretation he received from others seemed to agree and as such he viewed Jesuits cautiously. As life progressed, his protestant parents generally displayed hesitation around all things Catholic. At one point Jung works up the courage to examine for himself what happens inside Catholic churches. As he peeks into a local church, he manages to slip and gash his chin on a piece of iron.[117] In the act of peering in the church he was taking personal agency to create a new experience for himself, however the chin gash seemed to affirm his wary stance of Catholics. By this time, Jung had also developed a suspicion of Christ, whom he termed "the dear Lord Jesus," though paradoxically, he felt an affinity toward God the Father.[118]

Moving ahead in his life, Jung had come to a point in his theology where he believed he was tempted to commit what he considered the unforgivable sin. However, through a personal process of reasoning in which he considers God's foreknowledge of sin, he decides he will commit this unforgivable sin.[119] For school-age Jung, the unforgivable sin is to imagine a turd falling on God's head. After he commits the apparent sin of imagining such a scene, he feels an indescribable relief and grace that he feels comes from God himself.[120] In response to this grace, Jung begins to study the New Testament and he uses scripture to understand his experiences of

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[116] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 11.
[117] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 17.
[118] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 21.
[119] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 38–39.
[120] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 40.

sin and grace.[121] As a result of his readings, reasoning and experience, Jung came to a place when he was 18 that he desired to share his own experience of grace with others in the hope that the guilt of their sins might be lifted, just as his were.[122]

In this short re-telling of some of Jung's early life, each aspect of the paradigm can be seen. Jung passively experiences the Jesuits. He interprets both passively and actively that they ought to be feared. He actively engages creating a new experience by peering in the Catholic church, his active reasoning after cutting his chin caused him to affirm his distrust of Catholicism. As Jung decides to commit the "unforgivable sin," he actively reasons that he should. He actively creates an experience in his imagining the "unforgivable sin" and then passively experiences God's grace. As a result of his experiences he actively reasons in theological terms and passively gains insight from scriptures. The resolve of all these situations was a meeting point of harmony or equilibrium. At eighteen Jung comes to believe firmly he ought to share his own experience and interpretation with others so that they might come to know God for themselves.

If this proposal on the process of belief formation is accurate, it should be able to describe how anybody, anywhere, comes to hold the beliefs they do. The small case study of Carl Jung shows how he came to hold his beliefs as a result of the process articulated in the paradigm. The paradigm is not ridged enough that it breaks down under the diversity of belief-forming experience people have been through. Neither is it broad enough that key moments in belief formation are undervalued. This paradigm is able to serve as a nuanced and reliable guide as the church in North America re-envisions youth ministry for a post-modern context.

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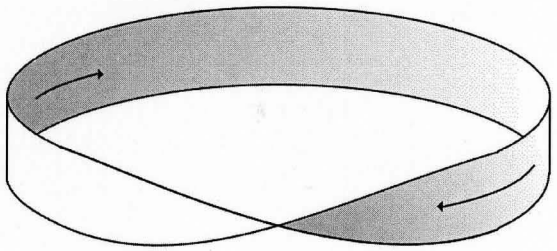
[121] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 41.
[122] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 43.

Integration of the Social Sciences and Theology

Some of the essential considerations put forward in this thesis are from the perspective of the social sciences. Given that the method and goal of the social sciences differs from that of theology, the question then arises: how suited are the social sciences for describing matters of faith and belief? The reply is that the social sciences are able to describe both faith and belief, however there are more dimensions to faith and belief than simply the perspective of the sciences.

James Loder uses a metaphor based on a Möbius band to describe the relationship between psychology and theology.[123] A Möbius band is a strip of material that is twisted 180° and connected to itself lengthwise. The unique feature of such an arrangement is that there is only one side to the band; an ant traversing the band could transition between the inside and outside of the band, without traversing an edge. In Loder's thought, both theology and psychology are able to describe belief and both flow into one another. Each describes one "side" of the same Möbius band, though at a different point along the strip. Such a band is seen in figure 4.



Möbius band

Figure 4.

Loder also uses the doctrine of Christ to elaborate on this perspective. He observes that

[123] Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 13.

Christ was one person with two natures: a physical nature and a divine nature.[124] He makes this observation not to infer that all humans are divine, but to emphasise that at the heart of Christianity is the serious integration of the transcendent and the physical. Thus, behind observations about spirituality is the psychology of belief and behind observations concerning the psychology of belief is genuine spirituality.

Lewis R. Rambo is a scholar who has closely studied the concept of religious conversion. Rambo comes to a similar conclusion as he observes how people come to hold the beliefs they do. Unlike Loder, Rambo suggests there are five frames through which a person could look at conversion. Rambo suggests conversion (or belief formation) could be observed through a cultural frame; one could inquire how the values of a culture promotes or dissuades certain sets of beliefs.[125] Conversion could be studied through history and sociology; one could inquire what historical and contemporary events precipitated conversion experiences.[126] Conversion could be studied at the personal level; an individual's thoughts, experiences and personality could be considered.[127] He also sees conversion as sacred; a person's own spirituality and theology can be examined in the study of conversion.[128]

As Rambo speaks of divine agency in conversion, he makes the interesting observation that theology ought not to dominate the discourse. He observes that there is:

> ... value to the researcher in bracketing the theological dimensions in order to uncover the social and personal dynamics of conversion. Good scholarship should start with the rich description of the phenomenon [of conversion], and with respect for its integrity. On the other hand, some religious scholars have the tendency to spiritualize the study of conversion by relegating everything that is not spiritual to the realm of the demonic or the irrelevant.[129]

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[124] Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 14.
[125] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 8–9.
[126] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 9–12 .
[127] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 9–10 .
[128] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 10–11 .
[129] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 11.

In Rambo's thinking, there is great value in uncovering all components of conversion in the effort to give each aspect the consideration it is properly due and thereby avoiding assumptions about conversion.

Conclusion

In chapter one, observations were made about the apparent struggles of youth ministry in North America as it is currently envisioned. If a purely theological perspective were taken, it would be necessary to argue that God has preferred to lessen his involvement in youth ministry over the past 25 years in North America. It is fair to say such a perspective is absurd and therefore a more nuanced understanding of youth ministry in North America is needed. The approach that is needed involves consulting social-scientific perspectives and adapting practice to better fit what such perspectives reveal. To come full circle however, Rambo also expresses that "whatever conversion is psychologically/physiologically, it is also mystical."[130] A psychological perspective cannot be complete without recognizing the divine initiative behind it. Just as salvation belongs to God (Rev 7:10), so too does the task of drawing people into this salvation.[131] Theologically, it is important to emphasise that saving faith comes from God. Ministry is effective only through God's Spirit (Zech 4:6), is available as God prepares (Eph 2:10) and will reach only those who the Father draws (John 6:44).

However, if belief is just as much psychological as it is spiritual, yet God is ultimately responsible for drawing the individual to himself, why would it matter if a ministry practitioner knew anything of the cognitive processes at work as God calls individuals to himself? Such knowledge would not be able to be leveraged to change the outcome. This is a paradox that

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[130] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 48.
[131] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 531.

cannot be addressed fully in this thesis. For though God is ultimately responsible for calling people to himself, he also chooses to give people a meaningful role to play in the process. The Christian minister appeals to others on Christ's behalf (2 Cor 5:20). He or she seeks to speak in a way which the other can both understand and respond to (1 Cor 9:22) and is prepared to offer both reasons for the hope they possess and a defense for Christ (1 Pet 3:15). The Christian minister needs to live in this paradox: that God calls, but human agents are given a meaningful role in the process.

To address this paradox very briefly, part of the meaningful role human agents are given is to help individuals be able to be open to and discern God's call. Spirituality does not take place in a vacuum; people respond to God's grace in the social context in which they find themselves, with their particular mix of personality preferences, emotional wounds, past experiences and patterns of thought.[132] Though God gives the minister meaningful ministry to labour in, he or she cannot change others but is only able to create an environment where change can take place.[133] Part of creating such an environment involves ensuring that people are able to lay aside defences and preoccupations, and thus be attentive to listen to the voice of God calling.[134] And part of allowing a person to lay aside defences and preoccupations involves understanding the inner life, articulating the inner life for the other and helping the other to respond to remove distractions that prevent the Spirit from being heard.[135] More will be said on this in the final chapter, but for now; those who understand the perspectives of theology and the social sciences as it pertains to belief, can use this knowledge to create situations where people can better hear the call of God on their lives.

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[132] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 99.
[133] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 221.
[134] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 224.
[135] Nouwen, "Wounded Healer," 132.

Chapter Three: Faith Formation in Youth Groups

Introduction

The paradigm of belief formation proposed in the second chapter is general enough to describe how any belief would form. Given that humans generally process and think about experience in set patterns, this general approach can apply to any belief. [1] Such a perspective is useful for discussing Christian belief in that a general approach is able to describe how people come to hold Christian belief, but also why they might leave Christian belief for another set of beliefs. This general approach is also able to describe a person's movement into Christian belief from any starting point. For example, key events on the road to Christian belief would likely be quite different for an individual converting from Hinduism in rural India as opposed to an individual converting from Humanism in urban Europe. Further, each individual's road toward Christian maturity would also be noticeably different. For the former individual, his Christian maturity might be thwarted by a sense of being religiously (and therefore culturally) isolated within larger Indian culture. For the other, her Christian maturity may be thwarted by the accessibility of various conveniences and indulgences afforded by wealth. Though the context of each differs, the basic process of moving toward mature Christian belief would be similar and could be understood through chapter two's paradigm.

The concern of the larger thesis is Christian belief formation and how Christian adolescents in North America can be guided into lasting, mature belief. In the first chapter a picture of immature or abandoned adolescent Christian belief was offered. In response, it was

[1] Rogers, *On Becoming A Person*, 26. Rogers comes to the conclusion that while the specific context of deeply personal experiences differs from person to person, the general experience remains the same. For example, the way people think and experience loneliness is the same, even though the circumstances surrounding the loneliness may not be.

noted that the predominate mode of youth ministry currently employed in North America is unable to lead young people into committed Christian belief.[2] A review of chapter one is not needed here, however one statistic will be offered as a placeholder for the survey of chapter one: only four in ten Canadian young people who were raised in the church attend services into their young adult years.[3] Regardless of whether or not these young people are abandoning Christian faith completely or living nominally, this statistic shows that Christian belief has not formed mature and lasting Christian meaning in their lives. This chapter will identify what mature Christian belief looks like, and discuss why the church has not been able to nurture young people toward mature Christian belief. In this chapter it is proposed that a significant part of the reason why adolescents are finding it difficult to track toward spiritual maturity is because the church has not been able to structure itself in accordance with chapter two's paradigm of faith formation. While the teaching and reflecting of the "interpretation" pole is attended to through church programming, the experience polarity is largely neglected.

Defining Christian Spiritual Maturity

James Fowler has argued that a desire for the transcendent, beliefs about the transcendent and action informed by belief compromises spirituality.[4] His categories can also be used to formulate a definition of what is meant by spiritual maturity. Simply, a mature Christian is a person who is mature in desire, belief and faith.

It is important to differentiate between mature belief and mature practice of faith. Belief is the set of understandings a person holds concerning an ultimate environment and how one

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[2] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 35.
[3] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 22.
[4] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 27. Fowler's terminology has been altered for congruence with other authors in this chapter. This edit still maintains the integrity of Fowler's thought. Fowler's original term "faith" has been replaced with desire. Fowler's term "religion" has be replaced with "practice" or "faith."

ought to interact with this ultimate environment.[5] Mature belief is therefore a system of understanding that has been refined to accurately represent the whole of reality: physical and transcendent. Related, yet different, is mature faith. Faith is the enacted implications of belief. A mature faith is the ability to integrate beliefs and actions into the environment in which one finds one's self – a process that benefits from the discernment offered by reflecting carefully on life experience.[6] Such mature faith will be appropriately nuanced and able to produce something valuable in relation to their beliefs.[7] Though mature belief and mature faith differ, they are also very closely related – each affects the other in the same way that the polarities of experience and interpretation inform each other.

Spiritual maturity must also include a desire for relationship with God.[8] Desire is essential in Christian maturity as it fuels the process of maturing. Without a desire for the God of the Christian scriptures, an individual's Christian maturity will stall as there is no impetus to drive the process of refining one's beliefs and practices. Thus Christian spiritual maturity is best understood as a compilation of three constituent parts: mature belief, mature faith and desire for God.

Christian spiritual maturity is evidenced in an appropriately balanced belief and enacted faith. The element of desire must be assumed to be present, or the Christian belief and faith that are present would not have occurred. Consider for a moment the pitfall of Christian legalism – the emphasis on rules of God without a meaningful emphasis on the grace of God. Legalism would emphasize the severity of sin and encourage assigning public guilt to individuals who

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[5] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 27.
[6] Fowler, *Stages of Faith,* 198.
[7] Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 72–75. Fowler's thesis in this book is that mature Christians act congruently with their beliefs.
[8] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 42. Tillich argues one's will plays a significant role in an individual's selection of an ultimate concern.

have been observed in sin. Without wading too far into these theological issues, it could be said that such beliefs and actions are not properly nuanced with regard to the implications of Christ's forgiveness and grace. It could therefore be said such a theology is still maturing as proponents have not yet meaningfully integrated Biblical grace into their theology. In the act of assigning guilt to individuals, there is also a lack of meaningfully representing God's love. Therefore a legalistic faith structure has also not translated a theology of grace into their practices. However, as such dissonances in thinking and action come to light, individuals with legalistic perspectives may become more nuanced in their thinking and practice. In including a meaningful theology of grace, a person's spirituality might shift from a performance orientation to a relational orientation of seeking union with God for themselves and others.[9] In the case at hand, spiritual maturity in this aspect is arrived at when a person's beliefs and actions appropriately balance God's grace with the severity of sin.

There are other conceptions of spiritual maturity that are offered by Christian thinkers. However, at the heart of these is also the combination of mature belief and mature faith. By way of example, two further synopsis of spiritual maturity are offered here. First, Benedict Groeschel sees spiritual maturity as the ongoing process of losing one's ego in union with Christ. This process involves moving through despairing moments where the soul is filled with pain and where obedience is the only way forward.[10] Second, Mark DeVries, a youth ministry theorist, believes teens (and people in general) move toward spiritual maturity as they *relate* well with God and others, as they *think* correctly about the world and their place in it, and as they *behave* in response to their understanding of, and relationship with God.[11] DeVries' view is the most comprehensive in that it involves elements of the other views given above. Though each thinker

[9] Hagberg and Guilich, *The Critical Journey*, 103.
[10] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 185.
[11] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 48–53.

represents their vision of spiritual maturity in their own manner, each envisioning is predicated upon refining belief and actions. Groeschel's loss of ego requires a right integration of beliefs about self and beliefs about God, the desire to persevere in Christian maturity – and the act of obedience is the response. DeVries includes the categories of both belief and faith and desire, yet simply uses the term "relate well" to refer to desire, "think" in reference to belief and "behave" in reference to practices.

Given this discussion about mature belief, how do adolescents move toward such belief and what is the role of the church in this process? Adolescents in particular are in a time of life where they are exploring the world. They are deciding who they will be, which groups will they identify with and what values they will hold as their own. Part of discovering a portion of their own independence includes the ability to choose who they will become and what they will believe. Adolescents at this point in their lives have not yet internalized a sense of authority for what they will believe; values and meaning in large part are still taken from the situations in which teens find themselves.[12] In an adolescent's world, there are multiple sources of belief formation that the adolescent becomes exposed to. Values and experiences that come from school and community involvement may gain equal consideration to the values and experiences that have come from home and church, assuming a Christian upbringing.[13] In this life stage teenagers will often 'try on' various conceptions of themselves in order to discover who they feel they are, or which social group offers the most safety.[14] Further, there is the fact that in some cases the process of selecting beliefs may not be a conscious process; many teens will not fully

[12] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 154, 158.
[13] Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, 159–160.
[14] Kelcourse, "Finding Faith," 78–79.

consider where their beliefs are coming from or why they hold them.[15] As these traits of adolescence converge, belief forms based upon which group's values seem to have been able to best affirm the adolescent and offer him or her a unique sense of self.

It is in this mix that Christian belief and accompanying spiritual maturity vie for the designation of "ultimate concern" in a young person's life. A common format for church-based youth groups is one meeting per week and perhaps an additional bible study.[16] Attendance at such an event may be offset by other commitments, extra-curricular activities, or simple interest.[17] Given the relative participation in events and experiences that promote Christian meanings versus participation in events and experiences that promote alternate meanings, Christian belief may struggle to hold special meaning in the face of other competing options. It is conceivable that the message of Christ as asserted by church programing may become lost in the pluralism of perspectives that speak into adolescent life. This is especially true if an adolescent's church experience has not been able to give validation to the teaching he or she received from the church. In such cases Christian belief could either be abandoned or cease to mature. As discussed in the first chapter, this has indeed been the case in North America.

Rahner would comment that inability to socialize young people into Christian faith due to cultural pluralism may not be a bad thing. In pluralistic culture, young people who commit to and mature in Christian belief have formed these beliefs not as a result of a socialization process, but as a result of the Spirit's work.[18] It is still possible some socialization into Christian belief may happen in pluralistic culture. Some teens participate in church programming due to a lack of

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[15] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 161–62. Fowler comments that teen's beliefs are tacit; they are unexamined and based upon feeling without the teen being fully aware this is the case.
[16] Goreham and Meidinger, "Sr High Youth Group Participation," 99–100.
[17] Goreham and Meidinger, "Sr High Youth Group Participation," 99.
[18] Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22.

other options that interest them.[19] However it is true that participating in youth group for most teens comes out of a genuine inward desire to connect with God and fellow Christians.[20] Two factors that stand out among various reasons for adolescent participation in church programming is first, their desire to grow a relationship with God and second, their desire to connect with Christian mentors who challenge them to mature.[21]

Rahner's comments however are not intended as a calling to cease evangelism and discipleship efforts. It is not within the church's prerogative to resign itself to nurturing only those who feel compelled by the Spirit to mature in their Christian belief. While God is the critical partner in a person's spiritual maturity, the church is also called to be faithful and diligent in the process of helping young people to mature in their faith.[22] It would therefore be irresponsible to assume that the church's role in spiritual maturity is to offer token participation as if God were solely the party responsible for a Christian's faith maturity. Rather, as was argued in the closing discussion of chapter two, the church has a responsibility to reflect critically on its practices such that they would better support the process of maturing belief.[23]

Moral Development in Adolescence

In adolescence, a young person enters a time of life where they begin to rely upon their own abilities and judgements.[24] The teenage boy or girl will begin to seek a sense of who they are and will struggle against the shame that produces doubts about the image of themselves they are actively forming.[25] This image of one's self that is created as a result of newly found autonomy will balance one's will with one's beliefs and will be refined or distorted by the shame

[19] Goreham and Meidinger, "Sr High Youth Group Participation," 100.
[20] Goreham and Meidinger, "Sr High Youth Group Participation," 101, 103. Adolescents may also attend youth group in the search for God; ie hoping he reveals himself to them in the youth group setting.
[21] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 35.
[22] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 55.
[23] Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey*, 38.
[24] Capps, *The Decades of Life*, 24.
[25] Capps, *The Decades of Life*, 29.

encountered either in self-reflection or social interactions.[26] As such, it is a very confusing time of life – but it is none the less the time of life where a basic self-conception will be formed.

As mentioned in chapter two, faith formation is related to moral reasoning as both require the process of making judgements about what is right or wrong. Both processes require the individual to reach a harmony between one's reasoning and one's experiences. As adolescents begin to build a sense of themselves as an autonomous individual, they will must also make decisions about what they will believe and how they will judge right from wrong as an autonomous individual – their beliefs and moral judgements must be their own. Lawrence Kohlberg draws on Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development to observe that adolescents enter a cognitive developmental stage where they can, for the first time, deduce cause and effect, and reason about reasoning.[27] This ability of adolescence was termed "formal-operational thought" by Piaget, and was the final of four stages of cognitive development.

In Kohlberg's thought, individuals on lower Piagetian cognitive stages could only reason at lower moral developmental stages. However, as an individual matured to the point where higher cognition became available, individuals would gain the ability to reason at higher moral developmental stages.[28] However, just because an adolescent is able to reason at Kohlberg's "Principled" level of reasoning, does not mean he or she will. It has been observed that adolescents tend to make moral judgements with great objectivity and at higher levels of moral reasoning if they hold no personal stake, yet with greater bias and lower levels of moral

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[26] Capps, *The Decades of Life*, 27–29.

[27] Kohlberg and Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher," 1063. Piaget's levels are *sensory-motor* at ages 0-2, *pre-operational* at ages 2-5, *concrete operational* at ages 6-10 and *formal operational* at ages 11+.

[28] Walker and Richards, "Stimulating Transitions in Moral Reasoning," 97. Walker and Richards alter Piaget's stages and relate these altered stages to Kohlberg's stages. They propose *concrete operations* coincides with Kohlberg's pre-conventional stages. They divide up Piaget's *formal operations* into *beginning formal operations*, *early basic formal operations* and *consolidated basic formal operations. Beginning formal* and *early basic formal operations* coincide with Kohlberg's conventional level stages. C*onsolidated basic formal operations* coincides with Kohlberg's final stages at the principled level.

reasoning when personal interest is a factor.[29] Thus, while adolescents can make moral judgements at a high level, their moral behaviour may not coincide with their judgement if a personal interest creates a personal bias. Interestingly however, this discrepancy between the ability to judge right and wrong in a situation and one's behaviour in the situation may not be entirely a function of conscious reasoning. Adolescents are also more likely to mediate the influence of personal bias in moral behaviour, if they are consciously aware of how their own bias is affecting their moral judgement.[30]

This means that Piagetian maturity is necessary, but not sufficient, for higher-level moral reasoning. Rather, it appears that high-level moral reasoning also requires what could be termed "advanced logical reasoning." Advanced logical reasoning is a thought process that goes beyond the basic direct cause and effect reasoning characteristic of formal operational thought.[31] Advanced logical reasoning also requires meta-cognition: thinking about other's thinking and thinking about one's own thinking. The formal operational brain is indeed capable of such meta-cognition, but it may take an extra circumstantial impetus to direct an adolescent down this path.[32] Pastoral theologian Robert C. Dykstra suggests that solitude could be one very helpful avenue of moving adolescents into what could be termed advanced logical reasoning. He suggests there is natural and beneficial self-reflection that happens in adolescent solitude.[33] Dykstra also suggests that there may in fact be some harm in ushering adolescents into groups as a sole course of action for moral development. Moral reasoning requires the space for one to distill one's thinking over time and the nature of solitude gives opportunity for such distillation

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[29] Weiss, "Understanding Moral Thought," 858.
[30] Weiss, "Understanding Moral Thought," 856.
[31] Walker and Richards, "Stimulating Transitions in Moral Reasoning," 101.
[32] Walker and Richards, "Stimulating Transitions in Moral Reasoning," 101. The authors tentatively suggest that role-playing with moral dilemmas accompanied by critical reflection about the role play may aid an adolescent in their advanced logical reasoning.
[33] Dykstra, "Out of One's Depth," 9–11.

to occur. The tendency to think in accordance with a group would hinder this process if an adolescent is over-exposed to the group.[34] As Dykstra considers youth groups and solitude, his remarks appear to be intended for the sake of balance. It is not as though youth groups should be disbanded in favour of solitude. Rather, his remarks point out some of the limitations of faith formation and moral development in youth groups. One strong point that could be made about youth groups, is they can serve as a setting in which young people can encounter "advanced logical reasoning" as the group engages in discussion with the youth minister or youth worker.

General Findings of the *Move* study

It is at this point that a close look at the practice of youth ministry should be undertaken. In 2011 the Willow Creek Association published a book entitled *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*. This volume draws on three related studies that the association undertook between 2004 and 2009. The first study, *Reveal: Where Are You?* Was published in 2007 and sought to measure spiritual growth in congregation members.[35] Data from youth programs specifically are not available from the study, but data from youth ministries are part of the aggregated results.[36] Spiritual maturity in this initial study was defined as a subjective sense of closeness to Christ; those who were mature felt close to Christ and those who were less mature felt less close to Christ.[37] This definition of spiritual maturity was also based on Jesus' command to love the Lord and one's neighbour as one's self (Matthew 22:37–40).[38] Two follow up studies were undertaken: *Follow Me: What's Next for You?* was published in 2008 and *Focus: The Top Ten Things People Want and Need from You and Your Church* was published in 2009.[39]

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[34] Dykstra, "Out of One's Depth," 11–13.
[35] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 190–93.
[36] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 4372–82.
[37] Wright, "What We Can and Can't Learn from Reveal,"102–03.
[38] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 190–93.
[39] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 4078–81.

Together, these studies revealed very surprising and somewhat alarming results. In the process of conducting these studies, it was found that participation in church-based programing did not correspond with spiritual growth or Christian maturity. In measuring congregation member's feelings of closeness to Christ and their ability to love others as indicators of Christian maturity, church involvement did not correspond with congregation member's spiritual growth.[40] *Move* represented their findings in a graph, seen in Figure 5.[41]

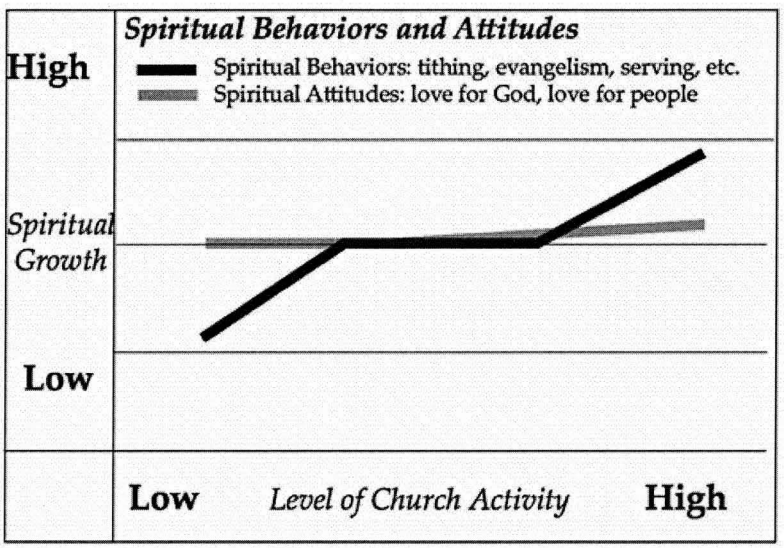

Figure 5.

In this graph it is seen that a Christian's love for God and love for others does not increase with church participation. Conversely, though, neither does love for God and other decrease with low amounts of church participation. Christian practices do change as a result of church participation, however it is unclear if this increase in practices is a result of genuine growth or cultural norms present in churches. The temptation is to lean toward the latter, as one's love for Christ and others seems not to increase with church attendance. One thing *Move* does indicate however, is that church ministries have difficulty nurturing Christian spiritual maturity

[40] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 687–91.
[41] Wright, "What We Can and Can't Learn from Reveal,"109.

among their already-Christian congregation members.[42]

Before the findings of *Move* are addressed and their relevance to spiritual maturation drawn, it ought to be pointed out that the studies are lacking in some ways. As critics of *Move* (and its former studies) have pointed out, the reason the flaws of the study should be addressed is that a few observations may add some perspective to the findings.[43] First, it could be argued that the definition of spiritual maturity originally proposed in *Reveal* may not have been ideal. One's personal feelings of love for Christ and love for others are quite subjective. Perhaps a measure of "dedication to Christ" may have produced different results. Feelings of love may be subject to the vacillations of one's inner life. Further, the fact that the studies were not longitudinal mean they are not able to capture a general trend of a person's feelings over time.[44] Rating one's quality of relationship with God and others could be a difficult task due to the natural dynamics of relationships. Even though an individual might feel far from God, the individual's dedication to Christian belief and action could also be an important feature of genuine spiritual maturity.

A second issue with Willow Creek's *Move* is an underlying assumption that there is a problem with the apparent inability of church programming and worship services to spur on long-time Christians to increased levels of closeness with Christ.[45] However, it could be that church services and programs have a limited value in terms of what they can ultimately provide for the believer. It could be that at a certain point spiritual growth becomes something that must take place between the individual and God.[46] At such times one's fellow Christians have done all

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[42] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 2355–60.
[43] Wright, "Can We Follow Willow Creek's Follow Me?" 93.
[44] Wright, "Can We Follow Willow Creek's Follow Me?" 97. A longitudinal study happens over a period of time and is meant to avoid any anomalies that might be present at any one moment in time. It will also indicate the effect of (in this instance) church participation over time.
[45] Wright, "What We Can and Can't Learn from Reveal,"110.
[46] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 11, 93. The authors divide stages of spiritual growth into "outer" stages and "inner" stages. Outer stages are early stages where believers are nurtured by others. Inner stages are advanced stages where the believer matures through pain in a personal relationship with God.

that they can for the individual in terms of teaching and support. It is now time for the individual to move forward toward Christ in obedience with the pain of going it alone as the only sign they are on the right track.[47] Thus, while the data shows growth as a result of service attendance is below expectation, it may be that more cannot be expected of church programming; spiritual maturity may require other types of settings. The church programs may keep the individual buoyed in their faith as they move through inward pain and on toward union with Christ. While these two critiques have attempted to account for perhaps some of the findings of *Move*, the reality is that the general direction of the data in *Move* still needs to be interpreted.

Conversion in *Move*

One finding the study reported in *Move* was that the longer a non-Christian attends church, the less likely they are to become a follower of Christ.[48] The emphasis of this thesis is not conversion, but nurturing committed and maturing faith among adolescents. However it is appropriate to consider what *Move* had to say about conversion: part of the process to spiritual maturity is conversion. This must be the case for in order to mature in a set of beliefs, one must hold them first. *Move* notices that the longer a non-believer attends church programming, the less likely they are to decide to become a Christian.[49] In response to this finding, the authors of *Move* identify that seekers are looking to have the claims of scripture validated through personal encounters with Christ as opposed to being validated through sound argumentation.[50] This initial insight is quit helpful as it affirms the need for an experience-based spiritual maturity. However, *Move* becomes less helpful thereafter. The authors in later chapters argue that a person will transition from exploring Christ (not-yet a Christian) to growing in Christ (Christian

[47] Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," 150.
[48] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 438–59.
[49] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 198—202.
[50] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 495–98.

commitment) based upon their attitude toward Christian belief.[51] For example, the authors of *Move* inform the reader that coming to hold a belief in salvation by grace is a major step in a person's commitment to Christ.[52] The insight offered here is minimal as it would seem apparent that coming to hold Christian belief is of course essential for Christian conversion. Also regrettable is that *Move* does not comment on why the probability of conversion lessens in relation to time spent in church programs. In defense of *Move*'s authors, it is a common pitfall for writers to inadvertently describe what Christians ought to believe while not realizing it would be more helpful to comment on how one comes to hold belief. [53]

Author Greg Robinson is able to provide some helpful insight as to why conversion probability lessens as time is spent in church programs. Robinson observes that learning involves changing one's mind about a given subject.[54] Learning as it pertains to belief also involves a shift in one's emotions in relation to the belief.[55] A change in either one's thoughts or feelings requires a disturbance great enough to be a catalyst in forming new thoughts or feelings.[56] Robinson's ideas are quite similar to Kohlberg's ideas of equilibrium and disequilibrium, save that Robinson observes an individual must surrender to the new meanings a disturbance causes.[57] In Robinson's thought, Kohlberg's disequilibrium could occur, however the individual may not be willing to restructure their perception of reality in accordance with new meanings that would bring equilibrium. Robinson goes on to argue that for a disturbance to lead to new learning or new emotions concerning belief, one must surrender some measure of control, certainty and

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[51] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 1606–21.
[52] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 1613.
[53] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 20.
[54] Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus*, 37.
[55] Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus*, 37.
[56] Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus*, 37.
[57] Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus*, 42.

comfort.[58] Control is surrendered such that new meanings can direct belief as opposed to already-held belief dismissing new meanings. Central to this for Robinson is the desire to be right. This desire can be a source of pride that stands in the way of new learning. Finally, it may be easier to remain comfortable than to enter into new belief and its concomitant meanings.

Drawing on Robinson's thought, if conversion is to happen in a church setting, a person must have a disturbance at a magnitude great enough to unsettle one's current equilibrium of thought and experience. As chapter two's paradigm espouses, a change in belief requires a disturbance and accompanying disequilibrium that will affect familiar activity in all quadrants. In addition, one must be willing to surrender control, certainty and comfort in response to the disturbance. It is conceivable that some individuals participating in church programs were unable to find a disturbance great enough to change their way of thinking. This lack of disturbance may then reinforce skepticism and as such a greater disturbance would be required for a future change in thinking. There is only so much humanly that can be done to introduce disturbance and therefore a person would be less likely over time to convert, if what was needed to convert could not be given early on in their exploration of Christian belief. However, this is not to say conversion cannot happen after lengthy amounts of time spent in church programming. It may also be that the individual in question did not have a desire to surrender control, certainty and comfort. It could be the case that participating in church programming at the right moment, when an individual is open to surrender, could be the catalyst for conversion.

Spiritual Maturity in *Move*

The left graph in figure five depicts a lower than expected rate of growth among those involved in church programming. Even with some of the edge removed by the critiques of *Move*'s findings, the church appears to be ineffective at promoting spiritual maturity. It is the call

[58] Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus*, 42–43.

of the church to make disciples (Matt 28:16–20). However, the default tactic in the disciple-making endeavour seems to be to lean on traditional religious education as the way to accomplish the task. There is heavy reliance in the church on sermons, bible studies, discussion groups and other forms of formal teaching methods.[59] Part of the reason such teaching avenues are stressed in the church is due to the assumption that effective teaching happens through effective argumentation and presentation of facts.[60] However, for something to be learned, there must be an accompanying experience.[61] This truth is recognized by theorists and often commented on in spiritual formation literature. Wilhoit comments that "Spiritual formation does not take place primarily in small groups and Sunday school classes; instead, it mostly takes place in the well-lived and everyday events of life."[62] Another author says:

> Both the goal of educating the local church and the means of achieving it are expressed in the Greek word *koinonia*, which [can be translated as] fellowship, communion, contribution, offering, participation, sharing, taking part, having a part, partnership, help, and communication.[63]

In these two quotations, each author insists that discipleship efforts need to be structured less along the lines of formal education and more along the lines of information education. This would be accomplished in students experiencing the Christian life in everyday situations and reflecting upon these experiences with Christian thought. Robinson comments on the problem of attempting to disciple through formal educational methods. Says Robinson:

> The real shorting coming of religious education is that it most often takes place so far away from real-life situations. A situation that is talked about on Sunday may not take place for days, weeks, or even months. Consequently, by the time the student is most in need of direction, he or she is farthest from the teacher.[64]

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[59] Losey, *Experiential Youth Ministry Handbook*, 23.
[60] Losey, *Experiential Youth Ministry Handbook*, 23.
[61] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 144–145. Dewey remarks "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance."
[62] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 38.
[63] Chechowich, "Our Global Task of Fellowship-Community," 191.
[64] Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus*, 55.

Robinson's perspective is more than speculation. Studies show that discipleship efforts that involve adolescents in the practices of the Christian life such as meaningfully serving others, show correspondence between participation and spiritual formation.[65] This means discipleship efforts that view adolescents as partners in ministry are on better footing than those who view adolescents as objects of ministry.[66]

The necessity of experience-based discipleship is seen in the paradigm of belief formation from Chapter two. If a church's main orientation to ministry is providing the opportunity to participate in activities on the interpretation end of the paradigm, this leaves the experiential end of the paradigm untouched. It is true that in sermons, bible studies and discussions people are invited to reason from a Christian perspective about their experience. However as Robinson points out, it is quite possible the experiences church goers are invited to reason about may not be the experiences that are most in need of interpretation at that point in an individual's life. This in turn means that the experiences from everyday life will be interpreted through some other means if the individual does not have personal dedication or ability in Christian reflection.

Another perspective on why perhaps the authors of *Move* discovered an unexpectedly slow rate of spiritual growth from those in church activities comes from authors F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage. Shults and Sandage propose that the process to spiritual maturity requires a mix of relational intensity that comes from intentionality and intimacy.[67] The relational intensity between God and individuals is marked by an individual's trust in God through difficult situations and a desire for spiritual intimacy with God.[68] Intentionality is the

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[65] Sherr et al., "The Role of Community Service in the Faith Formation of Adolescents," 50.
[66] Sherr et al., "The Role of Community Service in the Faith Formation of Adolescents," 51.
[67] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 30.
[68] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 87–88.

human desire and dedication to seeking spiritual intimacy with God. Shults argues that the classic three-way spirituality of purgation, illumination and union requires intentionality if an individual is to progress through the stages.[69]

Shults and Sandage propose a process by which individuals move into relational intensity with God and thereby spiritual maturity. The process draws on Loder's ideas of transformational knowing, but the authors have included a greater emphasis on the Spirit's role and have also drawn on three-way spirituality.[70] Shults' and Sandage's conception of spiritual growth is seen in figure six.[71]

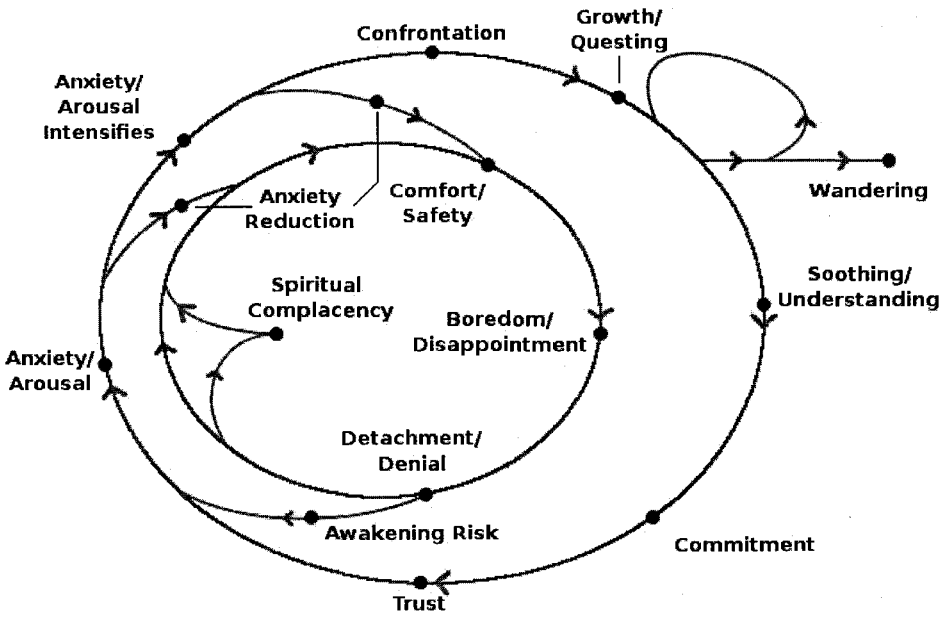

Figure 6.[72]

In this construal, there are two circles. The inner is a cycle of comfort and safety in the spiritual life that Shults and Sandage propose leads to detachment from faith desire. The outer

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[69] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 116.
[70] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 28. Three-way spirituality refers to the traditional movement through purgation, illumination and into union.
[71] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 33.
[72] As a side note, Shults and Sandage's conception of spiritual growth cannot be used as this thesis' paradigm of belief formatiom for the same reasons that Loder's "transformative knowing" theory cannot be used. Briefly, it is too linear and cannot account for belief formation that happens outside of its process.

circle leads those who follow it through the three classic movements of three-way spirituality, which Shults and Sandage also refer to as relational intensification. As an individual engages Christian spirituality, presumably they will encounter challenges that will take them out of their habitual patterns. Such challenges could be anything from laboring to remove habitual sin to sharing the gospel with a friend. Shults and Sandage propose that an individual's engagement with whatever has moved them outside of their comfort zone is an act of "purgation" in the three-way spirituality perspective.[73] After a confrontation in the spiritual life, an individual seeks to understand the meaning of their experience in relation to their larger Christian life. There is potential for this seeking to lead a person away from Christian faith.[74] Although if such wandering is not the case, the individual will eventually arrive at understanding through the guidance of the Spirit. This understanding is also the stage of illumination in the three-way path.[75] In illumination, the Spirit guides to understanding and the individual learns to enjoy the Spirit's presence in this. As the cycle finishes, an individual learns to commit to and trust the understanding that has come from their experience. This final stage is union, where a person rests in God's presence.[76] Having come full circle, a growing Christian can either slide back into complacency, or move forward through the process again. Shults and Sandage make note that generally, the movement into anxiety and confrontation in the spiritual life is avoided by people unless there is some catalyst that pushes them in this direction.[77]

Shults and Sandage's conception of growth can help further interpret the findings of *Move*. Churches will have a very difficult task ahead of them if they elect to push congregation members into anxiety and confrontation; for this reason such initiatives may be absent from

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[73] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 34.
[74] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 34–35.
[75] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 35.
[76] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 35.
[77] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 35.

church programming and thus, the lack of spiritual growth detected by *Move*. Shults and Sandage observe that both anxiety and confrontation are disliked and therefore avoided by Christians. [78] It therefore seems reasonable to assume that congregation members will be resistant to, or avoidant of spiritual anxiety and confrontation. As discussed above, the church cannot program for divine experience between an individual and God. Space can be made for this, but it cannot be forced.[79] Of course another consideration has to be about the nature of a program that promotes growth through anxiety; should a church indeed have such a program available? Without careful discernment, ministry efforts aimed at creating disturbances in belief could end up shaping others in the image of what ministry practitioners believe is right, as opposed to how God desires to shape the individual.[80] Contrived spiritual growth may be qualitatively different than genuine spiritual growth. In such a case the mutual trust between ministry personnel and those they minister to could break down and the path toward spiritual maturity could stall.[81] If (by way of example) young people in a church congregation were forced to pray aloud in front of the congregation as an exercise in Christian growth, such an experience would likely come with the necessary anxiety and confrontation that drives Shults and Sandage's process. Conceivably, these young people could discover in this process that they are indeed able to pray in front of others. However, this moment of growth would probably be overshadowed by the individual's new found lack of trust in the church's leadership. Given that other such scenarios could be envisioned, it is fair to say that the range of anxiety that a church ministry can ethically or intentionally produce is limited. Because of this limited ability to create anxiety, there is in turn also limited ability for genuine growth to occur through involvement in church programs as they

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[78] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 35.
[79] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 221.
[80] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 244–45.
[81] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 230.

are traditionally conceived.

Practical Response to *Move*

This chapter's discussion of the *Move* findings has identified some deficiencies of youth ministries (and church ministries) in nurturing spiritual maturity. This deficiency is seen in the church's relative inability to lead people into the experience quadrants of chapter two in a meaningful way. It has been identified above that the church is good at teaching, however if this teaching is not validated by accompanying experiences, the teaching loses its meaning.[82] While there are indeed many Christian experiences that church ministries produce, the results of *Move* indicate in many cases they are not of a magnitude great enough to either promote spiritual maturity or lead a person into conversion. [83] This inability to create meaningful experiences and accompanying interpretations is exacerbated by the adolescent proclivity to trying on various beliefs to find what fits best for them. The best way to characterize the findings of *Move* is to say church programming struggles to provide and sustain meaningful experiences that would compel adolescents into Christian belief and maturity.

The response to these considerations should not be the abandonment of the church and church-based youth programing. Even as the church's deficiencies are pointed out, the church remains indispensable in the task of promoting Christian spiritual maturity. The church is made up of the people of God, it is the place of belonging to God and the place of meeting with God.[84] The church plays a critical role in encouraging and directing early discipleship in the Christian life; young Christians are heavily dependent on the church for wisdom, council, direction and encouragement.[85] The church also supports the ministries of its members; each person's giftings

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[82] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 144–145.
[83] Wright, "What We Can and Can't Learn from Reveal,"109.
[84] Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 7.
[85] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 53–55.

are celebrated and put to use as the body engages ministry.[86] Even when the ministry of the church seems ineffective, there remains the fact that the church is called into ministry by the Spirit. Ministry is a matter of trust and obedience. As Henri Nouwen comments, "Ministry is not, first of all, something that we do (although it calls us to do many things). Ministry is something we have to trust."[87] It is not the primary responsibility of the church to be effective ministers. It is the responsibility of the church to be faithful and diligent ministers who trust the Spirit to effect real ministry.

Though the church ought not to be discarded, there is place for reflection and critique on how the North American church envisions itself and what this means for its ministries. One strong critique can be made regarding the ways consumer culture is shaping church ministries. An individualistic and consumerist approach to Christian spirituality is at odds with Christian maturity.[88] The tendency in consumerist spirituality is to package ministry in convenient user friendly and attractive ways.[89] The problem with this is that spiritual maturity, as *Move* has alluded to, cannot be packaged and programmed. Groeschel has argued that the process of spiritual maturity is progressive loss of a person's ego in union with Christ.[90] Forming and removing ego is not done through classes and programs, but through the difficult task of disciplining oneself in everyday experiences to live for Christ.[91]

Part of this difficult task happens in the crucible of Christian community.[92] A group of people whose members feel a sense of belonging will also feel a sense of responsibility to one

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[86] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 74–75.
[87] Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Living*, 44.
[88] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 106.
[89] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 110.
[90] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 185.
[91] Mabry, *Growing Into God*, 175.
[92] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 35.

another.[93] A group whose members feel responsible for its members will care for each other.[94] A group whose members care for one another will not make personal demands of the community, but will serve the community.[95] A group whose members desire to serve the community also participate the in community's purpose and mission.[96] A group whose members participate in the community's mission will share in the community's experiences and understandings. And as individuals engage deeply in Christian experiences and interpretations, spiritual maturity is the result.

It may be optimistic in the early-to-mid 21st century to argue that North American youth ministries can organize themselves as an intimate community engaged in mission. However, the resulting spiritual maturity that could come from such an arrangement makes it worth considering and pursuing. Interestingly, such an arrangement is found in a particular segment of children and adolescent ministries. Summer camps have been observed to produce results contrary to the findings of *Move.*

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Christian maturity and the general trajectory that a young person should be moving as they move toward Christian maturity. At the beginning of this chapter, some of the pit falls of faith formation in adolescence were also addressed. In conversation with Willow Creek's *Move* study, this chapter has pointed out that the general way church programs are envisioned do not necessarily help to promote a maturing faith or take into meaningful consideration some of the difficulties modern adolescents encounter as they mature their Christian faith. In response to these critiques, this chapter has identified that attendance at

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[93] Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 18.
[94] Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 20.
[95] Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 55–56.
[96] Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 84–85.

content driven programs does relatively little for spiritual maturity while encountering and moving through anxiety in the Christian life has significant potential in promoting spiritual maturity.

Chapter Four – Belief Formation at Summer Camp

Introduction

If chapter two's paradigm of belief formation is going to be introduced into church settings, it will be helpful to closely observe an environment in which people move through all aspects of the paradigm. These observations will serve to highlight key features that ministries could incorporate into their efforts so that participants would engage all quadrants of the belief formation process from a Christian perspective. The discussion in both the first chapter and the discussion of the previous chapter have shown that church-based ministries often have trouble offering adolescents (and adults) ministry that promotes mature faith. North American summer camps provide an excellent example of a ministry context that is structured to lead participants through each quadrant of the belief formation process. Moreover, summer camps have a proven track record in their ability to promote maturing Christian belief. The transformation that happens in these settings is a result of experiential processes campers encounter at the summer camp and such experiences could be used to inform church-based ministry efforts.

Data Concerning Spiritual Growth at Summer Camps

Christian summer camps in North America are temporary communities with trained leaders, often in outdoor environments and are purposed with promoting spiritual objectives among campers.[1] Traditionally, many such camps have been residential. Campers come to stay in the community for a period of weeks and the camper is subject to the communities' structure. The daily program of camps varies camp to camp, but the activities campers and staff engage in each day are purposed to offer a mix of recreation and education to campers.[2]

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[1] Williams, *Theological Perspectives on the Temporary Community*, 1.
[2] Thurber et al, "Inspirations," 1.

A landmark Canadian study was released in 2010 concerning the developmental value of young people's attendance at summer camp in Canada. The findings confirmed what has been generally accepted for some years by casual observation and intuition: summer camps in the majority of cases aid young people in their maturation process. This study, called the "Canadian Summer Camp Research Project," found that participation in summer camp between the ages of 4 years old and 18 years old promoted growth in five areas: Social Integration, Environmental Awareness, Attitudes toward Physical Activity, Emotional Intelligence and Self-Confidence.[3] On a six-point scale, the average growth rate as a result of participating in the camp environment was one point in each category.[4] The most benefit was observed to occur in older campers, female campers and returning campers.[5] Regrettably, the authors of this study did not consider spiritual values in their study. However, other studies that received less attention have been able to track growth occurring in young people's spiritual lives as a result of participation in the camp environment.

A 2007 study entitled "Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience: Evidence for Multidimensional Growth," included findings in the area of spirituality, among other measured outcomes. This study did not reveal exceptional growth, but the slight increases found are worth mentioning. This study measured social skills, self-esteem, physical aptitudes and, unlike the Canadian Summer Camp Research Project, spirituality. The authors did not define what was meant by spirituality, but an assumption can be made in the absence of a specific definition that spirituality in the case of this study was a measure of the participant's experience or value of being in relationship with the divine. Campers self-reported on average a 0.67%

[3] Glover et al., "Canadian Summer Camp Research Project," 8–9.
[4] Glover et al., "Canadian Summer Camp Research Project," 10–15.
[5] Glover et al., "Canadian Summer Camp Research Project," 3. Returning campers are campers who had spent some time in the camp environment the previous year.

growth in spirituality as a result of camp participation.[6] Parents reported observing a 1% growth in their children's spirituality as a result of camp participation.[7] Camp staff reported observing an average of 4.34% growth in spirituality among campers over their time at camp.[8] While the rate of growth in camper's sense of spirituality seems low in this survey, the study as a whole produced similar results in each of its other categories. For example, the highest growth value of this study was in the camper's sense of adventure and exploration. A modest 6.67% growth in camper's enjoyment of adventure was observed as a result of camp participation.[9] Part of the reason these scores were low is likely due to the fact that the study mainly followed campers who attended camp for one week.[10] It is probable that if campers were to spend a greater amount of time in the camp environment, or attend yearly, the scores found by this study would be greater. Regardless, there are yet further studies that indicate camps can be a significant source of spiritual nurture in young people.

A 2005 study by the American Camping Association (ACA) called "Directions" revealed very similar results. In this study spirituality was measured by feelings of closeness to God and by the desire to participate in religious activities.[11] Similar critiques that were made for *Move* could be made about this definition of spirituality, but it is worth noting that the ACA is not primarily concerned with spiritual growth and therefore a rigorous definition may not be

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[6] Thurber et al., "Youth Development Outcomes," 245. This study used a four-point scale where a score of 1 indicated the respondent strongly disagreed and a score of 4 indicated the respondent strongly agreed. An increase from 3.15 to 3.17 represents a 0.67% increase. Campers s responded to statements like "I have a close relationship with God" to generate results. Survey size was 2119 participants.

[7] Thurber et al., "Youth Development Outcomes," 247. 2374 parents responded. Pre-camp parent-observed spirituality was 3.15 in children and post-camp was 3.18, on a four point scale. The study indicates parents were asked to respond to the statement "my child has a close relationship with God."

[8] Thurber et al., "Youth Development Outcomes," 249. 2549 camp staff responded. These staff reported a pre-camp spirituality of 3.08 and a post-camp spirituality of 3.21, on a four point scale. The question asked of camp staff was not recorded in the study.

[9] Thurber et al., "Youth Development Outcomes," 245. 3076 campers responded. Pre-camp value was 3.56. Post-camp value was 3.76 on a four point scale. The sample statement campers were to respond to was "We should take care of our planet."

[10] Thurber et al., "Youth Development Outcomes," 251.

[11] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 14.

expected.

Directions included sample survey responses from campers, staff and parents. One camper self-reported:

> Camp makes you feel more free to be yourself and not have others judge you. At home, many people think I'm a punk, but at camp, I'm just a Christian and people don't judge me the way the world does. – Daniela, age 14[12]

And a camp staff member comments:

> The kids are often challenged at camp, and it makes them grow and become more sure of themselves. I have seen many kids have a change in their attitude and outlook on life due to their new relationship with Christ. – Charlotte, age 20[13]

The *Directions* study used a four point scale to measure results. The survey asked campers if they have a close relationship with God and asked parents if their child liked attending church, synagogue or the mosque.[14] On this scale a 3.0 indicated if the respondent agreed a little and a 4.0 indicated if the respondent agreed a lot.[15] One thousand, seven hundred and twenty respondents completed surveys that included post-camp and follow-up results of six months after the child's time at camp.[16] *Directions* asked campers how they felt camp affected their spirituality. Campers reported a pre-camp spirituality of 3.15, a post camp spirituality of 3.17 and a follow-up spirituality of 3.15.[17] There is some issue with these findings as the difference in spiritual growth reported by campers pre-camp and follow-up do not show any long-term improvement. Although, this could be a result of a lack of Christian influence outside of camp and not a comment on the nature of growth at camp. In contrast to the camper's self-

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[12] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 15.
[13] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 15.
[14] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 15.
[15] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 4.
[16] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 5, 14. 2294 surveys were returned, however the authors comment that "about a quarter of the participants" chose not to answer the questions about spirituality.
[17] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 15, 19.

reported growth, parents observed their children to have a pre-camp spirituality of 3.28 and a post-camp spirituality of 3.31. [18] This study also measured a parent reported six month follow-up spirituality of 2.29.[19] Although a regression is likely expected, this drop in parent reported spirituality is somewhat steep. The study does not speculate why this is, however this regression does not by default call into question the authenticity of the growth that occurred at camp; there are many factors in a post-camp setting that could contribute to this finding. Camp staff also were surveyed to see if their campers "demonstrated spirituality in some way" before and after a child's time at camp.[20] Camp staff reported observing spiritual attitudes as a result of camp participation grow from 3.08 pre-camp to 3.21 post-camp.[21] There was no follow-up study done with camp staff perceptions of camper spirituality after six months.

It might be argued that *Youth Development Outcomes* and the *Directions* studies do not indicate significant spiritual growth. This perspective could come from the lack of long term spirituality increases self-reported by campers in *Directions* and the generally small increases observed on the four point scale used by both studies. One response to this is to observe that while somewhat meager, the findings of the above studies all demonstrate increased spirituality as a result of a child's time at camp; there certainly is spiritual growth happening in the camp environment, even if it is slight. This observation is made all the more significant by contrasting these findings with those presented in *Move* and the statistics covered in the first chapter. The camp environment manages to promote spiritual growth in young people, while the larger North American church is struggling to keep young people interested in spiritual matters at all.

A second observation that affirms the value of summer camp is recognizing that the

[18] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 19.
[19] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 19.
[20] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 15.
[21] Burkhardt et al., "Directions," 20.

above studies did not set out solely to study spiritual growth in summer camps. It could be that data on spiritual growth was "diluted" by camps that did not strongly promote spiritual growth. It is therefore worth also looking at specifically Christian studies concerned with spiritual growth in the summer camp environment. The findings of such studies reveal notable growth happening at camp.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) commissioned two studies to track where congregation members and pastors experience spiritual growth. The first study released in 2002, discovered that among those who report having a "singular spiritual growth experience," (an intense religious experience) summer camp was the most likely setting for such an event to occur. The study graphed the results they received and can be seen in figure seven.[22]

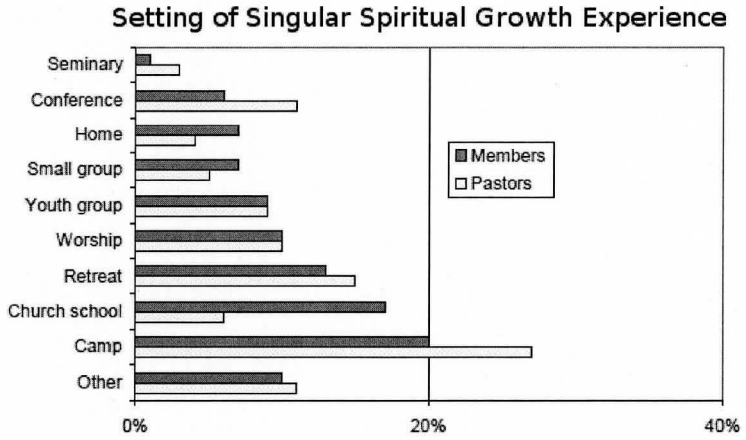

Figure 7.

It is important to note that this study does not dismiss the importance of church. The study also observed that among church members: 80% felt worship services and sermons made very important contributions to their faith life and 51% felt the same about church school.[23] This is compared to only 38% of members feeling camps made very important contributions to their

[22] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Church Camps and Retreats," 2, A-1 . Members (n=287), Pastors (n=517)
[23] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Church Camps and Retreats," 2.

faith life.[24] These findings, in conversation with the high "singular spiritual growth" statistic observed for the camp setting, led the study's authors to conclude that while camps were the most likely place for intense religious experiences to occur, involvement in the local church was "more important for building up faith in general."[25] This remark ought not to undercut the significant findings of spiritual nurture at camp. It could be argued that for "faith in general" to be built up, it must be awakened first.[26] If one's faith beliefs are simply a theoretical construct to which the individual has not fully committed due to a lack of experience, it will be difficult for the church to build up such a faith. If however, Christian belief is experienced and internalized in a camp setting, then there is a substantive structure of belief and presumably commitment to this belief that then can be nurtured by the church.

The second study the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. commissioned was a 2012 study designed to explore spiritual growth experiences. The study's responses revealed that 51% of congregation members and 78% of pastors report having had spiritual growth experiences that have been very significant for their Christian life.[27] When asked where these experiences occurred, the respondents indicated that a camp setting was the fourth most common location.[28] Interestingly, the survey revealed that among pastors or Christian leaders camps were the location of the greatest number of spiritual growth experiences.[29] The results are seen in figure eight.[30]

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[24] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Church Camps and Retreats," 2.
[25] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Church Camps and Retreats," 2.
[26] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 122.
[27] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Spiritual Growth Experiences," 1 .
[28] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Spiritual Growth Experiences," 1 .
[29] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Spiritual Growth Experiences," 1 .
[30] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Spiritual Growth Experiences," 1 .

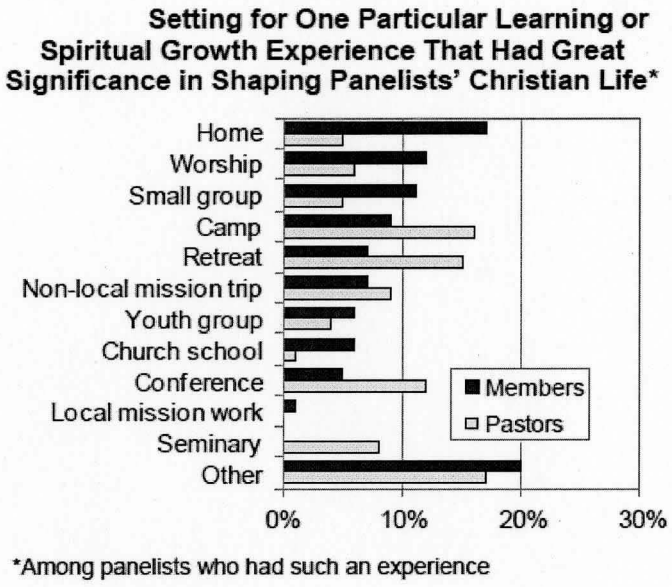


Figure 8.

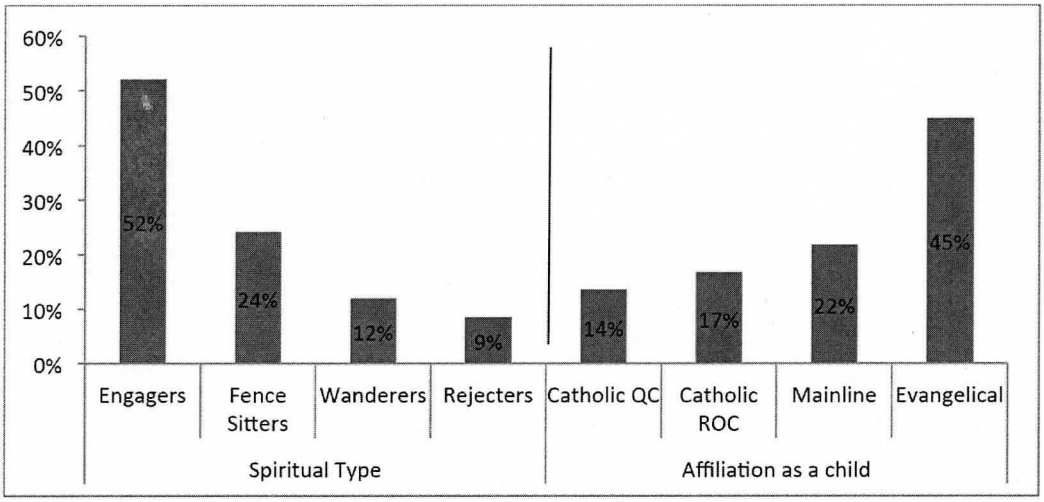
This differs from the 2002 study, where camps were the location of the greatest number of significant spiritual experiences. Although this 2012 study does not indicate if respondents having no camp experience skewed results by naturally ranking camps low due to a lack of experience in the camp setting. Regardless, it is probable this second study is more accurate as it received a greater number of responses by comparison to the 2002 study: members (n=2413) and pastors (n=1497).[31] Although the camp setting is fourth on the list, this ought not to diminish the contribution camp could have in an adolescent's spiritual life. It is worth noting that the reported spiritual growth of camp according to this study is greater than church school, youth group or even foreign mission trips. Of the four options unique to adolescent ministry, camps report as the most significant.

Two further Canadian faith-based studies also report findings on spiritual growth at camp. One of these is *Hemorrhaging Faith*. Not all respondents of *Hemorrhaging Faith* are

[31] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Spiritual Growth Experiences," 4 .

committed Christians; around 73% of those surveyed attend church seldom or not at all.[32] Though many do not attend church, all respondents report attending church at least monthly as children or adolescents.[33] The authors of *Hemorrhaging Faith* also discovered that one quarter of respondents reported attending a summer camp as a child or teenager.[34]Among respondents who do have a committed faith and who have attended a camp as a young person, half indicate camp was the setting where their "faith came alive."[35] The survey's findings can be seen in figure nine.

"[My faith came] alive at summer camp," for those who indicated that they attended summer camp, by spiritual type and religious tradition as a child



Note: There were only 22 Quebec respondents who were raised Catholic that attended a Christian summer camp. Use this statistic with caution.

Figure 9.

These findings are important first for the fact that they specifically address camp involved young people; the findings are not diluted by responses that may not have had a camp experience, or have had a camp experience but not necessarily Christian camp experiences. These findings are also important for the fact that among those who had an openness to commit to or mature in the Christian faith, half did so as a result of involvement at summer camp. It could be debated that such openness to faith could have enabled these respondents to become

[32] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 188.
[33] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 120.
[34] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 98.
[35] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 99.

committed to Christian beliefs in a different setting anyway. But the fact that they did choose Christian commitment in a camp setting speaks for the unique nature of camps. One respondent quoted by *Hemorrhaging Faith* says of her camp experience:

> I do not remember one exact moment [of conversion], instead I think of that summer at camp. It was like the top of a mountain and it would have been very different without the camp. So for me it was more a journey, for I think I was always super aware of my faith and how God was important to me but it took a little push for me to integrate that into my life. – Hannah[36]

The last study to consider is another Canadian study that surveyed former camp attendees and is published in book format under the title *Growing Up Christian* by Wycliffe College professor John Bowen. This study drew its respondents from a pool of people who, as teenagers, had attended Ontario Pioneer Camps's leadership training course; an evangelical Ontario camp run by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.[37] This survey sent out 600 questionnaires and had 333 respondents, out of which roughly 75% were committed to church attendance at the time of the survey.[38] Respondents who attended church regularly were categorized as loyal believers and assumed to be growing in spiritual maturity.[39] The survey turned out broad findings about the nature of growing up in the church and keeping, maturing and discarding one's faith. One set of findings was about the role that Pioneer Camp's leadership training course had on the respondent's faith lives. *Growing Up Christian* reports that 36.7% of respondents who are active in their church and faith report that their Pioneer camp experience was an important part of their spiritual development.[40] One respondent reports:

> It was there I first made a commitment to God. It was there that I first experienced God's presence in worship. It was there that I was inspired to take ownership of my spiritual journey. It was there that I was inspired by the

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[36] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 96.
[37] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 19.
[38] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 19.
[39] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 22–23.
[40] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 49.

> breathtaking lives of certain highly committed Christians. – Loyal Believer, 33 [years old].[41]

The theme of camp as a catalyst experience in the Christian life was common in this study. Most respondents identify that their camp experiences no longer shape their faith life, even though such experiences were pivotal during their adolescent years.[42] In these cases it seems that camp began the belief formation process by providing essential activity in the passive-experience quadrant but the individuals continued to move through the paradigm after their camp experience finished. One respondent writes "Camp, IVCF, etc. were very important in the past, but seem to have less of a role today. However, they provided me with a foundation upon which I practice my faith."[43]

Growing Up Christian also identifies that camp experiences for some were an awakening to Christian belief, even if this belief was not sustained.[44] This means the rate of 36.7% of camp attendees who chose to enter into the Christian life may in fact be higher – even if spiritual growth was not sustained. Ultimately this thesis seeks to provide a way forward to nurture sustained and maturing belief. However, the fact that camp is able to at least initiate belief in the Christian life is important to note. If what can be learned from the spiritually formative nature of the camp environment can be translated into the practice of the wider church, perhaps some of the spiritual awakenings that happened in the camp setting could be nurtured beyond its sphere of influence.

Of these four studies with a distinctly Christian interest and perspective, there are some discrepancies. The Presbyterian Church studies do not agree if important religious experiences occur for 10% or up to 25% of attendees. The *Hemorrhaging Faith* study and the *Growing Up*

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[41] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 49.
[42] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 49.
[43] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 49. The respondent is a 32 year old loyal believer.
[44] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 97.

Christian study do not agree if 36.7% or 50% of camp attendees with committed faith developed the building blocks for this faith in a camp environment. Although, as with the comparison of the *Youth Development Outcomes* and *Directions* studies, the goal of this discussion is not to reach a consensus, but rather to present evidence of a trend. Moreover, it is entirely possible that consensus will never be reached regarding the rate of spiritual growth that happens in summer camps. From a theological perspective it is not as though God is compelled to meet consistent growth quotas across North American camp ministries. From a psycho-social perspective the openness of young people in relation to Christian belief likely varies person to person, camp to camp, year to year. Rather, the essential purpose of reviewing these studies is to show that in contrast to trends in church-based ministries, camp ministries are effectively calling children and adolescents into the Christian life. There are therefore two questions that need to be asked in response to these observations. Frist, why does this happen in camp environments? And second; what can church-based ministries learn from answering this question?

A brief history of Summer Camps

Examining a brief history of the camping movement will provide a sense of the goals and practices of summer camps. An understanding of the goals and practices of camps will in turn aid in understanding how it is that camps are able to nurture spiritual growth to the extent that they do.

In the 1880s summer camps appeared in North America and were first envisioned as a social experiment in maturity for middle and upper class white protestant children and adolescents.[45] The first camps sought to restore something of the pioneering spirit that camp directors felt was being lost among young people in the industrial age, particularly in urban

[45] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 3–6.

settings.[46] In this time there was a growing concern that city life was birthing in young North Americans a sense of entitlement and that young people were not learning perseverance leading to maturity.[47] In response to urban culture, the myth and lore of North American native culture was often appropriated by camps. This appropriation was not for the sake of honouring native traditions, but for the sake of embodying the anti-modern idealism camps stood for.[48] In that North American culture could still be considered devoutly religious at that time, many early camps also held to beliefs that were reflective of an evangelical theology; something that camps sought to nurture in campers in as well.[49] Many prominent camps were sponsored by particular denominations or Christian agencies such as the YMCA or CGIT.[50] Behind these camps were individuals who were mission minded. For example, Luther and Charlotte Gulick provided leadership to YMCA camps in the early twentieth century. The Gulicks viewed themselves as innovative home missionaries who proclaimed camps as "instruments of education for mind, soul and body."[51] By the 1920s in the United States, summer camping was an established part of culture with upward of twenty-two hundred private camps and up to seven thousand organization-linked camps in operation.[52] By the 1930s, camp attendance in the United States was estimated at thirty million children and adolescents per summer.[53]

Summer camps took great pride in their purpose of instilling values and attitudes in campers. By the 1920s some Ontario camps had become finely tuned for the purpose of

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[46] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 17–18.
[47] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 7.
[48] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 216–18.
[49] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 222.
[50] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 20, 106. YMCA stands for Young Men's Christian Association. CGIT stands for Canadian Girls In Training.
[51] Venable and Joy, *Camping Experiences*, 5.
[52] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 62.
[53] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 63 .

socializing middle-class children for future success.[54] Such camps created a controlled environment which were populated with other middle and upper class children and operated in a careful system of rewards and punishments.[55] Such camps were so concerned with the socialization and proper development of young people, that many had child psychologists and professional teachers as salaried staff.[56] These staff would administer psychological assessments including IQ tests for the mental and social "betterment" of the campers. Such camps prided themselves in their developmental focus to the extent that some would hold on-site "case files" of each camper.[57] Curriculum was developed for campers based on psychological insight from that period and camp sessions spanned a minimum eighteen-day period; enough time, it was thought, for a camper to thoroughly engage the curriculum.[58]

Such upscale camps also featured extensive canoe out-tripping programs, especially in Ontario. It was commonly felt that young people who experienced "roughing it" would be better for the experience. It was hoped canoe trips would develop skills such as perseverance, a taste for a challenge and leadership aptitude as young people band together to move through the wilderness.[59] Some camps featured canoe trips of up to seven weeks – trips that might route through James Bay before returning to areas accessible by road.[60] Not only were out-tripping programs intended to personally benefit individual campers, they were also intended to have communal benefit. Campers would work as a team to overcome the challenges of the wilderness and would have to discover how to trust one another to overcome hardship and obstacles. It is not surprising that many of the friendships formed in the camp setting developed into intense

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[54] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 64.
[55] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 66.
[56] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 67.
[57] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 238. Whether or not these efforts produced real results is left to speculation.
[58] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 239.
[59] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 73.
[60] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 74.

bonds that lasted into adulthood.[61] Such attachments would also turn into nostalgia and loyalty for the camp of one's childhood. One former camp staff looks back on their camp experience after a successful career in law saying camp was "perhaps the happiest work I have ever done."[62]

Even though camps strived to attain particular development goals for the campers, they often came up short. The ideals and values of camp were at times larger than life as camp directors and staff sought to impose upon campers their own idealized version of what the "authentic" camp experience would be.[63] Camps were not immune to some behavioural tendencies of teenagers; camp life could feature damaging pranks, hazing rituals and what would be considered in contemporary times as bullying.[64] Some camps were over regimented, while others gave campers too much autonomy; in either case the intended nurture that camp was to provide was obscured by over control or lack of control.[65]

Though some camps were not ideal environments for child and adolescent adjustment, this did not stop the camping movement from taking very seriously their self-imposed mandate for promoting maturation through social interaction. Dr. Mary Northway was a Toronto based psychologist who was very involved in the camping world throughout her life.[66] Her doctoral dissertation was on children's social relationships at summer camp and her career led her to be a camp director, the chair of the Ontario Camping Association and a professor at the University of Toronto in the area of psychology.[67] In her case, the career she had was dramatically informed by her childhood experiences of being a camper at summer camp. In 1963, she edited a handbook for adolescent camp counselors purposed to give insight and instruction to each aspect of camp

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[61] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 95.
[62] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 96.
[63] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 169.
[64] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 171.
[65] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 173.
[66] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 19.
[67] Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 20.

life. For example, Northway includes a section where she describes the barriers to trusting adults in a child's life. She comments that the ability for children to trust adults is essential for maturity and she leads her readers through the information and skills that counselors need to help children trust adults at camp.[68] Northway is so focused on the potential for children's social development at summer camp that she encourages her adolescent readers to review her notes once a week and discuss with fellow counselors strategies for specific camper's social development.[69] Dr. Northway's aim was to have front line camp staff serve as much more than babysitters; the adolescents who staffed summer camps under Dr. Northway's eyes were to be skilled enough to serve as a front lines agents in promoting camper's maturity.

The average day of a summer camp was carefully programmed. Not all moments of the day were filled with structured activity, but each movement of the day had a purpose that contributed to the overall camp experience. Each aspect of camp had to have some meaning if campers were expected to find value in the activity.[70] Even "rest hour" (an unstructured afternoon downtime) gave both the opportunity to have an afternoon rest during a busy day, and also the opportunity for staff and campers to spend low-key unstructured time together.[71] Especially meaningful were morning prayers or worship where the staff were expected to set an example for campers in terms of attentiveness and participation.[72] One contributor to Northway's volume on camp counseling observed:

> God seems to be closer at camp. Sometimes he seems hard to find in our cities, with the hectic pace, the complexities, the pressures, the gaudiness. Camp is stripped of these trappings. Our opportunities for imparting spiritual values are, therefore, all the greater.[73]

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[68] Northway, "Understanding Your Campers," 23–26.
[69] Northway, "Understanding Your Campers," 29.
[70] Bertram, "Program Ideas," 99.
[71] Lowes, "A Counselor's Typical Day," 79.
[72] Bertram, "Program Ideas," 99.
[73] Lowes, "A Counselor's Typical Day," 91.

In contemporary times the summer camp experience has remained philosophically consistent with its roots. North American summer camps continue to offer a relationally intense temporary community for the purpose of camper development. Camp staff and directors continue to labour toward a certain set of objectives for campers; most often growth in moral reasoning, spirituality, social and physical areas.[74] This focus on spiritual growth is particularly true of Christian camps who offer an immersive experience in the Christian faith. Campers and staff participate in grace before meals (that may be sung with traditional camp songs), sunrise services, cabin devotions, group discussions, worship and teaching.[75] There are often special rituals or services that mark important times in a camper's experience. There may be "friendship circles" where encouragement is offered to each member of the group, campfires where prayers of thanksgiving are offered in response to the blessings of camp life or perhaps an end-of-session camp fire where campers are invited to reflect upon what their time at camp meant for them.[76] In that camps are often located in outdoor settings, there is the opportunity to learn about and develop a sense of awe regarding God's created order.[77] There is also ample space for informal moments of teaching in the faith life that can take place between campers and counselors. Termed "teachable moments," these moments throughout the day are often spontaneous opportunities to reflect upon and participate in the life of faith.[78] Such teachable moments occur when campers are uniquely open to learning; an experience may be fresh in their mind and they want to discuss it, or they may have openness to new ideas and they ask questions of their counselor. Teachable moments have a practical application that is immediately applicable. In

[74] Meier and Henderson, *Camp Counseling*, 73.
[75] Meier and Henderson, *Camp Counseling*, 154.
[76] Meier and Henderson, *Camp Counseling*, 156.
[77] Meier and Henderson, *Camp Counseling*, 184.
[78] Meier and Henderson, *Camp Counseling*, 98.

such moments a camper may learn about the importance of offering forgiveness, extending compassion or developing a thankful posture in prayer (among many other examples).

The essential observation that is to be made from this discussion of summer camp in North America is that camps were designed very specifically to nurture young people into certain behaviours, roles and personal convictions. The camping movement through the years intuitively sensed that their program was good at accomplishing what is had set out to do in young lives. Early experiments in camp living seem to have almost stumbled into the deeply transformative construct of temporary community that became known as summer camp – and the basic philosophy behind these early camps have been preserved in camp practice through the years. Moreover, it was not just the case that camps were effective at socializing and promotion spiritual maturity – it was discovered along the way that campers also found camp life to be both important and enjoyable.

Why are camps good at what they do?

Earlier in this chapter it was demonstrated that camps are excellent places for young people to develop spiritually. The above discussion of summer camp history, philosophy and practice demonstrated camps were designed to be places of challenge and maturation. The question remains however, why are camps so good at what they do? The answer to this question could shape how ministry is conceived of and practiced in other environments, such as within the church.

Broadly speaking, camps are good at what they do because they can provide the opportunity for *sustained* activity in each quadrant of this thesis' belief formation paradigm. They accomplish this sustained activity through four features of the camp environment. These four features are not the only factors of a camp's ability to nurture maturing Christian belief.

They are however, the features unique to the camp environment that promote activity in the various quadrants of this thesis' belief formation paradigm.

The first feature that promotes belief formation is the fact that camp is novel and protracted. For many campers, the camp experience is new. For returning campers, the camp experience is at least not consistent with their habitual patterns of life back at home. This means that the camper will need to form new habits, relationships and meanings for their time at camp. Some camping theorists have termed the experience of being out of one's habitual environment for an extended period of time "adaptive dissonance."[79] A state of adaptive dissonance is produced when an individual is placed in a unique physical environment, with unfamiliar individuals, often with the aim of completing problem solving tasks (see figure 10).[80] The tasks of camp life may be selecting new friends, growing to trust one's councillor, conforming one's attitude to what is expected of those in the camp environment, or seeking a renewed connection with God.

[79] Walsh and Golins, "The Exploration of the Outward Bound Process," 20–21.
[80] Walsh and Golins, "The Exploration of the Outward Bound Process," 20–21. Outward Bound has specific learning goals for students enrolled in the program. Problem solving tasks of most summer camps are social in nature as opposed to Outward Bound's emphasis on skill proficiencies. Their theory of adaptive dissonance still applies to social learning or spiritual learning in a camp setting.

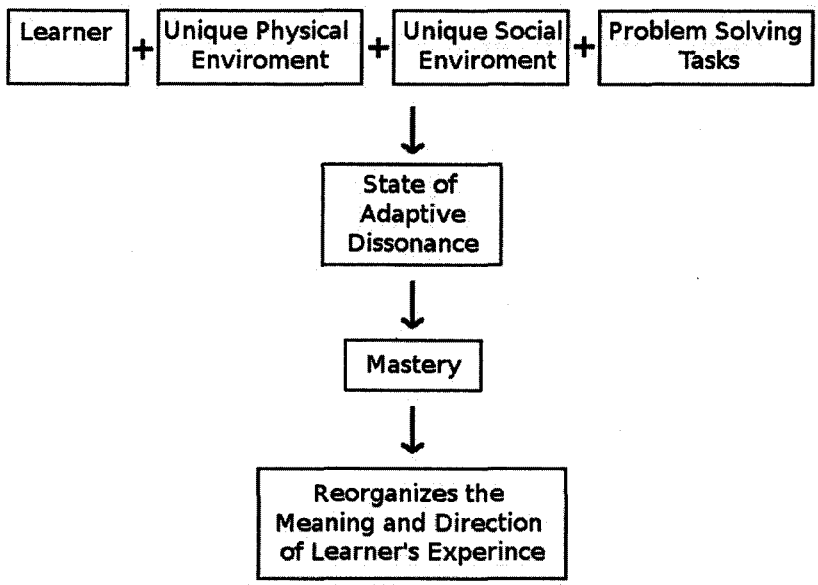

Figure 10.[81]

Because the camper does not have habitual behaviour or understanding of the new situation, new learning must occur. Such learning must also occur because the camp experience is lengthy and immersive enough that a camper can move through this process. During a campers' time at camp, he or she may experiment with different personality traits in order to navigate this new setting they have found themselves in.[82] It is probable at some point a camper will "try on" the persona expected of them in the camp environment.[83] If this persona alleviates adaptive dissonance, the camper may inhabit this persona and accompanying value system for themselves. This is especially true if the teen feels a sense of safety or belonging in relation to the conventions and persona they have adopted.[84]

A second feature of belief formation at camp is the community's expectations of its members. The social/behavrioual expectations of camp cannot be avoided by campers. This

[81] Walsh and Golins, "The Exploration of the Outward Bound Process," 20–21. This diagram is adapted from an Outward Bound flow chart.
[82] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 154. Teens especially will "mirror" behaviours of others to fit into new social settings. Through the act of mirroring, a teen will often decide which identify fits them best.
[83] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 158. If a community's standards fit an adolescent's sense of self, they may take these conventions for his or herself.
[84] Venable and Joy, *Camping Experiences*, 9–10.

reality is something that can add to a campers' experience of adaptive dissonance. A summer camp is generally a somewhat isolated and insular community; campers do not have the freedom to move in and out of the camp community as they please and therefore they must constantly abide by the camps norms or encounter repercussions. In any community that strives for meaningful relationships, its participants must surrender an appropriate portion of their own will in service to the mission of the community.[85] There is a refining nature then in the conflicts that arise in a camp setting; in conflict campers are being challenged to surrender parts of their desires and in exchange take for themselves the values of the camp. The metaphor of a crucible is helpful to further describe the refining nature of conflict in a camp setting.[86] A crucible is a container that withstands "the intense heat and pressure that can transform raw materials and catalytic agents into qualitatively different substances."[87] In one's home setting it may be possible to ignore or avoid situations and individuals who bring challenges into one's life. In the camp setting however, the environment is relationally intense. In such an environment confrontation is unavoidable. Confrontation need not be a bad thing however, Shults and Sandage's observations from chapter three indicate that confrontation is necessary to reorganize one's thinking and move into a deeper maturity.[88] Confrontation could be a councillor leading a camper thorough the necessity of loving others who are different than one's self or a councillor bringing a challenge to a camper's beliefs about God in a bible study setting.

Marshall McCluhan famously coined the term, "the medium is the message."[89] While the relationally intense camp environment promotes confrontation, the message it sends in that this confrontation is not hostile. McCluhan intends by his statement to point out that the mode in

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[85] Smith, *Intimacy and Mission*, 65.
[86] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 238–41.
[87] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 31.
[88] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 33.
[89] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 149.

which communication happens carries a meaning in and of itself.[90] Growth in the summer camp environment does not come primarily through formal teaching, but through observing and participating in the life of the community. If young people enter into a Christian summer camp and discover councillors who are committed to loving, caring, challenging and growing with campers, this sends a message. Because campers can observe and even test a councillor's commitment to the mission of the camp, the actions and commitment of the councillor to the camp mission conveys the meaningfulness of the camp mission to the camper.[91]

A third feature of belief formation at camp is camp's proximity to the natural world. Christian theology holds that God is revealed through both scripture and the natural world.[92] Camps are most often situated in close proximity to the natural world and can therefore facilitate a sense of awe inspired by the natural setting. This is especially true of camps that offer adventure opportunities such as canoe out-trips. What is exactly meant when one believes they have had a spiritual experience is a subject of debate, however there are two aspects that can reliably be given to the term spirituality. Spirituality is first characterized by a different way of thinking about the world than what a person is normally disposed to.[93] Instead of being focused on self, the individual with a "spiritual" perspective will see oneself in relation to other realties, both physical and transcendent. Such a perspective generally involves a humble viewing oneself as minute or insignificant in comparison to larger realities.[94] Spirituality is characterized secondly by an emotional response to this shift in perspective.[95] The spiritual person does not simply own a set of facts about themselves and other realities; they *feel* something in response.

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[90] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 153. As an example, the authors argue the implicit message of a seminary is that biblical knowledge ought to be outsourced to experts and not concern the laity.
[91] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 154–55. The authors argue a Christian's life is the Christian's message.
[92] Ferguson, *Training Staff to be Spiritual Leaders*, 38.
[93] Agarwal, *Ethics and Spirituality*, 57, 61.
[94] Maslow, *Religion Values and Peak Experiences*, 59.
[95] Agarwal, *Ethics and Spirituality*, 62.

The scriptures speak of the heavens declaring the glory of God and the skies proclaiming the works of his hand (Ps 19:1). This metaphor of heaven's speech can be seen in the sense of awe and relative insignificance one has when contemplating God's creation. Such an experience is certainly possible in a camp setting as campers sleep on a beach at night under the stars, hike up a river-side cliff during an out-trip, or even just wander through the forest on the way back to one's cabin after a gathering.

A fourth feature of belief formation in the camp environment is the compelling nature of close relationship. The values of the camp are transmitted to its members quite effectively because the camp community exists in a state of "liminality."[96] The idea of liminal space came from anthropologist Victor Turner as he studied coming-of-age rituals in non-literate African people groups.[97] One such ritual of the Ndembu tribe involved initiates being charged with gathering "medicines" from the surrounding wilderness and thereafter engaging in an elaborate ceremony in which the medicines played a crucial role.[98] If a group of young people could gather these medicines and complete the ritual, this would signify their transition into adulthood. The ritual process came to fascinate Turner in part because he believed the type of transformation that happened in Ndembu young people also happens in other societies; he believed that liminality exists in some form in all societies.[99] Turner likens the Ndembu ritual to the struggle of the beat generation in the 1960s to transform society from an authoritative modernistic culture into a culture more in-touch with humanistic ideals.[100] He also saw the liminal struggle to be spiritual in nature. He observed individuals in liminal space struggle for causes and meanings greater than their own personal interest and as a result such individuals experience personal

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[96] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[97] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, vii.
[98] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 27–31.
[99] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 138.
[100] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 118.

transformation and as such "transcendent" meanings are internalized.[101]

In Turner's thought, a liminal experience occurs when a small group of people are temporarily separated from larger society for the purpose of pursuing a challenging goal. [102] Liminal space involves a process of transition. Individuals in liminal space have begun to affect some sort of change in either themselves or the environment (or both), though have not yet reached their desired end. Such striving for a difficult-to-attain yet desirable goal is extremely compelling to the human heart; especially if the struggle occurs in concert with others seeking the same end.[103] A group in liminality is primarily concerned with the achievement of the goal at hand; all other concerns become secondary. A liminal group may also be required to make sacrifices in pursuit of the goal.[104] Sacrifices made in liminal space vary depending on the nature of the liminal space. Sacrifices made could be as large as the loss of life in the context of an ongoing war. However sacrifices may be as small being denied common comforts and familiar settings in in the context of an extended summer camp canoe trip. Even though the magnitude of sacrifices being made varies, the fact that sacrifices are being undergone gives greater significance and meaning to the challenge of moving through liminal space.

In such settings a group often will experience "intense comradeship and egalitarianism" where "rank and status disappear or are homogenized."[105] Turner called this intense bond created between people in liminal space "*communitas*."[106]In Turner's observation, this intense bond and the accompanying struggle to move through liminal space was experienced as sacred.[107] He calls

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[101] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 114.
[102] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[103] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.
[104] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 102.
[105] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.
[106] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96.
[107] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96–97. Sacred in Turner's use connotes a humbling of self to serve the greater cause of the larger community. This humbling of self is not coerced, it is willingly engaged in liminal space.

the liminal experience a "moment in and out of time."[108] This phrasing is slightly poetic; it is used to imply first that liminality and *communitas* are quantifiable experiences that have a beginning and an end. It is used secondly to imply that liminality and *communitas* are experiences that transcend the moments in which they occur: the meanings and transformations that happen in liminal space extend past the experience of liminality and into everyday life.

Liminality and *communitas* characterize the camp experience. The Christian camp experience is about a group of people struggling together for a noble goal that is difficult to attain but which has great value. In the pursuit of this goal "rank and status disappear or are homogenized," [109] – while there is a staffing hierarchy at summer camps, both staff and campers strive together in Christian mission. The camp setting is isolated to varying extents from the larger world and it therefore can function like a crucible; the members of the camp community do not have the liberty to freely move in and out of the group. [110] Because individuals cannot easily move in and out of the group, they are obliged to strive with the group, for the group's goals, while they are present with the group. Both campers and staff are therefore in effect "stuck" for a period of time in a community that is striving for a particular ideal. In the midst of this struggle, intense bonds are formed between the members of the camp community. Such bonds seem to be spiritual in nature in that they have meaning that will last for the individuals past their experience of liminality in the camp setting. Further, the values of the camp setting are instilled in camp staff and campers as a result of the bonds that are produced in *communitas*. The recollection of the camp community carries with it camp memories and the values by which the camp community operated under. Liminality and *communitas* are therefore two of the strongest

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[108] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96.
[109] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.
[110] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 31. Shults and Sandage remark that a crucible creates an isolated environment. The isolation of camps varies; typically residential camps are more insular. Camps that feature extended outdoor trips are of course very insulated from larger society.

features of the camp experience that contribute to the spiritual growth of those who are involved in the summer camp environment.

The transformative nature of liminal space is heightened among those who carry more responsibility for the success of the camp's mission. It has been noticed that staff members at summer camp seem to internalize the values of the camp community at a deeper level than that of the campers. A study of Jewish American summer camps found that a higher percentage of counselors placed higher value on "every dimension of Jewish life" as compared to campers.[111] Campers were found to place a higher value on "every dimension of Jewish life" as compared to those who had not spent time at Jewish summer camps.[112] This study reports among camp counselors (n=703), that 68% felt it was important to lead an ethical and moral life.[113] Among those who attended a Jewish summer camp (n=1864), 63% felt it was important to lead an ethical and moral life. [114] And among those who identify as Jewish, but who had not attended a summer camp (n=2147), 60% felt it was important to lead and ethical and moral life. [115] Thus, it appears that counselors (or those with responsibility of others) internalize the values of camp most deeply. It could be that camps tend to hire staff who already display values in line with the camp's own value. And there is likely some truth to this; if a potential staff expressed during an interview that it was not important to lead and ethical and moral life, they would likely not have been offered a staff position in the first place. However, the trajectory of the data associated with summer camps suggests that involvement in the camp environment does affect individual's values.[116] In that counselor's scores were higher than camper's scores, it seems more likely that a

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[111] Saxe and Sales, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents*, 106.
[112] Saxe and Sales, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents*, 106.
[113] Saxe and Sales, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents*, 106. A sample of other values measured were "Caring about Israel," "Having a rich spiritual life" and "Observing Shabbat."
[114] Saxe and Sales, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents*, 106.
[115] Saxe and Sales, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents*, 106.
[116] See this chapter's discussion of studies done regarding values internalized from camp participation.

counselor's greater responsibility in the camp environment leads to greater internalization of camp values. If campers have little responsibility in the spiritual life of others it is possible they will not internalize spiritual values as deeply as those who hold responsibility for the spiritual development of others. It is most probable then that the experience of liminaity and *communitas* is strongest among those who laboured most deeply or felt the most responsibility for the success of the mission of the community. Thus, being a staff member at a summer camp will most likely result in even greater spiritual growth than what has been observed in campers.

Conclusion

Each of these four features of the camp environment promote sustained activity in the belief formation paradigm. The novel environment and protracted stay in this environment exposes campers to new experiences and new interpretations. The nature of the camp community to force confrontations means campers will likely encounter disequilibrium experiences that will beg new interpretations to restore a camper's sense of equilibrium in their beliefs and values. The close proximity to nature, nurtures a sense of awe and wonder and may awaken a desire for spiritual searching in campers. And the liminal nature of camp engenders deep bonds between camp members, allowing for campers to more readily internalize the values and meanings of the camp community.

Ontario Pioneer Camp, a ministry of InterVarsity Canada, is the summer camp John Bowen's *Growing Up Christian* drew upon for its research sample. It is also the summer camp I attended as a child and as a teenager. In the summer of 2000, I went through Pioneer's Leadership Training Course – a month long program designed by Bowen to teach the fundamentals of Christian theology and Christian leadership to adolescents interested in serving

as counselors at Pioneer.[117] This experience of immersion in Christian mission in the context of summer camp was very compelling. I continued to return to the camp as a staff member for whole summers, or portions of summers, between 2001 and 2014. As a result of these summers working for Pioneer Camp, I came to believe that the summer camp experience held something very special that church-based youth ministry efforts could not offer. This conviction that I held informed the practice of the church-based youth programs I have run in my employment as a youth pastor from 2006 to the present. The teenagers who came through my program either entered the Christian faith, kept the Christian faith or gave up the faith for a host of reasons – most of which are beyond my ability to carefully analyze and report upon. However, I found that if I could get a student from my youth program involved as a staff member at a Christian summer camp, the quality of their spiritual life and their commitment to their spiritual life was noticeably changed as a result of their time spent in summer camp. To the best of my knowledge, there is not an exception to this observation among students from my group who served as staff at a Christian summer camp. There are, I must admit, exceptions among those who only attended camp as campers. This has been a trend in my ministry that became fascinating. I wondered if what I had experienced at camp was not simply an anomaly in my own instance, but a general truth – that young people really are given the opportunity for noticeable spiritual growth in the camp setting.

There are two documents that characterized my staff experience at Pioneer and I believe, the staff experiences of members from my youth group. The first is a letter written to Pioneer

[117] Guest and Gillham, *On the Shores*, 175. Bowen made a significant overhaul to Pioneer's leadership training program in the 1990s. Part of this overhaul involved writing a curriculum, called "The Building Blocks of the Christian Faith." The program before and after the overhaul featured two weeks of training and a following two week practicum in the camps. Part of the initial training takes place during a canoe trip.

Camp staff by founder Howard Guinness in 1929.[118] He writes:

> Have we been rash in taking the name of Pioneer for ourselves? Have we that matchless spirit of daring that must go forward in the name of our Great Chief to do the undoable? What blood flows in our veins, comrades in the great fight? Is there the burning longing to pioneer for Jesus, to be found in the field that others are neglecting, to do the thing that others are not doing and maybe cannot do? What mettle are we made of? What high ambition is ours – Pioneers? Are we worthy of the name? And yes, we bear a higher Name, a worthier Name, a name more precious far – the Name that is above every name. Are we worthy of that name?
>
> I know of a world sunk in shame, of hearts that faint and tire and I know of a Name, a Name, a Name that can set the world on fire! Its sound is sweet, its letters flame, I know of a Name, a precious Name – 'tis Jesus!
>
> Would-be-Pioneer, if you want to win through, it means sacrifice. Are you ready? Well the you can start right away and the cost of all that gets in your way. Keep your morning watch. Farwell comrades in the fight. [I] can never forget or cease to pray for those whom [I have] grown to love. If [I have] ever been more that the servant of all, then forgive and forget – for this has ever been [my] aim. Onward ever onward! Upward ever upward! Till the trumpet shall sound![119]

In this letter Guinness conveys the intensity and the importance of camping ministries. He also calls upon his staff to display great dedication to this ministry he feels so strongly about. Guinness rightly believes his Pioneer Camp could be used by God in remarkable ways, given the unique ministry environment camp creates. In my own experience, Guinness's call to make the name of Jesus known in the summer camp setting has been a tremendous source of joy. This joy comes not only from serving the Lord, but also because camp seemed to open people to the gospel message in ways I had not observed in church settings.

The second document is a counselor training manual a Pioneer staff member penned in the 1950s. The document described the nature and practice of camp ministry and eventually

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[118] Guest and Gillham, *On the Shores*, 3–10. Pioneer camp was founded by Dr. Howard Guinness in 1929. His intent was to provide a place where teenaged boys would be challenged to mature in a variety of ways, but most importantly in their commitment to the Christian faith.

[119] Ontario Pioneer Camp Archives, 2013.

became an official training document of Christian Camping International.[120] An excerpt reads as follows:

> Because God is God, he cannot be boxed in. He breaks through all the structures we make for Him and works whenever He wants. Strange as it may seem to us, sometimes His work may be more effective on the waterfront or on an outtrip than in a Sunday service. He often comes and upsets our programming.
>
> The whole of camp living is the camp program – not just the activities – but also meal times, rest periods and clean up. More important than that concept is the fact that the whole of camp living is the Christian message. There is no way we can turn it on and off. God is the God of all, and he can and will work through it all.[121]

At a time when modern empirical studies on camp were yet unavailable, this portion of a 1950s training manual reveals Pioneer Camp staff intuited the value of camp's live-in environment. The church-based teaching that happens on a Sunday morning or at a youth meeting is certainly important. But a different and perhaps more shaping teaching happens in the setting of Christian life shared among a group of people. Such teaching is experiential in nature as it rises out of everyday experiences that are being connected to the life of faith.

This thesis was initially conceived as an opportunity for a personal exploration of why the summer camp environment seemed to be so transformative. This chapter sheds some light on this question. However, this line of inquiry cannot end with articulating why the camp environment is able to see the ministry results it does. Rather, it also ought to be asked, for the benefit of church-based youth ministries, what a church-based ministry can learn from the paradigm presented in this thesis and the findings of this chapter. This question will form the discussion of chapter five.

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[120] Guest and Gillham, *On the Shores*, 237. Christian Camping International is a resourcing and accrediting body for Christian camps.
[121] Guest and Gillham, *On the Shores*, 238.

Chapter Five – Ministry Implications for the Local Church Youth Group

Introduction

This thesis has articulated a belief formation paradigm and shown how this paradigm functions within the summer camp environment. This thesis has also examined church-based youth groups and observed that these groups struggle to move adolescents through the belief formation paradigm presented here, toward mature Christian belief. It is essential that belief formation should first address how a person moves through the belief formation process. This was discussed in chapter two. However, understanding how a person forms belief constitutes only half of the belief formation paradigm. There remains the need to articulate a ministry response. This chapter will discuss how youth workers in the church-based environment can work with the paradigm of belief formation. It will approach each quadrant of the paradigm and relate each quadrant to church-based youth ministry. This chapter will also propose two in-depth programs that a church-based youth ministry could undertake to move adolescents through the paradigm at a more formative level than youth group attendance can provide.

The Use of Paradigms

It will be helpful to recall the discussion of paradigms from the first chapter. The first chapter discussed how ministry can be conceived of on four levels. The first is the preceptual level; any ministry must first have a set of principles on which the practice of ministry will be formulated.[1] The second level is the model; a model is a set way the ministry will practice the principles it has chosen in the perceptual level.[2] The third level is the paradigmatic; paradigms are general sets of core convictions that arise from refining models to better suit the context of

[1] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207.
[2] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 207.

ministry.[3] The fourth level is the construct; constructs are a grouping of tested paradigms that are found to be transferable between universal contexts.[4]

Both this thesis and this chapter are most interested in the paradigmatic level of ministry conceptualization. One of the features of paradigms is that they are flexible enough that they can fit into multiple contexts and be relatable to the "intricacies and complexities of life."[5] In presenting a paradigm then, it is not ideal to give specific instructions for structuring ministry according to this thesis' paradigm of belief formation. Such instructions would become models that are bound to the context they were conceived in. Rather, it is best if the church in its various contexts undergoes the labour of discerning for itself what it would mean to enact a paradigm.

A helpful metaphor to expand on the use of paradigms comes from mathematics. It has been found by mathematics instructors that there is a difference between memorizing mathematical formulas and understanding the concepts behind why a given formula is structured the way it is.[6] When it comes (for example) to calculating the area of shapes, instructors find students who understand the concepts behind area formulas are able to calculate the area of non-standard shapes while students who have only memorized standard formulas cannot.[7] The reason behind this is that standard formulas were developed only for standard shapes such as triangles, circles and squares. Yet, formulas for non-standard shapes must be specifically created for each individual non-standard shape – of which there are an infinite number. The creation of a new area formula requires understanding the concepts or area that underlay each area formula. Given a rectangle with a particular irregularity, the area formula may be found to be: area = 1/Y x length x width. However, without understanding why the particular shape's area formula is

[3] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[4] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208.
[5] Zylla, "Contours of the Paradigmatic," 210.
[6] Battista, "Understanding Area and Area Formulas," 362.
[7] Battista, "Understanding Area and Area Formulas," 362.

"1/Y x length x width," it will not intuitively be clear how to alter this formula to a rectangle with a slightly different irregularity.[8] Thus, understanding how to work with the concept of area proves more useful when working with diverse shapes than memorizing formulas.

This discussion of formulas and concepts in mathematics can serve as a metaphor for Zylla's discussion about paradigms and models. A ministry model is akin to a formula in that it applies to the specific context that it was conceived for. A paradigm of ministry is akin to a mathematical concept. Just as concepts can be used to alter formulas to match new parameters, paradigms are used to tailor models to dynamic ministry contexts. This thesis has delved into the theory of belief formation. The discussions of this topic have been akin to mathematical concepts: the insights of this thesis thus far pertain generally to ministry but not to specific ministry contexts. This chapter will suggest various ways a paradigm of belief formation could shape the practice of ministry. It is however important to note that suggestions offered in this chapter may not be the best fit for all contexts. Rather, ministry staff – each in their own context – must discern how to best shape their ministries in response to this thesis' belief formation paradigm.

The process of discerning how to bring a paradigm of ministry into any context is best done through the pastoral cycle. Author Laurie Green utilizes the idea of the pastoral cycle in his book, *Let's Do Theology*.[9] In Green's conception, the cycle starts with an experience.[10] Green mentions the experience could be anywhere on a continuum between concrete and conceptual. He gives the example of running a rowdy youth group as a concrete example and the careful decision making required in a predicament as a more conceptual experience. [11] Before beginning

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[8] Battista, "Understanding Area and Area Formulas," 367.
[9] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 18.
[10] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 19.
[11] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 19.

to scan for solutions, the experience or situation must be sufficiently understood.[12] In the case of this thesis, part of the experience of belief formation and spiritual maturity was discussed in chapter two. This paradigm focused on the process of belief formation any given individual will move through. However, the specific contexts in which individuals move through the belief formation process was not addressed due to the fact that there are a great number of potential contexts in which belief formation happens. The onus therefore is on the one who ministers to possess a thorough understanding of how belief formation occurs and what it could mean for their own context. Green refers to the process of coming to understand one's own context and the theory that would apply there as, "exploration."[13]

After an exploration of the context at hand is completed, reflection takes place.[14] Green encourages reflection to happen in a group as the collective wisdom of a body of believers is often greater than the wisdom of a single believer working alone. The goal of the reflection process is to come up with an appropriate response to the experience that precipitated the pastoral cycle.[15] After reflection comes the response. It is the goal of the pastoral cycle to formulate and enact a response that would best respond to the initial need that precipitated the pastoral cycle.[16]

As a result of the completed cycle, the response taken to the initial experience will create a new experience. This is because an action taken in a certain set of circumstances will affect these circumstances to become in some way different than they were before.[17] The new situation that is a result of responding to the previous situation is also a new starting point for the pastoral

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[12] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 20.
[13] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 21.
[14] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 22.
[15] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 23.
[16] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 24.
[17] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 24.

cycle. Because action in one situation creates a new situation, the pastoral cycle is a steady, ongoing process. Green diagrams his process as seen in figure eleven as follows:

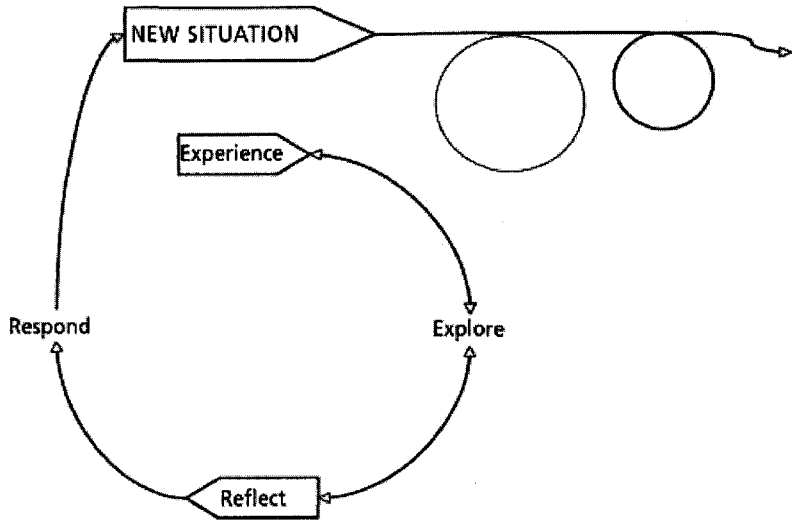

Figure 11.[18]

Green points out that even in the event that nothing changes in a ministry context as a result of moving through the pastoral cycle, the continued practice is essentially a new situation.[19] The situation is different because there is fresh insight and understanding behind the action that is taking place. It is conceivable that a ministry has already arrived at an appropriate response to a given situation. Moving through the pastoral cycle would then serve to affirm the action already taken in the situation and would also serve to alleviate concern that alternate methods should be brought into the situation.

This discussion of Green's pastoral cycle is important to this chapter as it must ultimately be the work of those who minister in a situation to discern what is going on, what the response needs to be and then come to their own conclusions regarding how to best work toward nurturing a maturing faith among adolescent church populations. The requirement for discernment of a

[18] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 25.
[19] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 24.

situation does not however give the minister licence to discard portions of belief formation theory if they seem undesirable for some subjective reason. Rather, the goal of this discernment pertains to how belief formation theory will be best applied in the situation at hand.

Each Quadrant in a Youth Group Context.

Even though the minister must discern for their own context how best to apply this paradigm of belief formation, it may be helpful to offer some suggestions. The suggestions given here are general enough that they should apply to most youth group contexts without great revision being required. This section will draw on the discussion of camps in chapter four and the discussion of belief formation in chapter two.

One fundamental observation applies to all quadrants of the belief formation paradigm. Henri Nouwen has said that "ministers cannot save anyone. They can only offer themselves as guides to fearful people."[20] This statement is theologically true as saving grace must come from Christ (John 14:6). This statement is also true in the process of belief formation. The youth worker cannot force an individual to choose a specific course of action through the quadrants, nor can he or she initiate experiences of the divine in the passive experience quadrant. The ministry of belief formation, like all ministry, is a matter of trusting God to move.[21] This trusting entails the act of ministry on the part of the youth worker.[22] However the youth workers must still trust that their actions will be made effective by the work of the Spirit.[23]

Passive Interpretation

The passive interpretation quadrant contains the meanings and insight that a young person encounters outside of his or her own intuitions. In this quadrant a range of potential

[20] Nouwen, "The Wounded Healer," 165.
[21] Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Living*, 44.
[22] Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Living*, 44.
[23] Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Living*, 44.

beliefs are supplied by peer groups, media, significant adults and the culture at large. The individual will most often select from these options a belief that best fits in with his or her broader life circumstances.[24] In the context of a youth program, introducing Christian interpretations into an adolescent's life would most naturally occur during a youth meeting's corporate teaching time or during mentorship that that takes place between an adolescent and a youth worker.

In an adolescent's life, there is more than one value system, or set of interpretations, that could be subscribed to. This multiplicity of options available to select one's value system from can be referred to as "pluralism."[25] The reason there is more than one value system is because a value system cannot be true or false in the same way a propositional statement can be true or false. Statements that are false can be ruled out as options for correct interpretations. However, because values are subjective many can exist in a society without any being ruled out as false.[26] Among the options presented by pluralistic culture, individuals will most often choose a value system that subjectively feels best to them.[27] Using Kolhberg's idea of equilibrium, an individual will most likely choose a value set that allows the greatest amount of cognitive equilibrium. Once a value set has been chosen, individuals tend to reduce remaining dissonance regarding their choice through "collecting" apparent evidence that affirms their choice.[28] The youth worker's role in this pluralism of values is to promote a maturing Christian belief system. This will require the youth worker to effectively highlight the cognitive dissonances in an

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[24] Folwer, *Stages of Faith*, 154. Fowler mentions adolescents will try on different conceptions of self and accompanying meanings that are available to them in their contexts. It is conceivable that an adolescent may create their own conception of self an accompanying meaning, but Folwer insinuates this would be very rare.
[25] Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 16.
[26] Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 14.
[27] Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 17.
[28] Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises,"177. This phenomenon is known as confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the tendency to select for truth that affirms what one is disposed to believe or has previously chosen to believe.

adolescent's beliefs that have been covered over by the messages of the larger culture and the adolescent's own thought processes.

As discussed in chapter four, adaptive dissonance occurs in the camp setting and is caused by removing the camper from his or her familiar setting into an unfamiliar setting. The absence of familiar surroundings means the camper must reorganize his or her thinking and behaviour to better suit the new environment. Because the camp environment is immersive and protracted, the dissonance caused by participating in summer camp is great. Youth groups cannot create the same depth of adaptive dissonance as camp. Adolescents attending youth groups may attend with friends from school and the group culture may resemble local culture (save for a Christian value system) and youth group programming might be a few hours each week. With these few hours per week it will be difficult to offer an experience of adaptive dissonance of a magnitude that would cause an adolescent into re-organizing their values and beliefs. This may be especially true if youth are attending for the sake of social time with friends; the friend group's influence may insulate against any dissonance experienced in the youth event.

Though introducing dissonance may be difficult, cognitive dissonance for the purpose of leading adolescents toward Christian belief could however be created with the use of interactive teaching. This would require youth ministers to have a group size small enough to permit meaningful dialogue between adolescents and the minister. Dissonance could be created in such a setting by fostering the exchange of ideas (and therefore meanings) between adolescents, one another and the minister. If a discussion is able to call into question assumptions adolescents have made of their presently held interpretations, dissonance is created. However, this dissonance must not be initiated in what could be perceived as a hostile manner or the adolescent

may not feel safe examining their held assumptions.[29] In the camp setting campers realize camp staff are committed to caring for their needs because of the consistency of the staff's caring actions. This sense of safety allows camp staff to challenge camper's assumptions without being perceived as overly hostile. Similarly, if the youth worker is able to respectfully question an adolescent's assumptions, yet show care before and after this questioning, these actions could create a safe space for Kolhberg's disequilibrium to form in a young person's thoughts. This disequilibrium, though initially unpleasant for the adolescent, could give way to a new, more mature equilibrium, with the guidance of the youth worker.

Some may argue that encouraging critical thinking and the free exchange of ideas on theological topics may undermine an adolescent's faith. There may well be some truth to this assertion as critical thinking and novel ideas might well upset previously held convictions. However, commitment to belief and mature belief are not arrived at through ignorance of alternative possibilities. Rather, they are arrived at through an awareness of alternative possibilities and a conscious choosing of Christian belief over and above alternate possibilities. It also ought to be mentioned that the youth minister has some ability to control the direction of conversation by affirming ideas that lead to mature belief, offering his or her own point of view during the conversation and affirming a select few ideas as the discussion closes.

Active Interpretation

Very closely related to passive interpretation is active interpretation. Activity in this quadrant entails that the individual is discerning for themselves which set of reasoning will best fit their experiences. Activity in this quadrant can only be initiated and directed by the individual forming beliefs (or by the Holy Spirit). A youth worker cannot direct this process as the

[29] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 221–22. Nouwen comments that change takes place when an individual feels safe to change. Perceived hostility creates defensiveness and an un-willingness to risk the vulnerability required for change.

individual will ultimately decide for themselves what they will believe. In an adolescent's choosing of one belief above another, the youth worker can only serve as a guide. Further, the youth worker may only serve as a guide if the individual chooses to receive their guidance.[30]

It may be tempting to the youth worker to be overly directive in their teaching and mentoring of adolescents. Such overly directive teaching can be seen in teachers who inform students what to think and believe by virtue of their position of authority. It may well be that directive youth workers teach correct content, it is just that directive teaching becomes more an exercise in obedience on the part of the adolescent than an opportunity for learning. This instinct toward overly directive teaching could be a result of the pride that comes with teaching or the desire to be viewed as a successful teacher.[31] This temptation could also be the result of inexperience in religious instruction. Regardless, being too directive is ill advised as it can be perceived as hostility or ignorance regarding the individual's specific circumstances. Further, being overly directive is ill advised as youth workers (as with everyone else) cannot by force of will or argument, create genuine Christian belief in another person.[32] Rather, it is advised to allow for adolescents to wrestle for themselves through what their experiences mean. This does not mean teens should be left without guidance, but it does mean that the benefits of moving through cognitive dissonances ought not to be circumvented by providing summary conclusions. To engage in the struggle for a suitable interpretation will add personal conviction to the conclusion that is reached; there is a greater learning value if an adolescent has arrived a conclusion through a process similar to Loder's transformational knowing, than if an adolescent

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[30] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 172–73. A young Christian chooses an external authority to learn from about belief and faith. Even though authority on belief is external, the Christian still holds the ability to choose which voice will speak into their lives.

[31] Thielicke, *A little exercise for Young Theologians*, 16–20.

[32] Nouwen, "The Wounded Healer," 165.

is given a statement of fact from a youth minister. [33] This is because the act of searching leads the adolescent to invest themselves both in the discernment process and also the answer that their searching leads them to. Regrettably, it is possible that an adolescent's searching, even with the guidance of a youth worker, could at times lead them into un-Christian beliefs. Theologically, this possibility must be permitted to happen. This is because the Spirit must be trusted to do his work – genuine Christian transformation does not come through clever argumentation, but through the Spirit's guidance into God's truth.[34] In a situation where an adolescent is discerning the Spirit's leading for themselves it may be tempting to give directive teaching to ensure the process reaches a desired conclusion. However, at the point at which an adolescent begins to feel the licence to examine their beliefs for themselves, such summary answers, though given in good faith, may be viewed with suspicion and discarded.[35]

As discussed above, youth workers can provide an experience of dissonance in the context of a caring environment by pointing out assumptions in an adolescent's thinking. Youth workers can also incite such searching by leading adolescents to ask what their experience means. In the camp environment a common practice around the campfire or before bed is to talk about what made the day's experiences meaningful. Such dialogue may happen quite naturally given the many novel experiences that happen in the camp context. This dialogue might center instinctually among adolescents centered on events like an intense after-dark game of capture-the-flag. However, a good councillor will also turn the conversation toward spiritual moments from the day, for example, an act of compassion where one camper carried another injured

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[33] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 40.
[34] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 114–15.
[35] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182–83. Given a set of circumstances that challenges faith, young people will often enter into a time of life where they systematically examine for themselves what they believe. Beliefs that the young person has arrived at through their own searching are given more credibility in this time than beliefs external authorities have directed the young person into.

camper to the infirmary during the capture-the-flag game. Discussing a situation and how it relates to the Christian life will provide spiritual meaning for adolescents and indicate an appropriate response.[36] Just as the Christian camp habitually seeks for campers to interpret their experiences, youth leaders could structure teaching and mentoring around this movement as well. For example, a youth minister could relate situations from his or her own life, though without giving an immediate interpretation of the situation or articulating what decisions the youth minister made as a result of the situation. In this scenario, adolescents could be invited to give the youth minister advice on what the best interpretation of the situation would be and what course of action should be taken. This discussion would also give the youth minister opportunity to (with grace) point out areas where greater discernment is needed as adolescents think about their faith in relation to the situation. Further, if the group happens to have a shared experience of their own that would allow the youth minister to facilitate a discussion and interpretation of this shared experience and what a Christian response would be.

Passive Experience

Passive experience in the belief formation paradigm refers to situations that act upon the individual and play a role in informing what they believe. Such passive experiences could be the subjective experience of God's peace (Phil 4:7), viewing a beautiful sunset or being cared for by a Christian community. Such experiences give an individual the opportunity to search for what these experiences may mean for them.

Mark DeVries has observed that youth workers need "...to understand that belief is a product of a large system. Youth workers are liable to burn themselves out if they believe they

[36] Pattison, *The Challenge of Practical Theology*, 249. Discerning meaning and articulating a response is the task of practical theology. However, this task does not necessarily need to be strictly academic. The basic movements of practical theology can also serve to inform adolescent faith and spirituality.

are the only ones that will make the difference in a young person's life."[37] In this quote DeVries identifies that belief draws on broad sets of experiences. Therefore there needs to be a breadth of experience in an adolescent's life that is relatable to the Christian faith in order for mature Christian belief to form. DeVries also mentions that the youth worker alone cannot create the conditions for these experiences. In the camp environment, the councillor views him or herself as one piece of a larger operation that promotes belief formation. Though the councillor shares camp experiences with the camper and guides the camper in the faith, the councillor is only one piece of the larger enterprise of camp. At camp, staff work as a team. The youth worker ought to conceive of him or herself in a similar way in the church setting.

For the youth worker to view himself or herself (as well as the youth program) as part of a larger process of belief formation means building ties between the youth program and other aspects of church life. Isolating adolescent programming from the life of the larger church means teens will lose out on the opportunity to benefit from interaction with the body as a whole.[38] The benefit of being connected with the larger church body is in part a socializing benefit; teens stand to gain Christian insight from interacting with mature believers that would not be available if their Christian experience was solely based in peer-interactions.[39] There is benefit of being connected with the larger church body as a relational bond is nurtured with the community. A sense of belonging will better enable an adolescent to take the values of the community for themselves.[40] Lastly, being connected with the larger community will provide greater opportunity for an adolescent to experience faith in ways a youth community will struggle to

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[37] DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, 54.
[38] DeVries, *Family Based Youth Ministry*, 41–42.
[39] DeVries, *Family Based Youth Ministry*, 41.
[40] Goodenow and Grady, "Relationship of School Values and Friends Belonging to Academic Motivation," 68. This study shows that young people will tend to internalize the values of the groups they identify with. It was found that the value placed on studies by young people was affected by their peer group and their sense of belonging in the school environment.

offer. For example, the opportunity to show compassion thorough listening to a person's story may not be available in a youth group context due to the high energy levels of many youth groups. However, when youth are connected to the larger body, there may be individuals in the congregation who will be connected to the young person so that when more conducive contexts for sharing present themselves there are individuals available to listen and offer support.

The method of connecting adolescents to the larger church community does not necessarily need to be a form of religious education (e.g. intergenerational bible studies or discussion groups). Participating in group life, regardless of the event, will strengthen an individual's sense of belonging within a group.[41] At camp, campers enjoy a variety of recreation activities, spend structured and unstructured times with the camp community, have various responsibilities (perhaps such as kitchen clean-up or bike shop maintenance) and participate in the spiritual life of the community. Each of these activities plays a role in the larger mission of camp, even if some of these activities do not explicitly teach the beliefs of the camp community. Involving adolescents in the life of the church may aid in developing a sense of belonging that will in turn allow adolescents to be open to the values of the community. Some such events in church life may be pot-luck dinners, pick-up hockey, family camping weekends, fundraisers, community service events or special worship services. At many points along the way, the values of the group need to be clearly articulated to the individual developing a sense of belonging, but such events will be helpful in the belief formation process.

Finally with regard to passive experience is the necessity of a spiritual awakening in the maturing life of faith. This spiritual awakening gives life to the process of Christian belief formation as a genuine experience of God has created a disturbance in one's life that demands a

[41] Marshal, "Behavior, Belonging, and Belief," 363. Incidentally, Marshal argues a pre-existing feeling of anxiety or transition will help a person to form a sense of belonging. His observations are reminiscent of chapter four's discussion on "adaptive dissonance."

response. This response may well take the form of prayer. For Henri Nouwen, "prayer" is the state of being engaged in a relationship with God.[42] He says of this: "the paradox of prayer is that we have to learn how to pray while we can only receive prayer as a gift."[43] The gift of prayer, or the gift of knowing God's presence, is a gift from God and cannot be manufactured by human initiative. However, as Nouwen points out, a person can also learn how to pray. This learning to pray takes place in the other quadrants of the belief formation paradigm, but has roots in the passive experiences. An individual must have a set of experiences on which to form understandings. In turn, such understandings will help an individual to be open to the gift of "prayer" in their life. A passive experience that could help a person learn to pray could be seeing the Christian life modeled by another. In addition to simply teaching the Christian life, a good youth worker should also live an appropriately transparent life. A teacher is does not become a good teacher through meticulous attention to teaching technique.[44] Rather, "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher."[45] A poor teacher will distance themselves from the subject at hand – a posture that will also distance themselves from their students.[46] A good teacher, with integrity and knowledge, will teach others to become like themselves.[47] Adolescents who are maturing in the Christian life need guides who are willing to share their own Christian walk. The youth worker is positioned to be such a guide and is able to share how he or she has come to the maturing faith they own for themselves. Such knowledge can serve as a model to the adolescent as they learn to "pray" for themselves.

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[42] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 256.
[43] Nouwen, "Reaching Out," 256.
[44] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 10.
[45] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 10.
[46] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 11.
[47] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 2.

Active Experience

The remaining quadrant contains the experiences of an individual as they enact the meanings they have arrived at in the interpretation quadrants. The active experience quadrant also contains an individual's emotions; the adolescent who is engaged in maturing their Christian belief must *feel* something about the meanings they have arrived at.

The paradigm of youth ministry discussed in chapter one had as its goal religious instruction. This paradigm relied on fun and games to draw adolescents into the program such that they would be present for the instruction portion of the meeting. As discussed above, there is not necessarily anything wrong with using fun and games to foster belonging. The problem is however, that religious instruction is where the paradigm of youth ministry ends. In chapter one's paradigm, there is not opportunity for religious experience or participation in the life of the church. It appears youth workers assumed that a cogent and compelling argument for mature Christian belief was the essential ingredient in mature belief. The argument of this thesis has shown that this is not the case.

Perhaps the biggest strength of the camp environment in belief formation is its liminal nature. In liminal space, individuals are actively engaged in the purpose and mission of the group.[48] Liminal people strive together to achieve their envisioned end. In the Christian camp environment, the community exists to nurture Christian belief and Christian maturity in its members. Insofar as the camp is able to encourage participation, camp life is structured to encourage everyone's participation in this mission. Conversely, chapter one's paradigm of youth ministry solicited very little participation in the life of faith from group members. It is most likely that participation in the Christian life was expected of the group, but such expectations could only be realized by one's own initiative outside of the meeting. The extent of participation

[48] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94–96.

in the Christian life happening within such youth groups is listening passively to a Christian message for the latter portions of the meeting.[49]

Chapter One also briefly discussed the missional church while considering what constitutes a paradigm. It was mentioned that the prevailing paradigm of church in North America is to gather the Christians together to care for their spiritual needs and serve as a moral compass for the larger culture. [50] The missional movement argues that the church should view itself as a Christian missionary initiative, sent by God, to people in its local area.[51] If a local congregation, and the youth group that is part of it is going to be missional, its people will need to participate in the mission of God.[52] Going about the work of meaningfully announcing God's kingdom will likely provide passive experiences where individuals observe God at work around them. This work will initiate active interpretation as the individual must discern what these experiences of God will mean for them. This work will also draw the individual into passive interpretation as they seek training or reflect with fellow congregation members upon their own experiences. This work will also propagate further activity in the active experience quadrant as the individual will feel something in relation to what he or she has experienced or discovered. For instance, as new people become Christians, it is likely the Christians around these new believers would feel a sense of joy that propels them forward.

Proponents of the missional church have also employed the idea of liminality to describe the missional experience.[53] Just as the camp community struggles together toward its mission and makes sacrifices along the way in terms of familiar comforts and personal space –the

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[49] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 43–44. Hirsch identifies that a congregation listening to a speaker is passive. He suggests such a model of ministry is "consumptive" as people have no other function but to judge what they like best in a speaker. He further suggests consumptive churches will struggle greatly to nurture mature believers.
[50] Hunsberger, "Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," 78.
[51] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 7.
[52] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 148.
[53] Hisrch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 221–27.

missional community struggles together and makes sacrifices as they move out of their comfort zone to engage mission.[54] The missional movement is worth taking seriously as it draws inspiration from the missionary exhortations of scripture.[55] However, the missional movement is also an excellent means of creating maturing Christians due to its insistence on active participation and its camp-like creation of liminal space. To organize a church and its youth program around missional principles may be a significant undertaking, however the benefits in terms of the potential for spiritual growth are significant.

Two suggestions for program emphasis in youth groups.

The discussion thus far has identified ways a program could be structured to promote spiritual growth among adolescents. These suggestions are helpful for youth programs, but still may not revise youth programs enough to solicit an adolescent's own participating in their spiritual growth. In this section two suggestions will be made for significant initiatives that could serve to move adolescents through the belief formation process at a more in-depth manner than attendance at a weekly youth program could offer. Because weekly youth programs are inherently consumeristic, students can come and go from these events without a commitment to what is being taught. However, these two suggestions would give the opportunity for adolescents to make a commitment capable of leading them thorough each quadrant of belief formation.

Partnership between camps and churches

One of the responses to the discussion of this thesis would be to recommend that church-based youth ministries seriously consider incorporating summer camps as part of their yearly youth ministry program. In the United States, twenty-six percent of religious teens report

[54] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 231.
[55] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 531. Wright argues scripture records God's mission revealed in our world. To read scripture the correct way is to understand that is a missionary document.

attending a summer camp more than once.[56] Considering the time and financial commitments pertaining to summer camp, this statistic may be difficult to increase.[57] However, the difficulty of such a task ought not to dissuade churches from promoting summer camp among their young people.

One reason for churches to forge partnerships with summer camps is that the local church cannot manufacture the unique ministry environment of summer camp in a permanent location. This is not a slight against the local church. Rather:

> Whereas the local church represents the universal church as the more permanent community of the body of Christ functioning within a local community, camp represents the local churches and the universal church as temporary communities of believers gathered together for specific purposes connected to personal and corporate renewal and growth.[58]

Temporary community can be an important asset to needs that are unable to be met by a permanent local congregation.[59] Temporary community as exemplified by summer camps, (or retreats) can provide the means to engage in spiritual practices that the local church would have difficulties facilitating. Temporary community is useful for creating geographically and socially isolated settings that provide a stretch of time free of distraction.[60] It can create alternate social dynamics that remove the barriers to change.[61] It can create physical space that is conducive to change or can make use of physical space to minimize distraction. For example, a temporary community could be located in a place outside of cellular reception, thus avoiding the distraction

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[56] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 53. Among religious teens, 61% have never attended a religious summer camp. Curiously, 13% of religious teens who have attended camp, have only attended once. This statistic indicates teens prefer to return to camp after having experienced camp.
[57] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 18. Bowen reports that Pioneer Camp's teen leadership program is four weeks in length and in 2010, the program's fee was $1749 per person. These requirements will necessarily exclude teens from lower incomes and teens with alternate summer vacation plans.
[58] Williams, "Theological Perspectives on Temporary Community," 5.
[59] Williams, "Theological Perspectives on Temporary Community," 5.
[60] Williams, "Theological Perspectives on Temporary Community," 5.
[61] Williams, "Theological Perspectives on Temporary Community," 5.

caused by mobile devices.[62] Camp-based temporary community can also offer adolescents the opportunity to engage in meaningful ministry to children; the responsibility of this can serve to deepen their commitment to Christian beliefs.[63]

Church-based youth ministry and summer camps are able to form a natural partnership. Adolescents could spend their year in school, participating in the life of the church and its ministries. However, the summer provides a stretch of time where adolescents often take the opportunity for vacation or other novel pursuits that offer a break from school-year patterns. Instead of a church labouring to offer youth ministries at a time while many students are out of town or otherwise engaged, a partnership could be forged between church-based youth ministries and summer camps.

The ideal would be for the church to select one summer camp with which to form this partnership. There is wisdom in partnering with a pre-established camp, as opposed to creating one's own. Such an arrangement would not only capitalize on the expertise of already established camps, but it would also mean adolescents would have the opportunity for mentorship and teaching by staff who are not connected to their home church structure. Assuming the camp in question holds values on par with the church partner, the camp could be trusted for reliable teaching. Yet even though both church and camp are theologically approximate, camp staff could bring new perspectives and challenges into the adolescent's life as such staff would not have familiarity with the church's teaching emphasis and style. Camp staff and their novel insight could further the adolescent's experience of adaptive dissonance.[64] An additional benefit to an "outsourced" camp experience is the onus placed on the adolescent to

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[62] Williams, "Theological Perspectives on Temporary Community," 5.
[63] Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 65–66. The authors state that responsibility for ministry to others also serves to develop one's own spiritual maturity.
[64] Walsh and Golins, "The Exploration of the Outward Bound Process," 20–21. Outward Bound does not write on church camps, but the idea of adaptive dissonance discussed in chapter four come from this reference.

discern what their camp experience means for themselves. For learning that carries personal meaning to occur, a person must discern for themselves what meanings they will derive from their learning experience.[65]

This singular partnership would mean children and adolescents from the church would have common stories, common experiences and common values derived from the summer camp experience. Recollections of summers past shared among church young people could serve as a reminder of the values of camp, the experience of camp and the importance of the growth that happened in the camp environment. Having a core group of young people sharing a love of this particular camp may also serve as an organic means to include others in the summer camp experience. There is likely no stronger invitation than for one friend to ask another to join him or her at summer camp. The growth that happens in the summer camp environment can be put into practice in the local church.

Given sufficient numbers from a particular church in attendance at their partnered summer camp, a change in the culture youth ministries could begin to happen. If a core group of young people in a larger group setting share common values and meanings, their expectations, attitudes and behaviours can affect the behaviours of the larger group.[66] Culture changes as new meanings are introduced.[67] Just as young people can experience the socializing effect of peer's affirmations toward delinquent behaviours, a peer group can also promote behaviours and attitudes that promote openness to God.[68] A change in the culture (values) of the group can occur

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[65] Loder, *Transforming Moment*, 25.
[66] Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, 9. Bandura argues social learning can occur without extrinsic motivation. In many cases, all that is required is frequent observation of individuals modeling certain behaviours.
[67] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 24. Crouch defines culture as a set of meanings a group of people has given to goods and experiences. Therefore to introduce new meanings is to change culture.
[68] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 99. Groeschel remarks that "a person responds to grace and revelation in a social context." The dynamics of the social context inform how a person responds to grace, or perhaps if they will even be open to God's grace.

rapidly in a smaller group.[69] However, even in large groups, it is possible for a change in the group's culture if even a few people, who have social gifts such as the ability to persuade others, initiate the change.[70] It is probable that a person who has served as a camp councillor – a person whose role it was to influence others – would have the ability to lead their peers in shaping the culture of a youth group.

It may be argued that because camp is an insular community, it may produce a style of Christianity among its members that cannot meaningfully engage others who do not share the Christian faith. For Christian mission to be effective in contemporary times, Christians must be able to relate well with non-Christians for the purpose of establishing trust and communicating a gospel message.[71] Some Christian communities attempt to close themselves off from the larger world for the sake of preserving their holiness; a practice that by extension minimizes the groups' Christian witness.[72] Even though camps are isolated from the larger society, this does not mean growth at camp produces young people without ability to interact meaningfully with non-Christians. Not only does camp promote spiritual growth, but also growth in multiple areas of a young person's life such as their ability to relate to others unlike themselves.[73] Moreover, in any community there will be the need to learn how to interact with people who believe differently.[74] Not only might there be differing theology among staff at camp (particularly interdenominational camps), but campers come from a variety of backgrounds, including non-Christian.

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[69] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 196–97.
[70] McAllister-Wilson, "Reaching the Tipping Point," 115. McAllister-Wilson discusses how cultural values might be shaped in religious organizations. He draws on Malcom Gladwell's ideas from *The Tipping Point.*
[71] Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 136.
[72] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 65–66. Niebuhr argues there are five ways of relating faith to culture. One way of relating he terms "Christ Against Culture," where Christians isolate themselves from wider cultural influences. Niebuhr notes such a stance stifles mission and leads to a narrow view of faith.
[73] Glover et al., "Canadian Summer Camp Research Project," 8–9.
[74] Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 43. Vanier argues that communities invariably contain individuals who hold differing perspectives. Part of the challenge in community is to learn to accept others regardless of differences.

The use of short-term foreign missions in belief formation

Short-term foreign mission trips have a proven track record of being a setting of spiritual growth.[75] Although there is notable spiritual growth as a result of such trips among trip members, there is also some discussion about how beneficial such trips are in other aspects. Short-term missions may use poverty as a spectacle.[76] Short-term missions may also lack the depth to allow young people to understand systemic causes of poverty or the means to do something meaningful about this poverty once back in North America.[77] Some careful thought should go into addressing these concerns as a youth group engages in short-term mission. However, the practice of short-term mission is not the purpose of this thesis. Despite these potential issues with short-term foreign mission trips, such a trip could also serve to create disequilibrium in each quadrant of the paradigm.

A short-term trip can create disequilibrium before, during and after the trip. If planned thoughtfully, the year's preparation could involve challenges and opportunity to move through each quadrant of the belief formation paradigm. If a trip's budget is large enough that significant fundraising needs to be undertaken, the price of the trip and the need to fundraise these costs can move adolescents out of their comfort zone into a position where they need to rely upon one another and upon God. Depending on the amount to be fundraised, a trip group could be put together one year in advance in order to allow sufficient time to meet fundraising requirements. The fundraising events would necessitate a regular gathering of the trip group in order to plan and organize these events. Such gathering times could also include a discipleship component where team members take turns leading the group thorough a study, worship, sharing and prayer.

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[75] Probasco, "Giving Time, Not Money," 207–208. This study reveals long term benefits of mission trips are seen in areas such as charitable involvement, prayer and involvement in community.
[76] Howell, "Mission to Nowhere," 207.
[77] Howell, "Mission to Nowhere," 210.

If group membership were contingent on participation in these gatherings and fundraising events, adolescents would be guided to engage spiritual growth in a way usual youth group gatherings cannot facilitate. Such requirements of the group would move adolescents from being passive into being active in the faith life. Such requirements would also enable the group to act as a crucible;[78] because members of the group are committed to one another, the type or belief refining that takes place in a summer camp could also take place in a church-based setting. In that the group is committed to one another and compelled to meet together regularly, such challenges could be followed up with a show of support and caring for the adolescents. Short fundraising meetings could be held in homes with amenities such as an in-ground pool and the group could enjoy leisure time together periodically in the summer months.

The trip itself could be structured to feature much of the same elements a Christian summer camp might. The foreign location will remove adolescents from their habitual environments. The group would function as a crucible as they would spend each day traveling and working together. It is probable that over the course of the day opportune moments for teaching and refining might appear as the group goes about their responsibilities. Regular times of debriefing the day's experiences could be held at night and responses could be at some point related to one's faith walk at home. Relating meaning from the trip to one's faith walk at home would help the teens to both interpret what their experience means for the foreign context in which the experiences happened, but also what the experiences would mean for their home environments.

After the trip, group members could present to the church their various experiences and lessons learned. Trip members could be given roles in other church ministry initiatives such as serving on youth group student leadership. A summer retreat could be held for trip members to

[78] Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 31.

recall their experiences six months after being home. Part of this retreat could be used to help group members set patterns of life that will continue to nurture their maturing faith.

Conclusion

Church youth groups ought not to run as a formula as though there were a set model of youth ministry that is transposable into each setting of ministry. There are however general principles that can be organized in a paradigmatic fashion and that in turn, help to promote maturing Christian faith in young people's lives. In that the nature of a paradigm is dynamic, this chapter has proposed a variety of potential implications for the implementation of the paradigm discussed in this thesis. This variety is intended to show possible manifestations of an exacted paradigm, while leaving room for additional implications that would arise, depending on ministry contexts.

With general suggestions for enacting the paradigm of this thesis, this chapter addressed each quadrant in turn. In active interpretation, this chapter discussed the importance of facilitating young people's own learning in Christian theology as opposed to attempting to prescribe beliefs. In passive interpretation, this chapter advocated for giving a general awareness and response to various alternate or competing beliefs in a group discussion format. In active experience, this chapter advocated for youth to be seen as partners in ministry as opposed to recipients of ministry. Lastly, in passive experience, this chapter advocated using youth programs to move young people into a variety of experiences of the Christian life.

It is the hope of this thesis that as youth ministers enact this thesis' paradigm, that young people will have the opportunity to be open to the Spirit's shaping that previous perspectives of ministry did not intentionally allow for.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, a brief summary of Gordon Allport's work *The Individual and His Religion* was referenced. In this work Allport argues that the formation of belief is an intrinsic human drive.[1] This drive to form beliefs about the world around us includes religious belief, but is not limited to religious belief. The human desire for belief causes us to make meaning by ascribing value to the various elements of our lived experience.[2] Thus, people will form beliefs about topics such as politics, family, career, conflict, or personal freedom. In addition to these beliefs however, people also form religious beliefs; beliefs that allow an individual to locate themselves in relationship to what is considered transcendent. In that people are actively forming and confirming belief of many sorts – for a drive is difficult to ignore – it could be asked "what constitutes the general process by which individuals form Christian beliefs?" It is this question that has driven this thesis and this question with specific regard to adolescence that this thesis has sought to answer.

In chapter one it was seen that youth ministry as currently conceived of in North America has had difficulties revising its practice to better suit modern pluralistic culture. The difficulty of modern youth ministry is that a Christian message may only be encountered by teens once a week at youth gatherings – and in this encounter, teens are passively engaged.[3] This passivity, combined with the awareness and experimentation with alternate values, reduces the likelihood of serious engagement and commitment with Christian belief in teenager's lives.

Chapter two responded to the passive nature of the learning that takes place in church-based youth groups. The response was to discuss how learning happens and more specifically,

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[1] Allport, *The Individual and His Religion,* 13, 102.
[2] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 24.
[3] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 117, 123.

how individuals come to learn specific beliefs (hold convictional beliefs). It is true that passive learning is part of education. However learning also requires experiencing the truth of what is being learned, acting upon this learning and making meaning of the learning through personal reflection.[4] In that an individual must in some way come to know-for-themself (or believe) the content of their faith, there must be a process by which this happens. The paradigm of belief formation proposed in this chapter synthesises what is known about the learning process with the process of belief formation. The end product is the paradigm of belief formation that is comprised of four quadrants: passive experiences, active experiences, passive interpretations and active interpretations. This chapter proposes that youth workers and ministers can use such understanding to better nurture Christian beliefs among young people. Such learning can be helpful in faith nurture if ministers structure the practice of ministry such that young people engage activity in each quadrant of the proposed model.

The third chapter observed how church ministry efforts generally have trouble moving teens (or adult congregation members) through the paradigm of belief formation. In conversation with Willow Creek's *Move* study, the observation was made that participation in church programming does not necessarily correlate with spiritual growth. [5] This problem viewed through the belief formation paradigm of chapter two, is most likely a result of an abundance of passive interpretation and a relative lack of opportunity for activity in either of the experience quadrants.

In chapter four the ministry setting of the summer camp was examined. In contrast to church-based ministries, camp ministries are able to foster activity in the experiential quadrants, as well as provide immediate and related activity in the interpretation quadrants. Due to the fact that camp ministries are able to create activity across the paradigm, and this with the frequency

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[4] Hunt, "Dewey's Philosophical Method," 26–27, Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 139.
[5] Hawkins and Parkison, *Move*, Kindle Locations 687–91.

afforded by a live-in environment, camps have been observed to be highly effective sources of belief nurture among young people.[6] The effectiveness of camps in belief nurture is especially significant when contrasted with the struggling ability of church-based ministry to foster belief formation, as observed in chapter three. The question then arises, what can churches learn from the way camp ministries operate?

Chapter five discussed this question and provided some further insight. In that camp is a very specific type of community, some key elements of camp cannot be replicated in the church environment. However, churches can respond to what is observed about camps, by moving to a balanced program that emphasised and provides (as able) both religious education and religious experience. Additionally, space ought to be made in youth programs for adolescents to reason about faith and their experience for themselves. If learning is to be genuine and mature, a person must arrive at the validity of a belief in their own thought as opposed to adhering to another's authority.[7] This is not to say a minister ought not to challenge and offer correction, but the onus for forming religious conviction ultimately needs to be upon the adolescent. At the end of chapter five, two practical suggestions were offered for supplementing some of the deficiencies of the youth group environment. One suggestion is to forge a partnership between a Christian summer camp and the church. A second is to undertake a mission project for adolescents that would offer the opportunities for shared experience and reflection.

It may be said that the discussion of this thesis has not fully done justice to what it is to hold truly Christian belief. It could be argued that Christian belief is more than the distillation of one's experiences and interpretations into a settled set of personal meanings. Such an objection would be correct, at least in part. Coming to hold Christian beliefs is more than mental ascent to

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[6] Presbyterian Church U.S.A., "Church Camps and Retreats," 2. However, camps cannot play a role in sustaining growth that happens at camp, as the camp is a temporary setting.
[7] Loder, *Transforming Moment*, 25.

a set of ideas, but rather must be a genuine response to God's initiative in one's life.[8] That being said however, this thesis articulates a process that would lead a person into being open to responding to God's initiative. This thesis's paradigm is also able to describe what happens when God's self-revelation becomes personal in an individual's life. Both of these understandings can be used to more faithfully shape ministry to partner with the Holy Spirit's work in young people's lives.

Jesus gives the task of making disciples to the church (Matt 28:19). Therefore, the ministry practices of the Christian matter. It is true that God's Spirit creates the conditions for ministry and makes ministry effective. However, this truth is not validation to persist in ministry on the merit of sincere trust and belief alone. The Christian minister will indeed have trust and belief, but will also make use of available wisdom in the service of Christ's commission. The paradigm of belief formation articulated in this thesis, and seen at work in the context of camp ministries has the ability to better inform the practice of ministry such that faithful ministers are more readily able to help others become open to Christ.

[8] Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 70–71. Groothuis argues Christian faith commitment requires more than agreeing with well-argued propositions.

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