LIFT UP YOUR EYES: TRUTH, BEAUTY, AND THE CHRISTIAN NURTURE OF ADOLESCENTS

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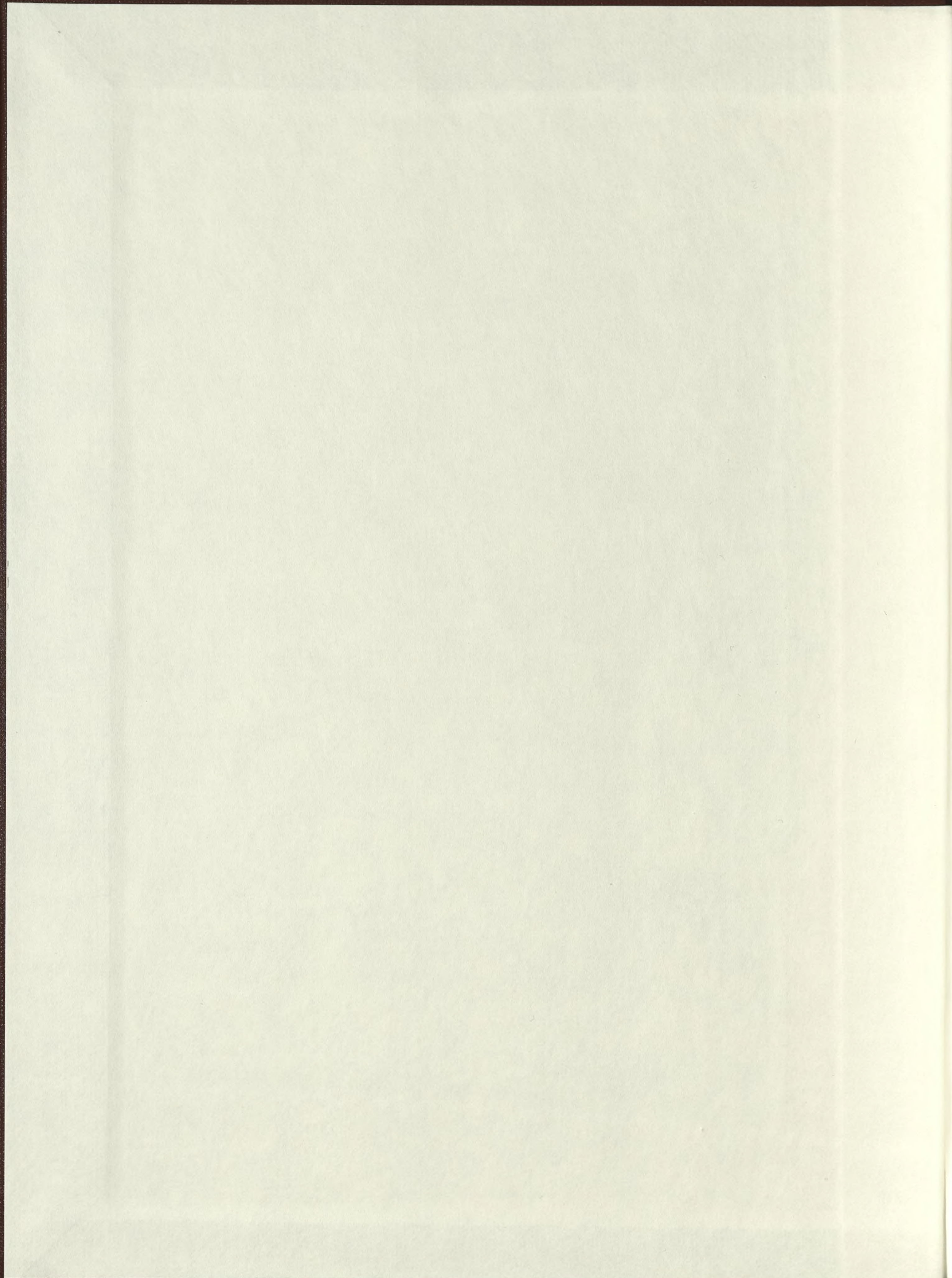

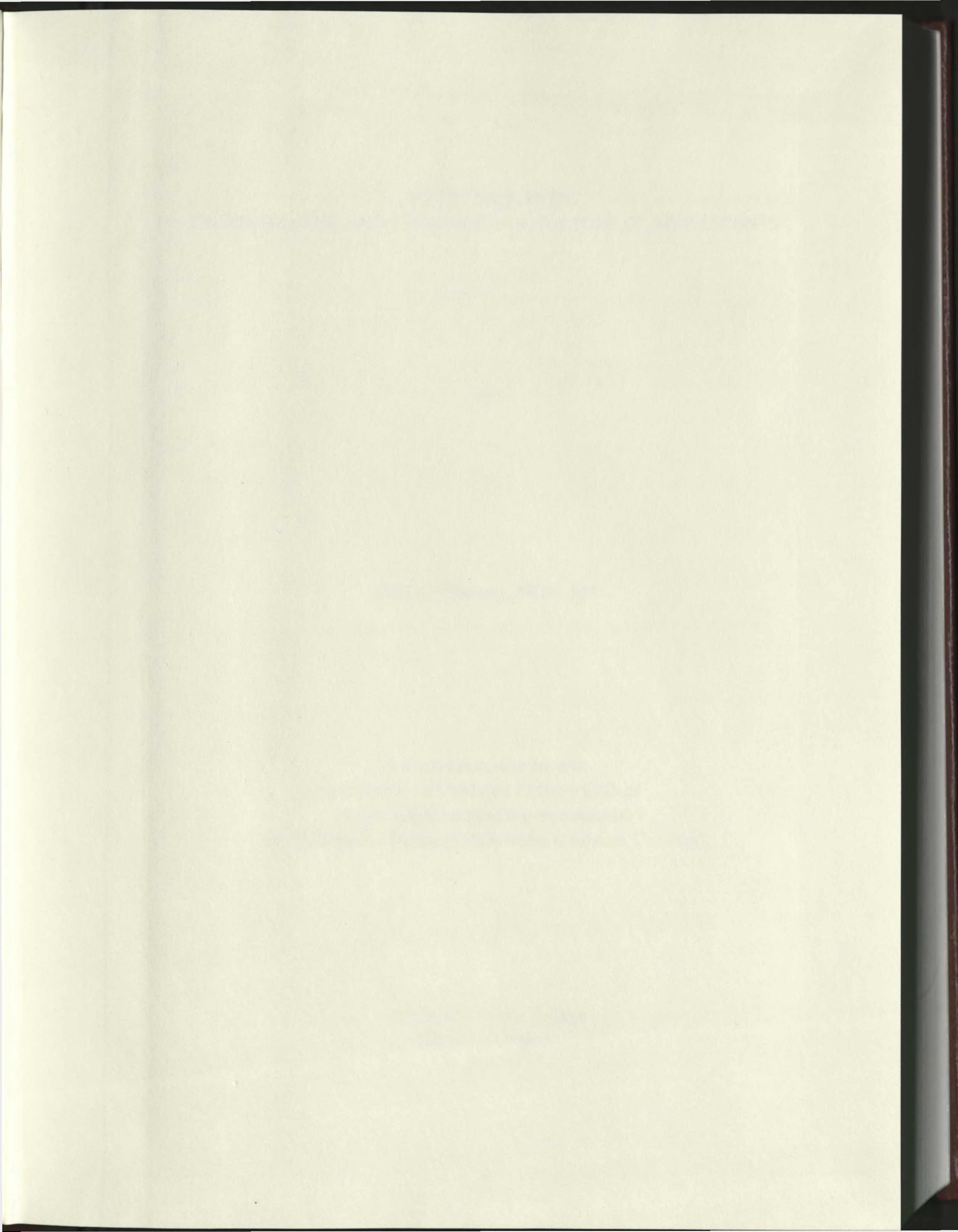

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ABSTRACT

"Lift Up Your Eyes: Truth, Beauty and the Christian Nurture of Adolescents"

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Christian education and Christian formation (participation in Christian practice) are two approaches to faith nurture that have been embraced by the church. Each approach has a body of literature that describes and examines its respective approach. While both approaches are good and appropriate for use in the discipleship and nurture of adolescents, neither approach fully accounts for what occurs during faith formation. Hans-Georg Gadamer speaks about the fusion of horizons as a hermeneutic event. The horizon of Christian education and the horizon of Christian formation can be brought into dialogue, toward the creation of new understanding.

Moving both horizons into dialogue will serve to elevate the significance of vision metaphors in faith formation. The perception of theological beauty plays a significant role in faith formation, unattended to by either contributing horizon's discourse. Theological beauty is represented to adolescents through the content of Christian teaching. The theological beauty is encountered by adolescents through formative practices of the church. In both cases the experience of beauty trains the attention and imagination on God. The theological beauty encountered in both avenues of nurture is the

beauty of God's own being.

Theological beauty is perceived in part through language and discourse. Language is interpretive and disclosive. Careful descriptive discourse provides theological perception that is necessary for the Christian life. Language calls attention to theological beauty and theological beauty sustains this attention. At a life stage where abstract thought is beginning to develop, adolescents are beginning to be able to appreciate symbolic beauty. It is at this developmental stage that a sense of theological beauty and wonder can begin to be cultivated.

Accompanying the discussion about the place of descriptive discourse is the guiding metaphor of the curator. The curatorial image represents ministry practice that carves out space for the encounter and appreciation of theological beauty. The "theological curator" draws young people's attentions to the beauty of God's character, and the beauty of God's personal call to them. The act of curation is also to make space for wonder as adolescents encounter God's character and God's call.

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INTRODUCTION

"...we do not see reality by just opening our eyes. To know the real rather than being in a state of illusion and fantasy is a difficult task."[1]—Stanley Hauerwas

In North America, churches are feeling threatened by the prospect of advancing secularism, and are concerned about retaining their young people. With this backdrop, youth ministry in recent times has aimed at maintaining religious sentiment by establishing and defending religious boundaries against secular incursion.[2] Though well intended, this approach is not without consequence. This orientation to Christian nurture in youth groups can become an exercise in triumphing over secularism through promoting Christian doctrine, morality, and piety.[3] While promoting Christian doctrine, morality and piety are good, there is a difference between understanding of an argument in support of Christian ideas, and a choice to love Jesus who is the object of the Christian life. Following a line of reasoning is not the same thing as loving Jesus. There is also a difference between a person who uncritically adopts the practices of the community they find themselves within, and a person who has wrestled with the meanings of Christian practice before committing. A young person's participation in a worshiping community is not necessarily the same as loving Jesus.

Approaching ministry with these assumptions, the church fails to see that

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[1] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 36.
[2] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 108.
[3] Lief, *Poetic Youth Ministry*, 123.

Christian behaviour is not the same as Christian imagination or Christian worship.[4] By aiming at behaviour outcomes in Christian nurture, the church forecloses on teenager's capacity to offer a self-willed response to God.[5] Foreclosure occurs when a person has adopted a self-understanding that is imposed, as opposed to choosing and owning one's identity for oneself.[6] Efforts to foreclose on adolescent's Christian identities can be problematic. Foreclosure results in the Christian life lived not because of a choice made out of love for God, but as a matter of response to human directives, guided by force of habit.

This dissertation is written for those who are responsible for the shape of youth programs at the local church level. Such responsibility would extend into a program's content and approach to ministry, including notions about how discipleship of offered to adolescents. Those in such positions of responsibility could include clergy, church staff, or lay volunteers who have taken on a significant role in shaping a church's youth programming. The reflections and inquiry of this dissertation are aimed at identifying assumptions commonly held about Christian nurture, and offering generative or corrective theological thought about these assumptions. The content of this dissertation will aim at renewing Christian nurture as it is offered to adolescents in local church settings.

The courtroom and the laboratory are two metaphors that could be temporarily employed to describe the approach ministry workers take to Christian nurture in North America. In the courtroom legal representatives seek to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that the accusations before the court are either true, or misplaced. In the

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[4] Myers, "Youth Ministry after Christendom," 174–75.
[5] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 181.
[6] Marcia, "Ego Identity Status Approach to Ego Identity," 11.

laboratory the scientist seeks to create particular outcomes by controlling an environment, and introducing variables that create specific reactions. Desired outcomes in the laboratory are determined by the human ability to control reactions within a closed environment. In the courtroom, outcomes are governed by the human ability to construct a compelling argument. In the mode of the courtroom and the laboratory, churches have attempted to program faith formation. These efforts have not been as successful as many would have hoped.[7]

Approaches to youth ministry in the mode of the courtroom or the laboratory rightly understand that effort in Christian nurture matters for adolescent's faith development. Yet these modes have failed to account for adolescents as judging, willing and choosing individuals for these modes have implicitly assumed that adolescent's desire for the Christian life cannot be programmed or compelled. There is a need therefore, for a deeper investigation of how faith formation occurs in adolescents, and how ministry might nurture this process. There is use in seeking out an alternate metaphor, and establish renewed normative vision, for Christian formation among young teens.

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas views Christian teaching as a practice which aids young people in making the Christian story their own. For Hauerwas, "...religious education is the training in those gestures through which we learn the story of God and God's will for our lives. Religious education is not, therefore, something that is done to make us Christians, or something done after we become Christian."[8] In the case of the Christian life, the story one adopts is the redemptive act of God in the person of Jesus.

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[7] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23. The Barna Group reports 59 percent of American young people either had or have "dropped out of church, after going regularly."

[8] Hauerwas, "The Gesture of a Truthful Story," 103.

Knowledge of Christian facts or ideas is *part* of making a story one's own—for one must know the story, and appreciate its truthfulness if one is to confess the story as one's own.[9] Yet coming to identify with a story entails more than knowing a story's content. A story must also have the capacity to capture one's imagination. Theologian James K. A. Smith says "...stories capture our imagination precisely because narrative trains our emotions, and those emotions actually condition our perception of the world."[10]

North American youth ministry can border upon a mechanistic assumption: if variables in support of the Christian life can be configured optimally, adolescents will embrace the Christian life. It is with good intentions that churches and youth workers have sought to identify and arrange these variables in favour of the Christian life. The missing understanding in this effort however, is the recognition that the Christian life is not solely borne from what is known, but what is felt, loved, and seen as beautiful.[11] We love what we find to be good, true, and beautiful.[12] In seeking to renew our vision for Christian nurture, it is worth considering how adolescents experience goodness, truth, and of specific interest to this unfolding discussion, beauty.

Conspicuously absent from literature about Christian nurture is the place our aesthetic intuitions play in shaping our Christian imagination. Learning and living God's story requires seeing and responding to the beauty of God's story. The encounter of beauty causes the "ascent" of the mind to God.[13] Reflecting upon his consciousness of God, Augustine speaks of God as the "truth" and the "beauty so ancient and so new."[14]

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[9] Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 35.
[10] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32.
[11] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 138.
[12] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 159.
[13] Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 105.
[14] Augustine, *Conf.*, B.10 C.16–17.

Beauty "has the capacity to both reveal and conceal" what is true.[15] Though not empirical truth, truth is none-the-less encountered in subjective aesthetic experience.[16] These subjective aesthetic intuitions are validated as they are recognized as "common sense" within a community or tradition.[17] The place of theological beauty has been under-attended in discussions about Christian nurture, but given the significant role theological beauty plays in nurture, this should be recognized to be an oversight.

Nurture and Theological Beauty

In order to locate the place of beauty within Christian nurture, a sense of what is meant by "Christian nurture" is helpful. The actions that involve encouraging and caring for adolescent's developing faith are the actions of Christian nurture. The language of "Christian nurture" signifies those actions that are educational or formational in the Christian life.[18] Educational aspects of nurture provide theological understanding for informing and living the Christian life.[19] Formational aspects of nurture provide a set of

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[15] Lawn, *Gadamer*, 90.

[16] Širka, "Gadamer's Concept of Aesthetic Experience," 385.

[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 34.

[18] Maddix ("Christian Nurture and Conversion," 322) brings together Christian education (i.e. formal or informal instruction) and Christian formation (i.e. Christian spiritual practices) under the umbrella of Christian nurture. Maddix has synthesised the theology of John Wesley and Horace Bushnell toward a theology of Christian nurture. Christian nurture may also occur prior to conversion, as a means of supporting and encouraging the conversion process (317).

A clear divide does not always exist between Christian *education* and Christian *formation*. The experiences of the Christian life can be educational, in that experience validates the teaching of scripture (Maddix and Estep, *Practicing Christian Education*, 17). Christian education also directly exhorts and supports the life of faith (Maddix and Estep, 43). Yet distinction is generally helpful for dividing two aspects of Christian nurture. Together, Christian education and Christian formation are to be understood as Christian nurture.

[19] Osmer (*Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 26–27) identifies three tasks of Christian education. The first is catechesis; teaching scripture and Christian tradition. The second is exhortation; offering moral encouragement and instruction. The third is discernment; instruction how to interpret their situation with Christian understanding.

experiences on which religious conviction is built.[20] Akin to different sides of the same coin, education and formation both aim at developing adolescent's Christian faith, and together are referenced in this dissertation through the language of Christian nurture.

The language of "theological beauty" should also be given some definition here. There is a difference between what is understood as 'theological aesthetics' and what is referenced by speaking of 'theological beauty' in this dissertation. Theological aesthetics is a field that is oriented to the theological dimension of the arts and often of nature (creation) as well.[21] As a discipline, theological aesthetics examines the beauty of artefacts and objects, and how this beauty relates to the divine. The exploration that unfolds in this dissertation however, is not primarily concerned with theological significance of artefacts. Yes, God's beauty and reality are represented in artefacts, but no, it is not the artefacts themselves that will be the concern addressed through the following pages.

The language of 'theological beauty' is employed to speak of the beauty that is a property of God's being. Theological beauty is something that is experienced and responded to by human beings. Theological beauty may be conveyed through story, language, object, action, or image, but points beyond such intermediaries, and toward God himself. Beauty has an instructive function: things that are beautiful have meaning to us. In turn, meaningful things represent something that is true by signifying or communicating this truth.[22] This same property is true of beautiful and meaningful

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[20] Wilhoit (*Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 23) offers a definition of formation: "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit" (23). Formation takes place through the spiritual disciplines (i.e. practices) of the Christian life (193–202).

[21] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 44.

[22] Beardsley (*Aesthetics*, 367) uses the example of a musical piece. He argues that if music is at all meaningful, then music must signify something that is also true. Beardsley uses this example to suggest

things: beauty *shows* us what is true.[23] Theological beauty is a kind of beauty that is able to show us what is true about who God is, and how He has revealed Himself; in His character and His action. Theological beauty is recognized or experienced as a having this quality of truth and is recognized as signaling what is true without empirical test. Theological beauty finds its perfect revelation in the incarnation of Jesus. The incarnation is the depth of "language and a means of expression for the divine Being and essence."[24] Theological beauty is beauty that shows us divine Being, revealed in Jesus Christ.

To capture the significance of beauty in Christian nurture, it will be argued through the body of this dissertation that Christian nurture of adolescents might be envisioned through the metaphor of an art gallery curator. The curator's art is creating space, or "carving out" space, for that which is "most provocative, beautiful, relevant," or truthful.[25] Just as a curator seeks to tastefully pair meaning and beauty in an exhibit, the one who ministers to adolescents seeks to tastefully present theology for the Christian life. Approaching nurture through the metaphor of the curator attends to the dimension of beauty that the 'courtroom' and the 'laboratory' have omitted. The truthfulness of theology can be recognized as one "feels," "imagines," or experiences theological beauty.[26]

Advancing the metaphor of the curator does not mean that Christian teaching or

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that meaning must entail truth. The type of truth that beauty signifies is not an empirical truth. Truth that is contained in beauty "involves a correspondence of something to reality" (368).

[23] Beardsley (*Aesthetics*, 375) considers how stories and paintings portray truth. A story tells the readers about what is true, as opposed to proposing what is true (374). A painting shows what is true, as opposed to containing a proposition about what is true (373). Neither a painting or story make truth claims, but both demonstrate what is true to their audience (375). Truth is recognized to have been shown through the painting or story by an observer who recognizes the true correspondence between the work of art and reality (375). By recognizing the truth that an instance of art shows, the art is said to "speak to us" (378).

[24] Von Balthasar (*The Glory of the Lord*, 29) argues that the incarnation is the final culmination of beauty. Von Balthasar says "This incomparable paradox stands as the fountainhead of the Christian aesthetic, and therefore of all aesthetics" (29).

[25] Davis, "Curation: A Theoretical Treatment," 771.

[26] Osmer, *Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 286–87.

Christian practice is no longer needed in Christian nurture. Both teaching and practice have been, and will remain, essential and necessary avenues of Christian nurture. By elevating the image of a curator, the aim is to offer a more nuanced means of approaching Christian teaching and Christian practice. The image of the curator offers an insight into what is going on in teaching and practice, and how adolescents are responding to God through teaching and practice. Through setting forward the image of the curator, Christian teaching and Christian practice are understood to *show* theological beauty to participants, and thereby signify to adolescents what is also good and true.

The age range between thirteen and eighteen generally populate church-based youth groups and high school ministries, and it is for these settings that the reflections of this dissertation unfold. Though children and junior high ages (grades six through eight) have the capacity to appreciate beauty, it is with the advent of abstract thought the abstract meanings present in beautiful things begin to be appreciated.[27] Children find beauty in simple form and colour, but by the adolescent years, young people have developed the capacity to see beauty in complexity.[28] They take an interest in fashion, music, and art, finding in these avenues of self-expression. James Fowler places the

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[27] Parsons et al., "Developmental Stages in Children's Aesthetic Responses," 85. Though the researchers do not find that developmental stages in aesthetic response are related to chronological age, there is a requirement of abstract thought for the higher stages.

[28] Parsons, *How We Understand Art*, 22. For example, younger children can choose a favourite piece of art, whereas those with more developed aesthetic judgement can analyse what a piece expresses.

Parsons has developed a five-stage cognitive theory of aesthetic development. In the first stage, individuals (younger children) are able to judge if they like a work based on a favourite attribute of the work, such as its colour (22). In the second stage (around school age), individuals begin to recognize a quality of beauty in art they find compelling. Individuals in this stage can begin to name feelings that are associated with a work (42). Stage three requires more abstract thought and could appear around adolescence. Stage three is marked by a capacity to recognize that a work of art is a form of communication. A person in stage three would understand that an artist was trying to express something in their work, or than a piece of art communicates something to the subjective viewer (65). At stage four an individual begins to interpret works of art. Parsons cites Gadamer's theories, suggesting that meaning is derived from aesthetic experience by interpreting experience with language (81). Note that an adolescent aged person might need assistance navigating operations in this stage, but that activity at this stage is possible in adolescence. In the fifth stage an individual is able to interpret art in context of period, style, cultural setting, or other influences contemporary to its creation (25, 123).

arrival of abstract thought within the adolescent years, and describes the religious significance of the new capacity. At this stage says Fowler, God is "re-imagined as having inexhaustible depths and as being capable of knowing personally those mysterious depths of self and other we know that we ourselves will never know."[29] This new ability to think abstractly and perceive depth in beauty deserves to be addressed in the context of Christian nurture.

Portions of theory that this dissertation addresses can also be usefully employed to provide understanding about the aesthetic dimension of faith in young adult or adulthood. Young adults and adults retain and the abstract reasoning developed while teenagers. However, the imagined audience for this dissertation are those who are working with adolescents. Stories, application points, and situational reflection in this dissertation are related most specifically to youth ministry within a church-based setting. In some cases either younger (Jr High ages) or older (emerging adult ages) are referenced. There is on occasion need for this wider frame of reference. Adolescents grew up from Jr High ages (grades 6 to 8 or ages 11 to 13) and thereafter, grow into young adulthood. Considering what precedes and what follows adolescence will inform how youth ministry practice addresses theological beauty. What is encountered in Jr High provides some setting for faith during the teenage years, and the faith experiences of the teenage years provide some ground for the faith (or lack of faith) in young adult hood.

The language this dissertation uses will generally be as precise as possible in describing which age is being referred to in the discussion at hand. The terms 'adolescents,' 'teens' and 'teenagers' will refer to ages 13 to 18. The terms 'young adults' or 'emerging adults' will refer to ages 19 to 25. In some cases multiple age ranges are

[29] Folwer, *Stages of Faith*, 153.

referenced at once. As a more general term, the language of 'young people' will be used to speak more broadly about the second decade-and-a-half of life (ages 10 to 25).

Lift Up Your Eyes

It is appropriate to begin a discussion about theological beauty by beginning in Scripture. In both the Old and New Testament scriptures, characters are recorded with some frequency to have "lifted their eyes" and seen what was not formerly available to their perception. This act of lifting one's eyes tends to occupy a turning moment in Biblical narrative. As the scriptures present characters "lifting" their eyes, they are allowed to observe what was not formerly perceptible.

While sitting at the door of his tent, Abraham "lifted up his eyes and looked" and saw three men approaching him with a divine message (Gen. 18:2, NASB). After Abraham's hand is stayed by God during the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham "raised his eyes and looked" to behold a ram caught in a nearby thicket (Gen. 22:13, NASB). Though prohibited from entering the Promised Land, Moses is commanded by God to "lift up your eyes to the west and north and south and east," and see the Promised Land for himself before he died (Deut. 3:27, NASB). As Joshua was preparing for battle with Jericho he "lifted up his eyes and looked" to see the angel of the Lord opposite him with instructions for how God will win the forthcoming battle (Josh. 5:13, NASB). As David awaited news of battle, a watchman on the fortress wall "raised his eyes and looked," to see a lone man running with both good news of victory and crushing news of Absalom's death (2 Sam. 18:24, NASB). In Psalm 121, the words "I lift my eyes up" refers to a

posture of prayer, of focusing one's attention on God.[30] Lifted by God's Spirit in a vision, Ezekiel is commanded to "raise your eyes now toward the north" where he sees the abominations Israel is in the midst of committing against the Lord God (Ezek. 8:5, NASB). Explaining the mission of God to his otherwise imperceptive disciples, Jesus instructs his followers to "lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest" (John 4:35, NASB).

This biblical turn of phrase carries poetic meaning. To have lifted one's eyes in scripture is not simply a description of eye movement and focus. The phrase is common in the context of revelation and signals when a character sees differently, by seeing what is really true.[31] The biblical character who lifts their eyes, perceives something formerly imperceptible. In John 4, Jesus calls his disciples to see something that they are not inclined to see. Though not initially inclined, Jesus calls his disciples to "see" the gentiles as people who will also receive God's salvation.[32] This notion of lifting up one's eyes also has meaning in today's world of youth ministry. It is to our teenagers that we also say, "lift up your eyes."

The biblical phrase "lift up your eyes" offers a question and a challenge. Instead of a comfortable indifference to God, the person who lifts up their eyes encounters a higher form of perception.[33] The person who lifts up their eyes is confronted with a reality they must respond to, but which is only understood through faith. There are many adolescents growing up in North America who are in some way connected to a church,

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[30] Becking, "God-Talk for a Disillusioned Pilgrim," 5.

[31] Boda ("Writing the Vision,"114) provides exhaustive citations of biblical text where the phrase occurs in the context of a revelatory experience. There are more instances of this phrase than have been recorded here.

[32] Sheeley, "Lift Up Your Eyes," 86.

[33] Heschel (*Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 364–65) cites Isa 40:26 and Dan 4:31 as he gives his interpretation of the phrase "lift up your eyes."

but who have not been able to see fully, or who have turned a blind eye to the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. Perhaps in response to this reality, there is some inspiration to be drawn from the phrase "lift up your eyes."

In the present body of youth ministry literature, there is an interest in sociological data and method to identify best practice for effecting a lasting Christian life among adolescents.[34] These avenues of research and reflection are helpful. There is a psychosocial dimension to faith commitments, as well as psychosocial dimension to a lack of faith commitment too.[35] We each come to faith in a particular context with particular relationships and understandings. Youth ministry literature has been able to helpful drawn upon social-scientific research method to understand and inform practices of Christian nurture. Nevertheless, it might be good to bracket this sociological approach to nurture and faith commitment for a moment. Turning away from these works is not a comment on their validity or usefulness. But turning away from this body of literature allows a different avenue of reflection about Christian nurture. Perhaps the Christian life is not just a simple matter of setting up conditions favourable to faith development, but more fundamentally, it could be that the Christian life is a matter of vision and seeing rightly. Perhaps Christian nurture is also a matter of helping our adolescents to "lift up" their own eyes.

The significance of vision in Christian nurture is under-represented in the body of literature concerned with the nurture of adolescent's Christian lives. This is an oversight. That teens (or anyone) should be expected to adopt the Christian life as a result of the

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[34] A survey of youth ministry literature occurs in the second chapter.

[35] Groeschell (*Spiritual Passages*, 99) argues that "spirituality does not exist in a vacuum." According to Groeschell, human responses, "including the response to grace, are best studied in a way that uses all the behavioral sciences" (99).

conditioning effects of ministry is a misunderstanding of how the Christian life takes form. A desire for Christ and his Kingdom is not instilled through careful ministry planning and execution. A desire for Christ and his Kingdom is motivated by seeing and perceiving who Jesus is. In the scriptures, because Peter sees who Jesus really is, he is able to make a sincere confession of faith (Matt 16:16–17). In contrast, the Kingdom of God is hidden from those who see in part, for those who see in part lack the ability to have appreciated God's reality (Mark 4:12).

"Lifting up one's eyes" links the idea of understanding to our visual acuity. The way we inhabit the world, depends on how we perceive the world to be. Attuned to the significance of vision, Stanley Hauerwas impresses upon his readers how critical the place of right vision is for the Christian life. As we can only act within the world that we see, right vision is necessary. Says Hauerwas:

> Moral virtue in its most general sense is the self's correspondence to reality, but we do not see reality by just opening our eyes. To know the real rather than being in a state of illusion and fantasy is a difficult task. Nor is realism a self-evident good, for we resist knowing the world in its contingency.[36]

The biblical turn of phrase "lift up your eyes" should be understood as more than just poetic licence on the part of the narrator. To the extent that the Christian life can be conditioned through ministry practice, it is conditioned through having one's eyes lifted up and being shown what is really true. The way we perceive depends in turn on how we look at the world and with what interpretations we make our visions of the world intelligible. Turning again to Hauerwas, he has observed that:

> The moral life is thus better understood on the analogy of the aesthetic mode of seeing and beholding than in terms of action and decision. For the right answer is mainly a matter of really *looking* while avoiding the constant temptation to return to the self with the deceitful consolation of self-pity, resentment, fantasy, and

[36] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 36.

despair.[37]

Really looking—to use the language of Hauerwas—is a matter of being willing and able to see what actually confronts us. Helping a young person to really look and see reality is not the same as labouring to effect Christian behaviour, or motivate Christian sentiment. Christian behaviour and sentiment are a result of really seeing. It is good and important to seek to find good practice, and good teaching methods to use in youth group settings. But careful implementation of practice or teaching is not the first and final event in Christian nurture. Practice and teaching are important, as they help a person to see for themselves what is really there.

Employing Language to "Look" at Reality

Simone Weil observes that we live in a world of dreams. She speaks of the need to clarify our vision, "To give up our imaginary position as the center, to renounce it, not only intellectually but in the imaginative part of the soul, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal, to see the true light and her the true silence."[38] The soul in Weil's writing longs for what is beautiful, and is able to find this beauty that is sought in the person of God, revealed in the incarnate Jesus Christ.[39] Theology is a matter of perception. Phil Zylla maintains that theology is way of approaching the world; of looking and seeing from within a "reframing perspective."[40] The beauty in theology is the beauty of God, and this beauty is also represented throughout the earth as the scriptures poetically articulate: just as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14). One significant way adolescents

[37] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 37–38.
[38] Weil, *Waiting For God*, 100.
[39] Weil (*Waiting For God*, 111) says, "Everything that is related to beauty should be unaffected by the passage of time. Beauty is eternity here below" (110).
[40] Zylla, "Explorations in the Aesthetic Pastoral Theology of Donald Capps," 4.

encounter theological beauty is through the language and discourse we use to speak about God.

It is a significant thing that the Bible comes to us in human language. Of the mediums that God has seen fit to communicate with humanity, He has chosen human words and human language to reveal His character and His actions. Our understanding of who God is, and our vision of what it means to live before Him as a created being, is profoundly conditioned by the words on the pages of the scriptures, set in human language. Donald Capps finds that the Christian life and pastoral work depend upon a perspective guided by scriptures' witness. For Capps, this sort of vision amounts to a "gift of perception."[41] The scriptures convey God's reality in human language and afford readers this gift of perception.

To give an example of the way language shapes our vision of reality, consider how the opening of the gospel of John unfolds. John's use of language draws his reader "deeper and deeper into the struggle to make out the meaning of his rich, enigmatic words."[42] Its opening words portray the divine character of Christ in poetic form: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1, NASB) In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Jean Vanier describes John's writing. Vanier credits the gospel writer with having articulated in language a "mystical vision of the healing of humanity."[43] Using the written word, John opens his gospel

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[41] Capps ("Response to Reviewers," 542) makes use of Phil Zylla's observation that theological reflection creates the possibility of theological perception. Zylla had suggested in a review that Capp's work had deepened theological reflection into theological perception (Zylla, "A Review of Capps," 533).

[42] Gardner, *John in the Company of Poets*, 1. This struggle is at the same time a welcome and captivating struggle. John's literary arrangement also draws the reader "deeper and deeper into the claim that Jesus is life itself" (4).

[43] Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus*, 18.

reference with a *thought*, a *vision*, and a *plan*, of redemption, guided by divine wisdom.[44] The gospel account itself is a beautiful message. In his poetic but descriptive manner, John portrays the beauty of the incarnation event with language that "reached spiritual heights unmatched by other [gospel] writers."[45] Language does more than communicate facts. Language also can—as seen in John's gospel—evoke imagination by carefully referencing what is beautiful. John's gospel portrays the beauty of the incarnation, in part through the careful and aesthetically informed use of language.

Language is a symbolic form; through language we signify what we have experienced reality to be like. Language can also be imprecise and difficult to work with. This is especially true of theological language. Pastoral theologian Robert Dykstra reminds us that "all theologians must read and write and say their words about God ... without assurance that any is airtight or foolproof or the last word."[46] Though language may be difficult to work with, this does not mean that language is unimportant or should be avoided in favour of seeking pure experience. Stanley Hauerwas observes that a well-constructed sentence should have the "potential to make readers stop and rethink what they thought they think."[47] Thoughtfully articulated theological language has the capacity to "reframe" our understanding with poetic insight.[48] Language paints a picture of reality. As the picture is painted, language can also cause us to reconsider our vision of reality.

Using Christian Practice and Experience to "Look" at Reality

Though language is a critical avenue of apprehending theological beauty, it will be

[44] Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus*, 18.
[45] Burge, "Gospel of John," 236.
[46] Dykstra, *Finding Ourselves Lost*, 18.
[47] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 122.
[48] Zylla, "Explorations in the Aesthetic Pastoral Theology of Donald Capps," 6.

important to stress that theological beauty also is encountered in experience. It is not through language alone that we encounter the beauty of God and the gospel message. Though theological ideas are borne in words, and language is important to clarifying adolescent's sense of God and the Christian life, instrumentalizing language is not the sole pathway Christian nurture is offered.

Christian community and human caring express God's character and love.[49] Regular participation in Christian practices makes a particular kind of intelligence accessible to the Christian.[50] These experiences of Christian community and practice lead us to understand something of God and God's world that is inaccessible to abstract theorizing. God also reveals His character and presence directly through mystical experience. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner points out that "the ultimate conviction and decision of faith comes in the last resort, not from a pedagogic indoctrination... but from the experience of God, of his Spirit, of his freedom, bursting out of the very heart of human existence..."[51] Practical theologian Andrew Root cites his own experience of divine action, and the experience of others of Divine action, as credible foundations for theological dialogue.[52] William James reports on several accounts of individuals who can recall experiences where they believe God addressed them personally.[53]

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[49] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 63.

[50] Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 9.

[51] Rahner (*The Practice of Faith*, 22) speaks of his conviction that the Christian life is a mystical life. He argues that the "Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all" (22). The mystical character of the Christian life comes from the fact that while we cannot objectify or adequately convey our conviction, we *know* that God has broken into our world. Says Rahner, "...this mysticism is one of the normal and natural things in Christian experience which no one can avoid, even if he [*sic*.] overlooks it or cannot understand it or sets it aside as something he does not want to talk about" (41). Rahner accepts that some consider themselves Christians by virtue of having being "indoctrinated about God by the religious society" (61). He is discontent to let socialization be the content of Christian experience. Rahner encourages Christians to look for experiences of God in the Spirit, within their own lives (84).

[52] Root, *Christopraxis*, 35.

[53] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 241–52. Note that James reports never having had a mystical experience, but is fascinated by them. James believes he cannot speak personally about mystical

Though the explorations of this dissertation will be mainly concerned with the way language is fashioned and offered to adolescents, it should not be understood that theological language or language-based hermeneutic exercises are the sole or primary way of approaching Christian nurture. Critically, theological language—as beautiful as it can be—is impotent without these more basic experiences of the Christian life. The meanings that are conveyed in theological language depend upon embodied experience for intelligibility. Present in this discussion about how theological language represents theological beauty, will be the ongoing assumption that such language orders and makes intelligible our religious experience.

Research Methodology and Framework

The discussion that unfolds through the pages of this dissertation has been guided by a practical theological method of research and reflection. Practical theology is a discipline that focuses on the interpretation of situations.[54] The task of interpreting situations is aimed at the creation of practical wisdom for ministry.[55] The philosophical hermeneutics usually associated with textual interpretation are employed in practical theology to interpret ministry situations.[56] This adaptation is made on the grounds that the way one comes to understand a text, is the same mode in which one comes to understand one's world.[57] If God is acting among our North American youth ministries, it is fitting that practical theologians serve the church by reflecting theologically about the practice of youth ministry.

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experience "...for my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand" (413).

[54] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 12.

[55] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 39.

[56] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 20–21.

[57] Brown, "Hermeneutical Theory," 114.

There are different streams of practical theology. Some interpretations of situations adopt a sociological approach, seeking to generate wisdom by studying demographic trends. Other streams adopt a psychological approach, articulating the movements of the inner life for informing practices such as Christian education or pastoral care. While each approach has made a place for itself within the broad field of practical theology, this dissertation aims at the *theological* interpretation of situations.

The method that has guided the research of this dissertation has been drawn from the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and his hermeneutic phenomenology. Gadamer's landmark work, *Truth and Method*, is a critique of interpretation arising from the supposed "unbiased" rationality of the enlightenment. In Gadamer's view, reason is always guided by a tradition, and cannot be recognized as reason outside of the tradition in which the reasoning occurs.[58] Gadamer argues that all reasoning and knowing takes form in a set of pre-understandings. These pre-understandings (or prejudices) cause the interpreter to "project" the reasoning of their tradition into the text or situation being interpreted.[59] In Gadamer's view, the finite human being therefore always interprets truth according to their own horizon of understanding. One's horizon of understanding is "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."[60] Since truth is experienced from within a horizon of understanding, this means that the supposed objective rationality of the enlightenment cannot actually be objective. Further, this implies that understanding cannot be advanced if one relies solely upon one's own tradition of understanding. If one's rationality conforms to one's tradition, a person becomes compelled to break out of one's tradition in order to deepen one's

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[58] Lawn, *Gadamer*, 35.
[59] Warnke, *Gadamer*, 76–77.
[60] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 313.

understanding of a thing. Neither force of will, nor innovative methods of inquiry, are able to move one outside of one's tradition, for both are fated to begin within the tradition one currently resides in. Instead, understanding is created as one encounters the truth present in another's tradition. For interpretation to occur, one cannot "stay" only within one's own experience.[61]

In dialogical exploration, conversation partners encounter each other's pre-understandings, and uncover forms of rationality not formerly present within their own sets of pre-understandings. Gadamer terms this event a "fusion of horizons."[62] In the context of conversation, the fusion of horizons occurs as "each person opens himself [*sic*] to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual, but what he says."[63] Such a conversation does not aim at situating an object of study within one's own horizons. Rather, as horizons of truth encounter one another, a fusion of horizons occurs, and new knowledge is created. The fusion of horizons is not limited to conversational dialogue. The encounter of horizons also occurs in reading a text, or observing a situation. The Gadamerian fusion of horizons is a constructive knowing; the hermeneutical goal exists between horizons, arrived at through the fusion of horizons.[64]

Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective was not explicitly formulated for practical theology. However, practical theologians have found in Gadamer generative footing for their brand of hermeneutical research.[65]

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[61] Veling, *Practical Theology*, 57.

[62] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 317.

[63] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 403.

[64] Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, 306) says: "The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (306).

[65] A few examples may be given. In *The Living Human Document*, Charles Gerkin argues that pastoral care and counselling is fundamentally a hermeneutic exercise. The aim of dialogue between pastor

Overview of this Exploration and Argument

Being guided by Gadamer's hermeneutics, the argument is set forward that the metaphor of the curator is a hermeneutical innovation that provides practical wisdom for the work of faith formation among adolescents. The goal of the research in this work is to re-establish and renew "normative vision" for Christian ministry.[66] Normative vision includes the "primary stories," images or tradition that allow Christians to conceive of what they are, and what they do.[67] To find this normative vision, the dissertation begins by surveying the "espoused theology" of youth ministry in North America.[68] Espoused theology is a community's account of their theology and their theological wisdom. In the case of youth ministry, its espoused theology is reflectively and coherently laid out in the scholarly (and popular) literature written for the field.

This literature will also represent in many cases, the "embedded theology" of

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and counselee is a fusion of horizons; a fusion that "opens up a new and novel vision of possibility..." (Gerkin, *The Living Human Document*, 46). Gerkin also draws upon Gadamer's hermeneutics in *Prophetic Pastoral Practice: A Christian Vision of Life Together*. In this work, Gerkin aims at establishing norms for Christian life together within North American culture. Such vision, suggests Gerkin, is "fundamentally metaphorical and imagistic" (Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Practice*, 17). The aim in this approach is a fusion of horizons that renews the guiding metaphors of church life, in dialogue with the theology of scripture.

Don Browning is a prominent practical theologian who also adopts Gadamer's hermeneutics. In Browning's view the Christian theology of congregations is embedded within the "theory-laden practices" of congregations (Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 40). To arrive at practical wisdom for Christian practices, Browning argues a fusion of horizons must occur. This fusion takes place as the theology that is being expressed within Christian practice is held in dialogical relationship with the systematic theology of the church (Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 51).

Terry Veling also draws upon Gadamer's perspective, not as a method, but for shaping methods. Veling argues that interpretation is *discovered* in the fusion of horizons, as opposed to *produced* through empirical method (Veling, *Practical Theology*, 27). In this frame, the Gadamerian fusion of horizons is an event of interpretation, as opposed to an outcome of method. Says Veling, "To be skilled in the art of interpretation is to be alert to this moment, to be expectant, hopeful, waiting, open—ready for that moment when a true revelation happens" (Veling, *Practical Theology*, 44).

[66] Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Ministry*, 13.

[67] Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Ministry*, 51–52.

[68] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 61–62.

youth ministry practice.[69] Embedded theology is the theology that is expressed in the "preaching and practices" of the church.[70] Practical theology has been described as a discipline that aims at the "critical interrogation of value-directed and action-guiding worldviews,"[71] In both the espoused theology and embedded theology of youth ministry literature, value-directed and action-guiding world views are laid out and may be interrogated for the sake of articulating a normative vision of faith formation.

The first chapter will examine the place theology, beauty, and choice play in youth ministry and Christian nurture. Five types of discourse style will be identified, each with particular use in the pursuit of providing Christian nurture to teens. Of interest to the research of this dissertation is the "descriptive discourse" that aims at shaping the theological vision of adolescents. The point of calling adolescents to see theologically is to set before them a clear choice: to choose for Christ and the Christian life, or to reject the Christian life. This chapter establishes the importance of vision and choice in faith formation.

In the second chapter a survey of youth ministry literature will take place. Two broad approaches to faith formation in youth ministry will emerge. Some within the field argue that faith formation takes place through teaching adolescents a Christian worldview.[72] Others argue that faith formation is a communal event, where adolescents are joined to the life of the church through participation in the church's practices.[73] These two approaches to faith formation can be addressed at two horizons of truth, or

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[69] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 13.
[70] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 13.
[71] Bennett, "Britain," 479.
[72] Habermas, *Introduction to Christian Education and Formation*, 48–57.
[73] Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 150.

"traditions" in which thought about youth ministry occurs.[74] Where one tradition emphasizes instruction for Christian formation, the other emphasises Christian practices for Christian formation. The point of moving through this survey is to demonstrate that neither approach has quite accounted for the place of theological beauty. The need to address theological beauty arises from bringing both horizons into dialogue.

The third chapter addresses normative vision and practice for faith formation in youth groups. Normative theology's role is to be a "guide and a corrective alongside practice."[75] One model of discerning what ought to be normative is intradisciplinary dialogue. In this dialogue, perspectives within a single field are brought into conversation and evaluated.[76] Paul Ricoeur describes the dialectic understanding that takes place in interpretation. For Ricoeur, it is not through critical appraisal alone that interpretation takes place.[77] Instead, Ricoeur argues that it is "only in so far as I place myself in the other's point of view do I confront myself with my present horizon, with my prejudices."[78] The notion of *alignment* with Christ will be introduced as a means of conceiving of Christian maturity (which is normative Christianity). A key dimension of the exploration of "alignment," will be the critical suggestion that alignment with Christ requires aesthetic vision.[79]

The fourth chapter sets forward the metaphor of the curator as a guiding image for

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[74] Simms, *Gadamer*, 72. Gadamer uses the language of "tradition" to signify the fore-meanings or prejudices through which situations are interpreted. Gadamer's treatment of "tradition" is related to, but different from his notion of "horizon." A horizon is that what can be seen from a certain standpoint (78). It is our "traditions" that provide the rationality through which a horizon is interpreted. Gadamer says "the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality [of] tradition" (See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305).

[75] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology, 62.*

[76] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 163.

[77] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 71.

[78] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 76.

[79] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 37.

the work of providing Christian nurture. The curatorial metaphor relates to Christian instruction (or education), and to Christian formation (or practice). The curator is a researcher who has a depth of theological knowledge, but is tasked with displaying what is most significant, relevant, and poignant to adolescents. The curator's role is to draw attention to what is theologically poignant and beautiful in lived experience by offering carefully articulated theological understanding about lived experience. The curatorial metaphor captures the requirement of choice and decision on behalf of adolescents about the Christian life. Just as a gallery curator cannot demand patrons "see" what they see in an exhibition, a theological curator cannot compel theological vision. Yet just as a gallery curator works carefully and diligently to shape patron's imagination, the theological curator carefully and skillfully makes space for teens to give their attention to what is good, true, and beautiful. With such vision, adolescents are set in a place to make a sincere and personal choice about entering and deepening the Christian life, or turning away.

The fifth and final chapter attends to three touchstones for Christian practice that arise out of the discussion of this dissertation. With the heavy theoretical lifting done in the first four chapters, the fifth chapter is an exploration of how youth groups might shape ministry to elevate theological beauty. Centering youth group studies or teachings on God's character, God's calling, and inviting responsive wonder, are three practical avenues that practitioners have to call attention to theological beauty.

CHAPTER 1
TRUTH FROM BEAUTY

Communicating Christian truth is a primary avenue youth ministry uses to nurture adolescent's Christian lives. Theological understanding directs the Christian life and allows a person to situate themselves in relation to God.[1] The interrelation of personal experience and theological understanding causes Christian understanding to become personal, giving shape to the Christian life.[2] Yet among the body of literature written about youth ministry and Christian nurture, *how* theological language makes the jump from speech that transfers information to a practice that inspires inward transformation is a matter left unattended in many cases.[3]

This chapter will explore the question: *How* can youth ministries communicate theological knowledge such that it is not received simply as information, but as words that give life? This exploration of theological knowledge will be conducted in three movements. How beauty gives rise to emotion and the moral life will be initially addressed. Thereafter, how theological dimensions of beauty are communicated to teenagers will be considered. Finally, it will be emphasised that a choice to love Jesus

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[1] Hauerwas and Wells ("Why Christian Ethics was Invented," 35–37) observe that actions of the Christian community are conditioned by the contours of Christian confession. This conditioning is what makes a community, a Christian community.

[2] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 135.

[3] Loder, (*The Transforming Moment*, 20) observes that "how the Holy Spirit teaches, comforts, afflicts, and leads into 'all truth' is largely a theological blank" (20). A similar sentiment is present in this discussion. How theological language nurtures the Christian life of young people is also somewhat of an unknown. On one hand, God's action is critical for Christian nurture. On the other, faithful ministry depends upon participating in God's action (57).

and commit to the Christian life must be just that: a choice a young person makes for themselves. Adding some urgency to this question, is the fact that this question is asked in the second decade of the twenty-first century. At this time the church in North American is having some difficulty providing Christian nurture that leads to a lasting commitment to Christ and the Christian life.[4]

The Sublime and the Christian Life

To guide a discussion about how theological speech (or discourse) is able to provide Christian nurture, help can be found in what might be initially regarded as an unlikely ally: moral philosophy. Moral philosophy is the study of moral obligations; of judging which actions are right, which are wrong, and constructing arguments for why a person is obliged to perform right actions.[5] Though gathered under a single objective of making moral judgements, there are distinct streams of thought in moral philosophy. Some of these streams are not directly compatible with a Christian account of the moral life, and thereby are not as helpful in providing wisdom about Christian nurture.[6] Other streams of moral philosophy are very well suited to help us think about what we are doing when we

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[4] A survey of statistics about declines in youth and young adult church participation can be found in the second chapter.

[5] Fieser, *Moral Philosophy Through the Ages*, iii.

[6] A brief account of four streams is given here for reference sake. A fifth (narrative ethics) will be addressed in the body of the dissertation. First, moral judgements in Virtue Ethics are made by reflecting upon the acts of virtuous character, and actions that exhibit *practical wisdom* in accordance with the Good for human kind. Virtue theory holds that the Good for human kinds is to live well through the exercise of the virtues (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.*, $1097^{b}25$). Second, moral philosophy in the non-cognitive stream treats moral judgements more like moral intuitions. Suspicious of human reason's ability to discern a final good, non-cognitive philosophers argue that the right action is the one which an impartial spectator would approve of (Fieser, *Moral Philosophy Through the Ages*, 166). Third, the deontology stream argues that the right action is the action which an agent might reasonably will to become universal law. Deontology is a reaction against non-cognitivism that seeks to reaffirm the place of moral *reasoning* in moral judgements (MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 122–23). Fourth and lastly, consequentialists in moral philosophy argue the right action is the one which produces the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers (Fieser, *Moral Philosophy Through the Ages*, 168–69).

speak to adolescents about the Christian life. Foremost among moral philosophies that are compatible with scripture's moral vision, is a stream of moral philosophy which can be referred to a "narrative ethics." Narrative ethics emerged as a stream within virtue ethics. In a narrative approach to ethics the right action is the action that is in keeping with a true narrative account of reality.[7] For the Christian, the right action is the one that is in keeping with scripture's witness and Christ's redemption. It is this stream of moral philosophy that guides the moral assumptions of this dissertation.

When reflecting upon the moral formation to inform some aspect of youth ministry, it is important to note that youth ministry is not primarily about producing good behaviour, or even Christian behaviour among adolescents.[8] If it were the behaviour of adolescents alone that youth ministry is concerned with, the motivating reason for behaviour would be irrelevant. Instead, the Christian life is a *response* to God's actions in Jesus Christ.[9] So while the aims of youth ministry and the aims of moral philosophy are separate, there is at the same time, some sympathetic overlap between the two. As youth ministry aims to nurture a response to Jesus Christ, considerations about teen's Christian character, virtue, motivation, intention, judgement and practice arise. If a young person

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[7] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 218–19.

[8] Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 26–28. Behaviour can arise from various intentions. To nurture young people's Christian faith is to nurture Christian motivations, and not just Christian behaviour.

[9] Niebuhr (*The Responsible Self*, 43) argues that the moral life is a matter of deciding "to whom or what am I responsible and in what community of interactions do I find myself?" (68). Drawing the idea of response and responsibility to define the Christian life, Niebuhr says "I call myself a Christian simply because I also am a follower of Jesus Christ, though I travel at a great distance from him not only in time but in the spirit of my traveling; because I believe that my way of thinking about life, myself, my human companions and our destiny *has been so modified by his presence in our history that I cannot get away from his influence*; above all, I call myself a Christian because my relation to God has been, so far as I can see, deeply conditioned by this presence of Jesus Christ in my history and in our history" (43). Niebuhr's definition emphasises that the Christian life is a response to Christ himself. Niebuhr's definition also hints at fatalism, saying "I cannot get away from his influence."

Stanley Hauerwas has drawn Niebuhr's fatalistic and willing elements together, saying the Christian life is the "painful training that allows me to make my life my own" (Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 43n11). For Hauerwas, a person is drawn into the Christian life, but makes it their own by choosing to accept the Christian life as their own.

reports a deepening Christian life, we might expect to see evidence of a consistent Christian character developing, or observe Christian motivations beginning to shape their decisions. The common ground youth ministry shares with moral philosophy is that these concerns of character, virtue, motivation, intention, judgement and practice are also the concerns of moral philosophy.

On these grounds, youth ministry practitioners are in a place to consider a challenge that rises from British and Irish novelist and philosopher, Iris Murdoch.[10] In her writing Murdoch challenges her readers to consider their assumptions about how moral judgements are made. Judgements about right and wrong actions have been assumed to be made in some cases by reason, and in others, by moral emotions. Reason might lead a young person to conclude that though they do not feel like it, treating their family members with dignity is the right thing to do, if one expects to be treated with dignity as well. Moral emotions (compassion, justice, *etc.*) also shape our sense of what is right. The right action, a young person might feel, is the action that supports and advocates for those who are mistreated or marginalized. However, Murdoch identifies something more foundational to moral judgement; something that shapes reason and enlivens moral emotions. For Murdoch, the experience of beauty is the reference point of the moral life.

Murdoch sensed that great and beautiful stories do not simply entertain or inform. Rather, the great stories that are told and retold over time are the stories that address the moral life and stories that appeal to the reader's aesthetic sense. Murdoch cites a handful of examples of stories that bring together a beautiful narrative and moral insight. She sees

[10] Dykes ("Iris Murdoch," 562) gives a short biography of Iris Murdoch. He notes her work is influenced by Christian themes, but she herself is agnostic. Murdoch is drawn to religious sentiment, believing there is value in spirituality, but does not confess Christian theology (563). Sill identifying as "spiritual," her reflective spirituality focuses on goodness and love. (566) Murdoch's construal of the moral life is used in this dissertation on account her valid critique of Kant, as opposed to her theological confession.

lasting beauty present within the Old Testament stories, New Testament parables, enduring folk tales, and novels by her favourite authors such as Dickens, Dostoevsky, or Victor Hugo.[11] Interested by this link between the moral and the beautiful, and seeking to name what it is about enduring stories that capture the imagination and moral sense of their reader, Murdoch comes across Immanuel Kant's notion of the "sublime."[12] The sublime is encountered when beauty is experienced, but is not the property of beauty in an object. Rather, the sublime is *the human sense of beauty that evokes emotion.*[13]

Sublime moments can have significant emotional gravity to them and demand our full attention. In the experience of the sublime, we receive a subjective *impression* of what is good and right about a particular situation. Though the sublime is only an impression it speaks to our moral imagination. Whatever is good or right about a situation in question has implications for a person's sense of what is good and right in general. A few examples of the sublime can be given. What stirs a person when standing before a dramatic cliff façade or a deep mountain valley? What happens within a person when we

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[11] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good,"48.

[12] Murdoch ("The Sublime and the Good," 44) traces Kant's conception of what is beautiful and what is sublime. Beauty for Kant is a property of art or nature, subjectively recognized by a viewer by giving the viewer pleasure. The sublime however, is not a property of an object, but an experience of beauty connected with the emotion (44). Murdoch parses Kant's distinction, observing that beauty relates to understanding as beauty conveys information, whereas the sublime relates to reason as sublimity evokes wonder (44–45).

For Murdoch, Kant's account of beauty is incomplete, for Kant only allows beauty to be recognized by the pleasure it affords. In Murdoch's view, tragedy is also beautiful, but not wholly pleasurable (48). Murdoch also suggests that beauty is more than pleasure; it is meaning. Art should be more than "flowers and meaningless lines interweaving," for in many cases, art has something to say because art is embedded in the history that gave rise to its form (51).

Murdoch proceeds to make a similar critique of Kant's ethics. Depending solely upon universal reason, Kantian ethics are an "empty demand for total order," and therefore make no considerations of history or tragedy (51). Kant's ethics are bound to instances of duty. Murdoch is suspicious of duty-bound ethics for duty alone makes no space for the sustained commitment which is love.

Having made her critiques, Murdoch suggests that Kant's notion of the sublime does make space for what she judged to be lacking in his duty-bound ethics. The beauty in tragedy, history, and literature are recognized in the sublime. Murdoch characterises the sublime as observing a portion of a circle, but then imagining the rest (50). Just as an impression of a circle invites a person to imagine the rest of the circle, the experience of the sublime invites a person to imagine what is good and right.

[13] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," 44.

hear stories of God's actions in otherwise difficult circumstances? What is the feeling while reflecting about the spiritual life with a friend who understands our situation? What is the sense of inspiration that arises when precisely the right words come to us through the scriptures? Each of these situations is a moment of the sublime. Something of what is good and beautiful is encountered in these situations, and perhaps even without recognizing it, the moral imagination is stirred.

Murdoch links the sublime experience of beauty to the moral imagination saying:

> Art and morals are, with certain provisos ... one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality ... The enemies of art and morals, the enemies that is of love, are the same: social convention and neurosis.[14]

While Murdoch has not written with the intention of shedding light on the practice of Christian nurture, her exploration does offer something significant to a discussion concerning Christian nurture. The truth value of theological propositions alone do not have transformative agency. Which means Christian nurture in youth ministry depends upon more than orthodoxy in teaching and practice, *even though orthodoxy is itself essential too*. Also involved is a process of speaking about Christ and the Christian life in such a way that the beauty of Christ and the Christian life is seen by adolescents. Following Murdoch, it might be said that words intended to shape or call forth moral conviction must in some way portray what is aesthetically appealing about moral convictions. In the Christian life, this aesthetic dimension is God himself. Christian nurture depends upon *recognizing* God's beauty in our experiences, and *seeing* God's beauty in our theological language. Particularly in the case of youth ministry where bible studies and Christian teaching can be the dominant means of providing Christian nurture,

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[14] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," 51–52.

theological language is the significant vehicle in which theological beauty is represented to adolescents. The challenge of the sublime is in speaking about beauty in such a way that a listener encounters something of this beauty for themselves.

Having leaned crucially upon Iris Murdoch to identify the place of the sublime in moral judgement, it is worth noting that others share Murdoch's convictions about the aesthetic foundation of moral judgement. Addressing the practice of youth ministry specifically, James K. A. Smith has argued that the gospel and the Christian life are appealing *on their own* and without help from those who feel the Christian life needs to be made more entertaining in order to attract teenagers into the Christian life.[15] Labouring to make religion attractive to adolescents assumes that God's beauty and God's call are insufficient on their own to attract attention. The critique of entertainment in youth ministry then, is that youth ministry may have failed to recognize that Christ himself draws adolescents in to the Christian life, and not the attractive trappings of youth ministry program. On this account youth workers would do well to represent the inherent and compelling beauty of Christ himself to adolescents. Hans Urs Von Balthasar suggests that theology contains and exhibits beauty, for theology speaks of God's own triune beauty.[16] Von Balthasar states: "In the case of revelation... form cannot be separated from content."[17] Christ's call into the Christian life is beautiful, for Jesus himself calls. James Loder finds that "compositional" considerations and "formulated language" are potent ways of symbolically expressing Christian vision and intuition in speech and written text.[18] Also from a hermeneutical perspective, Hans Georg Gadamer has argued that

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[15] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 145.
[16] Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 54.
[17] Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 54.
[18] Loder (*The Transforming Moment*, 51–52) finds that art and language can have "sufficient

aesthetic experience is credible and crucial means of understanding our world.[19] In Gadamer's view, not everything can be known or appreciated through pure reason. It is through the arts and aesthetic experiences that the knowledge gaps left by pure reason are filled in. One of these gaps according to Gadamer is moral knowledge.[20]

Having outlined a case for the place of the aesthetic in the moral life, a small anecdote will demonstrate how the aesthetic shaped the Christian moral life of some teenagers. This story serves to situate the sublime in youth ministry in one particular instance, offering an example of the role the sublime plays in nurturing a committed Christian life.

While on a youth mission trip, one warm afternoon following the group's lunch

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intensity to break the tyranny of surface meaning" and can speak of that which is "beyond formulated language" (52).

[19] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 37. In Gadamer's view, taste is required for both aesthetic judgements and moral judgements. One's aesthetic sense informs one's moral sense. Says Gadamer: "the significance of art also depends on the fact that it speaks to us, that it confronts man [*sic.*] with himself in his morally determined existence" (47). Further, taste is required for moral judgements. Says Gadamer, "judging the case involves not merely applying the universal principle according to what is judged, but co-determining, supplementing, and correcting the principle. From this it ultimately follows that all moral decisions require taste—which does not mean that this most individual balancing of decision is the only thing that governs them, but it is an indispensable element" (37).

Kant's moral philosophy, argues Gadamer, "purified ethics from all aesthetics and feeling" (37). Gadamer rejects this move arguing Kant failed to argue why "the concept has precedence over the aesthetic idea" (48). That an enlightenment moral system should avoid relying upon taste in judgements is a move that fits enlighten values, *but it does not for that reason* mean that ethical judgement is divorced from aesthetic sensibility. For Gadamer, the opposite is true. Gadamer argues that the aesthetic experience produces an aesthetic consciousness (74). The aesthetic consciousness includes a lasting sense of what is true and beautiful in this life. Such a sense of the true and beautiful has a moral dimension: one would feel compelled to act in accordance with what one sensed was true and beautiful. To defend his position about aesthetic consciousness, Gadamer must show that an aesthetic experience is not a temporary sensation. Critiquing the notion of aesthetic experiences being only temporary sensations, Gadamer argues "if the aesthetic were mere appearance in this sense then its force—like the terror of dreams—could last only as long as there was no doubt about its reality, and it would lose its truth on waking" (76).

Rejecting the aesthetic experience as a temporary sensation, Gadamer then turns to Kierkegaard to argue that the demands of the aesthetic experience are resolved in the moral dimension. For Gadamer, it is Kierkegaard's "criticism of aesthetic consciousness [that] is of fundamental important because he shows the inner contradictions of aesthetic existence, so that it is forced to go beyond itself" (87). Any sense of moral obligation is therefore dependent upon making meaning from aesthetic experiences. This is because the "hermeneutic continuity which constitutes our being" requires a standard of truth and beauty by which such a hermeneutic can exist (87). For Gadamer, it is an aesthetic consciousness that provides this measure (90).

[20] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 37.

break, we had invited the pastor's wife to speak to us about the congregation whose church building our mission team was helping to construct in rural Nicaragua.[21] The group had worked diligently during the morning, having erected the better part of the north wall, and had agreed to a longer lunch break—to be enjoyed in the shade of the lean-to structure this local congregation was currently using for Sunday worship. Through a translator, the pastor's wife described how it is that she and her husband, and a small group of Christians from the city, felt led to plant a church in rural Nicaragua. Most residents of the village, she indicated, made a small living selling what could be grown on their properties at city markets. Corn, nuts and fruit were popular items that could sell fairly easily. However the regular Nicaraguan dry season, explained our host, would regularly strain the welfare of the village residents. During the dry season, life would become uniquely difficult for the usual produce that the residents would sell (as well as eat) did not grow in the dry season. Each year, food and money had to last local families through each dry season, until the crops could begin to grow again.

Our group of asked many questions as they finished their lunches. "How are goods transported to the market?" "How long does the dry season last?" "What do people do during the dry season for work?" "Are there irrigations systems people can buy?" and "Is there a local food bank?" Graciously, our host painted a picture for our group of the living situation of the local population where the church was being constructed. She pointed out that water came from a local well, or was hauled by truck and stored in plastic reservoirs. She pointed out that most homes were one room, and in some cases

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[21] Howell, "Mission to Nowhere," 207. Short-term-mission trips have been critiqued for romanticising poverty, unhelpfully addressing needs, or functioning as glorified tourism. That these critiques exist does not mean short term missions are not valuable. Rather, these critiques invite reflection on short term mission practice so that both participants and recipients can mutually benefit from trip initiatives (211).

had floors of packed dirt. She indicated some homes had only one or two mattresses for four or five people. She pointed out that the dry season, regrettably, meant hunger for most of the residents of the village. Apparently surprised by this information our group asked our host more about the hunger status of the community. She replied that among the locals who would come by each day to help build the church's walls, perhaps half had not eaten either recently, and some not within the past day or two.

As our talk had begun, our team has been reclining in the cool of the shade, upon bags of concrete or benches made of cinder block and wood planks. Now however, team members were sitting up and attentive, concern showing on their faces. In this conversation, these teenagers had come to recognize for the first time, the difficult reality of the local people. Processing this information, team members asked about particular individuals, realizing this suffering could affect the lives of specific people they had come to know. That afternoon the group worked steadily, but largely in silence; preoccupied with the words of the Pastor's wife.

Later that same day, as our group gathered for evening devotion, the planned devotion was set aside. With the afternoon to consider what our host had said, the group held unanimous concern for the food security of the community we were working in. There was a need among group members to wrestle with what it meant to be a Christian in this situation. Several attempts to speak about the suffering of the community sounded hollow. Some expressed that God would eventually redeem all things. But this sentiment seemed not to fit the present circumstances, and the group kept pushing for the right words. As a few other suggestions were offered, the idea that God "sees" his people was elevated. The contours of theological meaning in God "seeing" his people are not wholly

relevant here, except to say the group seemed to find what they were looking for in this response. The right words were needed, or even demanded as the situation the group found itself within required these words. The words supplied an interpretation of who God was, as well as God's action amid the poverty of the rural community. These words gave theological clarity concerning the work ahead, giving meaning to the presence of God and the presence of the team in this community.

It is difficult to try to locate where the sublime was critically experienced in this preceding story. A sense of God's presence stretched throughout the day, and into the remainder of this trip. Yet for the sake of illustration, one unique moment of sublime perception arose during the evening's discussion. The group needed, and searched for, the right language to describe God's presence in the midst of hunger. As a theological understanding of the group's experience began to emerge in this discussion, a moment of conviction arose. A sense of beauty arose in recognizing God's action and presence in this situation the group had found themselves in. In response, conviction gave rise to action as the group moved to address the need on the trip. Following this trip, many (though not all) in this group sustained a deeper commitment to Christ and the Christian life upon their return home. In this story the striking beauty of God's call to this group, and the striking beauty of God's presence in suffering, evoked a response of Christian commitment on the part of several.

Theology Has a Place in Youth Ministry

In the preceding story, a group of adolescents and adult leaders were looking for the right words and descriptions to fit their experience. The group had wanted to *understand* their

experience, and they felt that their understanding required knowing what God does when He sees poverty and suffering. It is worth pointing out that as the group searched for the right understanding of their circumstances, they were *thinking theologically*. Before turning to examine the sublime in greater depth, it will be helpful to make a short case for why theology is important in youth groups. Theology is important in youth ministry. However we must also acknowledge that theology and youth ministry can also go wrong. Another story will illustrate this point.

On a youth retreat, a well-intended but misguided youth leader overestimates the value of "theology" in nurturing adolescent's Christian lives. Relaying this account, Andrew Root recalls a friend of his from seminary. "Ryan" is energetic about his theological studies and is keen to share what he is discovering with others. As he tells the story, Root and Ryan are attending a youth retreat, in which Ryan's responsibilities include the theological instruction of adolescents. Ryan is critical of youth ministry that emphasises fun and games at the expense of biblical instruction. Suspicious of excessive fun and games, Ryan resolves to convey more substantial theological truth during an afternoon teaching session at the retreat. By Root's account, Ryan:

> ...grabbed his Bible, pulled a stool to the front, sat down, breathed in deeply and began to teach. Ryan talked straight for fifty-five minutes, weaving in and out of conversations on redemption, Israelite sacrificial practice, theories of atonement and authorship of epistles. He even parsed a few Greek verbs. It was clearly not the programmatic, activity-centered youth ministry he had critiqued in the car. But as I sat there, trying myself to follow his explosion of facts, theories and musings, it was also clear that none of it mattered to the ninth graders and that all of them were somewhere else, passing notes or simply daydreaming of times and locations beyond the theological oppression of this seemingly never-ending moment.[22]

Following Ryan's teaching time, and after the students had departed the theater,

[22] Root, "Walking Into the Crisis of Reality," location 891–96.

the adult leaders of the retreat came together to debrief the lesson time Ryan had provided. Those in attendance stood in the balance of two opposing perspectives. On the one hand there was a desire to be optimistic and encourage a young seminarian. On the other hand each adult in the room recognized that the teaching session had not gone well. Ryan himself sensed this, though was reluctant to admit this fully. Instead he placed some blame on the students for not fully engaging his talk. "We just have to keep pushing" Ryan reflected, "right now they may not like theology, but it's important, so we just have to keep giving them theology, even if they don't like it."[23]

One person in the room however, was not content to let this final characterization of the afternoon's session go unchallenged. Root recalls Joyce, a long-time youth group helper and grandmother thoughtfully responding to the group's discussion. Having remained quiet for the debrief thus far, Joyce spoke up to conclude the discussion with what Root recognized as prophetic words: "Maybe it's not that they don't care about theology, but maybe what we provided them tonight wasn't theology."[24]

The words offered to nurture the Christian life ought to speak of God and the Christian life in a manner that has theological meaning to adolescents. In this story an earnest attempt was made to offer theological words and descriptions for the purpose of encouraging and deepening listener's Christian lives. Yet in this story the supposedly theological utterances intended to edify, had instead fallen flat. It will not be a surprise to many that grade nine audiences will struggle to find a lot of edification in biblical authorship theories or excessive Greek language parsing. Beyond this more obvious observation however, remains a problem. At some point words that nurture the Christian

[23] Root, "Walking Into the Crisis of Reality," location 900–901.
[24] Root, "Walking Into the Crisis of Reality," location 903.

life must do more than transfer information. Such words must also adequately represent Jesus, who himself has the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

If any number of Christian people, and especially adolescents, were asked to place the discipline of theology on a spectrum from "critically important" to "boring," it is probable that a fair number of those surveyed would rank theology toward the boring and irrelevant end of the scale. Neither is it a stretch of the imagination to suggest that youth ministry workers might feel some sympathy for teenagers who are turned off by theology. Theology however, in its basic simplest form, is faith seeking to understand God.[25] Theology is not an abstract discipline for the otherwise academically inclined. Rather, a person's understanding about who God is and how He has acted, has a bearing on how the Christian life is lived. Knowledge of God makes the Christian life possible, for without knowledge of God, there is no reference point for how to faithfully live in relation to God.[26]

Holding knowledge about God in the Christian tradition is not just a matter of knowing a selection of ideas about God. Jesus is not a set of ideas simply to be mused about. He is a person to be known, and a person who bids young people to come and follow Him.[27] In the Christian tradition, theological truths lead Christians to respond with worship, for theology is about a living and personal God who not only is all-powerful, but who knows each of his children intimately. This means that speaking theologically in youth ministry should not mean speaking within a discourse that is inaccessible.

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[25] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 28.

[26] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 30–31. If a person is going to participate in God's actions, then some knowledge of how God acts is required. As ministry is participating in God's actions, knowledge of God and his actions are required for faithful ministry. As the Christian life is a response to God's actions, knowledge of God informs the shape of the Christian life.

[27] Root (*Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 182) says: "Christian faith exists not through ideas, institutional programs, principles and doctrines, but only because the person of Jesus Christ lives and continues to call us, even today..." (182).

Theological ideas can and do come alive for adolescents when theology connects Christ to adolescent's personal experience.[28] As theological language is given to help teens describe and understand their own encounter with Jesus, Christian confession takes on a meaningful personal dimension.[29] This means that there is need for Christian theology, but also that Christian theology finds the greatest reception among those whose experience requires this theology to be made intelligible.

Helping adolescents to think theologically within the bounds of their experience and the guidance of scripture's witness requires a "deliberate, systematic, and sustained" ministry effort.[30] This sort deliberate, systematic and sustained effort however, does not mean "boring" classroom-like instruction. A systematic approach to theology does not mean that theology cannot connect with adolescent's experiences. The topic of prayer can be addressed through a group's stories of prayer in times of distress. Then perhaps a related topic of God's presence in suffering might be addressed through other personal experiences, and so forth. It is this education in the mode of action and reflection that creates what John Westerhoff III calls a Christian "consciousness."[31] By Christian consciousness, Westerhoff means to speak of the "subjective awareness that makes particular experiences possible, such as the presence and action of God in our lives, and the ability to discern God's will."[32] This aptitude to think theologically grants teenagers a vision of a God who loves them very much, and who has chosen to reveal Himself to them in the person of Jesus Christ.

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[28] Patton, *From Ministry to Theology*, 24–25. Patton's exercise aims to draw attention to how God has acted in individual's memory of events. Reflecting upon God's action guides people in theological reflection, allowing a group's imagination to be shaped by theological truth and possibility.

[29] Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 30.

[30] Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 45.

[31] Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 49.

[32] Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 49.

How Theological Language Works

Making the argument that the nurture of the Christian faith in youth ministry requires giving adolescents theological language to understand their experiences will benefit from addressing how theological language functions. A starting consideration in this exploration comes from theologian Paul Tillich. Language that can adequately represent Jesus is of a unique quality, for this language must serve as bridge. Language used to describe God begins in this world, but to adequately represent Jesus, this language must be able to point beyond this world into the transcendent. Tillich senses this unique quality in theological language, observing first that it is not holy language, only ordinary language that is used to speak of that which is holy.[33] Ordinary language, if it is to be used to speak of God, must speak about realities that are inaccessible to plain speech.[34] For this to happen, ordinary words must be fashioned in a quasi-poetic form, such that they are able to speak about more than what they might otherwise appear to say. In Tillich's mind, words in such a poetic form can be fashioned to symbolically speak of transcendent reality.[35] As this occurs, words become symbolic utterances that participate in the reality they point to.[36] It is as if theological language paints a picture. A painting represents reality, but at a distance. This is also the case when using theological language. To witness to God's reality, language is fashioned in a way that might make God's reality accessible to listeners. In the case of youth ministry, the style this symbolic language

[33] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 47–48.

[34] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 54.

[35] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 55.

[36] Tillich (*Theology of Culture*, 56) says: "every symbol opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate" (56).

takes should ideally be accessible to adolescents.

Following Tillich's intuitions, two sorts of language can be considered. First there is the symbolic language that points to the transcendent while formed by ordinary words. Someone might speak of being "drawn to the heart of God," or "standing firm in God's promises." These types of utterances make use of ordinary language to create images of God's reality. Second, there are words that relate in a tangential or supportive role to first order symbolic language. Someone might speak of "Christian faith formation" or "Christian practical wisdom." This sort of theological language provides some categories and structure on which the symbolic type of language identified is able to exist and carry meaning. Both are necessary. But the goal of Christian nurture through theological reflection is providing adolescents with meaningful statements in this first order of language. Second order language is positioned to help frame first order claims.

Discussing the function of theological language, theologians Brian Brock and Stanley Hauerwas have cited the significance of the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein.[37] As an analytic philosopher Wittgenstein has argued that a thought is a picture of reality. He suggests that language is necessary for thought, and therefore that knowledge of reality depends upon language that describes reality.[38] In his view, what cannot be spoken

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[37] Brock and Hauerwas, *Beginnings: Interrogating Hauerwas*, 80–88.

[38] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 23–24. The *Tractatus* is a systematic argument were Wittgenstein builds one precept upon another to finally argue that ethics and aesthetics are meaningless discourses (90). In later life Wittgenstein withdrew this dogmatic position, allowing that language can speak meaningfully of metaphysical matters, though with some difficulty as the metaphysical, by definition, is tangentially related to reality (Mark, "Wittgenstein, Theology and Wordless Faith," 424). Within the body of his larger argument, Wittgenstein argued that the limits of one's reality correspond to the language one uses to describe reality. To make this case, Wittgenstein argues first that a picture is a representation of reality from a particular point of view (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 28). He then observes that a picture is a set of facts, and facts are held within thoughts (30). In turn, thoughts are propositions that require language to express (38–39). If one cannot give language to a thought, then it follows that the thought or idea, is not known to a person (74). As a result of this line of reasoning, Wittgenstein then (rather famously) says "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (74).

of, cannot be known. While Wittgenstein's propositions can feel abstracted from the practice of Christian nurture, there is an important connection. The place of religious (or theological) language is to give expression and definition to the experiences of faith.[39] Theological language, tastefully and fittingly articulated, offers a set of understandings that enable a person to recognize God, and to participate in a relationship with God.

For Wittgenstein, language expresses concepts, language calls attention to concepts, and language expresses the specific purposes for which concepts are used.[40] Without language to describe God, the Christian life becomes difficult, for a young person cannot know what or who it is they are committing to in the Christian life. The intelligibility of religious belief and experience depends upon a theological grammar by which the essence of these beliefs and experiences can be understood.[41] If God is addressed as a mystery, a young person may have some sense of God's existence, but no distilled sense of God's action, or sense of how to respond meaningfully to God. This is why the revelation God gives us in scripture is important. Scripture allows human beings to respond to God not as a mystery, but as God revealed in scripture and through Jesus Christ. Speaking of God with evocatively descriptive language shapes teenagers' perceptions about God, moving knowledge of God from the realm of the unknown, into the known. Though theological discourse is known to have the capacity to bore adolescents, theological discourse also shapes our sense of who God is, and how he has revealed himself. While wisely avoiding abstract theological digressions, speaking plainly and truthfully about who God is and how he has acted is critical for youth ministry.

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[39] Altmann, "The God of Religion, the God of Metaphysics," 290.
[40] Bell, "Wittgenstein and Descriptive Theology," 6.
[41] Bell, "Wittgenstein and Descriptive Theology," 17.

Speaking Beautifully in Youth Ministry

Youth pastors tend to be known for their pragmatic sensibilities. In this discussion about the intersection of aesthetic experience, theology, and the Christian life, we might imagine youth pastors politely interjecting, "Yes but what do I do with this theory?" or "What does this mean for the actual practice of youth ministry?" Making these sorts of interjections is the right impulse to have. Many of those in youth ministry can see that it is one thing to speak about the moral value of aesthetic experience, and another matter to identify what such a set of understandings brings to youth ministry.

To honour the spirit of these interjections, a point of reflection might be given. Imagine a hypothetical situation wherein Iris Murdoch became a youth pastor. Imagine her post was at a mainline church with evangelical leanings, near Toronto Canada, around the year 2020. Youth culture broadly at this time is comfortably pluralistic (meaning value systems are treated as personal preferences) and post-modern (meaning truth claims are not always treated as universally true for all people). The students who attend her Junior High and Senior High groups are children of church families, and the friends these group members regularly bring along to youth gatherings. Her groups begin with gym activities such as basketball or dodgeball, and then transition after some food and drink into a time of worship and teaching in the church's youth room. What advice would this version of Iris Murdoch give her youth pastor colleagues about the significance of the sublime in Christian nurture? In her oddly scholastic way, she might try to impart some wisdom to her youth pastor colleagues saying:

> By opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us. We are anxiety-ridden animals. Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious,

> unusually self-preoccupied, often falsifying *veil* which partially conceals the world. [Such] fantasies and reveries are not trivial and unimportant, they are profoundly connected with ... our ability to choose and act.[42]

We might assume her colleagues would not fully follow her wisdom, so further explanation might follow. She might emphasise that adolescents (like all people) are subject to a 'falsifying veil' that distorts their ability to see and understand reality as it actually is. These adolescents have engaged their world, but have not fully seen what it is that confronts them. Like the biblical characters who 'lift their eyes' to see God's reality, Youth Pastor Iris Murdoch might suggest that adolescents need a similar experience in order to see the world and its religious dimensions rightly. She might observes that we cannot remove the falsifying veil simply by telling people such a veil exists and what is on the other side. There is a need to speak in such a way that others can begin to sense and see what is true on the far side of this veil. Youth Pastor Iris Murdoch would see that the adolescents who participate in our youth groups come with some ideas of what is good, and true, and beautiful. She would emphasise that youth ministries should help to clarify existing vision, and offer outlines of what may be missing.

As Murdoch has observed, a person can only choose within the world that they see.[43] Youth Pastor Iris Murdoch might hold that the challenge of providing Christian nurture in youth ministry, is not just telling adolescents what is good, true, and beautiful, but in some way also *showing them,* or *allowing them to see for themselves* what genuinely is good, true, and beautiful. This challenge would require helping adolescents to see that it is Jesus Christ alone, who Himself is good, true and beautiful. It is through Jesus Christ that all things have been created, and through him all things hold together

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[42] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 82. Emphasis original.
[43] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 35–36.

(Col. 1:16), and he alone is the measure of what is good, true, and beautiful. But this work is not a simple task, for as youth pastor Iris Murdoch aptly points out, by opening their eyes adolescents may not necessarily see what confronts them.

Nevertheless, the difficult task of speaking in such a way that adolescents could 'see for themselves' what is true and beautiful, it is still an essential one. Donald Capps observes that it is through "the medium of language" that we explore the inner life of the Christian.[44] It is also through the medium of language that we move to interrogate the reality we find ourselves within. The challenge of exploration through the medium of language, finds Capps, is to move beyond superficial language.[45] Superficial language affirms what heuristic vision of reality is already held, whereas to reach and struggle for the adequate turn of phrase creates the possibility of lifting one's eyes to more clearly see.

Language, Communication, and Vision

Helping adolescents to see what is in front of them will be done in part by speaking about what it is that *is* in front of them. There are different ways of speaking in ministry. The language and presentation of a sermon is different from the language of a bible study discussion, which is in turn different than the way friends might speak about God openly and honestly with one another. People will think, speak, write, and behave in different ways, depending upon the context they might find themselves in, and which meanings are present in this context. The form that a group of people's thinking, speaking, writing and

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[44] Capps, *The Poet's Gift*, 5.
[45] Capps, *The Poet's Gift*, 5.

behaving takes is referred to as a "discourse."[46] Perhaps an immediately recognizable form of discourse is heard in the way Disc Jockeys speak to listeners while on air.[47] Their discourse is a lively monologue that attempts to simulate a conversation with the radio audience. Political speeches are a form of discourse. Technical documents are a form of discourse. And children's literature is a form of discourse. The speech patterns of D-Js, politicians, technical documents, and children's literature are very distinct from one another. But there are still more forms of discourse containing more subtleties which distinguish them. There are language patterns of different social groups, genders, ages, and cultures can be analyzed to find that each grouping of friends inhabits its own patterns of discourse.[48] Each group has its own way of assembling a topic with speech. This is a patterned approach to constructing speech that goes beyond purely "intellectual content" and embeds speech with nuance and emotion.[49] A discourse:

> ...defines and produces the objects of knowledge. It governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out,' limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it.[50]

Discourse theory recognizes that the way we speak about topics has the capacity to call attention to particular aspects of the topic, and aspects of individual experience.[51] The way youth pastors call attention to Christian revelation and aesthetic experience is therefore, a type of discourse. General categories can be named concerning what such a

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[46] Goddart and Carey, *Discourse: The* Basics, 10.
[47] Montgomery, "D-J Talk," 91.
[48] Tannen, "The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies," 160–61.
[49] Lundeen, *Risk and Rhetoric in Religion*, 47.
[50] Hall, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and Discourse," 72.
[51] Lundeen, *Risk and Rhetoric in Religion*, 38.

discourse might look like. To give shape to these categories, attention is turned to H. Richard Niebuhr's work, *Christ and Culture*. In his work Niebuhr outlines five general ways Christians have approached their relationship with wider culture. Building upon Niebuhr's fives types of Christ and culture interactions, a catalogue of five difference discourse styles can be developed. A summary of each type will be given, then a description of an associated discourse style will be offered.

For some Christians, the Christian community should be separate from culture. In this approach to Christ and culture, culture is seen to be a distorting force, whereas Christian community is seen to be a setting for mutual encouragement in the Christian life. Niebuhr calls this view *Christ Against Culture*.[52] In contrast to the sectarian position, Niebuhr also recognizes the church at times has tried to make itself acceptable to culture by celebrating the shared values both church and culture hold. For Niebuhr, this is the *Christ of Culture* view. [53] Some Christian communities are pleased to interact and contribute to culture without feeling the need to adopt culture or condemn culture. In this view a distinct Christian confession is maintained on the basis of the authority of revelation, but such Christians also see *some* divine order in law, reason, and social

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[52] Niebuhr (*Christ and Culture*, 68) appreciates that the "moment of withdrawal and renunciation is a necessary element in every Christian life, even though it be followed by an equally necessary movement of responsible engagement in cultural tasks" (68). Niebuhr calls this approach to Christ and Culture a 'sectarian' approach, and cites Monastic or Mennonite Christianity as examples of those who adopt this position. In defence of this potion, Niebuhr argues that there is no obligation on the part of the Christian to work with, maintain, or convert social institutions (49).

[53] Niebuhr (*Christ and Culture*, 86) has in his mind the liberal church which has tried to affirm enlightenment values of reason and empirical knowledge. The church in this category "sought to disentangle the gospel from its involvement with barbaric and outmoded Jewish notions about God and history; to raise Christianity from the level of belief to that of intelligent knowledge, and so to increase its attractiveness and its power" (86). Niebuhr did little to hide his distaste for this approach, arguing that revelation is underappreciated by the church in this mode. Says Niebuhr, "Like their opponents, the cultural Christians tend to separate reason and revelation, but evaluate the two principles differently. Reason, they think, is the highroad to the knowledge of God and salvation; Jesus Christ is for them the great teacher of rational truth and goodness, or the emergent genius in the history of religious and moral reason. Revelation then, is either the fabulous clothing in which intelligible truth presents itself to people who have a low I.Q.; or it is the religious name for that process which is essentially the growth of reason in history" (110–11).

institution.[54] This is Niebuhr's *Christ Above Culture* position.[55] The fourth configuration of Christ and culture is Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture in Paradox*. Citing the biblical letters by Paul, Niebuhr observes that there is a dichotomy represented in Paul between this world, and the world to come.[56] Those in this category are referred to as 'dualists' for they reside in this world, but belong to another. These Christians accept responsibility to culture, but also maintain loyalty to Christ.[57] How these responsibilities and loyalty to Christ is partitioned is not easily divisible, and Niebuhr places these in 'paradox' to one another. Lastly, Niebuhr describes what he calls the "conversionist" approach, which he terms *Christ Transforming Culture*.[58] From the perspective of this view, the Christian is a participant in a kingdom not of this world, but this heavenly kingdom works to redeem the structures of this world. In this view the future kingdom of heaven is being revealed in the here and now, in part through the church's participation in the institutions of culture.[59]

Before moving to locate some discourse styles within each of these five views of Christ and culture, it is appropriate to contextualize Niebuhr's work for contemporary times. The last of Niebuhr's views is the one he presents the strongest case for, but this is also the view that most represented the aspirations of the American mainline church in the 1950s.[60] Perhaps caught in his own aspirations to promote the church's cultural

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[54] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 156.

[55] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 143–44. This position has been the dominate position in the history of Western civilization. Niebuhr observes that the "arts and sciences, philosophy, law, government, education and economic institutions" have been profoundly affected by Christian contribution (144). Niebuhr also gives a short critique of this position, suggesting that an embrace of this position can lead to the "institutionalization of Christ and the gospel" (147).

[56] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 164.

[57] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 149.

[58] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 190. Niebuhr holds that Christ's sovereign rule can work to redeem cultural institutions and values.

[59] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 201.

[60] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 40.

agenda of his time, there may be more validity to his other views of Christ and culture than Niebuhr is ready to give in his work. Niebuhr's work also assumes that the "culture" that the church interacts with is a single uniform entity. However culture is not uniform in our contemporary pluralistic multi-cultural North America, though it was more so in the mid-twentieth century when Niebuhr was writing. In a multi-cultural setting, the church may do well to keep its distinct identity as a voice of truth in the milieu of competing claims, and therefore there could be more significance to a Christ above culture type, than what Niebuhr initially concedes.[61] Or perhaps, a new type of Christ and culture relationship should be recognized. Formatted for a post-Christian society, the church could view itself as an agent of *Christ Through Culture*, whereby the church speaks Christian truth through culture(s) to culture(s).[62] Perhaps anticipating such critiques to arise, Niebuhr has offered a defence of his categories. He is willing and ready to concede the fact that no Christian group will exactly fit any one category. He calls his study in cultural typology "historically inadequate," but maintains its usefulness, for his typology grants Christians the advantage "of calling to attention the continuity and significance of the great *motifs* that appear and reappear in the long wrestling of Christians with their enduring problem."[63]

This enduring problem surfaces again when trying to draw teenagers' attention to theological beauty. Amid the various other claims on young people's attention in culture,

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[61] Carter (*Rethinking Christ and Culture*, 40) notes that the church was born in the pluralism of the Pax Romana (23). In the pluralism of the Pax Romana culture was against the church. In modern North American pluralism, culture is also *somewhat* against the church (111). Carter suggests the cross is the alternative to the sword and partnering with, or combatting culture would not be fitting approaches to cultural engagement (114).

[62] Wilson ("Christ and Culture: A Belated Assessment," 8) examines if Niebuhr's types appear in homiletic discourse. Some indication is given that preachers tend to speak within one or two of Niebuhr's types. Wilson also suggests a new Niebuherian "type" of Christ and culture may be necessary for post-modern settings (12).

[63] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 43.

how can youth ministries call attention to Jesus? As these general motifs in Niebuhr's typology are created for this very type of problem, Niebuhr's typology will be used here as a generative means of describing how Christian discourse might best draw attention to Christ. The following table associates a discourse style with each of Niebuhr's five types:

Discourse style	**Chief Virtue**	**Guiding Value**	**View of Christ and Culture**	**Select examples from Niebuhr**[64]
Instructive Discourse	Duty	Purity	Christ Against Culture	Rule of St. Benedict, Mennonites, Quakers.
Reframing Discourse	Care	Relevance	Christ Of Culture	Schleiermacher, Hegel, Kant.
Discerning Discourse	Loyalty	Integrity	Christ Above Culture	Thomas Aquinas
Prophetic Discourse	Submission	Obedience	Christ and Culture in Paradox	Apostle Paul, Kierkegaard
Descriptive Discourse	Witness	Christian Vision	Christ Transforming Culture	John the Evangelist

Styles of Discourse – Table 1

[64] The select works or writers listed here may be better-known by comparison to some of the other examples Niebuhr gives. For reference sake, the Rule of St. Benedict functions as a constitution of the Benedictine religious order. Mennonites and Quakers are protestant groups who have carved out space for their communities, with purposeful boundaries between the community and larger culture. Friedrich Schleiermacher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Immanuel Kant were enlightenment thinkers who sought to give religious notions rational foundations. Thomas Aquinas argued that the world could be understood through both natural law (reason) and divine law (revelation). While everyone is responsible to the natural law, Christians are also responsible for the divine law that has been received. The Apostle Paul developed a dichotomy existing in the Christian heart between the desires of the flesh, and the desires given by the Sprit (see Galatians 5 for example). Søren Kierkegaard argued that the church ought not to act as a branch of the state, but remain true to its theological status as a creation of God's Spirit. John the Evangelist penned the biblical books, I, II, and III John, Gospel of John, and the Revelation to John. John the Evangelist's writing is particularly poetic and speaks of a coming kingdom transforming the current world.

In this typology, each discourse style takes shape in relation to a type of Christ and culture. Each discourse aims at shaping the church according to its guiding value by nurturing its accompanying virtue.[65] Seeking to preserve the church against culture, the Christ against culture type instructs the church in Christian duty for the sake of the purity of the church. Wanting to legitimize the presence of the church within culture, the Christ of culture type reframes Christian teaching, and celebrates the church's caring posture, for the sake of the church's relevance within culture. The Christ above culture type discerns Christian truth while participating in culture; living according to this truth maintains the loyalty of the church to Christ and in doing so, the church's integrity is preserved. Calling the church to turn away from the world, the Christ and culture in paradox type engages a prophetic discourse, calling the church to submit to Christ and return to the action-guiding convictions of Christian confession. Lastly, Christ Transforming Culture type seeks to offer Christian vision to those who might have eyes to see or ears to hear what the church sees and understands.

No one style of discourse is "the best." Rather, each discourse is guided by differing values, each of which is present in the Christian tradition. It is probable that most churches gravitate more to one value or another, but this does not exclude a church community from also recognizing and acting upon other values in the Christian tradition. There is harmony between these discourses in the sense that each contains its own orientation, but together, their goal is for the church to glorify Christ. Some might gravitate toward John's letters and gospel, and others might gravitate toward Paul's

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[65] Bennet ("Britain," 479) describes the work of practical theology as the "critical interrogation of value-directed and action-guiding worldviews" (479). The "guiding value" column in this typology identifies the primary value that informs each Christ and culture worldview. The guiding value informs the discourse style, which in turn, aims at inculcating a "chief virtue" among those participating in the discourse.

letters. No one approach is superior, and no one approach is inferior.

Each approach may also have a related place in the overall enterprise of providing Christian nurture. In some cases, an instructive style must be adopted to convey where the boundaries of biblical Christian practice are placed. A reframing discourse may be employed in public theology. The wider public may not be able to appreciate the nuances of Christian confession, so a discourse that speaks plainly about Christian practice will be important to relating to those outside the church.[66] A discerning discourse may be employed to reflective probe Christian action and scripture's witness, as Christian ethical norms reflected upon with adolescents. And a prophetic discourse may be adopted when calling out places in adolescent's lives where they have grown complacent in their Christian lives.

The sublime is present in each discourse as well. There is beauty in the submission and dutiful action of the *Christ Against Culture* type. There is beauty in the care orientation of the *Christ Of Culture* type. There is beauty in the scholastic details of the *Christ Above Culture* type and beauty in the command of God heard in the *Christ and Culture in Paradox* type. Yet the sublime as a component of Christian nurture is most critically present in the descriptive discourse of the *Christ Transformer of Culture* type. Seeking to elevate the role of the sublime in Christian nurture, attention is now turned to the descriptive discourse.

Descriptive Discourse

The language of *descriptive discourse* signifies more than communicating a basic set of

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[66] Burns (*Pastoral Theology for Public Ministry*, 45) suggests theology will at times need to proceed "by attending to context through listening to those who inhabit a particular environment" (45).

facts about a situation. The terms descriptive discourse being used here signifies language that is illustrative, expository, and evocative. This type of discourse is illustrative, in that language is used to communicate a perspective about how things are. This discourse is expository in that language is used to give meaning to the objects being spoken about, and this discourse aims at being evocative, in the sense that a participant in this discourse might come to feel a certain way about the meanings being expressed in the discourse. A descriptive discourse aims at using language to allow participants in the discourse to see reality from a particular perspective, and to feel a particular way about what they see.

The descriptive discourse functions in a role akin to a sermon in that the discourse aims at witnessing to what is good and true and beautiful. In its role akin to a sermon, the descriptive discourse is characterized by carefully articulating truth in order to help others to "see" what is good and true and beautiful. The descriptive discourse also functions in a role akin to a counselling session as the apprehension of beauty is a deeply personal event. The discourse requires a patient attention to the situation in which the words are received. The descriptive discourse is not an exercise in theoretical philosophizing. The person who "lifts their eyes," does so from a particular position within a particular situation. The words being used to describe what is good and true and beautiful should meet the individual within their situation.

Donald Capps has explored pastoral discourse that brings together the sermon and pastoral counselling. Capps finds such a discourse has four movements: first, identification of the problem; second, reconstruction of the problem; third, diagnostic interpretation; and fourth, treatment or intervention.[67] The identification of the problem is necessary as the words being offered should meet a deficit of understanding. In

[67] Capps, *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching*, 53–60.

reconstructing the problem, new and more adequate theological vision is cast. The "diagnostic interpretation" identifies how God relates to us with the aim of offering hope and inspiring hopeful steps forward.[68] The "treatment or intervention" aims at reviving or establishing "a continuous pattern of activity."[69] Pastoral discourse that bridges sermon and counselling discloses theological vision and invites a response. This too is the hope of the descriptive discourse.

An example of a descriptive discourse can be seen in John the Evangelist's writing. John stands out in the New Testament canon as being the writer who produces poetic manuscripts. His work is recognized as being the writing of one who seeks to persuade his readers through "narrative art" as opposed to a logical progression of an argument.[70] Artistry in the words and speech of theology is not simply for the sake of entertaining a reader or a listener. The artistry of word and speech is interpretive. In articulating a description of reality in a particular way, a person sets forward a vision of reality, and calls attention to points of emphasis through the artistic medium. Artistry in word and speech is not just for pleasure or attracting the attention of the reader. Artistry in such speech contains what Paul Ricoeur calls a "surplus of meaning."[71] For Ricoeur, artistry in speech and writing carry more meaning than the combination of individual meaning of individual words. Says Ricoeur:

> The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words, but the words are something other than short sentences.

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[68] Capps (*Pastoral Counseling and Preaching*, 59) suggests that diagnostic interpretation fosters what he terms "positive emotion" (59). Positive emotion inspires faithful "concrete steps" toward an envisioned outcome. These positive emotions are related to a person sense of "the way that God relates to us" (59).

[69] Capps, *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching*, 60.

[70] Sloyan, *John*, 7. John the evangelist does not attempt in his writing to prove the divinity of Christ through careful argument (20). He has a way of illustrating his claims, appealing to the readers taste as it were, as opposed to a reader's logical facilities.

[71] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 55.

> A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of its words.[72]

Speech and writing signify the reality a writer or speaker sees. The artistic sensibilities of a speaker or writer place additional meaning within the language being used. By saying something in a particular way, a speaker can mean more than what is actually said. Human beings can only act and choose within the world that they see and raising awareness of unseen reality, allows a person to conceive of alternative patterns of action.[73] Where reason and conjunctive logic cannot wholly represent God's person and action, artistry fills in the gap and offers a vision of the world otherwise inaccessible.

A descriptive discourse is not the same as revelation. Language, observes Eberhard Jüngel, can speak about revelation but cannot be revelation itself.[74] The descriptive discourse can only draw attention to what God has already done. Language cannot act as a substitute for revelation. It is God's self-revelation that "makes demands of language," and not language itself that reveals God.[75] For Jüngel God's action is God's being, and therefore "God's being as being is pure *event*."[76] The descriptive discourse cannot call into experience what has not happened. If no event of God's actions can be pointed to, the language of the descriptive discourse cannot represent God. But as events of God's action are present in teen's lives, the descriptive discourse can call attention to the significance of God's revelation by giving these events language and meaning.

Through the witness of the church, the biblical picture of reality is offered to

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[72] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 7.

[73] Hauerwas (*Vision and Virtue*, 31) argues that right vision is necessary before right action can be determined. The question *what should I do* is dependent upon one's confession of *what is true*. For Hauerwas, Christian ethics is not a branch of theology (per se) but a way of doing theology that aims to give a truthful account of Christian theology and the actions such theology entails for the Christian life (Brock and Hauerwas, *Beginnings: Interrogating Hauerwas*, 90).

[74] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 24.

[75] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 27.

[76] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 39.

others. The discourse of the church in the "Christ Transforming Culture" type is descriptive, for the church in this type aims to describe what it sees adequately. The church is charged with communicating not just a set of facts about God's reality, but communicating in such a way that the attention of others might be directed to the beauty of Christ and divine reality. The aim of this descriptive discourse is Christian vision, and what can be called: good taste. Speaking of good taste as goal of the Christian witness may feel inadequate at first. In this case however, "taste" is being used to represent the intuition that makes moral judgements possible.[77] Good taste is the interpretive tool through which actions are judged to be in keeping with the Christian life, or not in keeping with the Christian life.[78]

The goal of the descriptive discourse is articulating the beauty of God in his person and action. A descriptive discourse aims at speaking truthfully about God, and to speak truthfully about God requires representing his beauty in his person and his action. To speak about God without something of his beauty in person and action being represented, is to have not truthfully spoken about God. Speaking about God in this way

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[77] Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 60–61. Responsible or ethical action in Niebuhr's thought depends upon making judgements about what action is *fitting*, given what is going on. Yet there is no precise rubric through which a fitting action can be determined. A fitting action is a matter of interpretation (61). As has been seen in Murdoch and Gadamer (see notes 15 and 9), a sense of taste guides judgements about what is fitting for the moral life.

[78] Carr, "Gadamerian Ethics and the Task of Theology," 473. Gadamer's ethics are hermeneutical, meaning the right action is not a matter of applying a principle, but a matter of interpreting what act best fits a situation, given a person's present understanding. For Gadamer, all understanding develops through encountering other perspectives in experience, text, and dialogue (474). This is also true, argues Gadamer, of the sort of knowledge that makes moral judgements possible. Gadamer observes "The task of making a moral decision is that of doing the right thing in a particular situation—i.e., seeing what is right within the situation and grasping it. He [*sic.*] too has to act, choosing the right means, and his conduct must be governed just as carefully as that of the craftsman. How then it is nevertheless a knowledge of a quite different kind?" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 327).

There is some weakness to hermeneutical ethics, as a person's ever developing understanding cannot provide an absolute ground or standard on which moral judgements can be made. Stanley Hauerwas addresses this this problem in his formulation of narrative ethics. While it is true that a person's understanding develops over time, it is also true that understanding develops within the boundaries of a particular story about reality. Christianity is such a story (Wells, Transforming *Fate into Destiny*, 63).

does not mean language must be embellished to increase its aesthetic appeal.[79] A descriptive discourse is structured so that the attention of the listener is not directed to the language of the discourse or its speaker. Instead, language is carefully chosen such that attention is called to God's actions and person. Through this discourse God is represented and "re-presented" for participants in the discourse.[80]

The relationship of language to Christian nurture is especially complicated by the fact that Christian vision cannot be wholly communicated through language. Language depends on an object that captures attention, and language is developed in relation to this common object that holds a community's attention. Murdoch has identified this tension, saying that language "is far more idiosyncratic than has been admitted."[81] Murdoch continues:

> If the common object is lacking, communication may break down and the same words may occasion different results in different hearers. ... human beings are obscure to each other, in certain respects which are particularly relevant to morality, unless they are mutual objects of attention or have common objects of attention, since this affects the degree of elaboration of a common vocabulary.[82]

Murdoch observes that common language depends upon common context.[83] A common context depends itself, upon a common object of *attention* for viewers to form language about. The common object that attracts our attention, attracts attention (metaphorically, if not actually) by virtue of its aesthetic quality, and that which holds the

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[79] Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 143–44. Standing with Gadamer, Viladesau is critical of Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement, arguing that the experience of beauty is not an exercise in meaningless pleasure (144). Theological artistry (in its various forms, including language) establishes a relationship between beauty and "truth, goodness, and the sacred" (143).

[80] Viladesau (*Theological Aesthetics*, 181–82) maintains that art (verbal, musical, and visual) has the function of "representing" its subject matter as art serves to "re-present" its object (181). Says Viladesau, "God's proper reality is presented symbolically and metaphorically; the message is presented through historical narration and portrayal; the working of revelation, grace, and salvation is shown in representations of transformed human life" (182).

[81] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 32.

[82] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 32.

[83] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 31.

individual's attention represents something which is good or beautiful.[84] Bound by one's attentions, directed by one's sense of aesthetic value, Murdoch concludes that one can "only choose within the world [one] sees."[85]

In this final move, Murdoch's ideas about the sublime are linked to what this chapter is calling a "descriptive discourse." Experiences of the sublime are interpretive of reality in the same way artistry is interpretive of reality. The sublime directs and captures our attentions by elevating what is poignant and significant. To the extent that a descriptive discourse can speak articulately and poignantly about God's actions and character, the aesthetic quality of God's actions and character are made available to participants in this discourse. Seeing God's action and character, a participant in this discourse encounters more than just information about God, but also *feels* something about God. From these feelings and knowledge about God, a response to God can be given. For Murdoch, the sublime makes possible choices that were not previously possible, by expanding or focusing a person's vision. Having had one's vision expanded or focused, a moment of decision arises: How should a person respond to what they see? As a person begins to see God revealed in Jesus Christ, the decision set before them is either to choose for or against Christ and the Christian life.

Making A Genuine Choice Possible

Christian ministry does not create disciples, so much as Christian ministry offers the opportunity for discipleship. Youth ministry is not a matter of doing Christian things *to* adolescents in order that they commit to the Christian life. Rather, youth ministry, as

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[84] Murdoch (*The Sovereignty of Good*, 31) has drawn upon Simone Weil, finding help in Weil's writing to define *attention* as "the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality" (33).

[85] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 35–36.

Christian ministry, *participates* in God's own actions.[86] There is no silver bullet method of making disciples; which means Christian ministry is not a matter of figuring out which controllable stimulus has the greatest likelihood of producing discipleship results. Because of this, Christian ministry is not the same as religious socialization.[87] Rather it is through participating in Christ's actions, that Christian ministry invites a response to Christ's action and self-revelation.

Because Christian ministry is not coercive (or should not be coercive), it is to be emphasised that the present discussion about descriptive discourse and the sublime cannot be viewed as a means of making efforts in Christian nurture more effective. If ministry is participating in God's actions, effectiveness in ministry cannot be decided by relating human action to outcome. The effective quality in ministry is God's action. The faithful quality in ministry is human action. But even as human faithfulness can and does consistently fail, God's faithfulness endures. Richard Osmer affirms the important role of ministry in a congregational setting. However he argues that God himself is "already out there in the world ahead of us" effectively acting in continuing creation and ongoing redemption.[88] What a discussion about descriptive discourse and the sublime can do, is provide or affirm faithful practices that make possible a genuine choice for or against Christ and the Christian life.

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[86] Swinton and Mowatt (*Practical Theology*, location 220) argue that practical theology "enables faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world" (220). Swinton and Mowatt make this point while speaking about the function of practical theology. The authors main argument in this section of text is that practical theology ought not to be only the exploration of human religious practice (239). Practical theology should instead, discern God's actions in a situation such that ministry actions might better partner with God's action.

[87] Hunsberger and Brown, "Religious Socialization," 246–47. Socialization can be observed in almost half of young people who will grow up to adopt without expressly *choosing*, similar religious or non-religious sentiments as their parents. Adopting similar religious sentiment from parents or group is different than making a clear choice for or against Christ.

[88] Osmer (*The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 212) continues, arguing that the church *participates* in the mission of God (221). Ministry is important only because ministry comes alongside of what God is already doing and accomplishing.

In his *Theology of Culture*, Paul Tillich argued that the goal of Christian witness is to make possible a genuine choice for, or against Jesus. Seeking to preserve the place of choice in the Christian life, Tillich rejects any ministry approach that is guided by the question: "How do we communicate the Gospel so that others will accept it?"[89] Tillich hold this position for he believes that ministry cannot be a set of actions done *to* a person to ensure an outcome. This position must be taken, for if the acceptance of the Christian message to be genuine, there must remain the possibility that the message of the gospel might also be rejected. Tillich writes,

> ...to communicate the Gospel means putting it before the people so that they are able to decide for or against it. The Christian Gospel is a matter of decision. It is to be accepted or rejected. All that we who communicate this Gospel can do is to make possible a genuine decision.[90]

Before continuing to explore the significance of Tillich's position, there is some reason to suspect Tillich's contribution could be bound within the late modern Christendom in which he writes.[91] Modernism, birthed in the Enlightenment, celebrated dispassionate reason as the foundation of knowledge.[92] Writing in the Christian modernism of 1950s North American society, Tillich assumed that Christian claims could be presented in such a way that those who encounter such a claim would be obliged to make a decision for or against Christ. The advent of postmodernity and pluralism in North America have changed the way religious truth claims are addressed within society.

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[89] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 201.

[90] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 201.

[91] McCormack, "Why Should Theology be Christocentric?" 80. Existentialism, philosophical foundationalism and modernism were the ascendant or established philosophies of Tillich's time. Writing in 1930s Wiemar Germany, and post-war America, Tillich's thinking is situated within these philosophical frameworks. His interest in the modern mind of his time allowed him to speak as a Christian into his time. Tillich reports that his chief project was to bring the gospel to what he refers to as the "modern mind" (Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 161). It is to be recognized that in writing for the modern period, his voice speaks from a distance to postmodern, generally evangelical, youth ministry contexts.

[92] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Post-Modernism?* 28.

Lesslie Newbigin has argued that in a pluralistic culture, religious claims are regarded as personal values.[93] Such values are treated akin to personal preferences, and therefore not evaluated as truth claims about which one must decide for or against.[94] Newbigin expands: "in a pluralist society such as ours, any confident statement of ultimate belief, any claim to announce the truth about God and his purpose for the world, is liable to be dismissed as ignorant, arrogant, dogmatic."[95]

Despite Tillich's location in modernity, his instinct that the Christian life must be chosen is not misplaced. If the sublime draws attention to Christian claims in a post-modern context, Tillich's focus on choice and the Christian life is made relevant again. Tillich rejects the more radical existentialism of his time which claimed that a person is wholly free to choose who they will be and become.[96] Instead, a person is free to choose for or against the story they find themselves in. In some cases, the act of choice may feel to some more akin to an act of surrender, or an act of accepting oneself as a participant in the Christian story.

Therefore Tillich suggests an alternate question to guide ministry practice: "How do we make the message heard and seen, and then either rejected or accepted?"[97] To have clearly heard and seen the message of the gospel places teenagers in a position whereby if Christ is accepted such a young person as has some biblical sense of what such a commitment will require of them. In the case where having heard and seen, but rejected the gospel, such a young person makes this choice knowing what it is they are rejecting.

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[93] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 7.

[94] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 7.

[95] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 10.

[96] Tillich (*The Courage to Be*, 138) is critical John-Paul Sartre and Friedrich Nietzsche, which claim that human beings have no transcendent self, and are therefore free to choose whom they will be and become (139–42). Instead, Tillich believes that the courage to be oneself must finally be found in "being-itself," which is Tillich's means of speaking (in this instance) of God (144).

[97] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 201.

Tillich moves the initiation of the Christian life out of the realm of "habit, custom, or social contract."[98] No longer a matter of habit or custom, the Christian life must then become a matter of vision and decision.

As a matter of choice, the Christian life is therefore also a matter of intention. What it means to act with intention is the subject of an nuanced debate. Yet three basic notions about intention have been articulated by Joseph Shaw. Shaw's points summarize what "intention" is for the purposes of this discussion. To act with intention means to have a motive that persists in guiding an action toward completion.[99] Second, an intentioned action is enacted reasonably expecting a particular outcome.[100] Third, an intention may exist as part of a plan to be realized over a series of actions.[101] The Christian life is motivated by Christ, is sustained over time, and reasonably expects to glorify Christ through Christian actions. Nurture for the Christian life in this light, would mean nurturing an ongoing choice for Christ, or a continual conversion to Christ. A descriptive discourse, practiced regularly, draws attention time and again to what is most poignant and beautiful. A descriptive discourse nurtures the Christian life by persistently articulating theology for the Christian life, and placing the choice of 'for' or 'against' Christ in front of adolescents.

It is to be noted that Tillich's treatment of choice is concerned with conversion whereas this dissertation is primarily concerned with Christian nurture. Providing Christian nurture assumes adolescents have at least a nominal commitment to the

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[98] Tillich (*Theology of Culture*, 202) elaborates: "We who communicate the Gospel must understand others, we must somehow participate in their existence so that their rejection means partly an ejection, a throwing it out in the moment in which it starts to take root in them. To this point we can bring them, and this is what communicating the Gospel means" (202).

[99] Shaw, "Intention in Ethics," 205. A motive is not the same as an intention in ethical discourse. A motive precedes an intention and shapes intentions.

[100] Shaw, "Intention in Ethics," 218.

[101] Shaw, "Intention in Ethics," 221.

Christian life which is to be nurtured. But Tillich's emphasis on choice in the Christian life remains significant for the disussion of Christian nurture, for sustaining and deepening the Christian life is also a matter of choice. William James has argued that the act of holding a faith commitments has been a matter of choice. To live the Christian life, or to choose against living the Christian life is a "genuine option."[102] James regards the choice to believe as though an intuitive choice—as opposed to rationally deliberative choice—but still a real choice none the less.[103] The Christian life, as Eugene Peterson has observed, is a *long obedience in the same direction.*[104] As a sustained commitment, the Christian life is in other words, a sustained series of choices for Christ.[105]

Allowing adolescents to decline the Christian life through an act of choice is not the same as being fatalistic about which adolescents will sustain their Christian lives through youth group, and into adulthood. Neither does elevating the position of choice in the Christian suggest that the church ought not to care if adolescents choose Christ or not. Rather, the role of choice is celebrated here as the church does care about teenagers' Christian lives. Though the Christian life is always made possible by Christ, it is a commitment to choosing for Christ in all things that gives the Christian life meaning.

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[102] James, "The Will to Believe," 3. A decision is a "genuine option" in James' understanding if a decision is required—as opposed to avoidable, and if the decision is momentous—as opposed to trivial.

[103] James, "The Will to Believe," 9. The choice is subjective in the sense that our "deliberate volitions" have determined a reasoned outcome. James suggests that "such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set..." play into our willing intuitions about what sort of faith commitments we will hold (9). This sort of intuition is referred to by James as our "non-intellectual nature" (11). This faculty of our being is important to rely upon as objective knowing is difficult to the extent that "no concrete test of what is really true has ever been agreed upon" (15).

[104] Peterson (*A Long Obedience*, 149) observes that Christian faith "needs continuous maintenance" (149). The Christian life is not chosen once and then unfolds as if on auto pilot. Rather the Christian life is series of choices for Christ.

[105] Bonhoeffer (*Ethics*, 127) argues that the ethical life is divided into two categories "for Christ, and against Him" (127). Ethics for Bonhoeffer, is a matter of acting within in the will of God (46). Acting outside of the will of God is to act immorally. He takes this strict stance for he rejects other ethical systems as a compromise of the biblical witness (129). The significance of Bonhoeffer's view in this discussion of choice, is that to act Christianly, is to sustain a series of choices for Christ, and against all other "penultimate" concerns (125).

Choice is important as some people will call themselves Christians without fully appreciating what this title should entail. Perhaps such a person was raised in the church but has never made a definite decision for or against Christ. As the ministry of the church has not led such a person to the point of decision, in Tillich's view, the gospel has not been properly communicated. Conversely, others may choose to reject Christ without fully knowing who and what they are rejecting. Such a person may hold false notions about the Christian life, or may have assumed without a proper base of understanding what the Christian life is about. Still others, who are the primary interest of this dissertation, are adolescents who have chosen Christ on some level, but require nurture to live into the Christian life with a sustained commitment. It is a descriptive discourse that draws attention again to what is good, true and beautiful—Christ himself—and nurtures the Christian life through calling adolescents to continually choose Christ.

There may be some suspicion about offering a choice about the Christian life. For some churches who have been hoping to keep adolescents in the pews, Christian nurture has become an exercise in soliciting theological confessions. Andrew Root argues that some of the efforts expended in youth ministry are less about Christian nurture, and more about defending sacred space from secular incursion. Root caricatures this attitude toward Christian nurture saying we feel "...we need faith that is robust, vital, and sticky so young people continue to believe, and participate, in such a way that the space of the religious is maintained."[106] When approached this way, faith formation becomes the project of soliciting commitment to religious ideas and spaces. Root argues however, that Christian faith is not something that is constructed by individual people, but something that is

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[106] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 108.

surrendered to.[107] To be "in Christ" is not to have particular beliefs about Christ, but to be taken hold of by an experience of Christ. Root expands: "to believe is not to hold or to commit to information that qualifies you as a member, but it is to trust experience. It is to follow the experience of the living Christ, who comes to minister to you."[108] In this effort to ensure adolescent's theological commitments, the notion that faith as an ongoing choice is being lost. The Christian life is a commitment not only to certain theology, but a commitment to living in a particular way.

The Apostle Paul insists that "since we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others" (2 Cor 5:11 NIV). The language of "persuading others" elevates the concerns of evangelism and a subsequent commitment to a life of discipleship, for the ministry life of the church. Paul continues, saying that God has "committed to us the message of reconciliation" and indicates that Christians are "ambassadors" of God's invitation, as God makes his appeal through us (2 Cor 5:19–20). It is critical that the church make this appeal heard clearly. The appeal must be clear, for the nature of an appeal is not in guaranteeing a specific outcome, but inviting a decision.

The point of a descriptive discourse is not to force the fact of the Christian life upon others. An attempt to force a love for Christ misunderstands what genuine love is: it is an action that is given. The Christian life must be chosen, just as loving Christ is chosen. A descriptive discourse is a means of making possible such a choice. As the sublime draws attention to Christ, Tillich rightly sees that a choice must be made. The Christian life, though made possible by Christ, is a matter of a sustained decision on the part of the believer.

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[107] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 128.
[108] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 136.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the place theological language holds in Christian nurture. Faulted at times as being boring or irrelevant, theology was shown to be our interpretation of our experience of God revealed in Jesus. These sets of understanding are critical for giving direction and shape to the Christian life. While adolescents may have difficulty seeing the relevance of theology, reframing theological meaning in relation to teenagers' lived experience can make theological understanding meaningful.

This chapter also argued that the Christian moral life is shaped by the theological vision a person holds. Seeking to provide understanding of how moral vision is shaped, the notion of the sublime was brought forward. Sublime experiences occur when an experience of beauty gives rise to emotion. These experiences have the capacity to shape a person's sense of what is good, and therefore, are a foundational part of the moral life. This chapter suggested that God's beauty, present in this world and described in theology, can be apprehended in sublime experiences.

The category of the sublime can be approached in youth ministry through what this chapter called a "descriptive discourse." This descriptive discourse is a patterned system of speech that seeks not just to transmit theological concepts to adolescents, but allow them to see and experience God through descriptive and evocative language. A descriptive discourse calls attention to the beauty and event of God's action in our world. A descriptive discourse is able to nurture the Christian life by drawing connections between adolescent's lived experience, and Christ's presence and action.

The sublime however, does not make disciples, or deepen the life of discipleship.

The sublime only serves to make possible a genuine choice for or against Christ. Conversion occurs when a choice for Christ is made for the first time. The Christian life is a continual choice for Christ and can be understood as continual conversion. Located as one approach within five constructions of Christ and Culture, the descriptive discourse is an approach to Christian nurture that calls attention to God's action. Seeing God's action, the choice of how to respond to God is placed before young people. Some may turn away from Christ, not seeing the beauty of God's revelation of himself in Christ. Others however, will choose to deepen their Christian commitments and live the Christian life with renewed conviction.

CHAPTER 2
WHY GOOD THEORIES STILL BREAK DOWN

The importance of theological beauty and the sublime in Christian nurture have been set forward by the first chapter. But how do these notions fit into existing literature and wisdom about Christian nurture? In the previous chapter, descriptive discourse has been elevated in partial response to this question, but there is more to be uncovered. In literature about Christian nurture there are two dominant theories. On one hand, there is a body of thought that elevates teaching and Christian instruction as the primary means that the church employs to nurture the faith of its adolescents. On the other hand, there is a body of thought that elevates participating in Christian practice as the primary means the church has for engaging the faith of its adolescents. Both approaches are important in the faith nurture of adolescents. This chapter will demonstrate that both also depend upon drawing attention to theological beauty. Christian practice and Christian instruction do not aim solely at conveying Christian information. Instead this chapter aims to demonstrate that both approaches achieve nurture by drawing attention to theological beauty and inviting a response. If this is true, this means that failures of nurture may not be a problem exclusively concerned with content or practice, but failure of nurturing actions could represent the failure of these actions to call sufficient attention to theological beauty.

A practice-orientation to Christian nurture tends to be (but not always) associated

with more mainline or liturgical churches.[1] Geoff is a young man who found his way into the committed Christian life Geoff through participation in church life.[2] As Geoff would bring his guitar to youth gatherings, he regularly played in the band during Jr High worship. Invited to play with the worship band on Sunday mornings by a youth leader, Geoff slowly began to move deeper into congregational life. On his third Sunday playing in the band, Geoff's family came to church to support his interests. Two years later, Geoff's family have become members at the church, and Geoff enjoys participating in worship, the church's youth mission team, and bringing his friends to youth bible study. In Geoff's story, it was through his participation in common congregational life that opened an avenue for him to explore the Christian life more deeply for himself.

An instruction-orientation to Christian nurture is commonly associated with more evangelical-leaning churches.[3] Nurture in this orientation aims at communicating the truth claims of scripture. This approach also has merit. Sarah is a young woman who had grown up with church as a steady fixture in her life. At age fourteen, Sarah felt she would like to be confirmed. Through confirmation class, Sarah discovered the depth and complexity of Christian confession that she had not otherwise been fully aware of. Despite growing up in the church, she felt she has not fully understood why Christians do

[1] See for example, Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 15. Speaking to his theological commitments and his assumptions about theological practice, Browning claims "a liberal mainline Protestant" viewpoint. Browning's seminal work argues that theology is embedded in the practices of the church. It is to be noted however that a professed mainline viewpoint does not mean such a person is not deeply committed to Jesus as Lord, and the *missio Dei*.

[2] Geoff's story (and the two that will follow) are given as brief and general vignettes of faith formation. These accounts are drawn from several real people, but are generically formatted such that they could represent any number of young people's experiences. These accounts are given as a means of locating otherwise more abstract theories about faith formation and Christian nurture in lived experience.

[3] See for example, Parrett and Kang, *Teaching the Faith*, 59–60. The authors argue that Christian teaching should lead "unto salvation." This occurs as teaching is presented "unto justification, unto glorification, and unto sanctification." The authors argue that "the teaching ministry of the church ...must seek to promote the glorious Gospel of the blessed God" (60). The authors identify this approach to Christian nurture as broadly evangelical (61).

the things they do and believe the things they believe. After confirmation, Sarah became involved with her family in one of the church's mission programs. She reported being challenged by her confirmation class and sought to express her beliefs in meaningful actions. Though Sarah had a wealth of experience in church life, it was through a series of scripture studies that she came to sense (or understand) God's call to her in Jesus Christ.

Despite including teenagers in the practices of the Christian life and teaching teens the essentials of the Christian faith, young people still adopt nominal Christian postures, or give up the faith entirely. Among those raised in either grouping, there are adolescents who end up either taking a break from, or rejecting the Christian life.[4] Matthew grew up in a devout Christian home. His family read the scriptures every evening after supper and were regularly involved in church life. Matthew faithfully attended both Jr. High and Sr. High bible studies and Sunday morning Sunday school. As a result of his faithful and dutiful Christian upbringing, Matthew knew Christian theology, and was happy to participate in the common life of the church. In early university however, for reasons never fully elaborated upon, Matthew gave up the faith. This is a decision that has lasted well in to his adult and married life.

Though both approaches are supported by developed bodies of literature they appear to miss an element of what is occurring in faith formation. Both approaches provide reasons why adolescents commit to faith and the Christian life. Neither accounts

[4] Penner et al. "Hemorrhaging Faith," 22. Authors report an increased decline in church participation between childhood and adolescence, and from adolescence to young adulthood. This decline is present among those raised Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Evangelical. Attendance of at least once a month or more declined among Catholic from 63 percent as children to 16 percent in young adulthood. Attendance of at least once a month or more declined among Mainline Protestants from 76 percent as children to 18 percent in young adulthood. Regular attendance of at least a once a month or more declined among Evangelicals from 78 percent as children to 48 percent in young adulthood.

fully for why adolescents disengage.[5] The fact that adolescents distance themselves from the committed Christian life, despite participation in church life and Bible study, signals that there is more occurring in faith formation than present practice of Christian nurture addresses. Identifying what may be missing from either discourse could serve to offer a fuller understanding of faith formation. The exploration take unfolds in this chapter will demonstrate that the missing ingredient is a sense of theological beauty.

Adolescents and Faith: A Lay of the Land

Arguing for the place of theological beauty in Christian nurture is not simply an exercise in abstract theological musing. This discussion is important as there is a small crisis occurring among church's adolescents: many are distancing themselves from the Christian life and Christian community. Literature describing adolescents and young adults in the North American church is concerned with a developing trend. A documented "religious slump" is seen in those who graduate youth groups and move onto college campuses.[6] Statistics are described as "alarming."[7] The absence of young adults from the church is a "wake-up call."[8] This faith attrition occurs at roughly the same rate between Canada and the United States. Four out of ten young adults raised in Canadian

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[5] Faith formation can sometimes be approached assuming that if faith-mitigating influences are controlled, the Christian life will emerge. But the Christian life is not a matter of social engineering, even though social context can have an influence on faith commitment (Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 99). Faith and Christian commitment are first, a theological reality. Karl Rahner speaks of the mystical and theological quality of faith saying:

"The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all. 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 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" (Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, 22).

[6] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 12.

[7] Powel and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 16.

[8] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 15.

evangelical settings, continue to attend weekly services.[9]

In the U.S., 59 percent of young adults raised in the church drop out of regular attendance during young adulthood. [10] This U.S. statistic translates into roughly 4 in 10 young adults who stay, which is congruent with the Canadian demographic. In the Canadian setting, sociologist Reginald Bibby records a significant exodus of adolescents and young adults from Canadian churches between 1984 and 2008.[11] Bibby reports the teen population in Canada at the time of each study, 50 percent of teens identified as Catholic and 35 percent identified as Protestant in 1984. In 2008, 32 percent reported identifying as Catholic and 13 percent as Protestant. Teens reporting no religious affiliation rose from 12 percent in 1984 to 32 percent in 2008. The church in Canada between 1984 and 2008 has presided over a significant exodus from the church, and thus far churches have been unable to draw those who left, or their children, back into the fold. More recently, the rate of faith attrition in Canada has been reported on by the "Hemorrhaging Faith" study.[12] Hemorrhaging Faith's authors report that one in ten young adults raised attending mainline or Catholic churches will persist in their faith into adulthood, while four in ten raised in evangelical traditions will keep their faith into adulthood.[13] A follow-up study to Hemorrhaging Faith, "Renegotiating Faith" found young adult participation in church declined by comparison to the participation of respondents while adolescents.[14] Regular weekly attendance fell in Canada from 38.2 percent of self-identifying Christians as teens, to 24.4 percent of these same respondents

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[9] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 22.
[10] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23.
[11] Bibby, *Resilient Gods*, 36.
[12] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 28.
[13] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 22.
[14] Hiemstra et al.,"Renegotiating Faith," 104.

as young adults.[15] 19.6 percent of young adults who formerly identified as Christian while in their teen years, no longer participate in worship services.[16]

In the United States, studies of young people's religiosity yield similar ballpark figures. The National Survey of Youth and Religion (NYSR) found that 35.4 percent of young adults aged 18 to 23 never attend religious services, which accounts for an 18.4 percent increase since respondents were polled at ages 13 to 17.[17] NYSR also reports 24.1 percent of adults 18 to 23 report being non-religious, which is a 13.1 percent increase since respondents were polled at ages 13 to 17.[18] In a study of religion among U.S. millennials, Pew Research found 25 percent of millennials reported having no religious affiliation, by comparison to 14 percent of those over thirty years old reporting no religion.[19] Having aggregated data from several supporting studies, the authors of *Sticky Faith* conclude that in the U.S., between 40 and 50 percent of teens will give up their faith as young adults—though some only for a period of time.[20]

This recent research indicates that the church is at risk of losing a generation: a missing demographic is becoming noticeable in many or most congregations. Blame for this trend is to be spread upon a few culprits. One factor is the secular age Western culture has adopted. Charles Taylor has observed that in our secular age, the plausibility conditions for belief have shifted. In the past the world was known and understood through religious creed, sentiment, and experience.[21] In our secular age society agreed

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[15] Hiemstra et al.,"Renegotiating Faith," 104.
[16] Hiemstra et al.,"Renegotiating Faith," 104.
[17] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 112.
[18] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 106.
[19] Pew Research, "Religion Among the Millennials," 3.
[20] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 15, 213n2.
[21] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25. Taylor argues that assumptions about God in the medieval world were "implicated in the very existence of society" (25). In this world, people's understanding was contained to their experience (31). Taylor points out that in this "enchanted" world where God and spirits

upon commonly accessible, objective standards for knowledge. If something is to be considered plausible and believable, we have come to assume such knowledge requires empirical verification. Believing reason to be an invulnerable standard for knowing, objective truth has become the accepted grounds on which public knowledge is validated.[22] Subjective knowledge is not necessarily a less adequate means of knowledge.[23] But in this secular age, belief in the transcendent *feels* to be out of place as knowledge of God is not independently verifiable. As society confesses skepticism about subjective knowledge, participation in religious communities declines proportionately.

But faith attrition is a product of more than Western culture's enthusiasm for reason. The 21st century has featured declines of membership not only in religious groups, but in civic and political groups as well.[24] This decline of participation in membership organizations is caused in part by the pressures of time and money in two-career families, individualistic electronic entertainment, and shifting generational values.[25] Where older generations were motivated by a sense of duty in the civic and

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where assumed to exist, meaning discovered by humans, as opposed to created by humans—for meaning came from a transcendent realm (35).

[22] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 300–301. Though convenient for avoiding confusion on account of subjective truth claims, this preference for objective truth does not mean subjective knowing is therefore illegitimate. Of those things that intimate the transcendent but are subjective (such as music, poetry, painting), Taylor argues our secular age has grounded these impulses in "a scientific anthropology which [is] very reductive and flat" (356).

[23] It is worth noting that revelation is not a mode of knowing that is subject to empirical validation. Revelation is knowledge given to a person or group, and by definition, is not accessible by reason. An argument for the validity of revelation as a source of knowledge is briefly outlined in Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 13 ff. A philosophical investigation of revelation as a source of moral knowledge is undertaken in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. For Kierkegaard, "faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off" (Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," 106).

[24] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 16. Putnam observes that community organizations across the board have difficulty filling their ranks as older members age out of active membership. In addition to religious groups, this phenomenon is evidenced in the decline of voter turnout and participating in democratic systems (32). Declines are measurable in labour union's membership and participation (81). And service organizations such as the Red Cross, Kiwanis, and Lions Club, also suffer from a lack of volunteers (117).

[25] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 283.

religious sphere, this sense of duty is less pronounced in modern Western culture.[26] Taking the place of a sense of meaning in fulfilling one's duty is a sense that meaning is achieved in authentically expressing one's individuality.[27] In this frame, adolescents would find little sense in participating in church life or deepening the Christian life, if they felt those identity markers were not 'authentic' to the self they wish to become.

Some features of church life can also push adolescents away from Christian community and the nurture this community provides. There are also charges that church communities can be overprotective, shallow, or intellectually dishonest.[28] Ministry workers can in some cases lack wisdom about Christian nurture or best practice standards—which could contribute to teenagers' sense that churches are overprotective, shallow, or intellectually dishonest. Karen E. Jones reports 52 percent of youth pastors do not have a seminary or equivalent level of education.[29] Roughly one-third of youth pastors are under 25 years old, and notably within the Assemblies of God, 55 percent of youth pastors are under 25 years old.[30] Ministry does not rise and fall on a seminary education, but it is true that critical reflection affords at least some wisdom about faith formation.

Lastly, some of the cause of declining commitment to the Christian life lies in parent's religious sentiments. Adolescents tend to adopt the religious sentiments and

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[26] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 30.

[27] Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 85–86. Smith suggests that *authenticity* is the driving cultural value of our times. Being authentic has trumped all communal identities such as citizenship or religion (86). The "age of authenticity" is evidenced in the ethic of tolerance Western society has adopted; the chief sin of our secular age is to be intolerant of another's authentic self-expression (87). Seeking to be authentically themselves, young people are more likely to reject traditional religious practice on the ground that religious convention inhibits authentic self-expression. Young people continue to have religious sentiment, but in the age of authenticity, some will come to express they are "spiritual, but not religious" (90).

[28] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 97, 115, 188.

[29] Jones, "Setting Ministry Goals," 237.

[30] Jones, "Setting Ministry Goals," 231.

enthusiasm of their parents.[31] In some cases, parent's vibrant faith is caught and expressed in teens' and young adults' committed Christian lives. In other cases, parent's nominally religious lifestyle imparts little that would inspire their children to explore the Christian life.

Anxiety-Driven Youth Ministry

This situation places some pressure on youth ministry. There is some anxiety about the future of youth and young adults in the church. The anxieties of the church can at times serve to place expectations upon the youth ministry program to reverse the trends that have been observed. Anxiety is directed toward "adolescent indifference" and "parental irresponsibility," together which can feel to like forces undermining the church's work.[32] Directed by these anxieties, youth ministry can lose focus. James K. A. Smith has offered a caricature of what a youth ministry guided by the anxiety of losing emerging generations looks like. Inviting his reader to envision a weeknight youth ministry at a local church, Smith describes this scene:

> You walk into a kind of loft space that combines various elements of an arcade, a coffee shop, a dance club, and a family rec room. The room is dripping with energy, an unrelenting sense of scripture happiness that is synonymous with being 'upbeat'—even while trying to communicate that this is a place where young people can 'chill.' Above all, it is trying very hard to be a place where young people *want* to be. Some kids are gathered around an Xbox playing video games, much as they would in a friend's basement. Others are lounging on couches, looking at Instagram and vaguely chatting with one another, catching up on their week. Still others are sticking close to tables laden with donuts and juice and M&Ms.[33]

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[31] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56.
[32] Van Meter, *Created in Delight*, 2.
[33] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 143.

Smith continues, indicating a youth pastor at a certain point gathers group members to the auditorium. In the auditorium youthful worship is offered as a "substitute" for congregational Sunday morning worship.[34] Seeking to usher adolescents into the committed Christian life, many in the North American church suppose that adolescents require a separate, special worship experience that will uniquely engage them; one that makes up for the alleged deficits of congregational worship. The worship involves a youthful and stylized band, with an atmosphere reminiscent of a music club. Songs often are first loud and catchy, and move progressively to quieter songs suitable for adolescents to get in touch with their emotions.[35] There is a funny skit to introduce a message, and the message concerns itself with God's concern for adolescents to feel good about themselves. Touchpoints to modern culture are frequently made, to "reinforce a sense that Christianity is relevant."[36]

It is to be observed that something might be out-of-place in youth ministry, if the work of youth ministry is about making Jesus relevant to adolescents. Chap Clark and Kara Powell recognize there is a temptation to rely too heavily upon outcome-oriented practice. In *Sticky Faith*, Clark and Powell outline practices that have been systematically observed to increase the likelihood of a young person's faith persisting into their adult years.[37] The authors also suggest that these practices should be understood and applied by parents and church. Clark and Powell indicate that a "haphazard" approach to nurturing the faith of adolescents has not given adolescents a faith that is sustainable, and therefore

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[34] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 143–44.

[35] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 144.

[36] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 144.

[37] To offer three examples; Clark and Powell find that faith is more likely to be retained if parents speak with children about their times of doubt (Clark and Powell, *Sticky Faith*, 72). Faith is more likely to be retained if adolescents participate in intergenerational worship (97). And faith is more likely to be retained if a young person can be part of a Christian justice endeavour they find meaningful (131–34).

they suggest critically informed and persistent practice.[38] Clark and Powell also recognize that outcome-oriented, research-based practice *itself* is insufficient for forming lifelong disciples of Christ. The authors appeal to their readers, saying "we are full of suggestions. But our top suggestion in this: trust the Lord with your kids and continue to ask — maybe at times beg — the Lord to build in them a Sticky Faith."[39]

There is a need to approach the question of Christian nurture from a perspective insulated from the anxiety. The anxiety that has lain beneath the surface of our contemporary discussion about Christian nurture has led to youth ministries that place high expectation on human agency for ministry outcomes. This is understandable, as human action is critically important to ministry. There is wisdom however, in bracketing an emphasis on human agency for a moment to have a clearer view of Christian nurture. Such a view would also be less influenced by anxiety about the future of the church. To bracket anxiety, an approach is adopted for the purpose of this study that does not focus on ministry outcomes (as important as these are).

Working to close off the avenues through which adolescents depart from the Christian life is a good impulse to have. However it is to be noted that working to prevent adolescents from discarding their faith is not wholly the same as nurturing faith. A choice for the Christian life is not a matter of having other life paths closed off. Entering the Christian life is a matter of responding with love to Jesus Christ. Similarly, ministry is not a matter of effecting Christian behaviours. Instead, ministry occurs as adolescents encounter God's action.[40] Addressed by Christ's love an invitation is made to love Christ

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[38] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 27.

[39] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 29.

[40] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, location 496–501. The authors recognize that ministry actions are theological actions, for in ministry actions *participate* in God's own action. The outcome of

in response. If this invitation is accepted, behaviour can be expected to follow (Jas 2:18). Aiming at behaviour first misunderstands the place of human choice and God's action in ministry. In the face of the fear of losing their young people, congregations may select for practices that appear to offer *effective* faith nurture. Ministry practice that only attends to outcomes and the techniques that produce such outcomes, is not properly ministry, but human action alone.

There is therefore, a need to renew our vision for Christian nurture. Being caught up in anxiety, the church's Christian nurture efforts have been backed into a metaphorical corner. Feeling like the church is running out of options, and anxious about the loss of adolescents, the thinking about Christian nurture has been driven by achieving ministry outcomes. The primary outcome being sought, is the retention of adolescents in church pews. While ministry outcomes are tremendously important, the assumption lurking in this outcome-oriented practice is that human agents must pick-up the slack that Jesus appears to be dropping. Renewing vision for Christian nurture is required to reposition the practice of Christian nurture in theological ground.

The renewal of vision means a hermeneutic process. There is a need to see differently; not excluding the wisdom of the existing body of literature about Christian nurture, but in concert with this body of literature. A means for sifting, discerning, and fusing ideas has been made available in Hans Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

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ministry can be evidenced in behaviour, but ministry cannot be simply an exercise in behaviour modification.

Gadamer and the Study of Christian Nurture

A note of explanation is required before proceeding. It is to be understood that the general conclusions of the hermeneutic process just called for, have already been alluded to in outline format, within the first chapter of this dissertation. The first chapter has outlined in broad strokes where this dissertation's investigation and research has landed. A vision for the sublime and a descriptive discourse was laid out. These conclusions represent the end of a hermeneutic process and renewal of vision for Christian nurture. The theological response to the present problems being encountered in Christian nurture, is not to try harder, but to elevate theological beauty. Jesus will draw all people unto himself (John 12:32), and though he will use the church in this task, he is finally responsible for the work. It is only fitting then, to lift Jesus up and allow him to draw adolescents to himself.

The investigative method that can address the need for a renewal of vision, and support the claims of the first chapter, is drawn from the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and his hermeneutic phenomenology. Gadamer's landmark work, *Truth and Method*, is a critique of interpretation arising from the supposed "unbiased" rationality of the enlightenment. In Gadamer's view, reason is always guided by a tradition, and cannot be recognized as reason outside of the tradition in which the reasoning occurs.[41] Gadamer argues that all reasoning and knowing takes form in a set of pre-understandings. These pre-understandings (or prejudices) cause the interpreter to "project" the reasoning of their tradition into the text or situation being interpreted.[42] In Gadamer's view, the finite human being therefore always interprets truth according to their own horizon of

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[41] Lawn, *Gadamer*, 35.
[42] Warnke, *Gadamer*, 76–77.

understanding. One's horizon of understanding is "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."[43] While a horizon is one's viewpoint from a particular location, a "tradition" is the set of assumptions that a person brings to their viewpoint.[44] In some cases it is helpful to speak of 'traditions,' as this language references a body of thought and logic in which individuals form their individual perspectives. In a sense, a tradition is a grouping of roughly similar horizons.

Since truth is experienced from within a horizon of understanding, this means that the supposed objective rationality of the enlightenment cannot actually be objective. Further, this implies that understanding cannot be advanced if one relies solely upon one's own tradition of understanding. If one's rationality conforms to one's tradition, a person becomes compelled to break out of one's tradition in order to deepen one's understanding of a thing. Neither force of will, nor innovative methods of inquiry, are able to move one outside of one's tradition, for both are fated to begin within the tradition one currently resides in. Instead, understanding is created as one encounters the truth present in another's tradition. For interpretation to occur, one cannot "stay" only within one's own experience.[45]

In dialogical exploration, conversation partners encounter each other's pre-understandings, and uncover forms of rationality not formerly present within their own sets of pre-understandings. Gadamer terms this event a "fusion of horizons."[46] In the

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[43] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 313.

[44] Simms, *Gadamer*, 72. Gadamer uses the language of "tradition" to signify the fore-meanings or prejudices through which situations are interpreted. Gadamer's treatment of "tradition" is related to, but different from his notion of "horizon." A horizon is that what can be seen from a certain standpoint (78). It is our "traditions" that provide the rationality through which a horizon is interpreted. Gadamer says "the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality [of] tradition" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305).

[45] Velling, *Practical Theology*, 57.

[46] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 317.

context of conversation, the fusion of horizons occurs as "each person opens himself [*sic*] to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual, but what he says."[47] Such a conversation does not aim at situating an object of study within one's own horizons. Rather, as horizons of truth encounter one another, a fusion of horizons occurs, and new knowledge is created. The fusion of horizons is not limited to conversational dialogue. The encounter of horizons also occurs in reading a text, or observing a situation. The Gadamerian fusion of horizons is a constructive knowing; the hermeneutical goal exists between horizons, arrived at through the fusion of horizons.[48] The aim of this mode of exploration is the renewal of normative vision for faith formation in youth ministry contexts. Normative vision is the primary, images, stories and meanings that guide a practice or a tradition.[49] Normative theology's role is to be a "guide and a corrective alongside practice."[50] To articulate normative vision, two horizons of truth will be brought together in dialogue.

The body of literature about youth ministry and Christian nurture is regarded as the "espoused theology" of youth ministry in North America.[51] Espoused theology is a community's account of their theology and their theological wisdom. In the case of youth ministry, its espoused theology is reflectively and coherently laid out in the scholarly (and popular) literature written for the field. This literature will also represent in many cases, the "embedded theology" of youth ministry practice.[52] Embedded theology is the

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[47] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 403.
[48] Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, 306) says: "The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (306).
[49] Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Ministry*, 51–52.
[50] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 62.
[51] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 61–62.
[52] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 13.

theology that is expressed in the "preaching and practices" of the church.[53] Practical theology has been described as a discipline that aims at the "critical interrogation of value-directed and action-guiding worldviews,"[54] In both the espoused theology and embedded theology of youth ministry literature, value-directed and action-guiding worldviews are laid out and may be interrogated for the sake of articulating a normative vision of faith formation.

There are two broad categories that shape the literature of Christian nurture and youth ministry. Some within these fields argue that faith formation takes place through teaching adolescents a Christian worldview.[55] Others argue that faith formation is a communal event, where adolescents are joined to the life of the church through participation in the church's practices.[56] Literature from either category will not be willing to concede very much ground to the alternate perspective. Therefore the argument will be made that wisdom concerning Christian nurture exists within two horizons. One horizon emphasizes instruction for Christian formation, the other emphasizing Christian practices for Christian formation. At this point an account of the logic of each horizon will be given, and the initial steps toward a fusion event will be taken thereafter.

Giving Definition to the Horizons

The task of articulating the position of the two dominate horizons of truth in the field of Christian nurture begins for this exploration in Chap Clark's edited volume *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*. In this work a selection of five authors have argued for their distinct approaches to youth ministry. After each model of youth ministry is presented,

[53] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 13.
[54] Bennett, "Britain," 479.
[55] Habermas, Introduction *to Christian Education and Formation*, 48–57.
[56] Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 150.

the other authors in the volume are invited to respond to what they have read. Chap Clark, the editor, describes the book's intended function in the introduction. Citing changes in society, the advent of "practical theology," the church's interest in missional evangelism, Clark suggests that youth ministry practitioners need to "go deeper and... find more stable theological footing for not only what and how we do our work but also why we do it and where it fits into God's plan for the church."[57]

The essays in this volume also offer a picture of the present thought of youth ministry in the early 21st century, North America. Though there are five essays in this volume, the perspectives of each author tend to be oriented toward either a practice-based approach to Christian nurture, or an instruction-based approach to Christian nurture. For example, one of the essays in this volume presents arguments for youth ministry that is organized by missional practice. Though the missional impulse is outward and evangelistic, a missional youth group would approach Christian nurture from a practice-oriented perspective. In this perspective, it is through the practices of mission that adolescents come to commit to, and deepen, their own faith.[58] Two of the essays in this work are of particular use in tracing either horizon's approach to Christian nurture in youth ministry. The first position to be addressed here is put forward by Brian Cosby. Cosby argues that Christian nurture is best offered through church-based Christian education, exemplified in such practices as the catechetical class. The second position to be addressed here is put forward by Chap Clark, who argues that Christian nurture is most faithfully offered to adolescents through the welcoming embrace into the life of the congregation.

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[57] Clark, "Introduction," xii–xiii.

[58] Stier ("Gospel Advancing View," 7) says the essence of Jesus' discipleship process is sending disciples out to witness and evangelize.

For the sake of being even-handed, it is to be noted that in some cases youth ministry literature spans both perspectives. For example, Timothy Van Meter has reflected on how to shape an ecologically conscious Christian faith. Van Meter argues that it is important to clearly communicate (or articulate) why an ecologically conscious faith is important for Christians to develop.[59] Van Meter also proposes practices that would engrain learning objectives at the close of each chapter, as well as proposing four virtues for groups to practice as they become ecologically conscious Christians.[60] That some authors are able to bridge both streams of thought doesn't mean these streams are not distinct; instead it means some authors have made a point of balancing both approaches to faith formation.

But having lead with an account of either instruction or practice-oriented Christian nurture from *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, the accounts of both horizons will be filled out with literature from a wider base.

Horizon One: Christian Nurture through Christian Instruction

Cosby's chapter is entitled *The Reformed View of Youth Ministry*, and he opens his chapter by affirming the sovereignty of God.[61] This is important to Cosby's view, for he suggests that teens are "kept" in church through what has attracted them to church in the first place.[62] If a teen comes to youth group or church for video games, dodgeball, and laser tag, it follows that they will stay as long as their interest is held by these attractions.

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[59] Van Meter, *Created in Delight*, 28–31.

[60] Van Meter, *Created in Delight*, 99–107.

[61] Cosby, "The Reformed View," 37. In Cosby's view, God is the primary actor in all ministry practice (38). Having made this confession, he is very careful to also emphasise that human action is necessary and essential for ministry to occur. Cosby cites the importance of parents and the local church in discipling young people. He indicates that human action is used by God to "save and sanctify" through the "ministry of the Word, prayer, sacraments..., service, and gospel community" (39).

[62] Cosby, "The Reformed View," 41.

If a young person comes to youth group for the sake of encountering God, this is what will keep them participating in youth group and church life.

Cosby suggests that youth ministry ought to be structured in accordance with the "means-of-grace" presented in scripture. In Cosby's theological tradition, these means are: the ministry of the word, prayer, the sacraments, service, and Christian community. However, the emphasis is placed first on the ministry of the word. Says Cosby: "...the ministry of the Bible—preaching, teaching and reading—is the *primary* means by which God saves and sanctifies youth."[63] In as much as all means of grace are necessary for Christian nurture, Cosby's position is that other means of grace receive significance because they are biblically understood. Adolescents' clear understanding of the Christian life arrives through the preaching, teaching, and reading of scripture. Cosby notes that historically Protestant churches have focused on the Word taught and preached for "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Rom 10:17 NIV).[64]

There are other voices in the field of youth ministry and Christians who have views in step with Cosby's emphasis on teaching. A short survey of select writings will now demonstrate the support Cosby's position holds among those who study faith formation among adolescents.

Paul Bramer has traced the place Christian instruction has held in ministry efforts among adolescents in the twentieth century. Bramer argues that the Christian education movement was the North American church's default approach to ministry with young

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[63] Cosby, "The Reformed View," 43.
[64] Cosby, "The Reformed View," 44.

people over the past century and a half has been the Christian education movement.[65] The Christian education movement has—until the advent of postmodern influence in the church—dominated way the church sought to form its young people into disciples of Christ.[66] The center of the Christian education movement has been the Sunday school, and accompanying the Sunday school could be a range of church programs which are formatted to provide effective biblical instruction to their participants.[67]

Educative nurture received less attention over the past few decades than it previously enjoyed. Over the course of North American society's move from modernism to postmodernism, a responsive shift also has occurred in the way Christian nurture is approached. As society recognized subjective postmodern criteria for knowledge, the church's thought about Christian nurture also began to change. Attention turned from Christian education and ministry began to consider a practice-based approach to nurture which often was referenced with the language of "Christian formation."[68] Bramer argues that the cognitive component of Christian education has not been lost however. Practices also invite "critical-reflective" theological engagement on the part of the participant.[69]

Though given less attention, educative approaches to Christian nurture still find a place in youth groups and churches. In the setting of the church school or youth group bible study, Christian knowledge is extended to those who wish to make theological sense of their experience. The teacher (or leader, youth pastor, *etc.*) is tasked with conveying what is good, true, and beautiful about God and the creation He loves. This

[65] Bramer, "Christian Formation," 353. An instructional approach was assumed to be the right approach to Christian nurture, given the twentieth century's modernist perspective. Society valued objective rationalism, and conveying information in a rational and objective way seemed to be the best way forward (356).

[66] Bramer, "Christian Formation," 354.

[67] Bramer, "Christian Formation," 353.

[68] Bramer, "Christian Formation," 356.

[69] Bramer, "Christian Formation," 361.

type of clear instruction in the Christian life extends a set of truths upon with a life of Christian virtue can be built.

Fernando Arzola's sees the youth worker or minister as being a sort of practical theologian, for and with adolescents.[70] In Arzola's view, Christian nurture takes place as experience and theological understanding are brought together to shape faithful Christian action.[71] Arzola emphasises the transformative function of dialogue, as conversation partners reflect critically upon experience, for the sake of arriving at understanding.[72] Seeking to emphasise the critical role theological instruction plays in the Christian life, Eugene Roehlkepartain has stated that "Christian education is the most important vehicle within congregational life for helping people grow in their faith. Done well, Christian education—in all its many expressions has more potential for promoting spiritual growth than any other area of congregational life."[73]

Henri Nouwen, writing as a voice in spiritual theology and spiritual formation, has said that the one who can "articulate the movements of the inner life," can clarify the experience of others, and "remove the obstacles that prevent the Spirit from entering."[74] Stan Grenz, a theologian and ethicist, argues that "the ethical life emerges as God's people seek to understand the implications of the biblical vision of life under God for existence in the concrete moment."[75] There is an obligation therefore, for those who want to live as Christians, to know and understand what the Bible teaches, and presumably for most people understanding what the Bible teaches will benefit from some instruction concerning what the Bible teaches.

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[70] Arzola, *Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry*, 99–100.
[71] Arzola, *Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry*, 55.
[72] Arzola, *Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry*, 59.
[73] Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*, 19.
[74] Nouwen, *Ministry and Spirituality*, 132.
[75] Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 257.

The failure to teach theology clearly and faithfully has been recognized as a serious flaw in the church's discipleship efforts among adolescents. Kenda Creasy Dean has observed that the faith adolescents practice is the faith they have been *taught* in church and at home.[76] In many cases, what has been taught at home only vaguely reflects the Christian faith. The way adolescents in North America tend to live and articulate their faith is quasi-Christian. Studies of adolescents' faith in North America have reported that faith is *Moralistic* (God wants them to be good), faith is *Therapeutic* (God will help them to be happy), and *Deistic* (if they are good and happy, God has few other purposes for interacting with them).[77] In response to this quasi-Christian faith many adolescents hold, Dean, like Cosby, pushes the importance of a catechetical approach to youth ministry. Teaching the Christian faith is critical to forming the Christian. Says Dean: simply "...exposing adolescents to faith, as it turns out, is no substitute for teaching them."[78] Teaching the faith means offering theology to adolescents so they can understand who Jesus is, what he has done, and how the scriptures call us to respond to him. Says Dean: "Catechesis sets out to evoke trust in a person, and specifically the person of Jesus Christ, more than to inculcate religious ideas."[79]

Articulating theology for others does not exclusively take place in structured educational settings such as Sunday school classrooms, or bible study groups. Theologian and educator Thomas Groome sees significance in experience and practice in theological education. If theology is solely engaged in the domain of the mind, Groome argues that

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[76] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 29.
[77] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162–63.
[78] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 16.
[79] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 115.

students will struggle to meaningfully live out their theology.[80] For Groome, theological understanding arises as "faith is made conscious and reflective in an existential and historical situation."[81] But for Groome it is the reflective and critical thought about practice that gives practice its meanings. Though Groome does not discount the place of practice, he emphasises mutually critical dialogue and instruction for understanding Christian practice. Elaine Graham (who has also written about the significance of Christian practice for Christian nurture) argues for the importance of carefully presenting Christian theology to non-Christians. Christian speech to the wider world ought to be "first an act of discernment and theological reflection, in terms of trying to attend to what God is doing in the world, and where."[82] Such speech is important for, as Graham observes, a moderated presentation of the claims of Christianity to a post-Christian society, accounts of the faith often end up "decontextualized" and separated from the "historic communities of practice or discourse" in which Christian theology was first established.[83] Clear speech about the faith is an avenue through which others come to understand the faith, and to clarify understandings about Christian claims.

This range of writing in support of instruction as the primary means of Christian formation can be summarized: instruction in Christian nurture is important, because theological understanding gives the actions and practices of the Christian life meaning. If a young person is to act Christianly, they are required to hold some set of understandings about what the Christian life is about, and what meanings are being expressed in

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[80] Groome, "Theology on Our Feet," 57.

[81] Groome, "Theology on Our Feet," 58.

[82] Graham, "How to speak of God?" 215. Graham cites that in her native Great Britain, 53 percent of adults report no religious affiliation, and almost three-quarters of those 18 to 24 report no religion (207). Considering how Christians represent themselves to the secular world, Graham advocates for finding "points of engagement and dialogue" between Christians and the wider population (211).

[83] Graham, "How to speak of God?" 213.

Christian actions. Instruction provides the conceptual categories for discerning meaning in the actions of the Christian life.[84] Without Christian instruction a young person cannot perform meaningful Christian actions, as they do not have cognitive categories necessary for performing meaningful Christian acts. In the view from this horizon of truth, Christian instruction is essential for living an intentional Christian life.

Horizon Two: Christian Nurture through Christian Practice

The second horizon of truth pertaining to Christian nurture is a perspective that celebrates the place practice holds in the faith formation of adolescents. The place of practice in youth ministry is elevated by Chap Clark in his chapter "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry" in his edited volume, *Five Views of Youth Ministry*. Clark sets forward the metaphor of adoption, suggesting that as adolescents are adopted by a church family they will come to participate in the life of the church. By participating in a welcoming Christian community, a young person gains a sense of God that is inaccessible through reason and teaching alone. Says Clark:

> The goal of youth ministry as adoption is for every child, every adolescent, and every young adult to be so embraced by the community of faith that they know they always have a home, a people, and a place where they can discover who they are and how they are able to contribute.[85]

Clark outlines how he has arrived at this conviction. Opening his chapter, Clark relays the story of three young adults who slowly drifted away from church after high school. While formerly possessing a visible and vibrant faith, these three young adults

[84] Bonhoeffer (*Ethics*, 126) argues that there are necessary boundaries and norms for "Christian social life" and "Christian pastoral activity" (126). Enabling young people to make judgements about these boundaries requires teaching young people how think and judge actions from a Christian perspective. Being able to make judgements about boundaries gives Christian meaning to actions performed within the norms of the Christian life.

[85] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 85.

relocated away from one another and their church home in their college years. Reflecting upon these individuals, Clark proposes that a significant reason for their departure was the lack of "God-given faith community" in their college years.[86] Clark observes that the routines of church-involved high school students tend to involve regular church sponsored programming. Yet as students move on from high school, these programs can no longer serve as a sort of anchor to the church community. Students must instead, feel they belong to the community themselves.

Clark critiques youth programs that have not attempted to meaningfully integrate adolescents who participate in the program, into the larger life of the church. He observes that the content of many youth group messages addresses the personal: youth pastors push for individual choices for faith, and personal salvation.[87] The language and emphasis on Jesus as *personal* Lord and Saviour may suggest to adolescents that church community is adjunct to one's relationship with God. Clark suggests youth ministry acquired this individualistic approach to Christian nurture from early twentieth-century "tent meeting" style of evangelism.[88]

While the tent meetings and the attractional youth-oriented programming worked very well in the twentieth century, North American culture is increasingly post-Christian. In this new setting the former excitement of evangelistic crusades have not proved to be a viable means of encouraging fresh religious commitment from adolescents. Instead, Clark suggests that the scriptural metaphor of the body and the family should shape future efforts in nurturing the faith of teenagers. He suggests that youth ministry currently

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[86] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 75.
[87] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 78.
[88] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 78.

"models and practices" a faith that is individualistic.[89] By contrast, biblical faith is sustained and practiced within a community of faith. Leaning on N.T. Wright's work, Clark regards the church as the "primary means by which God has chosen to further his kingdom on earth."[90] God is the Father, the church his children, and in partnership, the ministry of the church unfolds. In Clark's view, youth ministry will do well to consider the theological reality of the church. At a period in their lives when adolescents and young adults are moving toward independence and adulthood, Clark suggests that the church function as a family that can support these developmental impulses, and demonstrate that the family of God is always there for them.[91]

Having made his case for using a guiding metaphor of adoption in youth ministry, Clark offers three practical reflections about adoption and youth ministry. Clark is careful to affirm that personal commitment to Jesus remains important in youth ministry, but he reminds his reader that commitment to Jesus is also a commitment to the church.[92] Personal commitment to Jesus is also an act of trust, in response to a personal call. This personal call is to belong to a community of believers and participation in the common life of this community. Clark suggests that youth ministry as adoption should function as a bridge, moving a young person from being adopted by a peer group (i.e. youth group), and toward recognizing their adoption by an intergenerational church community.[93] This adoptive process should begin in youth ministry, but continue throughout the Christian life in the common life of the whole congregation.

Clark's emphasis on articulating and teaching Christian theology to adolescents is

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[89] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 79.
[90] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 80.
[91] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 85.
[92] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 86.
[93] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 88.

somewhat thin. But having held up the significance of giving adolescents theology for the Christian life, it is to be noted that Clark assumes teaching would happen in an adoptive church setting. Clark defends what might be called a conventional youth group configuration saying:

> Adoption as the goal of youth ministry does not negate the important role of a targeted ministry that incorporates adventure, risk, mission and ministry opportunities, small groups and the like. Youth ministry as adoption is best conceived as a bridge ministry intent on moving the young beyond peer-experienced faith by leading them into the welcoming area of the adoptive family of faith.[94]

He assumes that inclusion in faithful church family and faithful youth ministry would include a set of Christian experiences and accompanying Christian understandings being passed to adolescents by virtue of their participation in the community of faith. He highlights this sentiment as he responds to Brian Cosby's critique of his view of youth ministry. Cosby, in a forward manner had written:

> ...to be rather blunt, I see your model as incomplete and unbalanced. The church as a family is one of the *several* means of grace that God has given us to grow and mature—at any age or life stage. Thus, I must disagree when you argue that 'the goal of youth ministry must shift away from segmenting young people off from everyone else to offering them a mutual, empowering, engaging, and supportive new family.' Rather, I see the goal of youth ministry as glorifying God by planning and watering the gospel through the means that God has already provided: his Word, prayer, sacrament, worship, service, and gospel community. Your model simply takes this last element as the foundation without giving balance to the others.[95]

Yet nevertheless Clark remains committed to his view of adoption, suggesting that teens will feel open to encountering God's grace through the means Cosby mentions, if adolescents first feel embraced and listened to.

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[94] Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," 89.
[95] Clark et al. "Responses to the Adoption View," 98.

Clark is right to critique over emphasising the "personal" in personal salvation. The emphasis of the individual is a remnant of mid-century youth ministry successes that have been carried forward to present times.[96] At this time youth movements such as *Young Life*, *Youth for Christ*, or *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship*, had begun to gather significant momentum.[97] By the mid-1940s in the United States, these movements came to enjoy a significant cultural presence. In 1944, Youth For Christ which was then home to a young Billy Graham, could hold single evangelistic meetings where upward of 28,000 would come to hear testimonies given and an evangelistic appeal.[98] Around this time, *Young Life* began purchasing proprieties for youth camps. Attracted by friends and the promise of a variety of entertaining amenities, adolescents' faith thrived in a Christian environment where leaders connected with teens one on one.[99] With youth ministry past and present interested in passionately calling teens to personal faith, notions about membership in a worshiping congregation can become inadvertently under-attended. Clark addresses this saying:

> As ...the community gathers—whether in small groups, for missions and service, or to serve the family internally or intentionally as they seek to engage with those outside the family of faith—the rhetoric, style, and experience of the gatherings must be an intentional recognition of the reality of our station as a family. For example, this means that 'worship' is never limited to singing certain songs with a particular flavor; gathering together is a comprehensive communal opportunity to collectively thank the Father who calls us his own.[100]

Clark is not alone in his intuitions that it is through participating in the communal life of faith, that adolescents discover and deepen the Christian life. Craig Dykstra

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[96] Cannister, "Youth Ministry Pioneers," 156.
[97] Shelly, "Rise of Evangelical Youth Movements," 47.
[98] Shelly, "Rise of Evangelical Youth Movements," 48.
[99] Shelly, "Rise of Evangelical Youth Movements," 54.
[100] Clark, "Strategy of Adoptive Youth Ministry," 20.

considers the role of Christian practice in the life of the church. Dykstra, interested in how people grow in their faith lives, singles out the unique function Christian practice holds in Christian growth. In Dykstra's view, it is through the practices of the church that the church "makes available to itself and to the world 'external means' by which the gift of God's Word and presence may come to persons and take root in them."[101] The particular practices Dykstra is speaking of, are the those that have been recognized by the church through history as communal activities that nurture the faith of the Christian community. Like Cosby, Dykstra refers to these practices as "means of grace," and suggests that participation in such means of grace place believers (or prospective believers) "in a position where we may recognize and participate in the work of God's grace in the world."[102]

Instead of recognizing five means of grace, Dykstra incorporates practices identified across a range of formative Christian documents (such as the Barmen Declaration, and the Westminster Catechism), to recognize fourteen forms of practice the church upholds for the nurture of the faith. Dykstra recognizes: worship, storytelling, interpreting scripture and experience, prayer, confession, living peacefully (accepting other's failures with grace), acts of service and witness, generosity, suffering with others, providing hospitality, listening and dialogue, seeking understanding about God's world and our place in it, criticizing and resisting evil practices, and advocating for and creating just social structures or institutions.[103] In Dykstra's treatment of practice, a Christian way of approaching the world is received as one participates in the common life of the

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[101] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 44.
[102] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 41.
[103] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 43.

Christian church.[104] Participating in the common practices of the church leads to the flourishing and abundant Christian life Jesus promises (John 10:10), and in Dykstra's view, Christian practice and Christian imagination exist in "mutual interdependence."[105]

Not only have theologians advocated for the value of approaching Christian nurture through the practices of the Christian life, but some also have argued that propositional instruction cannot substitute for direct practical experience of the Christian life. Dorothy C. Bass et al., have critiqued the privileged place theoretical knowledge has in contemporary North American academy and society.[106] Bass et al. find that embodied knowledge has been brushed aside, treated as if the knowledge that comes through one's experience is not permitted to be knowledge at all. Instead, Bass et al. argue that "we who live as believers do not do so because we can defend our belief within the terms of abstract universal reason. Instead, the life of faith is embodied and developed in relationship with God and others in distinctive times and places."[107] For Bass et al., our experience makes a form of knowledge available that would be inaccessible any other way. Celebrating the place of Christian practice in ministry, Elaine Graham observes that pastoral practices are *interpretive*: pastoral actions such as care or encouragement mediate the Christian story to who receive such pastoral attention.[108] Christian practice for Graham, should be "placed at the center of the process by which human nature is realized and transformed."[109] This practice-centred approach to Christian education recognizes that the Christian life is matured by enacting the practices of the Christian life,

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[104] Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 42.
[105] Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 43.
[106] Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 1–2.
[107] Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 15.
[108] Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 119.
[109] Graham (*Transforming Practice*, 130) argues that the form of Christian practice should be informed by women's perspective and experience.

and not primarily through acts of theological cognition guided by a teacher or ministry leader.

Depth and Meaning in Practice

To more fully give an account of what a practice is, attention is to be turned to Alasdair MacIntyre's seminal definition. In MacIntyre's view a practice is:

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[110]

MacIntyre's definition was not given for the sake of describing which actions have internal goods which nurture the Christian life. Instead MacIntyre gives his definition as a stepping stone in an argument intended to reposition Aristotle's account of virtue.[111] For Aristotle, virtues are actions and states of mind which aid a person in attaining their human *telos*. In Aristotle's view, the universal good for humans, is to *live well* by exercising the virtues. Virtues for their part are the praiseworthy aspects of one's character.[112] Such virtues exist in two categories: philosophic wisdom (or intellectual

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[110] MacIntyre (*After Virtue*, 187) suggests that the game of football is a practice, but the act of throwing a football skillfully is not. Laying bricks to form a structure is not a practice, but architecture is. Planting crops is not a practice, but farming is. Chess is a practice, but only if one plays for the enjoyment of the game. MacIntyre points out that if chess is played for the sake of obtaining winnings, the goods which the activity aims at are no longer internal to the activity, and therefore the activity is not a practice. Some activities have good both internal and external to the enacting of the activity. Painting for example is an action that becomes a practice if approached in a certain manner (188–90). Painting has standards of excellence which a painter aims for. Painting also has a history for the skills of painting are formed over time, within a tradition, and subject to critique and renewal. Should the activity of painting such as in a portraiture studio be undertaken for the sake of providing a saleable product, painting according to MacIntyre's definition is not a practice as the goods that the activity aims at are not present within the enacting of the activity itself. However, if a portrait is painted and sold, but was painted while the artist enjoyed the challenge of their craft, then in this case portraiture is a practice.

[111] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 184.

[112] Aristotle, *Eth. nic.*, 1101^{b}26.

virtues) and practical wisdom (or the moral virtues).[113] By introducing his account of what a practice is, MacIntyre is able to offer a revision of Aristotle's account of virtue. Says MacIntyre: "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."[114]

By making this move MacIntyre pairs the goods a practice renders, to the virtue with which agents engage a practice. Without moral or intellectual virtue, a practice is in danger of ceasing to be a practice. Yet with moral and intellectual virtue, a practice affords agents enacting the practice, the goods internal to the practice. By pairing virtue to practice, MacIntyre also drives a wedge between what a practice is, and what a technique is. A technique is an action which has as its aim a specific, often external goal.[115] While technical skills are often present in practices—for example a painter requires painting proficiencies—a practice has no fixed goals, whereas technical skills always aim at fixed goals.[116]

This discussion about the difference between a practice and a technique is significant when speaking about Christian practices and their role in Christian nurture. Christian practices are not techniques to achieve the goals of Christian nurture. Take for example the practice of worship. Corporate worship is an activity without a fixed goal; nothing is aimed to be accomplished in corporate worship. This is to say that corporate worship exists for its own sake and not for the sake of something else. If corporate worship were employed in a manner intended to achieve a specific outcome, the object of

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[113] Aristotle, *Eth. nic.*, 1102^{b}30.
[114] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.
[115] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193.
[116] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193–94.

worship becomes the outcome, can no longer be God himself, and then ceases to be worship in the strict sense of what worship is: adoration and praise of God. If great excess in corporate worship leads worship to be primarily about a consumeristic religious experience, worship has ceased being a Christian practice and has become a technique to make people feel a certain way.

Jaques Ellul has issued a caution about the place of technique in modern society, and his warning has implications for the way notions of practice are understood. For Ellul, "wherever a technical factor exists, it results, almost inevitably, in mechanization: technique transforms everything it touches into a machine."[117] A technique values efficiency and therefore is a depersonalizing activity. As technical activity is increasingly relied upon, Ellul argues that two outcomes occur. First, productions norms are created that impede spontaneity and creativity.[118] Second, techniques reduce agents and objects to entities which are to be understood the logical dimension alone.[119] Technical apparatus creates what Ellul calls an "artificial system" and the mass employment of techniques creates an "artificial world."[120] Giving his strongest caution to Western society's prevailing interest in technical activity, Ellul says "technique has penetrated the deepest recess of the human being. The machine tends not only to create a new human environment, but also to modify man's [*sic*] very essence. The milieu in which he lives is no longer his. He must adapt himself, as though the world were new, to a universe for which he was not created."[121] Ellul does not advocate the removal of all technical

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[117] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 4.
[118] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.
[119] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.
[120] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.
[121] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 325.

processes from society.[122] Instead, he writes to issue a caution about the place technical processes may being playing in society.

Ellul's caution about technique informs what is understood about the character of Christian practice. Namely, Christian practices are not techniques of faith formation. To treat practices as such, is to mechanize practice and obscure the presence of the good thing that is internal to the practice. While neither MacIntyre or Ellul have explicitly intended their discussion of practices and technique to inform Christian nurture, others have appropriated this work within practical theology.

Dorothy C. Bass suggests that while practices have goods internal to the enacting of the practice, the "goods" for which a practice is enacted, are not resident within the practice, but resonate within God's own person.[123] In coming to this position, Bass recognises that some Christian practices are also practiced by non-Christian communities. Bass finds that practices such as telling stories or caring for the unwell are practices that are not exclusive to Christian communities, but which are also regarded as Christian practices.[124] A problem arises in this situation for the question may be asked: in what way can such a practice be called "Christian," if non-Christian communities also practice this practice. Responding to this question, Bass affirms MacIntyre's instinct that goods are internal to practices, but in the case of Christian practices, these goods which are internal to practices point or orient participants toward God, who Himself is ultimately good.[125]

Bass and Dykstra have proposed a theologically informed definition for what a Christian practice is. Bass and Dykstra suggest that Christian practices are what

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[122] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 325.
[123] Bass, "Ways of Life Abundant," 30.
[124] Bass, "Ways of Life Abundant," 31.
[125] Bass, "Ways of Life Abundant," 30 n.11.

"Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world *in Jesus Christ*."[126] Bass and Dykstra qualify this definition by noting that "Christian practices are the human activities in and through which people cooperate with God in addressing the needs of one another and creation."[127] Bass and Dykstra also reject more sociologically oriented definitions to Christian practice, such as any that might intend to signify "small bits of action" as Christian practice.[128] Bringing clarity to their vision of Christian practices, Bass and Dykstra cite as examples of Christian practice, twelve specific practices: honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping Sabbath, discernment, testimony, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and singing our lives to God.[129]

The God-sponsored goods internal to a practice vary, but each addresses fundamental needs of human existence.[130] While goods are internal to these practices, there are also effects upon individuals who faithfully engage practices. These effects, chiefly, are the deepening knowledge of God, and a deepening knowledge of oneself.[131] As practices are not required for salvation, but do serve to relate the human person to God, it may be said the apparent function of Christian practice is primarily to express the faith that one possesses. As one expresses their faith and grows in knowledge of God and self, there comes available a deeper sense of assurance which in turn engenders a deeper commitment to the Christ and the Christian life. As knowledge of God and self deepens,

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[126] Bass and Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding," 6. In an end note the authors have appended their original definition with *in Jesus Christ*.

[127] Bass and Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding," 7.

[128] Bass and Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding," 6.

[129] Bass and Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding," 6.

[130] Bass and Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding," 8.

[131] Bass and Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding," 8.

one gains a deepening capacity to trust who one has consistently recognized God to be. This trust, in turn, offers assurance for the Christian life and affords the Christian a platform on which one can more genuinely place one's whole trust in Christ.

For this second horizon of truth, the essential position of this approach to Christian nurture, is that theological concepts and ideas find their meaning as they are able to relate to experiences and actions. Those who advocate for a practice-oriented approach to Christian nurture are not against leading adolescents into theological concepts. The body of literature that describes a practice-oriented approach to Christian nurture is deeply conditioned by theological theory and concept. However, this approach treats genuine Christian theological understanding as embodied knowing.[132] Such a knowledge of God arises out of experience of God, and experience of God is often mediated by participation in the practices of the church.

This second horizon of truth has been given more extensive treatment here, than the first horizon of truth has received. This is a matter of balance. The project of this dissertation fits more broadly in with the first horizon in that this is an unfolding exploration of how speaking descriptively and beautifully can communicate what is true. But the second horizon that focuses on practice is important in Christian nurture as well. Being more thorough with this second horizon should signal that Christian practices remain a critical part of faith formation. Attention to practice should not be discounted, even as this dissertation attends more to how truth is articulated than experienced in embodied practice.

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[132] Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 15. The authors argue that the enlightenment rationality, though celebrated as the standard for validating truth claims, is not the only means of validating knowledge. Subjective and "embodied" knowledge is an equally valid means of finding truth. Though subjective truth is difficult to objectively verify, this does not disqualify subjective knowledge as a form of understanding. The standard of objectively proof for truth is a *convenient* standard for mediating subjective claims, but finally, it is also an arbitrary standard.

A Gap in the Horizons

Having given an account of two approaches to Christian nurture, it is to be observed that each horizon is consistently intelligible on its own terms. Though internally consistent, these horizons, at the same time, appear to not fully account for why adolescents might remain indifferent to, or reject the Christian life. In the first case, the logic that adolescents need theological concepts to live the Christian life entails that these concepts need to be taught. It follows from this logic that experience or familiarity with practice is itself insufficient for a committed Christian life to emerge. Yet it is possible to find adolescents who know and understand scripture's teachings, but are not interested in the Christian life. In the second case the logic that practice grants embodied understanding entails that understanding is accessible through experience. Following this logic, it is understood that arguments and theories can only be appreciated as true, and therefore support the Christian life, if the understanding in question can be ground in a set of practices that require such understanding to be made intelligible. Yet it is possible to find adolescents whose Christian upbringing through family and church has not drawn them into a committed Christian life.

If practices grant embodied knowledge, teenagers who practice the Christian life, should grow into the life of faith. If teaching the faith articulates what is true to adolescents, those who are taught the faith should recognize the truthfulness of Christian claims and embrace the Christian life. A sense of why this decline occurs is an omission common to the literature of both horizons. By exploring this common area unaccounted for in either perspective, the Gademrian fusion of horizons begins.

It is to be observed that the nature of nurturing actions is not to guarantee an

outcome, but to support progress toward an outcome. As acts of nurture, it cannot be the case that either instruction-oriented Christian nurture, or practice-oriented Christian nurture should always produce adolescents and young adults embrace the Christian life. Supporting this claim, is Donald Capps who has argued that the psychology of religion is more art than science: there are no "colourless and lifeless" formulas to be known that will produce Christians.[133] Playing only supporting roles in faith formation, neither horizon can claim itself to be an absolutely effective mechanism. On this account, some measure of decline can be expected as adolescents choose to make the Christian faith their own, or not—regardless of which approach to nurture (if either) was primarily used in their Christian communities. Further, it is to be noted that the nurturing capacity of either approach may also set the stage for a future return to an active Christian life. Though young people do wander from faith at least for a time, a portion of those who wander will still eventually return.[134]

Discussions about the faith attrition among young people have a way of assuming that the phenomenon has identifiable causes. Take for example this chapter's previous discussion about the causes of faith attrition. In identifying factors that have a role bringing about religious decline, the assumption is made that these factors are the cause of such declines. It is to point out then (and argued for in the next section) that the Christian life is neither caused by, nor expunged as the sole result of social stimulus. Cultural and social factors do factors into rates of decline. But a cultural landscape itself is not by itself the cause of faith attrition. There is another reason why young people may

[133] Capps, "Erikson's 'Inner Space,'" 93–94.

[134] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 158. Roughly one third of survey respondents identifying as "loyal believers" (n=251) were also "returned believers" (n=83). This group took time away from regular church attendance in young adulthood, but returned in later adulthood. Study participants were adults who had participated in a leadership course at an evangelical summer camp. Of total surveys distributed (n=600), a little over a quarter responded (n=333) (19).

stall in the Christian life: human beings make time for what they *desire* to do.

Desire and the Christian Moral Life

Social influences do not wield ultimate formative power. Neither is ultimate formative agency present in either approach to the nurture of the Christian life that this chapter identifies. There is an essential non-cognitive, affective element to faith. Adolescents do not accept or reject the Christian life just based on knowledge alone. Not if the knowledge gained is from Christian instruction, not if knowledge gained is from practical experience. Instead each person adopts or rejects the Christian life because, finally, they *desire* either to be, or not to be, a Christian. Knowledge tells us what options are available. But desire is the faculty of human being that gives direction to the will. Desire, in turn, is shaped by what human being sense to be good and beautiful.

To understand human desire, motivation, and choice, attention is again turned to moral philosophy. In non-cognitive ethical theories, moral judgements are thought to operate more like moral intuitions, and quite a bit less like rational deductions. In this mode of moral theory, moral emotions are themselves motivating reasons for acting.[135] A seminal thinker in this branch of ethical thought, David Hume has pointed out that reason does not shape desire, but desire guides and directs reason.[136] In this view it is our emotional being that directs our rational faculties. We reason about what we desire, but

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[135] Greenspan, "Craving the Right: Emotions and Moral Reasons," 43.

[136] Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, 415. In Hume's thought, a passion or emotion is a mode of existence. Reason does not change modes of existence, for "reasoning also is [never] the cause of any action" (413). Reason is guided by a person's passions toward the object of one's passion. Subjective judgement and opinion can shape one's passions, but Hume regards subjective judgement or opinion as akin to preferences. For Hume, reason "is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (415). "Preferences are not moral, or immoral in Hume's thought. Says Hume, "morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of" (470). For Hume, virtue "*feels* a satisfaction of a particular kind" and a vice an "uneasiness of a particular kind" (471).

reason does not by itself motivate desire. If a person is on a diet, but wants ice cream, reason can create a method for securing their desired ice cream, but reason cannot adjudicate between the desire to be healthy, and the desire to have ice cream. Reason can determine the consequences of being healthy or unhealthy, but reason by itself does not motivate action, or direct a person to place priority for one desire over another.

To illustrate the relationship between desire and judgement, Simon Blackburn has proposed a thought experiment. He imagines a scenario where Kantian ethics have been successfully defended from all detractors. In this scenario Kantian ethics have been explained to all rational agents, and anyone at anytime can accurately judge whether a moral maxim is worth following. If the situation where any action could be definitively judged as right or wrong, Blackburn observes that ethicists are still tasked with the problem of motivating people to live according to their moral judgements. He observes that despite a population's ability to make moral judgements, "we [still] have to get them to love the law, or at least respect it, and this is another piece of brute care and concern."[137]

Human emotion and intuition shape how we feel about situations. The emotional life is so essential to meaning-making that several psychologists believe that "emotions themselves may constitute an important and irreducible form of processing."[138] Our emotions are not simply a nuisance that otherwise rational and level-headed human beings must learn to live with. Instead, emotions can be regarded as the foundation upon which cognitions and judgements are built. For philosopher Simon Blackburn, our moral life is intertwined with our emotional life. Human reasoning is always *about* something.

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[137] Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, 91.
[138] Labouvie-Vief, "Emotion, Thought, and Gender," 103.

Reasoning and willing are not random, but are given direction through our emotional lives. In Blackburn's view, the human will is "rudderless" without emotions to guide our reasoning and choosing.[139] For example, compassionate action is predicated upon being motivated by compassionate feelings.[140]

It is to be noted that not all streams of non-cognitive ethics are directly compatible with Christian confession. Some non-cognitive ethicists place so high an emphasis on the moral status of emotions that they assert moral facts may not exist at all.[141] Christians will find it difficult to resonate with a totally non-cognitive moral theory. Though emotions play a significant role in directing moral action, Christians cannot confess that there are no moral truths.[142] While some positions within a non-cognitive perspective are at odds with a Christian worldview, the notion that the emotional life is intertwined with the moral life does have Christian foundations. James K. A. Smith has found theological significance in the non-cognitive perspective, arguing that God has fashioned human beings are not primarily as rational beings, but primarily as desiring beings.[143] Smith

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[139] Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, 131.

[140] Zylla, "Inhabiting Compassion," 2.

[141] Anscombe (*Modern Moral Philosophy*, 5) argues that the language of "should," "ought," or "needs" is only intelligible in relation the subjective *desires* of the individual. As an example, she argues that a plant only "needs" to be watered if the person watering the plant values the flourishing of the plant (7). If the plant is to be dug up to make space, it does not "need" watering. Some philosophers (Hume, A. J. Ayer) argue that since moral "truths" are not empirically or analytically verifiable, moral notions cannot exist as facts (Fieser, *Moral Philosophy Through the Ages*, 228).

[142] Barth, *Ethics*, 78–79. Moral vision in the Christian life is not a matter of a rational Kantian formula (78). Neither is the Christian moral life a matter of conscience (79). Distinctive to Christian ethics is the notion that the Word of God is the command of God. As a record of revelation, the divine command is not subject to empirical verification in order to be true. Rather the command is true, because it is revealed. Says Barth, "As my decision comes into God's judgement, it is—as my decision—condemned. It is, as my decision, measured by God's command, apostasy, treason, and revolt" (100). There is still room for emotion and reason within Barth's divine command ethics. A person must still understand and apply God's command (reason), and feel motivated by the command (emotion), in order to follow the command. Blackburn's thought experiment still applies in the framework of Barthian ethics. Even if a person knows the command of God, they are still required to *care* about enacting the command of God.

[143] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 46. Smith argues that the human person-as-thinker and human person-as-believer are "reductionistic" anthropologies. In response, Smith calls human persons "embodied agents of desire or love" (47).

elaborates on this view, observing that what we perceive as good and beautiful shapes our desires and moral intuitions. For Smith, we become who we are, according to what we love. Smith says:

> What we love is a specific vision of the good life, an implicit picture of what we think human flourishing looks like. Such a picture of human flourishing will have all sorts of components: implicit in it will be assumptions about what good relationships look like, what a just economy and distribution of resources look like, what sorts of recreation and play we value, how we ought to relate to nature and the nonhuman environment, what sorts of work count as good work, what flourishing families look like, and more. ... our ultimate love is oriented by and to a picture of what we think it looks like for us to live well, and that picture then governs, shapes and motivates our decisions and actions.
>
> It is important to emphasise that this is a *picture* ... we are fundamentally noncognitive, affective creatures. The *telos* to which our love is aimed is not a list of ideas or propositions or doctrines; it is not a list of abstract, disembodied concepts or values. Rather, the reason that this vision of the good life moves us is because it is a more affective, sensible, even aesthetic *picture* of what the good like looks like. A vision of the good life captures our hearts and imaginations not by providing a set of rules or ideas, but by painting a picture of what it looks like to flourish and live well.[144]

It is the picture of what is beautiful that we hold, that motivates the type of life we live. This means that approaches to Christian nurture can only motivate the Christian life to the extent that the nurture provided paints a picture of what is good and beautiful, and demonstrates why the Christian life is the right way to live in relation to this theological beauty.

It is to be observed that theological beauty is not an emphasis in the literature that supports a teaching-oriented approach to Christian nurture, nor is theological beauty an emphasis in the literature that supports a practice-oriented approach to Christian nurture. Both horizons assume that a base of knowledge (embodied in practice, or understood through instruction) gives rise to the Christian life. When either approach fails to produce

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[144] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 52–53.

the Christian life, the assumption is that the blame for failure is to be placed on a lack of Christian knowledge. Working from this assumption studies are commissioned to find what critical factors are impeding Christian knowledge among adolescents. Following such studies, actions are taken to overcome influences that erode Christian knowledge among adolescents. These impulses are good impulses to have, but unfortunately, it is not knowledge alone that motivates the Christian life.

Adopting a non-cognitive perspective about motivation offers a different interpretation about failures of nurture for the Christian life. If it is the emotional life and its desires that motivate the Christian life, it is to be concluded that failures in nurture are not strictly failures of knowledge. Instead, it must be the case that young people who stagnate in, or reject the Christian life, have failed to see the theological beauty that undergirds the Christian life.

Neither horizon of truth has quite accounted for the place of the sublime in Christian nurture. Yet in bringing both horizons together it is seen that this is an omission in both accounts of Christian nurture. The Christian life is the lived response to a sense of awe and theological beauty a person has come to behold. Both instruction and practice provide adolescents with an avenue to knowledge. But this knowledge gained through these avenues remains inert if this knowledge is not set in relation to what is good and theologically beautiful.

The elevation of theological beauty in either approach to Christian nurture is an initial step forward in a fusion event between the horizons presented in this chapter. But this initial step is not a final step. As will be seen in the next chapter, shaping nurture to include the sublime can offer a picture of Christian maturity through the metaphor of

alignment with Christ. To anticipate the final chapter, where the fusion event reaches its climax, both horizons of Christian nurture come together in a curatorial approach to nurture. Teaching for Christian nurture means curating and present theological ideas for the purpose of drawing attention to the beauty these ideas represent. Involving adolescents in Christian practices, for Christian nurture, means curating an offering of experiences and activities that participate in God's action.

Conclusion

Two dominant streams of Christian nurture have been identified in this chapter. One of these streams elevates the place of teaching adolescents the faith, as the primary means faith is nurtured and formed. The other stream advocates including adolescents in the practices of the church as the primary means faith is nurtured and formed. Both streams bring critical wisdom to the dialogue about Christian nurture, and neither should be dismissed as ill-informed or uncritical.

While these two horizons of truth represent a developed system of thought and research, neither fully accounts for why young people either abandoning their Christian lives, or adopt a nominal Christian posture. It cannot be a matter of a lack of knowledge or religiously-indifferent social context that determines such outcomes. Turning to non-cognitive ethics, it was demonstrated that the Christian moral life depends upon reason and knowledge, but more fundamentally is a matter of *feeling* and *imagination* in relation to what is good and beautiful.

That the Christian moral life rests first in the emotions and imagination, does not mean that teaching and practice are insignificant in Christian nurture. Rather, this means

that the orientation of teaching and participatory practices employed in Christian nurture ought not to have as their aim information knowledge, but instead, theological beauty. Continuing this exploration, the next chapter will explore the relationship between personal alignment with Christ and the experience of theological beauty.

CHAPTER 3
NURTURE ALIGNED WITH CHRIST

Before continuing to speak about how aesthetic intuitions can be made part of an approach to Christian nurture, it will be helpful to take a step backward and give some perspective. While considering how Christian nurture might work, it is prudent to situate the *how* of Christian nurture in relation to *what* this nurture aims at.

The focus of discussion when speaking about Christian nurture should be both the actions of nurture, and the goal that these actions aim at. Thus far our discussion has focused on articulating what goes on in the actions of nurture. It has been argued that there is a need for inclusion of theological beauty in Christian nurture. As the place of theological beauty is elevated, some description about what these efforts in Christian nurture are aiming at should also be articulated. Considering what constitutes the normative Christian life will provide conceptual and practical links between the craft of providing Christian nurture, and the goal this work is directed toward.

The normative Christian life is the pattern of life expressed by the mature Christian. The mature Christian is a person whose patterns of life, and habits of the heart, are conditioned by Christ. Such a person's pattern of life would exemplify the exhortations of Christian living within scripture. The metaphor of *alignment with Christ* signifies both the state of a person whose life is so conditioned by Christ, as well as the path toward such a state of being through which such a person arrived at this state of

being.[1] In addition to holding a technical meaning that signifies the normative Christian life, *alignment with Christ* is also a poetic phrase that signifies a way of being in the world, and a set of experiences that are associated with such a way of being.

The rich meanings within the metaphor of *alignment* have a practical place in our thinking about Christian nurture. Without explicit intention to do so, youth ministry programming tends to tailor its nurture toward culturally bound aspirations and assumptions about the Christian life. Youth ministry can inadvertently aim at producing good kids, who are involved in church life, and who will carry the traditions of the church denomination forward.[2] These are not inherently bad things to have happen. But neither do these behaviours necessarily flow from Christian habits of the heart. The type of nurture provided by youth groups should aim at a whole transformation of being, and not just hope to conform behaviour to a congregation's culturally bound sensibilities. By introducing the metaphor of *alignment* with Christ, an important comment is being made: Christian nurture is not about behavioural conditioning. Rather, Christian nurture is about aligning the habits of the heart with Christ.

To explore the significance of the language of alignment for speaking about the normative Christian life, several considerations will be looked at, each in turn. First, it will be shown that the normative Christian life is Christian maturity. Second, the metaphor of alignment will be explored. Third, an exploration of how the Christian moves into alignment with Christ will unfold. In this exploration, alignment will be found to be attention to, and communion with Christ, that results in a Spirit-given disposition within the Christian. Alignment with Christ is the slow process of coming to see rightly

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[1] The language of *alignment* has been taken from Phil Zylla. This chapter aims to outline what could be signified by evoking the language of alignment to speak about the normative Christian life.

[2] Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 26–31.

and thereby, be transformed through attention to Christ. Growth in the Christian life is more a matter of honing one's vision, that a matter of brute human effort. To be aligned with Christ is a matter of "lifting one's eyes" to see Christ, and then learning to train our attentions on him.[3]

Normative Christian Life

The question of Christian maturity is the question of the normative Christian life. The normative question asks "what ought to be?"[4] In this context, the normative question of the Christian life asks "what is Christian maturity?" The scriptures offer a picture of the Christian life as moving toward a goal, or perfected way of being.

The scriptures speak to what ought to characterize the Christian life. Jesus evokes an image of the Christian life as a vine, growing and being pruned (John 15). Jesus also likens God's kingdom to seed growing within those who hear the "word" (Mark 4:14). This seed of the kingdom falls in various locations such as along a path, rocky places, among thorns, and finally among the good soil (Mark 4:15–20). The seed that falls upon the good soil grows to maturity and reproduces. The epistles of the New Testament also present an idea of the Christian life as a way of being that is growing toward a theological ideal. Paul speaks of presenting the Christian community as mature to Christ, as a result of admonishment and teaching (Col 1:28). He encourages his readers to "put to death" acts and attitudes that belong to an earthy nature (Col 3:5), and to put on acts of virtue

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[3] Recall from the introduction, the biblical phrase "lifting one's eyes" refers to seeing the spiritual dimension of reality afresh.

[4] Turner, *Explaining the Normative*, 67–68. Normativity in ethics seeks to describe what ought to be, and clarify why the normative standard selected, is indeed, what ought to be. Normativity is not the study of moral facts, but of how moral facts come to bear upon a situation. There is some debate within ethical normativity if what ought to be "normal" should be based upon sociological normativity, or principled (Kantian) normativity. In this context, normative Christian life is addressed from a principled perspective.

that come from the virtue of love (Col 3:12–14). This process of putting to death some acts and attitudes, and putting on Christian virtues, signals Paul's view of a process in the Christian life whereby one exists in a state of becoming, aiming at a final or perfected mode of being. Elsewhere Paul encourages speaking the truth in love, such that believers might "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ..." (Eph 4:15), and the writer of Hebrews exhorts their readers to move beyond elementary teachings, such that readers might "go on to maturity" (Heb 6:1).

The mature Christian is someone who exhibits the mindset of Christ Jesus in their relationships (Phil 2:5). The mature Hebrew is one who acts justly, loves mercy and walks humbly with God (Micah 6:8)—a command that carries weight into the new covenant as well. The mature Christian is the one who makes disciples (Matt 28:19). The mature Christian is someone whose life is thoroughly conditioned by the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13). The mature Christian is one who rejoices always, prays without ceasing, and gives thanks to God in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16–18).

Articulating what Christian maturity is has been undertaken in theological writing. While there are common themes running through varied accounts of Christian maturity, there is also diversity in conceptions of Christian maturity. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, speaks about what ought to be in the Christian life with the term "sanctification."[5] In question 35, the Shorter Catechism defines sanctification as "the work of God's free grace" (2 Thess 2:13), whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God (Eph 4:23–24), and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness (Rom 6:4,6). Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard held that the goal of any life (including the Christian life) is to become a "self," through

[5] Westminster, *Shorter Catechism*, 22.

overcoming despair. This despair is the dis-relation of a self to one's self, which is endemic to human existence. The task of overcoming despair is achieved when "the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it."[6] This transparent grounding in God occurs as a person becomes what Kierkegaard refers to as a "true Christian."[7]

Paul Tillich holds that maturity is a manner of imagination: seeing the world with divine foolishness (1 Cor 3:18, 14:20).[8] H. Richard Niebuhr has argued that a Christian is someone whose life is "conditioned" by the presence of Christ in history, both regarding the meta-history of humanity, and the personal history of the Christian.[9] This conditioning gives rise to the Christian life as one responds to Christ in a fitting matter.[10] A Christian should be regarded as mature if they are consistently responding to Christ in a Christian manner.[11] Catholic theologian Hans Küng claims that the doctrine and teaching of Jesus cannot be separated from the person of Jesus, in the same way Platonism cannot be abstracted from Plato, or Marxism from Marx.[12] Therefore the Christian life is lived *actually following* Jesus, and not simply subscribing to a set of theological ideas. In Küng's view, the normative Christian life is fellowship with Jesus. This is the "binding oneself to him in the same spirit of allegiance and discipleship, of joining him permanently and making him the measure of one's own life."[13]

James Gustafson has argued that the moral existence of the Christian is fulfilled

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[6] Kierkegaard, "Sickness Unto Death," 271.
[7] Kierkegaard "Sickness Unto Death," 284.
[8] Tillich, *The Eternal* Now, 155–56.
[9] Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 43.
[10] Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 60.
[11] Niebuhr, (*The Responsible Self*, 67–68) has not explicitly set out to describe the normative Christian life, and is reluctant to describe what a Christian "ought" to do for he rejects a deontological approach to Christian ethics. Rather, he argues that being responsible to Christ (responding to Christ) makes a person a Christian.
[12] Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 544.
[13] Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 545.

as the Christian is ruled and commanded by grace.[14] Daniel Jenkins draws a vision of Christian maturity from the Sermon on the Mount. In Jenkin's view, mature Christians are shaped by the Christian virtues of obedience (meekness), peacemaking, generosity, and magnanimity.[15] Catholic theologian Benedict Groeschel adopts the perspective of three-way spirituality to describe the path and goal of the Christian life. As the Christian moves through stages of purgation, illumination, and the dark night, they come to the point of mystical union with God.[16] Educational theorist Parker Palmer draws upon his Quaker roots, arguing that the goal of formation is the undivided life.[17] In Palmer's view, the difficulties of life deform the soul.[18] Palmer believes that the divine presence ministers to the deformed soul in community and solitude.[19] James Wilhoit has described the goal of spiritual formation as a relationship with God where the Christian is "becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."[20]

This brief survey of thought about Christian maturity provides a range of views, and demonstrates some of the diversity of thought about what is being referenced in the idea of Christian maturity. Perhaps part of the reason a range of thought on the topic exists, is because scripture does not systematically speak concerning what the perfected Christian life looks like. This lack of explicit comment about what constitutes the mature Christian life gives space for diverse reflection. Though the language of alignment with

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[14] Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life*, 45.

[15] Jenkins, *Christian Maturity and Christian Success*, 12–18. For Jenkins, these qualities are able to encapsulate the sermon on the mount.

[16] Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 161. In purgation, the Christian cuts out sin. In illumination, the Christian gives attention to God. In the dark nights, the Christian is buoyed by commitment to Christ. The final stage, union, is wholly a gift from God, but a gift that cannot be received without moving through previous stages.

[17] Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 18.

[18] Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 58.

[19] Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 59, 63.

[20] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 23.

Christ is not the only way to encapsulate the scriptures' writing about the normative Christian life, it is a particularly useful and fitting way to speak about the normative Christian life. Further, the language of *alignment* is especially fitting when speaking about the role of theological beauty in the nurture of the Christian life. Having recognized that there have been other helpful contributions to a theology of the normative Christian life, attention is now turned more specifically to what is meant by *alignment with Christ.*

A Picture of Alignment

Some brief accounts or characterizations about the type of life that is in alignment with Christ can be given, but first is will be helpful to comment on a young person's capacity for Christian maturity. By a measure of life experience and the wisdom this experience grants, adolescents might not be said to be fully mature. Yet by a measure of their visible commitment to the Christian life, and Christian vision, some could be said to possess a sort of maturity that even some committed Christian adults in the congregation do not appear to exhibit.

Karl Barth affirms that the maturity of the Christian is not necessarily correlated with age. Instead, Barth celebrates a youthful disposition to the Christian life that is beyond childish ways, but not characterized by weathered "realism" of those without Christian hope.[21] For Barth, Christian maturity is both available, and still needed, in both

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[21] Barth (*Ethics*, 198) does not find strict correlation between age and Christian maturity. He is critical of the weathered, experienced "realism" of older generations, citing a lack of youthful hopefulness that should characterise Christian maturity (197). He is also critical of "childish" disposition of the young (198). For Barth, "real maturity" has a youthful quality, without being childish (198–99).

Barth is also cautious about endorsing the maturity of those who consider the jest and "pranks" of youthfulness beneath them. He disparages those who have become dull in their maturity saying "...we are not adult by renouncing the ideals and errors of youth with an air of established wisdom, by becoming solid and established, by not engaging in any more pranks, which, according to a not very reliable report, is the rule from forty years and up" (198).

young and older Christians alike. Reflecting on the potential for maturity in youth, Barth says: "The boundaries between the ages and what seems to distinguish them physically and mentally can as little be fixed with precision as can the true nature of male and female humanity. Are we not already journeymen as apprentices and still apprentices as journeymen?"[22] Pondering mature religious sentiment from a psychological perspective, Gordon Allport comes to the same conclusion as Barth: chronological age "is a comparatively poor measure of mental and emotional maturity, [as well as] religious maturity."[23] Though by initial impression it may feel out of place to suggest adolescents can attain a measure of Christian maturity, given their relative age and life experience. However age and life experience are not necessarily foundations of mature religious sentiment. With such a caveat in place, it is possible to consider adolescents and their growth into a form of Christian maturity.

There are perhaps one hundred and thirty adolescents who have attended our High School aged youth group programs between 2010 and 2019. These participants have included some who have rejected the Christian message, some who are indifferent, some who identify as Christian without a sense of commitment to the Christian life, and some who strive to live out their Christian confession through the acts of the Christian life. There is not the need to report on identifiable traits or relay stories about this group, except to say that these adolescents enjoyed the trust of their peers and adults as they led bible studies, organized outreach, or offered what could be considered pastoral care.

Around ten of these one hundred and thirty teenagers are specifically memorable for the way they embraced the Christian life. These individuals were generally interested

[22] Barth, *Ethics*, 198.
[23] Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, 52.

in Christian service. They often volunteered to help out where they felt their gifts were able to be used. They served on the worship team, some with church-based service groups, some with sound or video tech, some with our prayer teams, some in the Sunday school, and so on. These adolescents were generally interested in relaying the Christian message to others, and it was not uncommon for them to bring their friends to youth group or teen bible study. These teenagers were interested in Bible study. While not attuned to scholarly theology, they grasped the essential themes of the scriptures and were eager to explore scripture's instruction in their own lives. These teenagers regularly attended Sunday worship, reported some discipline in Christian practices such as Bible study and prayer, and were able to guide their peers toward these Christian practices.

These approximately ten teenagers were also rather unlike each other. Some were young women, others young men. Most came from homes with devout Christian parents, but some did not. Some were bright and studious, others struggled to move through High School. Some came from wealthier families, others did not. Some were athletic and "cool," while others were quieter with more niche interests. Some had times of struggle with mental health, some had difficult family relationships, and others appeared to have very stable networks of family and friends. To date, all of these teenagers remain committed to the Christian life, though some have moved on from youth group into periods of inactivity in church life during college years. Despite their different life situations, each has been orientated to the Christian life in a certain pattern that can be spoken about through the language of "alignment with Christ."

The point of these brief descriptions is not to provide case study data, or to make claims about what Christian maturity should or should not necessarily look like. Instead,

identifying some common characteristics of adolescents' maturing Christian lives can provide an impression of what is being held in mind when the language of alignment with Christ is evoked.

Initial Interpretations

Though more will be said about what alignment with Christ is, it is helpful to name two starting assumptions about what alignment is, and why this language seems to best describe these adolescents' orientation to the Christian life. First, alignment with Christ intimates beauty, and the way these teens expressed their Christian commitments was (often) beautiful. Second, alignment with Christ suggests prayerful attention to Christ, and these teens seemed to look at the world, first, with attention to Christ. Naming these two first impressions will give a starting point for a more in-depth exploration of what the language of alignment with Christ signifies.

First, living a life that is aligned with Christ is a beautiful way to live. Though the experience of beauty is subjective, there are some reasons why beauty might be commonly perceived in alignment with Christ. Saint Augustine speaks of beauty being displayed in the unified whole of beautiful things.[24] Recognizing that alignment with Christ is beautiful—following Augustine's intuitions—has to do with the fact that a life aligned with Christ is wholly unified with Christ as its reference point.

Augustine interacted in his writings with the Neoplatonism of his time.[25] For

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[24] Augustine (*Conf.*, 49) says: "Do we love any thing but the beautiful? What then is the beautiful? and what is beauty? What is it that attracts and wins us to the things we love? For unless there were in them a grace and beauty, they could by no means draw us unto them. And I marked and perceived that in bodies themselves, there was a beauty, from their forming a sort of whole, and again, another from apt and mutual correspondence, as of a part of the body with its whole, or a shoe with a foot, and the like" (49–50).

[25] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 226. Though influenced in part by Plato, Augustine also likely used Plato's thought as an interpretive tool, revealing to his readers the biblical worldview of the scriptures.

Plato, beautiful things "imitate" or "represent" beautiful divine perfection.[26] The beautiful object is a representation of beauty itself. Plato believed form and beauty exist in a two-tiered reality: our reality reflects the perfect beauty of an absolute reality. Christians confess that God's creation is good, and should not be denigrated. On this account Plato's vision of beauty cannot be directly transposed into Christian understanding. But his intuition that beautiful things are related to divine things is not wholly misplaced. Alignment with Christ is a beautiful way to live as Christ himself shines through such a life. The life aligned with Christ moves in harmony and unity with Christ. To briefly employ another metaphor, alignment with Christ is like the intuitive dance of two partners who are practiced to the point of being uniquely in tune with each other.

Augustine also distances himself from Plato's sense of beauty. Augustine did not think that the beauty seen in this world was only a pale imitation of God's beauty. Beautiful things in the material world are created through God's speech and were originally created to be good and perfect.[27] The person who is aligned with Christ does not just represent God's beauty through imitation, but the person who is aligned with Christ also participates in the life of God and the beauty of God.[28]

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[26] Beardsley (*Aesthetics From Classical Greece to the Present*, 34) examines Plato's use of the word "*mimesis*." Beardsley finds that *mimesis*, is used to mean roughly imitation, representation (34), or imitative craft (35). The notion of imitation does not carry a quality of deception (36). Rather, beautiful things imitate the transcend "Form of Beauty" that exist in the spiritual realm (39).

[27] Oliver, "Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion," 385.

[28] Wiliams (*The Ground of Union*, 27–32) outlines early Christian thinker's perspectives on theosis and deification. Deification includes the experience of God's grace by the Christian, knowing the mind of God, union with God's being, and perceiving reality with the vision of God – that is without human illusion. Williams also notes the term "deification" is an English translation of the Greek, "θέωσις" (or Theosis) implying mystical union of the Christian with God (104).

The Greek patristic writers employed the idea of Theosis to mean the process in which God makes the believer like himself (Finlan and Kharlamov, "Introduction," 7). Theosis is thought to have two movements: the movement of knowing God and the movement of acting like God. Both ideas are drawn from the scriptures. Theosis is an experience of grace by coming to hold the "knowledge of God" (2 Peter 1:2) (Finlan, "Second Peter's Notion of Divine Participation," 45). Theosis is also the processes becoming

Second, the notion of alignment with Christ speaks about a quality of prayerful attention to God. Henri Nouwen identifies three movements through which the spiritual life takes form.[29] The action that takes place in these movements is the movement of the heart's attention to one polarity or another. The first of these movements is the movement between loneliness and solitude. The second is the movement between hostility and hospitality. The third is the movement between illusion and prayer. As a person moves through life, they will find themselves oriented to one pole or the other. Living the spiritual life in Nouwen's view, is a matter of orienting oneself to the latter poles (solitude, hospitality, prayer) and away from the former poles (loneliness, hostility, illusion).

In Nouwen's account of these movements, the movement from illusion to prayer is the most critical for the spiritual life. He calls the movement from illusion to prayer, the "first and final movement."[30] Illusion is the state that the heart is naturally inclined toward. Illusion is being captivated by dreams of the fulfilment of desire. In contrast, prayer is seeing our lives as they really are: wholly dependent upon God's grace.[31] By moving from illusion to prayer, the spiritual life takes its form. Where formerly our own illusions of grandeur obscured God's reality, in prayer we become acutely aware of our need for Him. The movement from illusion to prayer is a matter of alignment of the heart. In illusion, the human heart is aligned with its own aspirations and desires. In prayer, the human heart comes to be aligned with God's own heart. The notion of 'alignment' with Christ is elevated because it has the capacity to reference the beauty and orientation of

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a participant in the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) (32). As both knowledge and action are divinized and conformed to Christ, the Christian inhabits Godly virtue and moral vision (46).

[29] Nouwen, *Ministry and Spirituality*, 182.

[30] Nouwen, *Ministry and Spirituality*, 249.

[31] Nouwen, *Ministry and Spirituality*, 261.

the mature Christian life.

Having given some initial impressions about what alignment with Christ signifies on the surface, a deeper exploration of alignment will uncover its fuller meanings. This exploration will first examine the language of alignment as metaphorical language, and thereafter, as theological language.

The Use of Metaphor

The language of alignment can serve as an interpretive metaphor to speak of Christian maturity. Though borrowing meanings from its originating context, an interpretive metaphor serves to impart and clarify meanings in its interpretive context. A short look at the interpretive function of metaphor will bring to light the way the language of alignment is intended to work.

In addition to being a matter of literary style, metaphors can also function in a hermeneutic role. A metaphor becomes an interpretive tool when language from its original setting is fittingly used to interpret the recipient setting. Through the transfer of language from one setting to another, the meanings from the source setting are given to a recipient setting. Jesus employs shepherding metaphors in his charge of Peter to the ministry (John 21: 15–17). As Jesus charges Peter to feed *his lambs*, or take care of *his sheep*, Jesus extends an interpretive framework concerning the work that Peter will do. In this case, as a shepherd cares for his sheep by attending to their needs, Peter will care for the fledgling church by attending to the church's spiritual needs. Jesus' use of metaphor is more than a literary device, for Jesus' instruction through the use of metaphor, implies an approach to the task that Jesus is charging Peter with.

For Paul Ricoeur, metaphorical language creates "the appearance of kinship where ordinary vision does not perceive any relationship."[32] This occurs by bringing together situation and interpretation, causing "a new, hitherto unnoticed, relation of meaning to spring up between the terms that previous systems of classification had ignored or not allowed."[33] In the case of Jesus and Peter, the pastoral metaphor interprets the work Peter is charged with. These pastoral metaphors offer images of caring, guiding and tending. Through bringing together meaning and situation in metaphor, the association "in short, tells us something new about reality."[34]

The construction of a theological metaphor is not intended to replace otherwise more precise language in theology. Rather, a metaphor set rightly in a situation compliments and distills the meanings of otherwise more technical or systematic theology. The metaphor stands on these intricate meanings by providing a unifying meaning that holds together the many meanings within a situation. Ricoeur compares the use of metaphor to a skilled photographer. An unskilled photographer's print depicts a scene in detail and precision. Yet the unskilled photographer's print "grasps everything but holds nothing."[35] Such a photograph may accurately depict a situation, but the unskilled photographer does not, in a sense, bring the situation to life. The unskilled picture is descriptive, but flat. Interpretation is afforded a similar benefit through the art

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[32] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 51.

[33] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 51.

[34] Ricoeur (*Interpretation Theory*, 53) differentiates between a metaphor and a symbol. The symbol holds a "surplus of signification" (55). This surplus of meaning "never passes over completely into language," but is "always something powerful, efficacious, [or] forceful" (63). The symbol exists first in its primary, or literal meaning. For example, the cross depicts the instrument used to kill Jesus. Yet a symbol also has secondary meaning, which is the symbolic meaning of grace. In Ricoeur's thought, the symbol "transfers" the one who views the symbol through its literal meaning, into the symbol's surplus of meaning (55). The symbol however, is like the metaphor in the sense that metaphor used language in a symbolic way. The metaphor affords language, "the implicit semantics of the symbol" (63).

[35] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 41.

form of metaphor. A metaphor applied as an interpretive tool in a situation does not negate previous interpretive work. Rather, the metaphor abridges the "complex interplay of significations" within descriptive interpretation, and brings "an explicit and an implicit meaning into relation."[36]

Metaphors are inventive in their meaning if they are able to retain their novelty. As a relatively novel conception of Christian maturity, the idea of alignment has the potential to shape the Christian imagination concerning Christian maturity. This is helpful, as metaphors need to be renewed periodically. Ricoeur observes that "live metaphors become dead metaphors through repetition."[37] By introducing the language of alignment into a discussion about the normative Christian life, the hope is that this language will supply a fresh and fitting way to speak about Christian maturity.

The exploration of metaphor has been identified as a means of research in practical theology.[38] Judith Muskett's article "Mobilizing Cathedral Metaphors: The Case of 'Sacred Space, Common Ground,'" is an example of this approach in use. In her research, Muskett explores the function of cathedrals by examining the source of the *sacred space* and *common ground* metaphors. She finds the idea of *common ground* to refer to a public space that may have a history as a shared plot of land where livestock graze.[39] Muskett also explores the images and language of sacred space by reflecting upon New York's ground zero monuments.[40]

Practical theology as a discipline recognizes the usefulness of theological play in theological reflection. Play has been described as an act of the imagination which leads to

[36] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 46.

[37] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 52.

[38] Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 63–67. In this section the authors describe why Ricoeur's ideas on metaphor are useful for work in practical theology.

[39] Muskett, "Mobilizing Cathedral Metaphors," 280.

[40] Muskett, "Mobilizing Cathedral Metaphors," 281.

perceiving correlation. This act of imagination is not simply finding patterns and relationships within reality, but in fact, inventing such patterns and relationships.[41] In the act of play a floating stick figuratively becomes a warship, a boy figuratively becomes a soldier, or the rope becomes a jungle vine to swing upon. In play, "we imagine reality, and our place in it, anew."[42] There is an imaginative quality to metaphorical interpretation. There is no exact science that produces a metaphorical interpretation. Yet through playing with an idea an imaginative sense of the idea can reveal further understanding.

By adopting a playful perspective, three situations of alignment will be explored here. Cooperative alignment of marching units, mechanical alignment, and moral alignment will each be discussed in turn. Taking Muskett's semantic method as a research cue, three every-day situations will be examined where the language of alignment is naturally at home. By interrogating situations where a metaphor's language originates, the meanings contained in the metaphor of alignment are brought to light.

The Situation of Alignment

Exploring the idea of alignment benefits from an exploration of situations where the idea of alignment is most "at home." Alignment may be said to be "at home" in situations where the language of alignment is commonly evoked to describe what is going on. The language of alignment is used to express mathematical relationships of agreement. This language appears when speaking about mechanical components' relationship to one

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[41] Whitehead, "The Practical Play of Theology," 42.
[42] Whitehead, "The Practical Play of Theology," 44.

another. And this language appears when referencing ideology or moral code that a person finds themselves agreeing with. While more settings can be referenced, these three are sufficient to examine the metaphor of alignment, and each setting will be addressed in turn.

The language of alignment appears in mathematics to speak of lines and linear functions that that are placed in agreeing or harmonious relation to one another. Parallel lines are aligned. Planets in orbit are aligned when they can be connected by a straight line. And a marching band is aligned if members keep in-step and in-position. While marching, a band member is obliged to keep aligned with both members of the band in their row, and members of the band in their column. This alignment is not to be broken, even during more complicated marching procedures, such as a pinwheel around a corner or an about-face as the band turns to march back through itself when the end of a field is encountered.

Alignment in a marching band is a matter of attention and intuitive cooperation. Keeping in step is a matter of attention, for the marcher is to keep in mind where the beat is located in the song's rhythm, and which formation the group is marching in. Attention to these particulars translates into the ability to keep in step. As the band negotiates a corner, moves in and out of a circular form to marching form, or performs an about-face, each member of the band acts in concert with their row, and the row, with the larger group. Any one band member, if delaying to wait upon the leading of another, will distort the alignment of the march. Rather, there is the expectation that when taking part in a ceremony or parade, band members move in intuitive unison.

Attention and intuitive cooperation are nuances of alignment with theological

significance. Alignment with Christ means attention to Christ. Mystic and philosopher Simone Weil has considered the nature of attention. In her view, attention creates what the will cannot. Says Weil: "What could be more stupid than to tighten up our muscles and set our jaws about virtue, or poetry, or the solution of a problem? Attention is something quite different."[43] Weil continues: "extreme attention is what constitutes the creative faculty in man and the only extreme attention is religious. The amount of creative genius in any period is strictly in proportion to the amount of extreme attention, and thus of authentic religion, at that period."[44] This type of attention that Weil speaks of is not simply the type of attention that a person gives to objects of study. Attention to God is a deeper reality than study, even as knowledge about God does play a supporting role in knowledge of God. Instead, attention to God is a matter of turning one's whole being to God. Weil concludes: "Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer."[45] Drawing upon Weil, it may be said that attention to Christ results in alignment with Christ: sustained attention is sustained alignment.

As the quality of attention rises, actions in intuitive union, or communion, come to characterize the believer's life. Scripture also presents this viewpoint. In Colossians 3:2 Paul calls his readers to set their minds on things above. As a result of this attention given to "things above," Paul expects his readers to put to death besetting vices (Col 3:5–9) and put on the virtues that fill the Christian life (3:12–17). Though Paul holds that his readers have received a "new self," the exhortation remains to "put on" this new self (3:10). This new self is put on through attention to Christ. Paul, putting on this new self, claims that "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved

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[43] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 169.
[44] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 170.
[45] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 170.

me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). This life in Christ is an alignment with Christ, for it is no long Paul who lives, but Christ who lives within him (2:20). Paul in Christ, and the Christian believer in Christ, gives their full attention to Christ, coming to act in intuitive union (or communion) with Christ himself.

Mechanical alignment is another situation where the language of alignment is at home. Interacting moving mechanical parts will operate with greater efficiency if parts are properly aligned. Knee replacement surgery is uniquely complicated by the fact that parts of the knee must be precisely aligned for the knee to function normally.[46] The knee operates best and to its fullest potential when its component pieces are related to one another in a cooperative and sympathetic manner. Engine components that are precisely aligned transfer the engine power more efficiently down the drive train.[47] Without losing efficiencies between loose or poorly placed components, engines deliver maximum power with minimal resistance or waste. The power and precision delivered to a golf ball by a golfer's swing are determined by the alignment of the golfer's posture with the golf club and to the ball. Being partially out of alignment causes the ball to hook left or right, and being out of alignment enough results in missing the ball completely.

When the parts of a mechanism are precisely aligned, there is no deviation in the system and the outcome is optimized. Any amount of deviation affects the ability of the system to produce its intended output. The sense of deviation being bad, and alignment being good is a motif the Old Testament develops. The scriptures speak of those who could be said to be aligned with God, as not turning aside "to the right or to the left" (Deut 5:32, Deut 28:14, Josh 1:7, Josh 23:6, 2 Kgs 22:2, 2 Chr 34:2, Prov 4:27, Isa

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[46] Gulati et al., "Influence of component alignment," 196.

[47] Uncredited, "Alignment technique," 47.

30:21).[48] The Lord charges Joshua to keep the commands given to Moses, not turning away from these commands "to the right or to the left" (Josh 1:7). Josiah is judged by the Chronicler to be a good king, for he did not turn away from the ways of David, "to the right or to the left," and purged Judah of its high places, idols and Asherah poles (2 Chr 34:2–3). Those who do not deviate to the right or to the left are therefore those who are in alignment with God's ways of living within the world.

Living in God's way is motivated by the desire to serve the Lord, and to detest the services of all other gods (Deut 28:13–15). The scriptures attest to blessings associated with those who do not turn to the right or to the left (Deut 28:1–14). Similarly, there are curses associated with diverting one's way to the right or to the left in service of other gods (Deut 28:15–68). But the ultimate motivation for not turning to the right or to the left, in the final position, out of reverence for God himself. If one serves for the sake of reward, one does serve God for his one sake, but serves for the reward. By having this aim, the reward itself becomes a form of diversion, for one then uses God as a means of attaining a good which is beyond God. To live in an undivided manner then, is not out of a sense of obligation for the sake of reward, but a commitment for the sake of God himself.

The language of alignment is also used to speak of one's agreement with political, moral, or other ideological positions. Political party policies are shaped in "alignment" with party values. Interests that are not aligned with governing lawmakers generally receive less political attention.[49] In the business world companies are interested in a workforce "aligned" with company aims. The availability of stock options is thought to

[48] Other instances of this idiom can be found in scripture, but are not employed in reference to keeping a Godly way in life.

[49] Hankins, et al. "Party polarization, political alignment," 370.

motivate workers, as an employee invested in a company holds a stake in the company's performance. When employee and company interests are in agreement, it is said that both parties' interests are "aligned."

Turning to a more imaginative source, characters in some genera of fantasy literature are described by the moral "alignment" of their characters. In the *Star Wars* universe, those who develop their ability to use the force are compelled to choose between the light side and the dark side: becoming a Jedi or a Sith. In the *Dungeons and Dragons* universe, a popular role-playing game, characters are placed on a rubric of moral alignment, and display accompanying behaviours. Alignment in *Dungeon and Dragons* (and its derivative books and games) is first, a character's moral sensibilities, and second, a character's attitude toward societal rules.[50]

The language of alignment is employed in politics, special interests, or fantasy literature for the purpose of referencing an internal disposition. There are definite limits to what these situations can offer to project in theological reflection. Yet significant to the way the language of alignment is used in these situations, is the observation that persons in a state of alignment are *aligned to something*. Being "aligned to" something requires both a disposition and a choice. A person whose interests are aligned with company interests chooses to act in the interest of both parties. But this person chooses to act in the interest of both parties as they hold a disposition toward the shared goals between both parties.

The alignment of one's character is addressed in Stanley Grenz's account of the moral life. Grenz has identified two basic sources of the Christian ethical life. One of

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[50] Noonan, ed., *Hero Builder's Guidebook*, 51.

these is the instruction or testimony of scripture, the other the leading of the Spirit.[51] To live the Christian moral life is to align one's character to the teaching of the scriptures and the leading of the Spirit. Grenz observes that God requires not simply actions of "outward compliance," but "what God actually desires is a 'renewed spirit' or 'a right heart'."[52] In this frame, Christian alignment with Christ is not only about not turning to the left or to the right, but it is also about desiring the same things God desires. Christian alignment is putting on Christ, and thereby being disposed to sharing his desires (Rom 13:14).

With this brief exploration of the language of alignment three meanings are understood to be evoked by the theological language of alignment. Alignment is first, attention to, and communion with Christ. Alignment is second, a lack of divergence to the right or to the left. Alignment is third, a Spirit-given disposition within the Christian—not only a set of actions, but the fulfillment of a moral quest.

Alignment in Christian Theology

Having moved through an examination of the metaphor of alignment, there will be benefit from addressing how more formal theology squares with the language of "alignment." The language of alignment has its roots in metaphor, but setting the language of alignment within theological discourse strengthens a theological grounding of the metaphor.

The meanings laden in the language of alignment can be situated in relation to

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[51] Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 242.

[52] Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 246. Simple compliance with authoritative moral commands or Kantian moral principles is not sufficient to please God. Instead, Grenz calls to mind Psalm 51:10: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (247).

theological writing. The works of Paul Tillich, Stanley Hauerwas, and James K. A. Smith have been used as key conversation partners in this dissertation thus far. These three thinkers have also articulated positions that can support and deepen theological understanding concerning the language of alignment with Christ. Paul Tillich has spoken about the Christian life as a life with a single ultimate concern. Alignment with Christ entails holding a specific sort of ultimate concern. Stanley Hauerwas has spoken about the Christian life as a life that is conditioned by, and bound to, the narrative of the Christian story. Alignment with Christ means alignment with the Christian story. James K. A. Smith speaks about the Christian life as the type of life lived while desiring God. Alignment with Christ is expressed not only in Christian action, but first by Christian desire for God.

To develop a theology of alignment, a short account of each theologian's position will be given, and then each account will be related to the language of alignment with Christ.

Tillich and Alignment

Paul Tillich's theological commitments were formed during Germany's inter-war years as Barthian neo-orthodoxy was emerging as a major theological perspective. Tillich found himself forming his theological convictions in the midst of; first, a return to Christian orthodoxy in theological writing, and second, the turbulent cultural and political life of the Weimar Republic (Germany 1918–1933). His writing exhibited two influences. His work reveals a desire to write theology that was faithful to the confession of

scripture, and second, a desire to write in a way that might speak to the culture of his time.

Tillich has been described as a theologian on the boundary of theology and culture.[53] Within his interest in culture, Tillich admired the way liberal thinkers created space for open-ended questioning. However, his admiration of liberal scholarship was a matter of form, and he tended to reject liberal dogmatism.[54] Attempting to bring together the boundaries of both theology and culture, Tillich's account of what it means to have faith speaks to audiences beyond both boundaries. Tillich sought to articulate what it means to have faith in the situation he found himself within. In Tillich's view, faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern.[55] The language of ultimate concern is clarified as Tillich explains: "only that which is the ground of our being and meaning should concern us ultimately, we can also say: Faith is the concern about our existence in its 'whence' and 'whither.'"[56]

Faith for Tillich is first a matter of existing in relation to a point beyond oneself. Having faith is first a way of being. The content of faith is important to the way a person experiences faith, but the content of faith depends on the object of one's faith. Because faith is given content in relation to the direction faith proceeds, faith exists in the form of a particular sort of ongoing concern. This concern is total and final. As a concern that dominates and directs existence, faith is an act of the "whole personality" that "will, knowledge and emotion" participate in.[57]

More specific than the general experience of any faith, Tillich also describes

[53] Jentz, "Paul Tillich: Today and Tomorrow," 380.
[54] Tillich, *The Boundaries of Our Being*, 319.
[55] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 28.
[56] Tillich, *Biblical Religion*, 51.
[57] Tillich, *Biblical Religion*, 53.

biblical faith. This is a faith whose content is shaped by biblical witness. Without any one faculty of being engaged in the life of faith biblical faith is no longer possible. Marked by sin in all faculties of being, regeneration in all faculties of being is therefore necessary for the biblical act of faith. Faith without an obedient will is a "compulsion and not a decision;" faith without emotion is a "nonpersonal, cognitive act;" faith without reason is "depersonalizing slavery."[58] Only the one grasped by biblical faith is restored. This faith is produced by God's grace. This sort of harmony with one's whole being is also an alignment with Christ. Keeping in step with the Spirit, the mature Christian wills, reasons, and feels in alignment with the heart of God.

Although Tillich does not explicitly link his idea of ultimate concern to scripture, some grounding for his idea may be found in Matthew 22:24–40. In this passage, Jesus is responding to a question concerning which commandments of the Hebrew Bible are the greatest.[59] Responding to the expert in Jewish law who posed the question, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:37–40, E.S.V.).[60] In this passage, Jesus exhorts the expert in the law to love (ἀγαπήσεις) both God and neighbour—not with "warm feelings of gratitude" but with "stubborn, unwavering commitment."[61]

The loving commitment to God and neighbour Jesus commands is articulated as

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[58] Tillich, *Biblical Religion*, 53.
[59] Parallel versions of this story are found in Mark 12:28–34, and Luke 10:25–28.
[60] Hare (*Matthew*, 258) cites Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18 as the source texts Jesus draws upon.
[61] Hare, *Matthew*, 260.

the adequate response to the reality of God. This standard required loving God with all the faculties of one's being: heart, soul and mind. Jesus also evokes the idea of the integration of these categories in personal being, for the scriptures' reader is invited to understand when one loves God with *all* their heart, *all* their soul and *all* their mind, there are no personal faculties remaining by which love can be directed toward an alternate object. Though Tillich does not ground his perspective of faith being an act of the whole personality explicitly in scripture, Jesus' identification of these faculties provides such explicitly biblical grounding.

Anchored here to Jesus' description of the normative Christian life, Tillich's language of ultimate concern is likewise a construal of the normative Christian life. A Christian *should* and *must* be a person who is ultimately concerned with Jesus Christ. The Christian focuses the faculties of their personality upon Jesus (will, knowledge and emotion) in the act of ultimate concern. Tillich's notions about our "ultimate concern" are helpful for providing some theological definition to the idea of alignment with Christ. The young person who is said to be aligned with Christ, should have Christ as their ultimate concern.

Tillich's language of ultimate concern is, however, not finally sufficient in itself for speaking about what it means to be aligned with Christ. A caveat should be made. Though Tillich maintains that faith is an act of the whole personality, he tends to prioritize (or give most of his interest) to the place our faculty of reason plays in the life of faith. The language of "concern" connotes something to be reasoned about, and solution to be arrived at through careful judgement. This priority can be observed in Tillich's writing, for as he speaks about the faith and the "whole personality," his instinct

is to move to articulate specifically and fully how the modern mind relates to Christianity, leaving other aspects of personality under-attended.[62] When speaking about the mature Christian life, Tillich focuses on what mature Christian thinking or reasoning should entail.[63] Tillich's main contribution to Christian nurture is to argue that supplying biblical answers to existential questions allows a person to establish themselves in the Christian life.[64]

Though a rich life of the mind is congruent with being in alignment with Christ, sophistication in the life of the mind is not essentially required by alignment with Christ. Whether loving Christ with all that one is should require a benchmark standard of knowledge or reasoning is an interesting question. For love to be directed toward a person, it is assumed a few essential details about this person need to be known. But in the case of Tillich's enthusiasm for the life of the mind and Christian ultimate concern, it cannot be said that acute theological sophistication is a prerequisite of alignment with Christ. As Tillich recognizes elsewhere in his writing corpus, willing and desiring—over and above the life of the mind—are essential to holding a biblical faith and a Christian ultimate concern.[65] Tillich's uncritical bias toward the life of the mind is part of his approach to the Christian life but an emphasis on the life of the mind is not wholly required to be aligned with Christ.

Alignment with Christ assumes the integrity of the human personality is "in-line"

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[62] Tillich, *Biblical Religion*, 57–62. While writing about the whole personality, most of Tillich's attention is given to the place of reason in the life of faith.

[63] Tillich, *The Eternal Now*, 156.

[64] Tillich (*Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 61) calls his method of relating existential questions to biblical answers "Critical correlation." Though unrelated to this present discussion, it should be noted that David Tracey (in *Blessed Rage for* Order, 1975) critiqued Tillich's critical correlation theology. Tracey argued that theology not only answered existential questions, but that experience informed theology.

[65] Tillich (*Love, Power, Justice*, 40) observes that being, in any configuration including Christian being, requires "self-affirming" power of the will, and the desire to sustain this act of will (40).

with Christ's. In alignment, the Christians' way of being-in-the-world is "in-line" with Christ's own being. The Christian's will is "in-line" with Christ's willing. The Christian reasons "in-line" with Christ's reason. And the Christian feels "in-line" with Christ's own feeling. The idea of alignment assumes the integrity of the self as a whole. The alignment of the Christian with Christ is a unified expression of being in relation to Christ, loving Christ with all of one's heart, soul, and mind. Tillich's construal provides a portion of a fuller theological account of alignment with Christ. Turning to Stanley Hauerwas, it is shown that alignment with Christ also means acting in accordance with the Christian story.

Hauerwas and Alignment

Stanley Hauerwas is a theologian who has concerned himself among other interests, with the narrative identity of the Christian and the Christian church. Hauerwas is known for his post-liberal commitments that are a mix of his Methodist upbringing, Yale-education (Episcopalian), and thirteen years in the divinity department at Notre Dame (Catholic).[66]

The themes of narrative and narrative identity are common themes in Hauerwas' works. The story that a person finds themselves within will serve as a guide toward the meanings a person adopts, and determine which actions express these meanings. The narrative arc of a story supplies a set of meanings and actions that push a story toward its end, and at the same time, exclude sets of meanings and actions which either detract or are irrelevant to the story's narrative arc. In this way any given action becomes

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[66] Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 95. Hauerwas was at Notre Dame from 1970 to 1983.

intelligible to an agent, if an action fits within an intelligible story.[67] This is to say, that our motivations and intentions are directed by the story we believe is true about ourselves and our world.[68] In the case of the Christian life our intentions are conditioned by the values and moral vision of Christian witness and biblical story. The primary story that informs the Christian life, says Hauerwas, are the stories of Jesus in the Gospels.[69] Adopting this holy story, the church becomes a holy community whose identity and mission is to "read and perform" this story.[70]

Hauerwas suggests that living the Christian life is the action of choosing a specific life story.[71] The Christian does not "choose" a story that defines their life, in the same way one chooses a novel to read, or a painting for one's living room. Rather, Hauerwas positions this notion of "choosing" a story to being an act akin to accepting one's fate. Reflecting on his own Christian choice, Hauerwas reports that he cannot help being a Christian, any more than he can help being a Texan.[72] "Choosing" to be a Texan, or a Christian, refers to the process where one comes to understand one's self in light of the story that being either a Texan or a Christian offers.[73] Hauerwas says: "to claim that I am a Texan is to appeal to a narrative account that helps me bind together a series of

[67] MacIntyre (*After Virtue*, 210) offers a short consideration to explain his point. Suppose while waiting at a bus stop, we overhear someone telling another patron what the Latin name is for wild ducks. This act appears random an unintelligible in itself. But when set within a story, this action becomes intelligible. MacIntyre imagines this interchange may have occurred after a discussion about ducks. Set within this story, the action takes on meaning (201). Or imagine that random people are observed gathering together to sit in a large room for an hour on a specific time, every week. This allegedly random act becomes intelligible if we become aware of a story about church and worship, and the people of God.

[68] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 78.

[69] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 42–43.

[70] Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 73.

[71] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 26.

[72] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 30–31.

[73] An argument could be made that the language of "discerning" is more appropriate to speak about the process of recognizing and committing to a story, than is the language of "choosing." Choosing however, may be employed in the recognition that one might choose to ignore or attempt to reject the meanings contained in a story one finds oneself within. For example, one might *choose* or attempt to ignore or reject the meanings associated with being a Texan. In deference to the language Hauerwas uses to explain his position, the language of "choice" is used here and not the language of "discernment."

contingent events that create an intelligible pattern for my life."[74] In a similar way, Hauerwas describes what it is to "choose" to be a Christian, saying: "by claiming to be a Christian, I am declaring my allegiance to those people, past, present, and future, who continue to struggle to live faithful to the God we find revealed in Israel and Jesus Christ."[75]

To be a Christian is to be aligned with a specific story about the world, and be aligned with the person this story is about—Jesus. Coming into alignment with Christ occurs as a person recognizes and accepts the Christian story they find themselves within. Agency in alignment with Christ is Christ's own, for it is God who works in us to will and to act according to his purposes. (Phil. 2.13) Agency in alignment with Christ is also required of the Christian, for the Christian must learn to make the story they have found themselves within, their own.[76] Elaborating on what it means to choose into the Christian story, Hauerwas says:

> ...we can no more learn what it means to be a Christian simply by attending to Scripture than we can learn to be Texan by reading about the history of Texas. Rather, we learn that story, like the way we learn the story of Texas, by caring for the tombstones of the saints. It is from them, as we see what the story of Jesus has done to their own stories that we begin to understand what that story requires and means. For the truth of the story we find in the gospels is finally known only through the kind of lives it produces. If such lives are absent then no amount of hermeneutical theory or manipulation can make those texts meaningful.[77]

Not just any story should be chosen as a means of ordering one's life intelligibly. The story that orders one's life should be a true story. Hauerwas anticipates this problem,

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[74] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 31.

[75] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 39.

[76] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 149. The language of "learned to make this story their own," is taken from Hauerwas. In his words, "claiming myself as my own is not the same as claiming that I have made or chosen what I am. Rather it means I am able to recognize myself in the story that I have learned to make my own" (149).

[77] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 40–41.

and provides some criteria by which a person can judge whether or not the story they have found themselves within is a true story. Paraphrased and formatted for this discussion, Hauerwas holds that a story is true if:[78]

1) The story can order our experience in a way alternate stories cannot.

2) The story allows us to see clearly through competing claims.

3) The story can be accepted and propagated without coercion or violence.[79]

4) The story accounts for why its truth should be maintained in the face of opposing power.

Following Hauerwas' criteria, the witness of the scriptures is *the* true story of our world. To be aligned with the witness of the scriptures is to hold a particular way of being-in-the-world. Yes there are multiple perspectives about how a Christian should exist, but the goal of our various Christian traditions is to respond faithfully to Christ as revealed in scripture. While the 'working out' of our alignment with Christ may vary between communities of Christians, the impulse to be aligned with Christ does not.

With interest in giving an even-handed account of Hauerwas' position, it is to be pointed out that his narrative approach to Christian identity and community has been critiqued for being sectarian. Specifically, this critique has been levelled against Hauerwas by his former doctoral supervisor, James Gustafson. Gustafson is concerned that Hauerwas has overemphasised the distinctiveness of the Christian life, to the point of creating a Christian enclave, inaccessible and unintelligible to the wider world. This charge is leveled against Hauerwas, for his instance on maintaining true stories makes it

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[78] Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 35.

[79] To expand, the truthfulness of the of the story can be plainly observed. The observation of a story's truthfulness iscompelling enough in itself that further motivation in the form of enticements or deterrents are not required for someone to accept the story.

difficult to honour people from who hold different stories about reality that the Christian story. For example, the secular world claims there are no true stories that give meaning, and we must make our own meaning. Gustafson is concerned that Hauerwas' position implies that Christians cannot interact meaningfully in a secular public. In Gustafson's view:

> This [sectarian temptation] seems to me to create problems of moral and intellectual integrity for Christians; they would have to interpret and explain the same events in different ways as they left the doors of the Church and went home to read the newspapers, the scientific journals, or watch television. Theologically Christianity becomes a modern and trivial form of Gnosticism.[80]

Concerned about such a reality unfolding, Gustafson critiques Hauerwas' narrative theology on the grounds Hauerwas implicitly lends his support to sectarian tendencies within the church. Gustafson makes his case by arguing that narrative theology is akin to sectarian theology in that articulating a distinct narrative entails identifying a distinct community that holds this narrative.[81] But in response, Hauerwas maintains and defends his position. Christian confession is not dependent upon a demonstration of its validity by rational or empirical standards. Such standards can confirm the truth of Christian confession as they are able. But the fundamental content of Christian confession is revealed as opposed to reasoned.[82]

If Christian claims are unintelligible to those outside the faith, there is an unavoidably sectarian character to the Christian life. To those outside the faith, there *appears* to be foolishness to both content and expression of the Christian faith (1 Cor

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[80] Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," 91.

[81] Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," 88. A further complication in Gustafson's view is that a sectarian community has distanced itself from meaningful political engagement with the wider society in which the community finds itself.

[82] Wells (*Transforming Fate in to Destiny*, 79–80) parses Hauerwas' thought, highlighting Hauerwas' own commitment to Christian truth as revealed by a Revealer, as opposed to being humanly deduced or reasoned.

1:18). Hauerwas therefore is unwilling to make what he considers to be compromises in his theology to accommodate truth claims from alternate, non-Christian stories.[83] He takes this stance on the grounds that Christianity is not simply a world view that might be defended through demonstrating its rational superiority to opposing world views. Instead he regards the truth of Christianity to be evident in the fact that the "fruitfulness" of Christian commitments are demonstrably evident in one's Christian life.[84]

Hauerwas is not inclined to say that this sectarian impulse should be realized in complete withdrawal from society, but neither should the Christian life be complete involvement in society.[85] Instead, the Christian life is to be lived within society, but the meanings of the Christian life cannot be shared with society, nor society's meanings wholly shared by the Christian. For Hauerwas, the Christian participates in society, but is aligned to an ultimate reality that broader society cannot fully conceive of.

This dialogue between Gustafson and Hauerwas has implications for how alignment with Christ is conceived. Alignment means the self-identification with the Christian story. And alignment with Christ also means that those not aligned with Christ cannot fully those who are. The Christian life is a reality that is not fully intelligible to those who have not found themselves bound to the Christian story. Being bound and conditioned by Christ and the Christian story, makes Christians strangers and aliens. Alignment means announcing what is true, but at the same time, making little sense to those outside of the Christian story. Alignment means living differently that those we find ourselves living among in this world.

Adding to Tillich's notions of ultimate concern, Hauerwas has been used to

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[83] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 9.
[84] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 10.
[85] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 11.

develop an idea of narrative identity in the metaphor of alignment with Christ. Moving forward, attention will now be turned to James K. A. Smith's theology of desire and the Christian life. Alignment with Christ is an ultimate concern, set in a narrative that motivates our desires in-line with Christ's desires.

Smith and Alignment

Philosopher and theologian James K. A. Smith argues that the stories that construct our identities, and which tell us what to do with our lives, are stories that we have primarily learned with our heart.[86] Human beings "feel" their way through life, coming to create and understand meaning through a mode of aesthetic judgement.[87] This is a point already expounded upon in the second chapter, so careful attention to this position is not as necessary here. In short Smith espouses a non-cognitive approach to ethics, meaning that we desire what is right and good, more than we reason about what is right and good. In this mode of aesthetic judgement we sense what is good, true, and beautiful from our experience and thereafter reasons toward what an adequate response should be.

Smith's intuitions about learning the Christian story suggest that alignment with Christ is not a matter of following Christian principles and ideas, but of having come to a place where one's experience of Christ has formed a person's heart. Alignment with Christ involves the life of the mind, but alignment depends first the Christian's desire for Christ Himself.

Smith has reacted against the idea that human beings are primarily thinking, or believing creatures. Instead he claims we are desiring creatures; we desire whatever we

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[86] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 108–109.
[87] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 116.

feel to be part of the good life and our being is bent in accordance with this desire.[88] Thinking and believing are certainly part of what it means to be a Christian or a human being. But Smith's contention is that thinking and believing are not the essential human actions that make a Christian, a Christian. To make his case, Smith observes that humans cannot simply "think," but must always think "about something."[89] There is no neutral ground in which thinking occurs, no thoughts about things that are guided by a value-free disposition. Imagine for a moment a person who is somehow able to move through life without desires of any kind. In the experience of such a person, their absolute indifference would make any thought or action they took feel meaningless. Such a person would feel no compulsion to think in any way, about anything, and thereby such a person would feel no compulsion to act in any particular way. But in that people have desires and values, our reasoning and our actions are motivated. The object of human reasoning is directed by desire. We think and act in particular ways because we have been motivated by a desire.

When humans think about something, we cannot be disinterested, and dispassionate observers. Rather, Smith argues that humans are always "involved" in our reasoning about the world we inhabit.[90] Smith observes that there are no rationalist foundations for why we hold our preferences, cares, concerns, motivations and desires.[91] Rather, our desires are shaped by the practices that fill our lives.[92] One might concede

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[88] Smith, *You are What you Love*, 36.

[89] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 48.

[90] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 49. By being "involved," Smith intimates the idea of desire.

[91] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 64.

[92] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 82. Some practices are "thin," meaning they contain relatively little meaning. Such routine practices may be watching the news, eating breakfast, or washing dishes. Some practices are also what Smith refers to as "think" practices. Says Smith: "other habits are what we could call *thick*, or meaning-full. These are habits that play a significant role in shaping our identity, who we are. Engaging in these habit-forming practices not only says something about us, but also keeps shaping us into

that many people *believe* reasons give rise to preferences, cares, concerns, motivations and desires. But there is an essential difference between *knowing* what is right, and *desiring* to act in accordance with what one knows to be right. Desiring precedes reasoning for desiring directs reasoning.

In Smith's thought: "The most basic way that we intend the world is on the affective order of love. This love constitutes our fundamental and governing orientation to the world. As such, our love is always ultimately aimed at a *telos*, a picture of the good life that pulls us toward it, thus shaping our actions and behaviours."[93] Bringing this perspective into the religious context, he observes that religious devotion is not a matter of cognition, but of love for God. Says Smith: "if humans operate with a social [imagination] well before they get into the business of cognitive theorizing, then by analogy we could say that humans were religious before they ever developed a doctrinal theology, and for most ordinary people, religious devotion is rarely a matter of theory."[94] A Christian is a Christian because they *desire* to be a Christian, and they *desire* to love God.

Smith's development of a theology of desire can helpfully inform what is understood when the idea of alignment is considered. His development of desire and the notion of alignment move in similar fashions. Alignment is a shared direction of desire. If two people share a desire, and both work cooperatively toward this end, these individuals

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that kind of person. So thick habits often both signal and shape our core values or our most significant desires" (82). For Smith, examples of "thick" practices are practices like Sunday worship, daily prayer, or evangelism. Smith also observes that "thick" practices may also train desires upon objects that do not align with the Christian life. He offers the example of listening to partisan and inflammatory talk radio on a daily commute. The challenge implied is that Christians would do well to evaluate the desires being cultivated in through their practices.

[93] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 80. To 'intend the world' is to hold an imaginary understanding of the world, "made up of, and embedded in, stories, narratives, myths and icons" (68).

[94] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 69.

may be said to be in alignment with one another. Similarly, as a Christian comes to share Christ's desire, with the Christian participating in Christ's actions toward this desire, mutual alignment could be said to occur between both Christian and Christ. In complete alignment with Christ, the Christian would therefore desire solely as Christ desires.

Alignment with Christ is not a state of being that is achieved only for one's own sake. Smith suggests worship is, in addition to adoring God, also a political practice. Worship is, or at least should be, a public announcement. Says Smith, "the politics of worship is tied to the renewal of moral agency of the people of God, who are formed to be sent."[95] Alignment, being a participating in Christ desires, means also participating in the mission of God for the world.

Summary of Alignment's Theological Contours

Not only does the metaphorical language of alignment gather meaning from the settings of its common and everyday usage, but the language of alignment can be imbued with rich theological meaning. A theology of alignment with Christ can be built upon Jesus' identification of the two greatest commandments in Matthew 22:24–40. To be aligned with Christ, as developed by Tillich, is to love the Lord with all of one's heart, and soul and mind, and to love one's neighbour as one's self. These loves are, as developed by Smith, desires that are nurtured through Christian practices. These loves are, as developed by Hauerwas, revealed in the story of scripture and the Christian church. To love the way Christ commands is to learn to make the story of scripture and church one's own. These loves are, as developed by Tillich, to grow in quality to the point where they become one's ultimate concern. To the extent that it may be possible in this life,

[95] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 59–60.

embodying the command to love with all that one is, and to love one's neighbour as one's self, the Christian enters into the normative Christian life, which is Christian maturity.

Alignment and Christian Growth

Though the metaphor of alignment is not intended to replace other conceptions of the normative Christian life, the language of alignment can renew some meanings within already established ways of speaking about the normative Christian life.

Consider the idea and language of *growth* in the Christian life. The language of growth arises from the scriptures and is seen in passages such as Ephesians 4:15; "we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." The imagery of growth into maturity also arises out of Jesus' metaphor of the vine and the vinedresser in John 15. Jesus speaks about the branches being pruned to bear fruit, or if these branches are not growing, they are cut off and thrown into the fire. (John 15:5) Paul gives thanks for the growing faith of his readers (2 Thess. 1:3), Peter calls his readers to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 3:18), and the author of Hebrews likens the Christian to children who must ingest solid food to grow into maturity. (Heb. 5:14)

Though the scriptures make ready use of the language of growth to describe a Christian's progression into maturity, it is possible that language of alignment can helpfully renew what is being spoken of when the term "growth" is used. The language of growth in North America appears in economic discourse as things like company growth or economic growth are celebrated. Growth in these terms is seen as a sign of vitality and expanding wealth. Exhortation toward spiritual growth in contemporary North American

settings may be influenced in part by the use of "growth." To "grow" in North America means to add more *stuff* to an existing measure. We celebrate when people add more knowledge, or more action, or more visible enthusiasm to the Christian life. Adding more is assumed to be an indicator of Christian growth.

If adding more to existing measures of spiritual knowledge and practice is the standard of Christian growth, we encounter a problem. Adding more *stuff* to existing measures means Christian maturity is an exercise in human endurance. Pragmatically, there is a limit to how many Christian actions a person can sustainably commit to performing in a given time period. This view supports a sort of spiritual rat-race: focused acutely on attaining maturity, increasing Christian effort is increasingly required to arrive at the goal.

The idea of growth in scripture's agrarian context contained an idea of a *telos* or end, in that a crop grows until it is mature. But the way the language of growth is used in contemporary North America tends not to hold out an idea of an end or telos. Proposing the language of alignment is not done to replace scripture's metaphor of growth, but to make up for a deficiency in the way the language of growth has been employed in consumerist North America.

Take for example, a group of adolescents who attend a weekend retreat. At the retreat participants are encouraged to be more visibly enthusiastic about the Christian life, are reminded of Christian moral teachings about sex, and are encouraged to pray out loud in small group settings. If participants exhibit behaviours in keeping with these exhortations, have these teenagers grown in the Christian life? It is best to answer this question by saying "perhaps" and "hopefully." But even while we might hope for

Christian growth in our church's teenagers, we are also obliged to recognize that enthusiasm, knowledge about ethical teachings, and participating in group prayer are not by themselves, Christian growth.

Wyndy Corbin Reuschling has argued that growth into the Christian life is growth into God's *shalom*. Growth into God's shalom is not attainable by "human hubris" and human action.[96] Finding oneself in God's shalom does not happen by adding more knowledge or actions to the Christian life. Reuschling argues instead that growth into God's shalom is a work of the Trinity. It is the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are "the means by which we pursue and participate in the Good by participating in the very life of God."[97]

The path toward maturity is not a matter of meeting or exceeding standards of Christian action and knowledge—even as much as Christian action and knowledge are critically important parts of the Christian life.[98] No Christian can make themselves into a mature Christian through striving toward standards of Christian knowledge, action, or enthusiasm. Instead, according to Craig Dykstra, participating in the practices of the Christian life put us "in a position where we may recognize and participate in the work of God's grace in the world."[99] Growing in the Christian life is not a matter of checking the right boxes and accomplishing the right tasks. We do not engage the practices of the

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[96] Reuschling, "Christian Moral Formation," 128.

[97] Reuschling, "Christian Moral Formation," 130.

[98] Willard (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 68–69) writes, "Depending on our religious background, we may think of regular church attendance and faithfulness to commonly recognized religious duties, of individual or social 'experiences,' of decisions or commitments of various kinds, as means of radical transformation of the self. Good effects often come from these. They are to be used and not despised. But their track record as means for actual transformation of individuals into Christlikeness is not impressive" (69).

[99] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 41.

Christian as a means of attaining Christian maturity.[100] Rather, the Christian engages the practices of the Christian life because there are goods internal to the enacting of these practices (recalling MacIntyre's definition of a practice), and this good is the participation in God's life and grace.

Consider the parable of the sower, found in Matt 13.3–9; 18–23, Mark 4.2–9; 13–20, and Luke 8.5–8; 11–15. In this parable a farmer goes out to sow seed. Some seed falls along a path, some in rocky places, some among thorns, and some on good soil. Though this parable appears to be speaking about the proclamation of the gospel, it is more probably meant to identify who the true people of God are.[101] Speaking about who the people of God are, this parable and others like it (e.g. the mustard seed in Matt 13:31–32, the seed growing in mystery in Mark 4:26–29, or wheat and weeds in Matt 13:24–30) are intended to emphasise God's action in in the growing Christian life.[102] He is the one who supports and nurtures the growing seed. These parables start with human action (such as planting the seed), yet it is God's action makes the seed grow.

The growth that leads to alignment with Christ requires the Christian's participation. But alignment with Christ is arrived at as the Christian learns to train their attention on Christ. Learning to train one's attention on Christ comes through the practices of the Christian life. Stanley Hauerwas speaks to the type of training by which we grow in the Christian life. Education and effort do not produce growth per se, but

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[100] Root, *Christopraxis*, 143. Root is critical of Aristotelian notions of self-constructed character in the Christian life. Root argues "While Aristotle asserts that human being can be righteous by actualizing the possibility of righteousness through their actions, Luther claims this as ridiculous, as devilish, for it makes divine action unneeded (or needed only as an example for human actualization). The great gift of the gospel, of Jesus' own ministry (Christopraxis), is to give humanity what humanity is not, to give us through the Spirit the gift of being children of God, to give humanity a new possibility born from what humanity is not, making humanity righteous while it is still sinful, giving life while yet we die" (143).

[101] Knowles, *Of Seeds and the People of God*, 59.

[102] Knowles, *Of Seeds and the People of God*, 63.

according to Hauerwas "...religious education is the training in those gestures through which we learn the story of God and God's will for our lives."[103] James K. A. Smith has argued that the stories we learn train our attentions and desires in a particular direction. Says Smith, "...stories capture our imagination precisely because narrative trains our emotions, and those emotions actually condition our perception of the world."[104] What we see and understand changes how we exist within the world. Seeing Christ and understanding the Christian story draw us into the growing and maturing Christian life.

Two diagrams are offered to give a visual aid to this present discussion. Figure 1 is a diagram representing the assumptions about Christian growth this discussion is working on refining. In figure 1, the assumption is that young people must build a mass of Christian knowledge and achieve standards of Christian excellence, in order to progress or mature in the Christian life. The emphasis in figure 1 is the effort of the Christian in their Christian growth; the Christian builds upon a base of knowledge, adding levels of difficulty and skill to the Christian life as they progress toward maturity. In figure 1, Christian nurture is the task of transmitting Christian understanding, and motivating Christian action.

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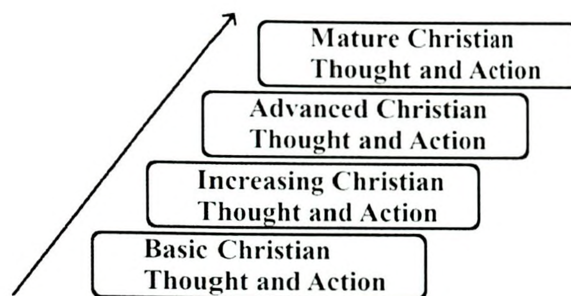
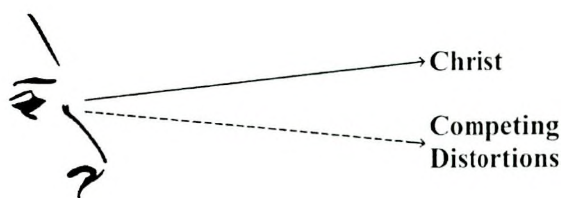
[103] Hauerwas ("The Gesture of a Truthful Story," 103) evokes the language of 'gesture' to speak of the ways that the Christian expresses and deepens their understanding of the Christian life. Hauerwas describes the importance of gestures, saying Christian gestures "embody as well as sustain the valuable and significant" (101). Hauerwas continues saying that it is "through gestures, we create and form our worlds" (101). Hauerwas identifies baptism and the Eucharist as "crucial gestures that are meant to shape us rightly to hear as well as enact the [Christian] story" (102).

[104] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32.



Ascending to Maturity – Figure 1

By contrast, figure 2 represents the vision of Christian growth being set forward in this discussion. By setting one's vision on Christ, a person pays attention to Christ. The process of Christian growth in this alternate frame, is in learning to train one's attention on Christ with increasing consistency and depth of commitment. This vision of growth in the Christian life stands in contrast to the mode of growth assumed in figure 1. Where figure 1 represents growth being effected by human effort in mastering the Christian life, growth in figure 2 represents the process of learning to train one's attention on Christ.



Vision and Maturity – Figure 2

It will be helpful to recall the discussion in this dissertation's introduction about the biblical phrase "lift your eyes." To lift one's eyes is an expression that signifies a person's renewed attention to God. The Christian life takes shape and alignment with Christ occurs as we "lift our eyes" and set our minds on things above. (Col. 3.2) No

longer setting our vision on the concerns of this world, a person grows into alignment with Christ by keeping their vision directed upon Him. Donald Capps affirms the importance of perspective for the Christian life. Capps finds that perception guides the way we exist in the world, even though our "external environment" is generally unchanging between perspectives.[105] It is our perspective that reveals or obscures the nature of the reality we find ourselves within. Capps identifies events such as melancholy, or an epistemology of science-as-theology, as two plausible factors that would cause individuals to perceive an "objectified" and "disinterested" natural world.[106] Recognizing the illusion we become caught in, allows for a re-focusing on Christ and a re-alignment with Christian story.

There is also a moral dimension to figure 2. Christian maturity entails Christian moral maturity. There are two categories represented in figure 2. Returning to Bonhoeffer's line of thinking (initially picked up in chapter one,) there are only two types of decisions a person makes: those which are aligned with Christ, and those that are not aligned with Christ.[107] Those types of actions that are for Christ, are not discerned by moral principles and judgements. The knowledge of what is right, and what is aligned with Christ, arrives in the Christian as the Christian is transformed by Christ himself. Says Bonhoeffer:

> [moral formation] ... is not a question of applying directly to the world the teaching of Christ or what are referred to as Christian principles, so that the world might be formed in accordance with these. On the contrary, formation comes only by being drawn in into the form of Jesus Christ.[108]

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[105] Capps ("Lessons of Art Theory," 324) cites an example of a parishioner who discovers hope through shifting perception, even though "nothing really changed" in their "external environment" (324). Capps finds our "cognitive schemas" mould our religious orientations (321).

[106] Capps, *At Home in the World*, 149.

[107] Bonhoeffer (*Ethics*, 127) states: "There are no distinctions. Everything must go to the judgement. There are only two categories: for Christ, and against Him" (127).

[108] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 81.

The decision that is set before the Christian is where they will train their attention. If attention is trained at things not in Christ, formation follows this trajectory. If on the other hand, attention is drawn to Christ, and is sustained by the beauty of this vision, formation of the Christian will be toward alignment with Christ.

By making the argument that it is through attention to Christ that Christian formation occurs, the implication should not be understood that growing in the knowledge of scripture and competency in Christian action is of no importance. Instead, the importance of knowledge and action are found as a result of one's apprehension of Jesus. Christian knowledge is a response to the apprehension of Christ, and leads the Christian deeper into worship and the Christian life. Christian action is the expression of their deepening Christian life. Both are critically important in Christian nurture, but their role is not as depicted in figure 1. Knowledge and action are not sought *so that* the Christian might progress toward maturity; they are signs of such a progression already in progress.

Conclusion

By using the language of alignment with Christ to speak of the normative Christian life, the focus of the agency in shaping the normative Christian life moves from human effort to participatory human and divine action. The normative Christian life takes shape as the Christian *sees and beholds* Christ as opposed to *acting and deciding* according to principles.[109] The impulse for youth ministry—or other efforts in Christian nurture—to focus on behavioural outcomes arises from good intentions, but misguided. Christian

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[109] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 37–38.

living is not a result of behavioural conditioning. Instead, the maturing Christian life comes as a result of setting one's attentions on Christ.

Growth into Christian maturity is about developing habits of the heart that are aligned with Jesus. This means Christian growth occurs as we care about Christ and the mission of God. Ministry is not an exercise in social conditioning, and is not primarily dependent skill-driven expertise.[110] Ministry is always a theological act because for ministry participates in God's action.[111] There certainly is an important place for skill within ministry, and it would be inappropriate to suggest that a posture of ignorance and ineptitude is the best way to approach ministry practice. But providing a platform for Christian growth to occur is not a matter of identifying what sort of program might produce mature Christians. It is critical that the place of God's action be retained in our thinking about Christian nurture. Providing a platform for growth to occur means continuously calling attention to who Jesus is, and what He has done.

There is interest (and demand) from parents, congregations, and elders for youth ministry to result in teenagers' sitting in the church's pews on Sunday morning. But the Christian life is not necessarily lived in relation to an idea or a standard of behaviour. The Christian life is lived in relation to the person of Jesus Christ. As much as churches might want youth ministries to produce adolescents disposed to Christian behaviour, the

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[110] Purves (*Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, 3) argues that ministry has become too dependent upon "skill-driven" proficiency and practitioners are in danger of forgetting the critically theological nature of ministry.

[111] Purves (*Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, 152) says "The church's ministry is a participation in [God's] ministry, not something new of the church's invention to meet some present need or circumstance, or a vague imitation of Jesus Christ but doomed to failure because we are not messianic... The danger is always that a pragmatic impulse might take over under the felt ministerial pressure of meeting needs" (152).

Christian life does not have as its object a moral code, or a set of principles.[112] The Christian life has as its object a person; Jesus Christ.

By calling attention to Christ, Christian nurture is "propaedeutic."[113] Christian nurture does not make a Christian mature, but invites the Christian into a Christ directed journey. Education, it is said, is not the filling of a pail but a lighting of a fire.[114] Our efforts in Christian nurture can also be understood by this adage. Alignment with Christ occurs as we learn to longingly direct our gaze upon Jesus. Calling attention to theological beauty is an introduction to God's person and action. The hope is that adolescents will begin a theological quest of their own, as they catch "sight" of Christ.

With a sense of what the normative Christian life is, and a recognition that the experience of theological beauty plays an essential role leading to this normative Christian life, attention is turned in the next chapter to how it is the practice of Christian nurture might take shape in response. If those who offer Christian nurture are tasked with helping adolescents to "lift their eyes" to see the beauty of Christ, it is appropriate to suggest that Christian nurture has a curatorial quality to its practice.

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[112] Gusatafson, *Christ and the Moral Life*, 241. The thing that binds Christian community together is not dogma, denomination, principles or "standards of morality" (241). Rather it is Jesus Christ who is an historical figure, and the "focal point" of Christian community (241). Though the moral life is shaped by values and beliefs, the "moral intentions of the Christian, then, can be, or ought to be consistent with this loyalty to Jesus Christ, and inferences drawn from what is known in and through him" (257).

[113] Karuvelil, "To Whom am I Speaking?" 682. Propaedeutic – meaning introductory, but introduced with the understanding that there will be further investigation or study on the part of the student.

[114] Strong, "Education is not the Filling of a Pail," no pages. This quote is commonly attributed to William Buttler Yeats, but Strong argues that this is an inaccurate citation. Unsure of who originally said this quite, Strong concludes that there is never-the-less, truth to this phrase.

CHAPTER 4
CURATING FOR CHRISTIAN VISION

The introduction explored what it is to "lift up" one's eyes. The biblical text uses this phrase to signify an event where the human person recognizes God's reality in a new or a fresh way. In our world, human beings so often fixate their attention on what is before them and fail to see what is really going on more broadly. To respond to God's reality requires that human beings be able to see something of God's reality. There is a need to lift up one's eyes and see with a different, renewed, vision.

When we stand before a masterwork, we may feel as much addressed by the work as we feel we are addressing the work. In this setting we *feel* the meaning of a piece in the ongoing present.[1] Johnathan Edwards suggests to us that there are two types of beauty that exist. Both the beauty of "harmony and proportion" from this world, and the "primary or spiritual beauty" of God capture our attention and speak their meaning to us.[2] Galleries and museums employ curators for the purpose of developing patrons' aesthetic understanding and experience of the beauty of this world. Perhaps theological beauty can also be curated to develop adolescents' vision of God. If the work of Christian nurture is to help teenagers to turn their attention to God, a curatorial metaphor could serve as a guiding image for this important labour. At this point, a guiding image is proposed for the

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[1] Jackson ("Dewey's 1906 definition of art," 168–69) parses John Dewey's definition of art. He suggests that art's meanings are *felt* and not just understood with the mind (168). He also suggests that these meanings address our ongoing present; art speaks consistently to us (169).

[2] Delattre ("Beauty and Theology," 62) draws on Johnathan Edwards to argue that there are two primary forms of beauty.

purpose of helping practitioners imagine an approach to the task they encounter in Christian nurture.

Complexity and the Use of Guiding Images

Practice and understanding in pastoral work have benefited from a collection of guiding metaphors and images. Donald Capps has argued that pastoral action has "world-disclosive possibilities" in that pastoral acts represent Christian meanings.[3] Pastoral acts themselves are guided by "modalities" or metaphors.[4] The paradigmatic nature of a tested metaphor provides a reliable way of navigating the nuances and unfolding complexity of ministry situations.[5] Metaphors and images are created as a means of distilling collected wisdom, and shaping an approach toward the pastoral role and pastoral action. The guiding image or metaphor suggests a path forward in ministry work, without specifying specific actions too rigid or inflexible to be applicable in a given setting. The guiding image or metaphor offers a practitioner a meaning-laden, but distilled, vision with which to approach the complexity of ministry.

The role of a guiding image is to provide ministry approaches within the complexity of ministry practice. This idea of *complexity* in human systems has been developed by Dave Snowden. Originally developed while studying decision making ability in leadership and management, Snowden proposed four situations in which

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[3] Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*, 58.

[4] Capps (*Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*, 72) notes that pastoral metaphors guide practitioners to "pastoral praxis and self-understanding." Capps also suggests that metaphors are also world-disclosive literary devices (20).

[5] Zylla, ("Contours of the Paradigmatic," 208) contrasts "models" of ministry to "paradigms" of ministry. Models are "derived from practiced precepts" and are linear approaches to ministry, shaped within specific contexts (207). Paradigms however, are "flexible but settled sets of core convictions" about ministry, able to guide ministry practice within the "lived reality" of ministry situations (208). The paradigm is a way of viewing ministry in a "summary yet flexible framework... deeply rooted in attention to the intricacies and complexities of life" (210).

decisions are made. There are simple situations where cause and effect are easily knowable. Complicated situations where cause and effect can be known if a situation is adequately studied. Complex situations where cause and effect can only be determined in retrospect. And chaotic situations where there is not a relation between cause and effect. Snowden's original paradigm is paraphrased in table two:

Relationship between Cause and Effect	**Description**
Known	Simple cause and effect, easily observable and predictable.
Complicated / Knowable	Cause and effect relationships are knowable if probed with adequate resources, capabilities and time.
Complex	Cause and effect relationships are logical, but not predictable. Cause and effect can only be determined in hindsight.
Chaos	Patterns of interactivity have broken down and the system exists in a turbulent state.

Strata of Complexity – Table 2.[6]

Graham D. Stanton has suggested that Snowden's paradigm is also useful for understanding congregations and ministry settings.[7] Stanton has helpfully expanded upon Snowden's categories by providing examples of each.[8] Stanton observes: making toast is *simple*; cause and effect are easily understood. Rocket science is *complicated*; though there are many interactions of cause and effect, with sufficient study these interactions can be reliably predicted. A child's birthday party is *complex*; though cause and effect relationships are present, they are not predictable and only understood in hindsight. An

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[6] Snowden, "Complex Acts of Knowing," 13–15. Some modest reconfiguration is represented in Figure 3. Snowden's original table was a 2 X 2 matrix. Descriptions are paraphrased, while general categories are Snowden's originals.

[7] Stanton, "A Theology of Complexity," 151.

[8] Stanton, "A Theology of Complexity," 148–49.

online comment board tends toward the *chaotic*: there is little or no relation between cause and effect, and events occur randomly.[9]

Ministry in its various forms takes place within human systems. These human systems are complex: there is a logic to human interaction, but human behaviour outcomes cannot be predicted reliably. An essential feature of ministry with adolescents is the added complexity of identity formation. Adolescence is recognized through history (and not just a modern social construct alone), a time of discovering and claiming oneself.[10] Adolescents navigate this task of identity formation by forming and reforming a socially bound sense of self and identity.[11] As this plastic sense of self forms and reforms, predictive strategies to ministry are difficult to rely upon. Guiding images provide a theologically informed and practical approaching the complexity of ministry.

Adopting the voice of a person who has not fully appreciated the significance of guiding images for pastoral work, Robert Dykstra rhetorically asks, "Why can't pastoral theologians or caregivers simply be who they are and do what they do?"[12] Implied in this question is the idea that there is little use in attending to a list of pastoral images and metaphors. The assumption in this question is that pastors ought not to bother with abstract and poetic thought, and simply care for their congregations. The issue with such a sentiment is that pastors are obliged to have in mind some sense of their role in order to work within that role. While it is good to have passion for the work, passion alone cannot direct pastoral work.

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[9] An example of chaos is not given in Stanton's paper. This example is an approximation in keeping with his argument.

[10] Kriggs (*In Search of Adolescence*, 118) finds that a distinct development stage in the adolescent years can be observed throughout historical record. Her conclusion is that adolescence is not a recent construct, but a period of formation across human experience.

[11] Crosnoe and Johnson, "Research on Adolescence," 441. Family, school, and paid work have been found to be very significant social settings for identity formation among adolescents (442–43).

[12] Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care*, 5.

Wisdom for pastoral work is offered in images, and in turn, these images offer an approach, a system, and a structure for pastoral action. The range of images represents the complexity of the role. Pastoral images have guided scholarly discourse about the pastoral role throughout the twentieth century. By way of demonstrating the useful place pastoral images have held in pastoral theology, a handful of notable contributions can be identified. Anton T. Boisen has suggested that pastoral care is the act of reading a living human document. To understand and care for a person, a pastor must understand a person within complex social location.[13] Seward Hiltner arranges pastoral work under three guiding images; the pastor is about healing, sustaining, and guiding.[14] Henri Nouwen spoke of pastoral work with the image of the wounded healer. For Nouwen, pastors as wounded healers are those who "are willing to put their own articulated faith at the disposal of those who ask their help."[15] Charles V. Gerkin speaks of pastoral work as prophetic ministry. Pastoral work in Gerkin's view presents "a vision of the possible to which God is actively calling God's people."[16] Don S. Browning observes that pastors are also ethicists. To care for a person or people, means also to help people think about the moral life, and to impart moral vision.[17] Donald Capps has spoken of pastors as agents of hope.[18] Angella Son suggests that the pastor is also an agent of joy.[19] And Rubén Arjona speaks of the pastor as a librarian; they offer stories of God's grace set in accounts of lived experience.[20]

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[13] Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World*, 85.
[14] Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 69.
[15] Nouwen, *Ministry and Spirituality*, 133.
[16] Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Practice*, 71.
[17] Browning, *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care*, 49.
[18] Capps, *Agents of Hope*, 3.
[19] Son ("Agents of Joy," 70) argues that being subject to God in an *I–ImagesThou* relationship is an experience of joy.
[20] Arjona, "Librarian as an Image of Pastoral Care, 749.

Pastoral work is not defined or directed by any one image. Instead, the pastoral task is guided at different times, by different images. In the situation where hope is being lost, the pastor is an agent of hope. Or in the situation where Christian vision is failing, the pastor is a prophetic witness. Having given an account of the value of guiding images and metaphors generally, the image of the curator will be considered specifically.

The Role of the Curator

The modern English word "curator" has Latin and Middle English etymological roots.[21] In Latin, "curare" means to take care of something. To take care of a person's medical needs is to aim at a cure. The verb "to cure" in Latin is "curer." In Middle English, a "curate" was a clerical designation which referred to a person who has the task of caring for, or curing souls. In the modern English speaking world, a curator is a title for someone who professionally tends and exhibits a gallery or museum's holdings and collections. There is a trend in North America to employ the language of curation not as a professional title, but as the practice of selecting and presenting items according to one's taste. For example, retail or service industries suggest that items or services for sale have been aesthetically judged worthy of sale by indicating that items and services have been "curated."[22]

There is some resistance in the professional curation world to flippantly employing the language of curation. A person with an advanced degree who job it is to expand a museum's collection has attained a different level of expertise than a person

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[21] Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary*, 135.
[22] Williams, "On the Tip of Creative Tongues," para. 1–7.

who "curates" trending furniture styles for an interior design shop.[23] However, the act of curating might be said to be practiced at different levels of expertise, in different situations. Just as the designation "artist" spans a range of skill and professionalism, so too can the designation "curator." In its use in contemporary North America language, a curator is someone who facilitates interaction between an artefact or creative expression, and a viewer.[24] To use the metaphor of a curator to interpret the work of providing Christian nurture to adolescents, the more formal sense of curator should be understood. The formal title also implies a degree of expertise with a particular field. In the case of providing Christian nurture, familiarity with the witness of scripture is required, a understanding of the Christian tradition, knowledge of Christian practices, and familiarity with the field of Christian nurture is a definite bonus. It is a case where more understanding will make better judgement possible while providing nurture.

The professional gallery curator, is first, a type of researcher.[25] In order to care for the collection in their responsibility, the curator must know the field that their collection belongs within. The curator needs to know which pieces are seminal or essentially representative of an art movement, period, or artist. The curator has a sense of which works should be procured to fill out an instruction's holdings. The curator knows which works might complement the intuition's holdings, and may arrange to borrow or purchase these works. Such works could be in difficult-to-attain settings, such as in personal collections, or other institution's unadvertised holdings.[26] It is the curator's role to search out these difficult-to-find works and bring them to display.

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[23] Cohen, "Everyone's a Curator," para. 5.
[24] Cohen, "Everyone's a Curator," para. 9.
[25] Kimmel, "Taking a Page from the Art Museum," 16.
[26] O'Reilly et al., "Curation, Conservation, and the Artist," 167.

Having researched well, the curator is able to function in their second task: the curator is also an educator (though, not in the sense of a lecturing teacher or professor).[27] Their role is not just to understand a field for themselves, but the basic thrust of their research is to make available a field to patrons and visitors. Adrian George, the senior curator for the United Kingdom Government Art Collection, speaks of the educational function of curation:

> While the image of the curator as highly skilled subject specialist persists, there is also the notion, driven by the shifts during the 1960s toward the demystification of the art world, that the curator should be an educator. The curator must now explain (often in layman's terms), and so justify, challenging new trends in visual art and position them within a historical context. In an era of rapidly expanding cultural production the curator is also seen to act as a filter, or gatekeeper—an arbiter of taste who, to put it bluntly, is able to say what is 'good' art and why.[28]

The curator understands the "inherent logic" of a work of art.[29] The inherent logic of the art involves the context in which it was produced, the intent of the artist in the work (if any), and something of themes in the artist's wider catalogue. Works are arranged to create "messages... carefully presented by curators to tell a particular story."[30] The curator's art is "carving out" space, for that which is "most provocative, beautiful, relevant," or truthful.[31] In the case of museum curation, exhibitions move a viewer from what is known, to what is unknown.[32] For this task, curators provide "cognitive hooks" (or aesthetic hooks in the case of galleries) intended to facilitate a lay viewer's experience and appreciation of content within the exhibit.[33] By exhibiting some works, or omitting

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[27] Though the theological curator interprets lived experience with theology, the theological curator is not primarily a metaphor for teaching. The metaphor supports the caring work of calling young people to look with wonder at Jesus Christ.

[28] George, *The Curator's Handbook*, 12.

[29] O'Reilly et al., "Curation, Conservation, and the Artist," 171.

[30] Saeji, "Creating Regimes of Value Through Curation," 613.

[31] Davis, "Curation: a theoretical treatment," 771.

[32] Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience*, 137.

[33] Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience*, 139.

others, curators give value to the works exhibited.[34] Selecting the right display items is essential to the work of curation. If a work or artefact is never displayed, its value is rendered "essentially worthless" to the gallery patron.[35] Summarizing his own experience of curation, Hans Ulrich Obrist reflects:

> To make a collection is to find, acquire, organize, and store items, whether in a room, a house, a library, a museum or a warehouse. It is also, inevitably, a way of thinking about the world—the connections and principles that produce a collection contain assumptions, juxtapositions, findings, experimental possibilities and associations. Collection-making, you could say, is a method of producing knowledge.[36]

The logic of curation is governed by aesthetic sense. Curators distinguish between art that will have lasting significance, and art characteristic of a temporary fad or trend.[37] Choosing art that holds significance can be a matter of feeling "directly addressed" by a piece.[38] Choosing pieces for an exhibition is also a matter of interpretation; as much is said about an exhibition's topic by what is presented, as by what is excluded.[39] The setting in which a piece is displayed augments the viewer's appreciation of a piece. The setting serves to highlight the meaning of an individual piece in relation to itself, but also in relation to the exhibit as a whole. A good exhibition fills a space with "the fullness of the visitor's experience (rather than the museum's or sponsor's or curator's experience)."[40]

Though the gallery curator's essential role is best understood as a researcher and an educator, it is not usually a formal type of knowledge that the curator seeks to impart

[34] Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 24.
[35] Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 24.
[36] Obrist, *Ways of Curating*, 39.
[37] Meyer, "Franz Meyer," 103.
[38] Meyer, "Franz Meyer," 104.
[39] Jacob, "Making Space for Art," 134.
[40] Jacob, "Making Space for Art," 137.

to patrons. The curator aims at a knowledge that is beyond fact and objective knowing. The brute facts concerning a work are not the primary object of knowledge being presented in an exhibition. That a work is created by such-and-such an artist, in such-and-such a medium, in a particular style, is not the manner of knowledge that a gallery exhibition hopes to transmit. Instead, the exhibit is necessary for there is a mode of knowing that fact and objective knowledge cannot convey.

Presenting art and beauty is recognized as an educational and transformative act. The experience of beauty presents us with an instructive moment in which change can take place.[41] Twentieth-century educational theorist John Dewey suggests that beauty carries educational meaning. The one who beholds beauty is charged with making a decision to accept or reject the meanings that beauty presents. An experience of beauty invites an act of surrender.

> The esthetic or undergoing phase of experience is receptive. It involves surrender. But adequate yielding of the self is possibly only through a controlled activity that may well be intense. In much intercourse with our surroundings we withdraw; sometimes from fear, if only of expending unduly our store of energy; sometimes from preoccupation with other matters, as in the case of recognition. Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy.[42]

Dewey sees beauty in human theologies and cosmologies. These theologies and cosmologies are more than matters of intellectual assent. Dewey reflects: "Theologies and cosmologies have laid hold of imagination because they have been attended with solemn processions, incense, embroidered robes, music, the radiance of colored lights, with stories that stir wonder and induce hypnotic admiration"[43] For Dewey, the

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[41] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 48.
[42] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 53.
[43] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 30.

experience of beauty leads to theology, or in the case of those not inclined to theology, cosmology. Beauty leads to theology as the appreciation of its presence points with an instructive quality to a transcendent source of beauty.

Museums and galleries also offer patrons an anthropological knowledge. This knowledge arrives in the form of an impression about culturally bound values and meanings, and what it means to exist in the world as a human being.[44] Art is representational, meaning any given work of art was created with some form of human intended meaning.[45] It may be that the meaning of a piece might not be readily accessible to a viewer or patron. Nevertheless if there were genuinely no meaning in art, there would be no reason to create art. This means, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, that in the encounter of beauty we are given "the assurance that the truth does not lie far off and inaccessible to us."[46] Guided by the curator's aesthetic sensibilities, the curated exhibit offers a type of knowledge about what it means to be a human being in the world. This knowledge is not always immediately accessible to a viewer. An exhibition invites a viewer to spend time looking and then thinking about the art the viewer experiences. Instead of "sweeping complex matters under the rug of hasty resolutions," the gallery space offers a viewer time to experience an exhibition on their own time.[47]

Curators are obliged to recognize their achievements are "for their own time."[48]

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[44] Schildkrout, "The Beauty of Science and the Truth of Art," 130.

[45] Beardsley (*Aesthetics*, 281) also acknowledges that the meaning of art is not always accessible in a straightforward way. Beardsley identifies abstract art as being non-representational (285). But a piece being non-representational does not mean that a piece has no meaning. Though a piece may not definitely represent something, Beardsley argues that abstract art sill makes "suggestion" in its "visual design" (284). Even for works that seem to not represent anything and therefore could be easily misinterpreted, Beardsley argues that the capacity to misrepresent something implies that the artist still intended to represent *something* through an abstract work (286).

[46] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 15.

[47] Perkins, *The Intelligent Eye*, 44.

[48] Meyer, "Franz Meyer," 104.

While the impression of an exhibition stays with a patron, the curator's art in setting up the exhibition is forgotten. Whatever remains of an exhibition in the viewer's mind, is not matters of presentation, but of the pieces themselves. The role of curation is both an important role, and a humble role. It is not the curator who is celebrated and remembered, but the work of the artist and the meanings contained in this art. Collaboration is common in curation; curators work both with other curators, and with artists themselves.[49] Curators also bring to public consciousness upcoming artists and their works, or in some cases, well known artists from other parts of the world.[50] Curators draw out themes in exhibits from past masters, contemporary art, as well as anticipating art being made that will be significant in the future.[51]

In order to be a good educator, the curator must be a good administrator. It will be no good simply to be caught up in the romance of selecting significant pieces for display, if an exhibition is not put on well. The curator exists at the hub of a network of individuals, working together for the success of the exhibition.[52] The curator secures funding, arranges for lenders to make pieces available, interfaces with special donors, oversees press and public relations, serves as the exhibition's liaison with the gallery who will host the show, directs the installation (such as lighting needs, art handling, or unique exhibition designs and requirements), licences merchandise, and may host special receptions for dignitaries or sponsors.

The Image of the Curator and Christian Nurture

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[49] Meyer, "Franz Meyer," 105.
[50] Meyer, "Franz Meyer," 105–106.
[51] Meyer, "Franz Meyer," 110.
[52] George, *The Curator's Handbook*, 86.

With a sense of the professional role of the curator outlined, the metaphor of the curator in Christian nurture is able to be developed—from here on to be referred to as a theological curator. Just as the gallery curator presents knowledge and meaning through carefully selecting works for display, the person who offers Christian nurture to adolescents selects and presents Christian truth and theological beauty to them. While the gallery curator carves out space for what is most beautiful and relevant, the task of Christian nurture is to carve out space for what is theologically beautiful and relevant.

A gallery's curator organizes permanent exhibitions around themes relevant to the gallery's purpose. Yet to complement the permanent exhibitions, the curator arranges for special exhibitions to augment the gallery's offerings, always with an eye to broadening and deepening the patron's experience of beauty. A theological curator continually lifts up the foundational truths that the Christian life stands upon. But as context and need dictate, complimenting Christian theologies are elevated. These supporting theological understandings are offered to refine, nurture, and encourage a young person's in their Christian walk. The character and grace of God revealed in Christ Jesus is a permanent exhibition in the curator's language. As the need arises the theological curator calls adolescents' attention to a theology of work, or play, or service, or worship (and so on).

The gallery curator draws from within their collection, presenting and calling attention to what is meaningful and beautiful, and relevant to patron's developing artistic sensibilities. The theological curator likewise draws from within their understanding to offer a theological interpretation of Christian experience and the Christian life.[53] The

[53] Nouwen (*Ministry and Spirituality*, 132) identifies the importance of offering interpretation of experience in the Christian life. He emphasises that careful articulation of experience is important for understanding how to live the Christian life. Says Nouwen, "People who can articulate the movements of their inner lives, who can give names to their varied experiences, need no longer be victims of themselves

interpretive vision that is offered extends a set of meanings for adolescents to make sense of their own experience. This interpretive vision identifies God's action and anticipates what a faithful human response could be. But in addition to selecting from within their established collection, the curator is on the lookout for works that will usefully augment a collection.

The gallery curator operates in their role under the assumption that the meaning of works displayed must, in a final sense, "speak" for themselves. Though contextual information about a work and display can help patrons appreciate an exhibition, the works themselves must convey their meaning to patrons. The theological curator likewise understands that their interpretive work enables others to see the meaning in theology, but the theological meanings themselves are what must address others.[54] The faithful theological curator, in the final sense, can only let theology speak for itself.

The gallery curator's craft assumes responsibility on the part of the patron to make use of the meanings they encounter in a gallery exhibition. The curator has brought their best intuitions, judgements, and knowledge to the task of giving shape to the gallery space. Despite the gallery curator's best efforts, they cannot control the experience and the aesthetic sense of the patron. The curator is obliged to surrender the meaning of the art he or she curates, to the relation between the art itself, and the patron who beholds it.

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but are able slowly and consistently to remove the obstacles that prevent the Spirit from entering. They can create space for the One whose heart is greater than theirs, whose eyes see more than theirs, and whose hands can heal more than theirs" (132).

[54] Hauerewas (*The Work of Theology*, 2) argues that theologians do not have control over the words that they use in their craft. Christian theologians adopt the language and discourse of the Christian scripture and Christian theology. The faithful theologian is not free to invent new meanings, but must speak about what is true using words that are not their own, but that belong to the Christian tradition.

Hauerwas writes: "That we do not have control of the words we use I think is surely the case if you are determined, as I have been determined, to think in and with that tradition of speech called Christianity. I am a theologian. Theologians do not get to choose the words they use. Because they do not get to choose the words they use, they are forced to think hard about why the words they use are the ones that must be used. They must also do the equally hard word of thinking about the order that the words they use must have if the words are to do the work they are meant to do" (2).

The theological curator in a similar way uses their skill to offer clarifying vision, but the theological curator cannot affect a change in a young person. The assumption from the point of view of the theological curator is that the meaning making process must rest finally, between God and young person. The theological curator acts in an interpretive guiding role sifting, discerning and presenting theology. And thereafter the onus of meaning making and decision is rightly transferred to the young person and God.[55] Henri Nouwen has emphasised that ministry is not about effecting change in others. Ministry "is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum for choice and commitment."[56] Like the gallery curator, the theological curator sets forth ideas and stories and experiences about who God is.

The gallery curator is never celebrated as much as the works they curate. Instead the gallery curator finds their place serving patrons by facilitating an encounter between patrons and works of art. The object of the gallery is the experience of art, and not the celebration of its curator. The task of theological curation is likewise a humble task. The theological curator is diligent in putting their best foot forward. But the theological curator is required to adopt a posture of humility. Having spoken with the best words they had available at the time, the theological curator finally must surrender any anticipated ministry outcomes to the domain of the young person and of God. Although there are

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[55] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 201. Recall from the first chapter Tillich's phrase "genuine decision" was discussed. The theological curator cannot make a genuine decision on behalf of others. Rather, theological curation makes possible a decision that is genuine (Ie. made knowing what one is choosing into, or opting out of).

[56] Nouwen, *Ministry and Spirituality*, 221. Good articulation of the experience of the Christian life is itself not the end of ministry. Articulation is an *offering* of understanding, but this understanding must still be accepted and made one's own. Ministry is also a matter of hospitality. Hospitality in ministry says Nouwen, "is not to change people but to offer them space where change can take place" (221). Hospitality in ministry is an open space "where strangers can enter and discover themselves created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host but the gift of a chance for guests to find their own" (222).

pastors and ministry staff who seek to be celebrated, the object of ministry is not the public role pastors and ministry staff can occupy. The work of theological curation is bearing witness about God. The primary focus of the gallery is the beauty of its art, and the primary focus of Christian nurture is the person of God, revealed in Jesus.

The gallery curator seeks out means to aid patrons appreciate classic works from the setting of their modern context. The gallery curator highlights seminal pieces and includes features of an exhibition by which patrons can appreciate the significance of the pieces they are encountering. The theological curator is also tasked with situating theological understanding within lived experience. The theological curator takes pains to select and fit the most fitting descriptive language for a situation. The nature of the fitting description is that it is true, beautiful, and adequately interprets the situation in which it is being used.[57] The theological curator is versed in many theologies. There are theologies of hope, and suffering; of correction and grace; of failure and renewal. Such theologies are brought forward as needed to clarify the vision of young people.

A gallery curator also makes the discourse of the art world accessible to the patron. While patrons are interested in the art world, they cannot each be experts in the field. A gallery curator disseminates the ideas of the art world to patrons, allowing patrons to connect with the discussions of the broader community. The theological curator likewise makes the wisdom being exchanged in the theological world accessible to adolescents for their Christian nurture. The theological curator holds out the wisdom of the Christian tradition by reframing this wisdom in terms young people can find meaning

[57] Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 61. The language of 'fitting' is taken from Niebuhr's ethics. A thing that is 'fitting' is related to "what is going on" within a situation. Niebuhr's commentator Thomas Ogletree elaborates: a fitting judgement is in keeping with the normative meanings within a situation (Ogletree, "Activity of Interpreting, 4).

within. This wisdom of the Christian tradition is not disseminated for the sake of young people's knowledge of Christian historical thought, but for the purpose of calling attention to God's beauty through the collected wisdom and experience of the Christian community.

We can imagine that the gallery curator finds a sense of satisfaction as they see patrons are inspired to wonder by new installations. The gallery curator participates in this wonder with the wonder as the patrons. The curator is saddened when patrons casually dismiss masterpieces, alleging that they "don't get it," without trying to see what the curator saw. The curator themselves, may be challenged and changed through the practice of curation. Fresh meanings are presented in new pieces, and the curator enjoys the work of surveying the art world for interesting and fresh pieces. The theological curator likewise, is not solely a repository of immutable theological truth, but someone who learns and grows themselves in concert with the young people in their care.

The gallery curator pays attention to the interests of patrons and keeps an eye out for meaningful or timely traveling exhibits. The curator understands their work is not for themselves, but for the benefit of patrons who trust the gallery to put on meaningful exhibitions. As the gallery curator pays attention to patrons, the curator may themselves encounter new works and themes they were not previously as familiar with. Permanent exhibitions are refreshed, and novel special exhibitions are arranged and presented, with perceptive attention. Like the gallery curator, the theological curator consistently brings young people back to foundational Christian confession; there are permanent and unchanging features of the theological curator's work. There are also many times when less attended theologies may come to the fore for a period of time. There may be

situations that the theological curator is unfamiliar how to navigate. In service of faithfully offering Christian nurture, the theological curator does not sit back and rely on past formulations of theology. The curator refines their craft, seeking to ever offer more faithful witness.

The Curator: Distilled

This curation metaphor is an extended metaphor. Out of its diverse sets of application, two critical insights arise from the metaphor of the curator. The first is that there is no formula to guarantee effective Christian nurture of young people.[58] Certainly there are ways of approaching Christian nurture that are more helpful, and ways that are less helpful. But just as the gallery curator cannot make patrons love the work they love, the theological curator cannot create mature Christians. Donald Capps suggests that "pastoral power" is "inherently paradoxical" for pastoral power is unlike the effective power of the secular world.[59] Pastoral actions do not present as "powerful methods for eliciting or effecting change."[60] But nevertheless, pastoral actions do effect change. Likewise it seems paradoxical that the work of curating theological beauty should do anything for anyone, let alone teenagers. But nevertheless, this work allows the possibility of a shift in perception and the event of lifting up one's eyes to God.

The skill and pastoral sensibilities of the minister do remain important for formation. The knowledge of the minister and sensitivities to young people's needs are

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[58] Loder (*The Transforming Moment*, 131) argues that while stage-based models of growth are helpful for providing an approach to ministry, linear models for ministry are "not fundamentally true" guides for Christian nurture (131). Growth in the Christian life is the "decisive recentring of the personality around a transcendental reality" (167). Recentring involves a leap of imagination (or vision) that is able to re-order a formerly disordered vision of the world (38). This imaginative event cannot be forced, but only accepted (39).

[59] Capps, *Living Stories*, 202.

[60] Capps, *Living Stories*, 204.

critical. Yet the minister can only surrender their efforts to the dialogue between subject and Absolute; between the young person and God. The one who provides nurture seeks to represent their inward knowledge of God's beauty for the sake of youth in their care. But just as the curator is unable to make patrons see what they see, the minister is unable to adequately communicate their own sense of God's beauty.

The second implication in this metaphor is more hopeful: that God can be trusted. Adolescents regularly do encounter divine beauty and divine presence through our efforts in Christian nurture. It is in part through the curator's craft that God makes his appeal (2 Cor 5:20). The curator cannot be responsible for the outcome of the appeal, but only that the appeal is presented faithfully. Henri Nouwen has said that "ministers cannot save anyone. They can only offer themselves as guides to fearful people."[61] The curator points the way by setting theological meaning in front of young people, and God, who made this appeal through the witness of the curator, can be trusted to see the work to completion. (Phil 1:6)

Foundations for a Curatorial Metaphor

The image of the curator finds its roots in the pastoral theology of Phil C. Zylla. In *Virtue as Consent to Being*, Zylla examines the usefulness of Jonathan Edward's construct of virtue for pastoral work. Exploring how virtue is expressed in pastoral work, Zylla offers three guiding images. Pastoral work is the work of the *attentive poet*: pastoral work is the careful task of capturing and expressing "the ultimate anxieties and the sublime hopes that wrestle for supremacy in our hearts."[62] Pastoral work is the work of the *weeping*

[61] Nouwen, *Ministry and* Spirituality, 165.
[62] Zylla, *Virtue as Consent to Being*, 144.

prophet: pastoral work requires compassionate participation in the brokenness of others' lived experience.[63] Pastoral work is the work of a *good shepherd*: it is moral work of "facing the world with benevolence."[64] The theological curator *attends* to beauty as they express theological vision. The theological curator is *prophetic*; speaking God's truth into situations through the careful and specific use of descriptive language. The theological curator offers their craft as a means of *shepherding* the developing faith of those under their care.

Of specific interest to the metaphor of the curator, is Zylla's appendix to his work. Appending his exploration in the main body of work in *Virtue as Consent to Being* is a poetic autobiographical story. The account Zylla relays is the story of a pastoral figure searching for the meaning of virtue. As the piece opens, the reader is introduced to a pastoral figure. Zylla writes:

> Captured by the importance of his pursuit of the Good, the word-smith calculated every twist in the plot, every turn of the phrase, each placement of a word. The words must be true. The words must speak the truth about virtue. The words must reflect something deeper to which they point. Goodness must prevail.
>
> Life was fragrant and good and the word-smith enjoyed his work. He hammered and forged new items each week that he would bring to the market. He particularly enjoyed the market. It was the one chance each week to break away from the hard work of the word shop and to share the wares with those who came to listen. At the market laughter and deception lived together. It was the most interesting place to take words. One never knew quite what to expect.
>
> Many persons came shopping at the market. Young and old would gather each week—almost ritually. Some had long since quit word-shopping; others were sincerely looking for a new word. Like Maria. She was a young and vibrant business woman. They say it was common knowledge that her marriage was "in trouble." Words buzzed around and (mostly) behind her. They said something about fault, something about the children. Cruelty was mentioned. Maria would ignore these words. She came because the word-smith had something prepared and she wanted to see if it could mean anything to her. She listened as the word-

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[63] Zylla, *Virtue as Consent to Being*, 120.
[64] Zylla, *Virtue as Consent to Being*, 125.

smith spun his stories. Something about grace. Something about making it through. Something about what Maria longed to hear most—that Someone loved her.

The word-smith thought diligently about those who might come to the market each week. He thought about Maria. He considered the others: the widower who longed for some companion-word. The lonely who longed for a word-friend. The blind lady who wanted words that could allow her to see. He thought about all of these and the many others who might come to the market.

The word-critics would come too! Oh, they would never miss! No siree! Often they would come and steal words without paying for them. It bothered the word-smith, especially if they took the words that others needed. The market was filled with laughter and deception. Days and weeks and months passed. Few things changed at the word market. At least so it appeared.

Then a terrible thing happened! It was unexpected and quite alarming. The word-smith was injured on the job. He had been carrying on his usual routine and something happened. The words began to seem hidden to him. He would look in the same ways and in the same places—but the meanings were gone. It was quite unnerving for him.

He tried to combat the problem by redoubling his efforts. The harder he tried, the more painful each day became at the word shop. The stories would seem wordless. The phrases and synonyms that he used to count on would hide. Verses seemed distorted and changed. Something terrible had gone wrong!

What was worse was that the market was no longer any fun. The people had stopped laughing; deception grew bolder and became scorn. The market still came and went every week but the word-smith had so little to sell. He knew he wouldn't be able to survive long on the few words that he was selling. His despondency deepened. Words became heavy and felt like giant boulders as he attempted to drag them around the word-shop. It all became quite difficult and the word-smith knew he would have to make changes.[65]

The story continues as the word-smith finds new employment and begins to hunt for the meaning of virtue. In this story there is an image represented of pastoral life through the character of the word-smith. The poetic character of the word-smith is evocative. The word-smith offers his wares to others—anticipating that the wares might be examined carefully, and purchased if they seem to suit the need of the customer. The

[65] Zylla, *Virtue as Consent to Being*, 131–33.

word-smith creates his words with careful attention. There is artistry to the word-smith's labour.

The image of the curator is similar to the character of the word-smith. Both play at fashioning and presenting meaning for others. While the word-smith is more at home in a pastoral care setting, the image of the curator is more at-home within a discussion about theological beauty and Christian nurture. The task of the theological curator is to display what is poignant, provocative, or significant. The curator arranges works to illumine a theme, convey a message, or set the stage for theological experience.

Aesthetic Consciousness in Adolescence

Having submitted the metaphor of the curator as a guiding image for Christian nurture, it is worth addressing whether or not adolescents have the cognitive capacity to respond to recognize and appreciate beauty within theological concepts. Though theories about the form of beauty are sophisticated, the experience beauty is itself appears to be a precognitive, and universal human phenomenon.[66] Beauty addresses those who are in its presence. Beauty does not need to be recognized by an act of cognition and careful judgement in order to be appreciated. Irrespective of adolescent cognitive capacity, the ability to recognize beauty is present in all human beings.

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[66] Galetta ("An Introduction to the Aesthetic Precognition," 249) finds that regardless of aesthetic expertise, art experts and non-experts alike are attracted to similar compositional elements in art pieces. He argues that the appreciation of aesthetic composition is precognitive: human beings experience the pleasure of beauty first, and thereafter make judgements about the beauty they have precognitivly recognized (252). His treatment of beauty is not wholly compatible with Murdoch or Gadamer's understanding of beauty. Murdoch and Gadamer approach beauty as an expression of the common sense of a community of people and subscribe meaning to beauty. Galatta this signals that he regards beauty as primarily a pleasurable experience that could possibly be predicted through an "algorithm" (253). Galetta's contribution to this present work is her identification that the experience of beauty does not require mental sophistication. He does recognize that culture and values condition the "symbolic and evocative appeal of an artwork" to a viewer (250).

However, the usefulness of the image of the curator also critically depends upon the adolescent capacity to derive meaning from the theological beauty they encounter. Though adolescents are not left to their own devices to extract meaning from beauty in the curatorial metaphor, adolescents must have a capacity to recognize (with guidance) what the beauty they perceive might signify.

In the second decade of life, the capacity for abstract thought is developed in part and continuing toward maturity. Adolescents can synthesise personally significant identity markers into a stable sense of self.[67] This task of identity is made possible by the recent developmental ability to be self-conscious; to see oneself abstractly through the eyes of other people.[68] Formulating a stable identity entails projecting a sense of self into both the past and the future.[69] The increased cognitive ability can be an overwhelming experience—particularly given hormonal changes in adolescent bodies and minds.[70] Adolescents may not at all times be cognitively available for abstract thought. Yet though the ability to think in abstraction can be disorienting, this does not mean adolescents chronically lack the capacity for nuanced thought. Adolescents can and do formulate sophisticated judgements.[71]

Adolescents can and do have a developing sense of aesthetic judgement. Art criticism and critical inquiry have become a staple part of public education in the twentieth century.[72] Adolescents have a developed capacity to appreciate visual

[67] Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 121.
[68] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 153.
[69] Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 209–10.
[70] Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian*, 112.
[71] Kohlberg and Gilligan ("The Adolescent as a Philosopher," 1075–76) find that adolescents are able operate at levels of moral reasoning on par with adult populations.
[72] Geahigan, "Conceptualizing Art Criticism," 37–38.

metaphor, and derive personal and subjective meaning from the experience of art.[73] That such a capacity exists does not mean that such a capacity is always fully developed. But like learning a language or developing critical thought, aesthetic judgements can be developed.[74] Consider that adolescents are saturated in artistic mediums that they feel personally connected to. Music, television, movies, and fashion are foundational pieces of adolescents' cultural setting.[75] Though a museum or gallery visit could be disinteresting to some, this does not mean that such teens lack a capacity for appreciating beauty or art forms. Instead it should be understood that adolescents who are disinterested by an institution's holdings, are compelled by other forms of beauty not present within an institution's galleries.

Theodore F. Wolff and George Geahigan identify four thinkers who have articulated why art education could and should be part of a child or young person's educational experience. By arguing that children and teenagers can be taught to make aesthetic judgements, Wolff and Geahigan also necessarily argue that children and teenagers have the capacity for aesthetic judgement. Wolff and Geahigan identify Thomas Munro, John Dewey, Harry Broudy, and Manuel Barkan as thinkers who have provided critical and seminal writing about the significance of aesthetic education.[76] A brief accounting of these thinkers' perspectives will provide some groundwork for claiming that young people have the capacity to find Christian meaning in apprehending theological beauty.

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[73] Parsons, *How We Understand Art*, 78.

[74] de Mul, ("Development of Aesthetic Judgement," 59) discusses Gadamer's observation that taste develops within a social location. de Mul reasons that human beings can develop aesthetic taste in the same ways we enculturate to our social locations. de Mul's argument also leans on Lawernce Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Just as moral judgement develops by learning to think in more sophisticated patterns, aesthetic judgement can be developed through exposure to patterns of aesthetic judgement (60).

[75] Levi and Smith, *Art Education*, 199.

[76] Wolff and Geahigan, *Art Criticism and Education*, 137.

Thomas Munro, a philosopher interested in art education, observes two reasons that high-school students may fail to develop artistic taste, though they participate in learning through a classroom-based art curriculum. Munro observes that that aesthetic education deals with the "likes, emotions, and imaginings of individuals."[77] As teenagers' aesthetic senses are deeply personal, Munro challenges the impersonal, fixed curriculum used at his time for developing high-school-aged artistic imagination. For Munroe, art education needs to go beyond pre-set curriculum, and aid young people at developing the aesthetic sensibilities they already possess. A second reason Munro believes art education will struggle in high-school classrooms, is that adolescents are self-conscious and introspective.[78] Adolescents struggle to see the world through alternate perspectives, as they are so deeply concerned and interested in their own developing perspective. Art education in high-school classrooms can fail to solicit the attention of students, if the educational approach focuses on the expert perspectives, and fails to allow adolescents to articulate their own perspective. He accepts that art education is therefore very difficult to do well, but pedagogical difficulty does not mean art education isn't useful. Says Munro:

> There are many difficulties in this form of education. It is hard to standardize; it must be constantly altered in details, and it makes great demands upon the individual teacher. The teacher must not only understand the great works and principles of which he [*sic.*] speaks, but he must be able to view the passing whims of youth with sympathetic discernment. ... As to the content of the sort of aesthetic teaching proposed, it is impossible to be very specific, for the reason that it should be constantly changed to incorporate the forms of popular art which are in favour with adolescent students at the time. It is the instructor's task to discover what these are.[79]

Though young people have the capacity for aesthetic reflection, aesthetic matters can be difficult for both student and teacher to reflect upon together. A teacher

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[77] Munro, "Adolescence and Art Education," 251.
[78] Munro, "Adolescence and Art Education," 255.
[79] Munro, "Adolescence and Art Education," 270–71.

approaches aesthetic reflection with curriculum aims, and the student, from their single very personal perspective. Children and teenagers have the capacity for aesthetic reflection, but a teacher's insensitivity to their aesthetic senses can make this reflection difficult.

John Dewey, a philosophical pragmatist and educational theorist observed that learning occurs when one is interested in the learning at hand. Dewey observes that "we *take* interest. To be interested in any matter is to be actively concerned with it."[80] The decision to take interest cannot be cajoled, but is a product of the learner's desire. Says Dewey, "there is not only the thing which is projected as valuable or worthwhile, but there is also appreciation of its worth."[81]

For Dewey, the meanings contained in beauty and art, are the meanings the original artist had intended to represent. One of the qualities of art is that art does not just contain meaning, but because its meaning is contained in beauty, the beauty of art creates an experience of meanings. Says Dewey, "to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art."[82] It is not beyond adolescents to perceive, take interest, and create their own experience. The sort of subject matter that may attract their aesthetic attention may differ from adults, but the capacity to appreciate beauty is present.

Harry Broudy, an educational and aesthetic philosopher, argued that art and aesthetic education should be regarded as a part of a basic education. Just like proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic are basic skills for processing the world young people

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[80] Dewey, *Interest and Effort*, 16.
[81] Dewey, *Interest and Effort*, 16.
[82] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 54.

encounter, aesthetic expression and impression, argues Broudy, are equally basic skills also.[83] Lastly, Manuel Barkan, advocated for art education for children in grade school. Barkan believed that critical aesthetic skill could be cultivated as early as third grade.[84]

While a capacity for recognizing beauty and thinking about beauty is present at adolescence, it is not to be taken for granted that all adolescents are ready to think abstractly about the meanings they encounter in beauty. There are destabilising factors that decrease adolescents' ability to think clearly and critically. Reflecting upon adolescent capacity for discernment, David F. White identifies six destabilizing factors that modern adolescents contend with:[85]

> 1. Puberty and adolescence are beginning earlier in the life cycle, and adult life (stable work, creating a family, becoming rooted in a place) is being delayed into the fourth decade of life.
>
> 2. Post-secondary education has become increasingly necessary for many professional jobs. Schooling delays adult responsibilities, and in some cases burdens young people with financial debts. With the proliferation of college-educated young people, professional level jobs are not always available to them when coming out of university.
>
> 3. The knowledge that a comfortable middle-class lifestyle may be out of reach for many young people—even those who are college educated—saps hope and optimism from their futures.
>
> 4. Under privileged young people also suffer setbacks in their earning potential, as their jobs must compete with labour in developing countries.
>
> 5. In the United States, juvenile misdemeanors have become prosecutable felonies, leading young people to be involved in the correctional system at a rate not previously encountered by previous generations.
>
> 6. There is an absence of strong adult mentor figures, and this void is increasingly being filled with electronic entertainment.

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[83] Broudy, "How Basic is Aesthetic Education?," 7.

[84] Henry, "Reflections on Manuel Barkan," 8.

[85] White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 21–22. This list is paraphrased for brevity from its original form.

Despite these destabilizing factors present in modern adolescent experience, White identifies the beauty of God as something that could break through the frustration or confusion of modern adolescent experience.[86] While adolescents are often caught up in their immediate experience of the world, this does not mean that adolescents are incapable of recognizing and appreciating beauty.

An Example of Adolescent Capacity for Aesthetic Appreciation

An example of critical engagement with art in a youth group setting can be given as a token way of situating these previous findings within lived experience. Our church youth group at one point was preceded by dinner and an in-depth Bible study. Teenagers would wander over to the church after school, and when our group had gathered, we would spend perhaps an hour in study, which was followed by dinner together. After dinner was concluded, there was usually about an hour of time to kill before the "official" start of youth group at 7pm—the time when those not as interested in an in-depth study would arrive for games, worship, and a shorter message. This after-dinner time was often spent by our teens in the church's gymnasium. They would find games to invent, and often listen to their music in the gym, played on the church's professional quality sound system. One afternoon, instead of playing our group member's music, a leader had brought an album titled "Lost in the Dream," by the band *The War on Drugs*. The album's songs had a dream-like feel, mixed with an indie rock sound. Several of the

[86] White (*Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 25) argues that beauty is "a set of relationships between the parts and the whole that strikes us as appropriate, proportionate, and pleasing" (25–26). White argues that appreciation of beauty is a type of discernment. Discernment "becomes possible whenever a person's sensitivity to one's 'heart' makes one available to hear the Spirit's voice" (67). Discernment and appreciation of beauty are activities of the soul. The soul contains "the deep resources of human experience where we touch the Holy" (74). Because adolescents have a soul, they have the capacity to discern what is true and the capacity in this discernment, to appreciate theological beauty.

tracks on this album included ambient-sounding extended improvised sections of music, with some songs reaching upward of nine minutes in length.

Our teen group members would affectionately refer to the leader's choices in music as "Dad-Rock," but more often than not were okay with accommodating periodic selections from our groups' adult volunteers. Having put this album on, and dinner finished up, the group's leaders went off to prepare some activities for youth group. Being away in the office wing of the church for perhaps twenty minutes preparing for the evening, we were surprised as we returned to the gym to find the lights off, and group members lying on the gym floor, heads together and feet extended outward as if they were rays emitting from a central point. The music was still on, and its sound echoed around the gym walls as these adolescents lay quietly listening to the rhythm and instruments pulse, ebb and flow on the recording. When asked what was going on, the response we received was that they were quite enjoying this music and felt that they should focus on these songs by laying in a patterned way and letting the music wash over them.

This anecdotal story comes with a point. Though adolescents do not always have an interest in paying close attention to a piece of learning or details of instruction, they do have the capacity to appreciate detail if they choose to. In the case of this *War on Drugs* album, a group of adolescents were so interested by the composition they were listening to, they took the time and effort to focus carefully and attentively on something they found to be beautiful, and worth paying close attention to.

An Example of Adolescent Theological Capacity

Given the assumptions of the curatorial image, it is worth also wondering if adolescents care for theology. It may be possible to caricature adolescence as a time when teenagers are developing higher cognitive functions, but as yet fall short having the capacity to appreciate nuance, beauty or subtle suggestion. Such a characterization, if it were to be offered, would have its roots in what is observed in adolescent behaviour. There are times in youth ministry life where leaders rightly question adolescents' decision making skills. Yet there are also other times where young people have paid close attention to a situation and are able to encounter a nuanced idea or artefact, and respond thoughtfully. While adolescents are probably not interested in academic writing, they are interested in understanding the God who addresses them.

In our church youth group there are two forms of attention that are given during scripture studies. There is the form of attention a polite young person might give a teacher; patient but more or less disinterested. There is another form of attention that is given if the group's attention is caught by a striking message from scripture. This form of attention is characterized by close attention to the meanings of scripture's message. It is as though the quality of attention changes between attention given while being entertained, and attention given when being addressed by the scriptures. Though this short report is a subjective account, the question about why adolescents sometimes give their attention to a lesson, and other times do not, is the underlying research question this dissertation has been guided by. What qualities of a scripture study lead a group of teenagers to address scripture's witness not form an *I-It* relation, but an *I-Thou* relation?[87]

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[87] Buber, *I and Thou*, 11. The *I-It* relation is the property of a relation of a subject to an object. We address tools, ideas, facts and rules through an I-*It* relation. Buber says "Man [*sic.*] travels over the surface of things and gathers their facts. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them: he wins an understanding from them" (5). In an *I-Thou* relation, two subjects address one another. Says Buber, "The

Surely the essential quality that facilitates this change in the nature of adolescents' attention is the perception of beauty in God's address to them.

Limits of a Curatorial Metaphor

It will be important, even as the metaphor of the curator is being set forward, to recognize that the metaphor of the curator cannot be the sole image that is used to imagine ministry practice among young people. There are limits to the metaphor of the curator, and these limits should be made explicit. Advancing a curatorial metaphor cannot mean that adolescents can rely on youth leaders to think theologically for them. And the image of the curator should not replace other established images for ministry.

The role of the guiding image is to give ministry practice a conceptual context in which actions become intelligible. Yet there is benefit to holding several guiding images. No one guiding image is able to stand alone and serve as a sole source of vision for ministry work. Just as no one discourse style is sufficient for exclusively nurturing young people's Christian lives (recall chapter one), neither should it be understood that Christian nurture cannot be guided by other metaphors. Images for Christian nurture such as the coach, the mentor, the teacher, the guide are equally helpful. The image of the curator for Christian nurture is set forward to press the fact that there is an aesthetic dimension to Christian nurture. The image of the curator is not set forward to replace an image of a teacher, or other images of Christian nurture.

In discussing the differences between curatorial and educative practice, Claudia

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primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being... I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting" (9). The change between addressing scripture as a text to be understood, and being addressed by scripture as a subject, is the change between and *I-It* relation and an *I-Thou* relation.

Ruitenberg parses the different, but complementary, roles of the curator and the teacher:

> The main difference between a curator and a teacher (at least in the popular image of these roles) seems to be that a curator's focus is on setting the scene for the encounter between a work of art and a viewer, or in the case of a web curator, between online information and a reader. A teacher's focus is on inhabiting that sense, of being present, either physically or virtually, in the encounter, of accompanying the student in that encounter, and forming a bridge between the work and the student—sometimes very prominently, by telling the student about the work, explaining the work, and so forth, sometimes more subtly by being available in the background as a guide and resource in the student's own grappling with the work.[88]

In accounting for what a curatorial role entails as it pertains to Christian nurture, it would be inappropriate to view the curator as someone who only arranges and presents theology. The image of the curator is a compliment to the image of the teacher.

Though the image of the curator does not stand alone and apart from other images of Christian nurture, its role as an image is essential none-the-less. The image of the teacher is insufficient in itself to provide vision for the aesthetic dimension of Christian nature. The teacher's task is to impart knowledge. The task of teaching, without care taken, can fall into the task of transferring information. Teaching is best understood, according to Albert North Whitehead, as education for "Life in all its manifestations."[89] The image of the curator is not the silver bullet to solve our concerns about Christian nurture with teenagers. But the image of the curator does address a specific dimension of Christian nurture not previously elevated in written work about youth ministry. As a complimentary image to already existing images, the curatorial metaphor offers a way of

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[88] Ruitenberg, "Toward a Curatorial Turn in Education," 230–31.

[89] Whitehead ("The Aims of Education," 198) characterizes a basic or default understanding about the aim of teaching: "With good discipline, it is always possible to pump into the minds of a class a certain quantity of inert knowledge. You take a text-book and make them learn it. So far, so good" (197). But Whitehead is unsatisfied with this approach. This approach has not captured the imagination of students. Whitehead proposes a solution: "The solution which I am urging, is to eradicate the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum. There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations" (198). Aiming to arouse interest in education is "the golden rule of education, and a very difficult rule to follow" (197).

thinking about nurture from the standpoint of one who is hopeful adolescents might encounter the theological beauty of God.

The curation metaphor similarly, should not imply that a mentor figure must perform all the theological thinking on behalf of adolescents. Although the theological curator has a depth of experience and knowledge in the field, a goal of the theological curator is to nurture teenagers' own ability to think clearly and discern God's actions for themselves. The gallery curator's objective in curating exhibitions is similar. While a gallery curator is a researcher and holds broad knowledge of their field, galleries, museums, and their curators also want to help patrons think critically about the exhibition they are encountering.[90] To appreciate art, some understanding of art is either helpful or required. To appreciate the meaning of a piece or an exhibition, viewers will want to ask: what is it? what does it mean? what is its value? and what is it for?[91] Though there is creative ambiguity about what the art-critic means by aesthetic "analysis, interpretation, evaluation and judgement," the impulse of art criticism remains important for understanding and appreciating art.[92] The gallery curator is not a keeper of knowledge, fundamentally one who wants to draw patrons into the world they themselves appreciate so much.

Youth ministry takes a misstep if leaders fail to foster critical thought among adolescents. A landmark *National Study on Youth and Religion* found part of the reason

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[90] Jeffers, "Gallery as Nexus," 21. Jeffers describes the importance of aiding student groups engage critically and reflectively with gallery exhibitions. As young patrons can be taught to appreciate art, Jeffers suggests patrons will gain the ability "see through the eyes of others."

[91] Anderson, "Toward a Cross-Cultural Approach to Art Criticism," 202. In relation to these questions, Anderson also sets out a course of reflective evaluation of art. The five steps he identifies are: "1) reaction 2) perceptual analysis, including a) representation, b) formal analysis, and c) formal characterization; 3) personal interpretation; 4) contextual examination; and 5) synthesis, including a) resolution and b) evaluation" (203).

[92] Geahigan, "Art Criticism," 87.

adolescents might fall away from the church and the Christian life, is that they are not being taught how to think or speak about their faith. The impulse to only "expose" adolescents to religion fails to help them understand their religious experience by thinking and speaking competently about their religious experiences.[93] Kenda Creasy Dean responds to these findings, "Maybe teenager's inability to talk about religion is not because the church inspires a faith too deep for words, but because the God-story that we tell is too vapid to merit more than a superficial vocabulary."[94]

The answer to this problem however, is not in simply teaching more theological content. Recall from the second chapter, Ryan's poorly considered teaching time. Though his "lesson" was very theological (in a sense) its conclusion produced a group of perfectly bored and disinterested teenagers. Simply presenting theological content does not quite address the critiques leveled against Christian nurture that produces inarticulate young people. The beauty of God is revealed in personal contexts. God is not an abstract idea to be theorized about in youth group settings. He is a person to know and love, in specific a particular and specific context. The challenge of the curation metaphor is to present theological beauty in such a way that adolescents are part of discerning and evaluating theological beauty.

A corollary example to Ryan's miss-steps is the story from the first chapter, about a group of teenagers looking for an adequate theology of suffering. By way of recollection here, a group of teens on a mission trip come to realize that the friends they were making lacked food security. Concerned about the chronic hunger of this village

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[93] Smith and Denton (*Soul Searching*, 267) emphasise that teaching the faith and articulating the language of faith, are two ways young people come to a personally intelligible faith. A faith that is intelligible to a young person is in turn, a faith that is more likely to be engaged and sustained.

[94] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 36.

during the dry season when crops did not grow, the group searched for an adequate theology to address the context they found themselves within. The teens in this group would not, if questioned, report they were looking for an "adequate theology of suffering." Yet their interest in theological reflection about their experience signals they felt the need to make theological sense of their experience. The so-called search for an adequate theology took place over time and discussion. These adolescents were active participants in discerning what understanding of their experience seemed to fit best. Group leaders guided a discussion. Yet group leaders did not prescribe a theological interpretation. Different angles were entertained until the group settled on an understanding grounded in God's call to compassionate service.

Conclusion

Tested and confirmed metaphors can serve as guiding images, providing a means of navigating the complexity of ministry practice. The image of the theological curator, based upon the gallery curator, can be included in the set of images youth workers approach the task of Christian nurture with. The image of the curator recognizes the limitations and possibilities of Christian nurture. The one who provides nurture cannot make a young person see with Christian theological vision. The one who provides nurture can however, offer theology that would make this vision possible. Through clear and careful articulation, the theological curator calls attention to the beauty of God through giving theological definition to lived experience. It is not the theological curator's craft *itself* that offers the conditions for Christian vision. It is the craft of the curator to point to theological beauty; God's own beauty draws young people to Himself. In the image of

the curator, the possibility and the impossibility of Christian nurture hold together.

Carrying this metaphor forward, the fifth and final chapter will address practical means as to how the image of the curator might inform how our practice of Christian nurture among young people.

CHAPTER 5

TOUCHSTONES FOR PRACTICE

Curators do not randomly select pieces for display. The practice of curation is a developed craft. The curator makes judgements about what pieces should be part of a show and there is a logic to why some pieces are held up, and others remain in storage. As the curation metaphor is extended into ministry practice there is also a need to articulate what sorts of theologies should be held up, and what can remain in the background for another occasion.

Picking up the metaphor of the curator, it is prudent to ask: *What sorts of theological themes should rise to the top of our curatorial efforts?* As an initial response, the answer is those themes that the body of Christ recognizes as significant to the situation. Though this response presents as rather unhelpfully unspecific, this initial response also implies that the breadth of the scripture's is important to communicate. Jaco Hamman has observed that young people in early twenty-first century North America have found themselves yearning for "the good life" as well as "good news."[1] It seems doubtful that the witness of the scripture could be distilled only to several key themes that outline good news and offer understanding for the good life. The whole of

[1] Hamman, *The Millennial Narrative*, xxviii. Young people are searching for a compelling narrative. The search for narrative arises from the desire to link between their sense of self to a narrative that hold concern for purposes larger than their sense of self (152). The *good life* that Hamman speaks of is a moral life shaped by Christian ethical vision. The good life is also a beautiful life. Cardinal John Henry Newman observes that "there is a physical beauty and a moral: there is a beauty of person, there is a beauty of our moral being..." (Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 111).

scripture is necessary for Christian nurture, and none may be cut out.

The whole of scripture is a large body of literature to disseminate to young Christians. But there is some method to discern what is most relevant at any given situation. It is commonly said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. However it is more suiting to say that beauty is in the *eyes* of the *beholders*. Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued that aesthetic judgement is regarded as common sense and shared within a community of people.[2] There is consensus among social groupings, generally, about what qualities are represented in beautiful objects or actions. This is also true for theological beauty.[3] The body of Christ can be trusted to help make Spirit-guided discernment for Christian nurture.[4] Christian discernment is not a solo effort. But God gives gifts to the body as a whole. These gifts, including wisdom and discernment are also recognized by the body as a whole.

Moving beyond this necessary and initial response, a second answer can also be articulated in response to the question, *What sorts of theological themes should rise to the top of our curatorial efforts?*: the theme of God's character, the theme of God's call and the theme of human wonder. These three themes will be set forward in this last chapter. God's character and God's call are avenues through which young people experience theological beauty. Human wonder is our worshipful response.

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[2] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 34.

[3] Caldecott (*Beauty for Truth's Sake*, 32) reports on religious-oriented aesthetic judgement. When asked which of two presented objects students found most attractive, students rarely formed consensus around one or the other. Yet when asked which they would "be happier to offer to God," Caldecott reports upward of ninety percent of students agreed independently on one specific object (34). Caldecott cites Christopher Alexander's *The Phenomenon of Life: Nature of Order, Book 1: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe* as the source of his data. Alexander's work is concerned with architectural design.

[4] White (*Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 7) says "congregations, adults, and youth, who engage each other in discernment—in telling and hearing each other's stories, understanding the world in which youth are formed, and seeking to know how God calls them to respond in the world—find that in discerning together, they are in fact doing much of the work of youth ministry (and adult ministry)" (7).

Though the theological reflections that guide this dissertation are centered in a youth group context, it is appropriate to recognize that the exploration of this chapter can be made use of in broader contexts. God calls to children and adults alike, revealing His character in Jesus, and inviting a response. It will be appropriate to make use of the conclusions in this chapter in ministry with Jr High (ages 11–13) or young adults (ages 19–24). As preceding years to adolescence and the advent of abstract thought, the Jr High ages can be used to begin to cultivate an appreciation for theological beauty. As proceeding years, the young adult ages are a time when the experiences and commitments of adolescence are still being processed. As this chapter's exploration addresses this wider age bracket, the language of "young people" will be used to signal an age range inclusive of the second decade-and-a-half of life (ages 10 to 25). It should be understood, given this wide range, that some depth of theological meaning may not be wholly available to a Jr High age. Further, a young adult age may find additional significance in questioning and wrestling with the theological themes identified in this chapter.[5]

The 'Practical' of Practical Theology

As a work in practical theology it is right (and helpful) to ground a discussion about beauty in Christian nurture in the practice of Christian ministry. The otherwise more abstract theorizing that has shaped the preceding four chapters is driven by a concern for the faith lives and developing Christian experience of adolescents. This final chapter takes a step beyond the hermeneutical investigation to offer three touchstones that a discussion about theological beauty and Christian nurture could provide to those who

[5] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 180. Individuals in early adulthood can place higher value on critical reflection. People in this stage of faith development often are suspicious of truth claims from authority figures, and may want to carefully interrogate claims.

offer Christian nurture to young people.

The preceding four chapters attend to a hermeneutic investigation that aims at synthesising two perspectives about Christian nurture; a synthetic effort that has resulted in a sustained dialogue about the place of theological beauty in Christian nurture. With the identification of the descriptive discourse and "the curator" as its companion guiding metaphor, the Gadamer inspired hermeneutical investigation that drove the core research of this exploration is concluded.

Though the main concern of this exploration's hermeneutical question has been satisfied, there is in practical theological writing, a need to articulate how practice might be informed as a result of the preceding reflection. Richard Osmer observes that practical theology at its best draws inspiration from Gadamerian hermeneutics. Osmer identifies five movements in Gadamerian practical–theological investigation:

1. Preunderstanding
2. The experience of being brought up short
3. Dialogical interplay
4. Fusion of Horizons
5. Application[6]

Preunderstanding is the sets of assumptions that have arisen from former experience and that are brought to the present situation being explored. *The experience of being brought up short* occurs as we become aware our preunderstanding is insufficient to understand a present setting. *Dialogical interplay* is the "back-and-forth" interplay of perspectives from alternate horizons of truth. This interplay critiques our preunderstanding and opens up pathways of further consideration. *Fusion of horizons* happens as "the interpreter and the interpreted join together." As both horizons of truth fuse, new understanding is created. And a*pplication* is the final stage of the

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[6] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 23.

hermeneutical circle where the newly generated understanding is brought to bear upon how we think and act. Taken in succession, these movements constitute a complete hermeneutic circle. As application is arrived at, a new set of preunderstandings emerges and the circle may begin again.

The hermeneutical circle has a companion form that is modestly more simple, known as the pastoral cycle. The pastoral cycle—though it resembles the form of the hermeneutic circle—does not share similar origins. The pastoral cycle has its roots in the Catholic Jocism movement, and thereafter, matured by the Latin American liberation theology.[7] The Jocism movement came to prominence after World War I, first in Europe, then it spread worldwide. Led by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, the movement encouraged young people to Christian social activism. At the heart of the movement was the injunction to "See what the situation is; Judge how it squares with what it should be; and Act in such a manner as to change it for the better."[8] This basic triad of *seeing*, *judging*, and *acting* was developed into what liberation theologian Juan L. Segundo also called a "Hermeneutic Circle." Segundo's hermeneutic circle contains four movements: first, an experience occurs; second, we understand our experience in light of our ideological assumptions; third, theological reflection challenges our instinctual interpretations; and fourth, new theological understanding results.[9]

The point of briefly reviewing methods and movements of theological reflection is not to delve into a summary of evaluation of circles and methods, but to point out that a

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[7] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 18.

[8] Lawrence, *Father of the* Miracle, 515.

[9] Segundo (*Liberation of Theology*, 9) does not include an action or response movement in the hermeneutic circle, but he does assume theological understanding should correlate with Christian action. The hermeneutic circle "is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal" (8). Developing theological interpretations will impinge upon the "concrete struggle for liberation" and affect the action and experience of the theologian (26).

practical theological investigation should rightly end by attending to what meanings its investigation might yield for the practice of ministry.

Three Artefacts and Three Touchstones

A final question remains as the hermeneutic developments of this dissertation move toward finding a space in the practice of the church. Based on what has been uncovered, the question remains; how and where might those who offer Christian nurture to children, adolescents and young adults, meaningfully call attention to theological beauty?

The easy answer is to say that practitioners might identify and call attention to theological beauty. Yet there is value in being more specific and identifying more concrete themes for actual practice. A response to this question then, will require some reflection on sets of experiences where theological beauty has been encountered in a sublime way. Probing the experience of the sublime could yield insight for guiding others to the theologically beautiful sublime themselves.

Popular books and film are artefacts that may be usefully probed for such insight. Donald Capps has argued that creative mediums, including novels and film, can and should be used to guide pastoral reflection.[10] The use of popular literature and film also provides a means of moving reflection from personal experience, to a tangible artefact that can be commonly engaged, and commonly reflected upon. The theologically sublime experience is profoundly subjective and may be difficult to extract general precepts for ministry from. Centering a discussion on objects more readily accessible moves this discussion out of the realm of strictly personal experience. At the same time, books and

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[10] Capps "The Lessons of Artistic Creativity," 256. Note also, Capps argues that theological reflection upon artistic medium is "perfectly legitimate" for doctoral dissertations. (249)

film still retain elements of the personal; while being more accessible objects for reflection, literature and film are not distant and detached from human experience.

In this chapter two books and one film are reflected upon with the aim of drawing out specific touchstones for ministry practice. Grahame Green's novel, *The Power and the Glory*, the Disney film, *The Sword in the Stone*, and Jostein Gaarder's philosophical fiction, *Sophie's World* will serve as passageways for practical insight here.

Graham Greene's *The Power and The Glory* is a study of character. The subject of the novel is a priest who lives under the weight of his vices: he drinks to excess and has fathered an illegitimate child. Further complicating the exercise of his priestly duties is the fact that the priest serves in a southern-Mexican state during a period of the early 20th century when being a priest was illegal and punishable by death. Though the arm of the law pursues him, his flight to freedom is consistently waylaid by his sense of duty and compassion. This whisky priest is caught between his inward desire for comfort, and at the same time, his inability to turn away from human suffering. The whisky priest, despite his flaws, cannot help but represent God's care and God's grace to those in need. The beauty in this story is a tragic beauty, but a beauty that guides the reader to consider their own character in relation to the character of God. *The Power and the Glory* reminds us that God's character, represented through his actions, is beautiful. The whiskey priest's character is being conformed to the character of God through the pages of the novel. Green's book reminds us that a first practical principle when offering Christian nurture is to elevate the character of God: who He is, and how He has acted. Theological beauty begins with God.

Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* is a 1963 animated film adaptation of T. H.

White's 1939 novel of the same name. The film centers on a scrawny twelve-year-old boy referred to as Wart, but whose real name is Arthur. Orphaned and adopted by Sir Ector, young Arthur anticipates a modest existence, aspiring to eventually be the squire to Sir Ector's son Kay. While searching for a sword for Kay to use in a tournament, Arthurs pulls the sword from the stone. Arthur discovers thereafter, this particular sword could only be pulled from the stone by the rightful heir to the throne of England. Arthurian legend implicitly invites its audience to consider what callings may have been set before them. Arthur did not aspire to kingship but was called to the title. In the Christian life we are charged with living a life worthy of the *calling* we've received (Eph 4:1). A second practical principle to be developed is to affirm that the Christian life is not a human demand, but a calling from God. God sees and chooses young people to follow him. There is a quality of theological beauty to the knowledge that we are each seen and chosen by God.

Originally written in Norwegian, *Sophie's World* is a novel that imagines a young girl's correspondence with a philosophy teacher. Sophie finds herself the subject of a series of mysterious letters and mysterious events, through which, she comes to uncover the history of philosophy. Sophie approaches the increasingly unusual events she finds herself in, as well as the lessons she is learning along the way with a sense of wonder. As the novel opens, Sophie's character considers what is required for the events that will unfold with her at the center. A letter from the philosopher teacher reads "... the only thing we require to be good philosophers is the faculty of wonder."[11] It is this sense of wonder at her world and circumstances that draws Sophie (as well as the reader) into the history of philosophy, through the pages of the novel. In human experience, the beauty of

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[11] Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, 15.

God and his creation are sources of wonder. God's "wonders of old" lead us to "meditate" on his works and deeds. (Ps 77:11–12, NASB) A final touchstone for bringing theological beauty to Christian nurture is to evoke a sense of wonder among young people.

There are a few reasons these works are helpful selections. Each was written with a different age group in mind: *Sword in the Stone* for children, *Sophie's World* for adolescents or young adults, and *Power and the Glory* for young adults and adults. Each of these stories' narrative arcs addresses the sacred from an age-related perspective, yet none is too shallow or too deep to be inaccessible to broader audiences. Reflecting on the significance of sacred stories, Stephen Crites finds a "special resonance" in sacred story such that "every serious attempt to express [the story] creates poetry."[12] These stories also have a captivating character to them. Christian nurture is not just transmitting knowledge about the Christian life, but it is inducting young people into the Christian story.[13] These narratives depict theological beauty through time and action. As such their content provides a suitable basis for reflection on practical principles for ministry, with interest in theological beauty's role in Christian nurture.

Contemporary works from the twenty-first-century have not been addressed, in part because works with a 'classic' status are more widely known. Further (and more significantly) a quality of beauty has been recognized in these three stories through successive years or generations and each has attained a degree of recognition as a 'classic' modern work. There is a beauty that has been recognized in these works over years which is helpful as theological beauty is not a matter of trends, or fashion, or fad.

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[12] Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," 69.
[13] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 149.

Theological beauty has God as its source and is of a different quality and origin than the beauty of fashion or fad.[14] Some aspects of aesthetic sense transcend culture and generation for their source if transcendent itself. It is this type of work that is of most interest here. True beauty is not created (such as trends in culture are) but is encountered in relation to God's being.[15] More succinctly, true beauty is not invented but discovered.[16] These works contain accounts of such beauty discovered.

Lastly, a brief account should be given concerning the place of fictional narrative in practical theological work. Practical theology is an exercise in theological reflection, as opposed to an effort to apply doctrinal statements forged by the systematic work of theology's companion disciplines.[17] The practical theologian recognizes that theology comes to us through our experience of the world, in addition to the witness of the scriptures. Terry Velling describes this perspective saying, "We are not bare, thinking subjects who reach out to know a world of objects. Rather, we are absorbed and immersed in the world, never over against it as a subject to an object."[18] Part of how we imagine the world is depicted in the stories we tell and fictions we invent. Looking to

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[14] Edwards (*The Nature of True Virtue*, 2) distinguishes between a *particular* beauty and *general* beauty. Particular beauty appears beautiful in "within a limited, as it were a private, sphere" (2). General beauty is beauty that is perceived universally: it is present in all its relationships and connections. This universal beauty comes from God, and leads to God. Universal beauty leads to "union with God, conformity and love to him, and joy in him" (25).

It is not strictly necessary to confine our search for theological beauty to adolescent culture, for the type of beauty we are interested in comes from God. The sort of beauty of interest here is not resonate exclusively in cultural artefacts set in adolescent demographics. Something like Edward's sense of *True Virtue* is universally recognizable for those with the willingness to see an action imbued with theological beauty.

[15] Edwards (*The Nature of True Virtue*, 29) suggests that true beauty is a spiritual beauty. True beauty is represented to the world in actions that are characterized by "mutual propensity and affection of heart" to that of God's own heart (29).

[16] Farley (*Faith and Beauty*, 57) interacts with Kant's aesthetics. In the same way theoretical reasoning allows a person to discover truth, apprehending beauty is an experience of discovery.

[17] Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, location 225. Practical theologians attempt to avoid a split between theory and practice. Theology is not impractical, but is embedded in practice (location 426–30).

[18] Velling, *Practical Theology*, 6.

what themes are depicted in fiction and story is a means of probing human experience. On this account, stories and fiction are able to serve as generative grounds for theological reflection. This is especially true when reflection—as is the case here—probes the human experience of beauty and the divine.

With these sets of introductions in place, attention is now turned to three prominent themes each work portrays in turn to its audience.

Character, Call and Wonder

A vision of God's character is a vision of God's beauty. The sound of God's call comes with the recognition that God knows and chooses each to serve him. God's love is too deep, too wide, too long and too high to fully grasp. It is a love that "surpasses knowledge" and leads us to wonder and adoration. (Eph 3:19 NASB)

The character of God is displayed in the grinding poverty and hopelessness of the Mexican lower class and a whisky priest in Greene's work. Amid the desperation of the situation, God's redemption is visited upon situations initially thought to be hopeless. These impressions of God's character that break into our world are like rumours of glory that spark a fresh notion that God might really, actually be there.

The call of God is thought to extend to those who are noble and honourable. But the humble boy, Wart, believes himself to be neither. He is unaware that he is destined to be King. When the call comes, he is sure there is a mistake. With the help of Merlin, Wart discovers the call is actually his own. The experience of being called is also the experience of the Christian life.

Sophie wonders at the constitution of the world she finds herself in. Her sense of

wonder leads her on an incredible journey to becoming a real person. The Christian life similarly, is a life captivated by wonder. Wonder turns our attention to adoration and directs our Christian adoration to God Himself. God's character, God's call, and our sense of wonder are three themes with an aesthetic dimension. Examining these closer will serve to develop these themes into touchstones for practice.

The Power and The Glory—God's Character

The Power and the Glory is an exploration of the contrast between the frailty and cruelty of the human heart, and the unlikely care and redemption of God. An aesthetic quality of style, story, and theological form are recognized in Greene's novel. The reader is struck by the way images of God's character are glimpsed through the striving and stumbling desolate priest in the poor Mexican state of Tabasco in the early twentieth century. Greene's work imitates the theologian's task: he guides the reader toward 'seeing' the form of Jesus Christ in the fallen world.[19] The character of the priest, even with his human failings, finds himself moved to represent the care of God to those suffering and in need. The priest's redeeming quality is his recognition that he by himself is incapable of representing God's care. Green's work is celebrated as it is the character of God that is glimpsed through the actions of the priest who struggles to live into his role.[20] Through becoming aware of his limitations, the priest surrenders himself to God such that

[19] Bosco ("Seeing the Glory," 35) finds that Greene's work models Hans Urs von Balthasar's approach to theological aesthetics. Balthasar contends that we cannot know the form of Christ without also knowing the beauty of the form (Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 24). For Balthasar, the presentation of the form of Christ comes through the church, and Christ himself (Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 556). Balthasar's approach to theology is to speak of what is One, True, Good and Beautiful (Bosco, "Seeing the Glory," 36). Bocso argues that Balthasar—who has spoken well of Greene's work—believes great literature also can reveal the form of Christ.

[20] Leah, "A Bad Priest?" 20.

paradoxically, God's own care comes to be represented in his priestly presence.[21]

The opening scene of *The Power and The Glory* depicts the book's protagonist, the priest, arranging his departure from a Mexican state where it is illegal to be a priest and punishable by death. The priest has moved to disguise his identity while purchasing passage on a ship which sails from the port every three weeks by maintaining that he is a doctor. While waiting for his escape by boat, a boy comes calling to the port office, looking for a doctor and reporting his mother is near death. Inwardly the priest understands it is his priestly duty to care for those passing from this world. Resigning to the pastoral care he knows he can provide, he risks missing his departure to visit with the dying woman:

> 'If she's dying,' Mr Tench said, 'there's no point in a doctor seeing her.'
> But the [priest] got up as though unwillingly he had been summoned to an occasion he couldn't pass by. He said sadly, 'It always seems to happen. Like this.'
> 'You'll have a job not to miss the boat.'
> 'I shall miss it,' he said. 'I am meant to miss it.' He was shaken by a tiny rage. 'Give me my brandy.' He took a long pull at it, with his eyes on the impassive child, the baked street, the vultures moving in the sky like indigestions spots.[22]

The unnamed priest has made an important decision in the opening chapter. He chooses to tend to the care of a woman in need, and thereby, misses his chance to escape his persecution and death. Two sentiments battle within him as he makes his decision to visit the dying woman. On one hand, he has a stake in his self-preservation. On the other, he feels that that as a priest, his life is not truly his own. When both desires come into conflict, the priest chooses the sense of duty he carries over and above the weight of his personal interests. This act of self-denial is beautiful as this act represents Christ's own

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[21] Gotia ("God's Image," 114) explains: "The priest is brought down to a great moment of truth: he cannot do much, he is not really needed, but God can show his power in his minister's weakness. As much as one can say these things, the priest through his martyrdom was granted the salvation of his soul" (114).

[22] Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 16–17.

self-denial and adopted servitude. As the story continues, the priest flees inland away from the pursuing soldiers. Hungry, tired, and destitute, the priest happens upon a village and seeks shelter. He finds himself being taken in for the night by an old man:

> 'The soldiers were here yesterday,' the old man said. He blew on the fire. The smoke poured up and filled the hut. The priest began to cough, and the rat moved quickly like the shadow of a hand into the sack.
> 'The boy, father, has not been baptized. The last priest who was here wanted two pesos. I hand only one peso. Now I have only fifty centavos.'
> 'Tomorrow,' the priest said wearily.
> 'Will you say Mass, father, in the morning?'
> 'Yes, yes.'
> 'And confession, father, will you hear our confessions?'
> 'Yes, but let me sleep first.' He turned on his back and closed his eyes to keep out the smoke.
> 'We have no money, father, to give you. The other priest, Padre José...'
> 'Give me some clothes instead.' He said impatiently.
> 'But we have only what we wear.'
> 'Take mine in exchange.'
> The old man hummed dubiously to himself, glancing sideways at what the fire showed of the black torn cloth. 'If I must, father,' he said. He blew quietly at the fire for a few minutes. The priest's eyes closed again.
> 'After five years there is so much to confess.'
> The priest sat up quickly. 'What was that?' He said.
> 'You were dreaming, father. The boy will warn us if the soldiers come. I was only saying–'
> 'Can't you let me sleep five minutes?' He lay down again. Somewhere, in one of the women's huts, someone was singing – 'I went down to my field to my field and there I found a rose.'
> The old man said softly, 'It would be a pity if the soldiers came before we had time... such a burden on our poor souls, father...' The priest shouldered himself upright against the wall and said furiously, 'Very well. Begin. I will hear your confession.'[23]

Once again Greene's unnamed priest is confronted with his character before God, and his character in front of others. The old man in this passage does not relate to the priest as a common person. Instinctually, the old man relates to the priest as a representation of God's character. The priest surrenders to this reality: he is not just himself, but he accepts that despite his sense of humanity, others see God through his actions. God's beauty is

[23] Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 44–5.

known to the old man, and the reader, through the person of the priest.

It is understood from a protestant perspective that though the old man looks to the priest to represent God's presence, the old man could conceivably look to any body of Christian believers to represent God's presence. The priest is a type for all believers; it is a beautiful truth that we look to each other in the community of faith to represent God's presence to one another. It is not wholly clear what Greene's Catholic commitments should mean for interpreting the character of the priest in this passage.[24] Greene most likely believes that it is solely the domain of priests to mediate the Catholic faith to the faithful. Yet there is precedent from within the Catholic world to suggest that the "total subjection of the laity to the clergy" should not characterize the relationship between the priest and the faithful.[25] The character of the priest may be approached as a type for the ministry of all Christian believers. Through the priest's actions we are reminded that the character of God is glimpsed through others, and that others glimpse the character of God through our actions.

Nearing the novel's end, the priest is faced with yet another pressing dilemma. A dying man wishing to confess, but this dying man is across the border in the state where the priest is wanted. While safe in a neighbouring state, a man who had previously attempted to betray the priest to the police appears. The betrayer signals to the priest that a wounded man wishes to give confession. This wounded man is a wanted criminal, and this confession is presented as something like a conversion. The priest's betrayer indicates the wounded man is near the border of Tabasco, where the priest is accused of

[24] Glicksberg, "Graham Greene," 341. Greene's Catholic commitments are the lens by which he interprets and evaluates literature. It is assumed his Catholic theology should be inferred upon his writing, if one wishes to interpret Greene according to Greene's own intentions.

[25] Küng (*The Catholic Church*, 201) suggests that the relationship of priest to Catholic faithful was established in the medieval period and should be revisited for future generations. Though Küng is a Catholic scholar, he recognizes to his readers that his positions do not reflect present Catholic orthodoxy.

treason for being a priest. Appreciating the implications of his decision, the priest nevertheless agrees to travel with the betrayer to the wounded man. Agreeing to walk into a trap set by the police, the priest is beset by a deeply personal experience of the divine. There is a sense of peace in his decision that has surely come from God:

> The half-caste bridled angrily again. 'You don't trust me, father.'
> 'Oh no,' the priest said. 'I don't trust you.'
> 'You think I'm lying.'
> 'Most of it is lies.'
> He pulled the mule up and sat thinking, facing south. He was quite certain that this was a trap—probably the half-cast had suggested it—but it was a fact that the American was there, dying. He thought of the deserted banana station where something had happened and the Indian child lay dead on the maize: there was no question at all that he was needed. A man with all that on his soul... The oddest thing of all was that he felt quite cheerful; he had never really believed in this peace. He had dreamed of it so often on the other side that now it meant no more to him than a dream. He began to whistle a tune—something he had heard somewhere once. 'I found a rose in my field': it was time he woke up. It wouldn't really have been a good dream—that confession in Las Casas when he would have to admit, as well as everything else, that he had denied confession to a dying man.
> He asked, 'Will the man still be alive?'
> 'I think so, father,' the half-caste caught him eagerly up.
> 'How far is it?'
> 'Four–five hours, father.'
> 'You can take it in turns to ride the other mule.'[26]

In the first example with Mr. Tech, the priest's character points to God's character. In the second example with the old man, the priest's character represents God's character to the old man. Here is this last example, the priest *himself* experiences God's character he marvels at the deep inward transformation he has experienced. No longer begrudging his position, the priest finds himself peacefully travelling to his martyrdom; a fact that happily startles the priest as well. Not only does the priest translate God's character to others, in this moment the priest feels firsthand the care of his Lord. Arriving at the dying man, the priest finds what he expects: the police are waiting for him. The

[26] Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 180–81.

decision to visit the dying man is a decision that leads to his imprisonment and then to his death by firing squad. At the same time, it is a decision that lifts up the power and care of God for all to see.

In his story the priest's actions are a witness of God's character. God's character is represented through the priest as human action becomes the vehicle of divine action. It is a beautiful thing the priest does; faithful portraying God's heart of love. The beauty of God is glimpsed through the priest, and this redemptive thread draws the towns people to the priest, and to God.

Practical Touchstone: Witness

Whether the priest has intended it or not, his presence and actions have represented the divine presence to the needy he has encountered. At times this presence was reflected in spite of the priest's best intentions—he was tired, or self-interested, or wishing for better. In these moments the gracious character of God still shone through the cracked vessel. At other moments the priest is willfully participating in God's work. In these instances also, the gracious character of God is attested to by the priest's actions. Through the arc of the story, whether willing or unwilling, the priest holds a role of a witness as he publicly displays who God is. The priest's witness is not a witness in the sense he is proclaiming good news—and perhaps the priest can be critiqued in this capacity. But his witness is given as his actions attest to the character of God who is present among those in need.

It is possible that the work of theology can, for young people and adults alike, feel like an exercise in abstract reasoning. After church one Sunday, a group of Christians went to lunch. This intergenerational group was comprised of people who were younger

in the faith, and people who were older. Evaluating morning worship is an easy topic of conversation and this group was happy to entertain various opinions about how the worship and sermon unfolded both that morning, and in other situations they'd recently been in. It was an engaging discussion without apparent consequence as the lunch order was being prepared. This group of both teenagers and parents roundly condemned sermons whose content is heavy abstract theological ideas, and light on stories. Though a casual lunch gathering is not the best forum for careful and nuanced theological discussion, the opinions expressed surely had some grounding lived experience. Those around the table had found a common problem with witness in the church. This group around the table also yearned for words that would represent the personal quality of the experience of God that drew each into the Christian life.

The practice of Christian witness stands in response to this common experience of feeling disengaged. Christian witness is more than conveying abstract theological notions, but it is calling attention to who God is, and what He has done. The Christian faith is not centered on a set of ideas and propositions, but on an actual person (Jesus) who knows us, cares for us, and who has moved into relation with us. The language of "witness" has been usefully developed in Christian preaching literature. Thomas G. Long is a seminal voice who has articulated the significance of the witness metaphor for homiletics. To describe the role of the witness, Long draws upon Paul Ricoeur, giving four characteristics of the preacher who acts as a witness:

1. The witness is not a volunteer, not just anyone who comes forward to give testimony, but only the one who is sent to testify.
2. The testimony of the witness is not about the global meaning of human experience but about God's claim upon life. It is Yahweh who is witnessed in the testimony.
3. The purpose of the testimony is proclamation to all peoples. It is on behalf of

the people, for their belief and understanding, that the testimony is made.
4. The testimony is not merely one of words but rather demands a total engagement of speech and action. The whole life of the witness is bound up in the testimony.[27]

In this way the witness is not only storyteller or teacher, for the witness has a personal perspective that only they can articulate. The content of the witness's message, and ability to communicate this message, are important for the listener to understand an event that has occurred.[28] The witness is different from a herald, who conveys relevant information without personal experience.[29] The Witness is not a pastor, whose craft is in caring and tending to needs. The witness focuses on an event's truth and the event's implications. The practice of witnessing does not neglect care, but neither is care the primary orientation in witness. Lastly, the witness is free and encouraged to relay the essence of their message through the compelling nature of narrative storytelling. Yet the witness neglects their essential role if the preacher avoids speaking about the fullness of what has occurred.[30]

Scripture and the church offer examples of individuals acting as witnesses. The prophets of the Old Testament are examples of the practice of witness in their own time. In Abraham Heschel's study of prophets, he moves to articulate God's heart displayed in the prophetic writings. "The prophet" says Heschel "hears God's voice and feels His heart."[31] The prophetic witness avoided theological abstraction; the prophets were not

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[27] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 46. Long's list is a paraphrase of Ricoeur in: Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Lewis S. Mudge. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, 131.

[28] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 47.

[29] Long (*The Witness of Preaching*, 49) describes the preacher as one who encounters the text of scripture, and God's presence. The preacher then "turns back toward those who wait" and describes the truth encountered, balancing relevance to the needs of the church, and the truth the text proclaims.

[30] Long (*The Witness of Preaching*, 50) advocates that the preacher should not avoid the difficult or unpopular truths about Christ and his kingdom.

[31] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 31.

interested in reflecting upon moral principles or constructing theological ideas.[32] Instead, they were witness to the fact that God Himself was concerned with justice, mercy, grace, repentance and forgiveness.[33]

The New Testament is the recorded witness of the early church; its authors were concerned with producing "a set of documents closest to the facts."[34] This set of documents, and particularly in the gospels, are concerned about who Jesus was, and what Jesus did. The Christian message was carried forward by the church with both its political and personal implications, is centered on announcing a set of facts who Jesus is (Lord) and what he has done. The church witnesses to this truth in its public life, and as James K. A. Smith points out, Christian worship also re-narrates "who we are and whose we are."[35] The church practices witness internally concerning the person and action of Jesus Christ.

Witness in Nurturing Dialogue: Three Practical Questions for Reflection

Witnessing God's character is the first touchstone for practice. God's character is on display in the scriptures, and through lived experience. It would be a shame if adolescents' experience of the Christian life was primarily of a teacher or pastor asserting and defending statements of belief. As a personal God, He intends more is meant to be

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[32] This is not to say that a discussion of Christian principles and ideas have no place in the Christian life. The point being made here is that witness does not focus on principles and ideas, but on God and his actions.

[33] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 277. The prophet's moral outrage is not a matter of "ultimate laws" or "eternal ideas" for "moral ideas are not entities apart from [God]; they are his concern" (277).

[34] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 16.

[35] Smith, *Awaiting the Kingdom*, 61.

experienced, rather than simply conceptually grasped.[36] God can be found in lived experience because he has acted within lived experience. There is value in witnessing to God's personal character with groups of young people, and if possible, pointing at evidence of his character in action.

A trio of questions are suggested here, and can be used to help guide nurturing conversations with young people. These questions are interpretive, taking lived experience and discerning God's person and action within this lived experience. In this way these questions may function akin to the movements of the pastoral cycle. Just as the beauty of a work of art can take some time to be fully appreciated, it is worth giving these questions some time and prayerful reflection. Allowing these questions to "sit" in our mind can aid us in finding the best way to carefully articulate our experiences of God's person and presence.

* Where is there evidence of God's character in the church's common life?

* Where is there evidence of God's character in our missional action?[37]

* Where is there evidence of God's character in a young person's lived experience?

The aim of these questions is to move beyond religious conceptualizations, and help young people to see God himself

[36] Lee ("Religious Instruction and Religious Experience," 547) presents himself as a Universalist, but makes a careful point worthy of orthodox Christian reflection: "In the final analysis" says Lee, "God in his many manifestations is primarily to be experienced, rather than to be defined" (547).

[37] This question assumes that the mission of the church is to participate in the mission of God. In summary format, it can be said God's mission is the reconciliation of all things to Himself; through salvation and justice. Fully unpacking the mission of God and the missional church is beyond the scope of this present work. Some inspiration for this question came from a practical introduction to the missional church in: Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

The Sword in the Stone—Calling

The Arthurian legends come initially from Sir Thomas Malory's sixteenth-century work, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. This initial volume is the inspiration to the cascading iterations of literary and cinematic Arthurian myth and story. Creative works inspired and based upon Malory's tales retain the form of Malory's story, but can be recognized to be situated in the time and cultural setting of their writing. T. H. White's novel *The Sword in the Stone* is an example of British "neomedievalism."[38] When lifting up Arthurian legend for reflection, it is prudent to also recognize that early-twentieth-century Arthurian stories can unhelpfully propagate some Victorian-influenced social norms, just as at the same time these tales celebrate moral virtue. The Arthurian tales are a "double-edged" sword that can "cut both ways" if they are uncritically endorsed as guides for contemporary moral virtue.[39]

Perhaps a Disney film might present as too shallow of a story to offer meaningful inspiration for the way we approach ministry. Within the Arthurian world, *The Sword in the Stone* is has been called "too childish" for serious consideration and is derided for paying poor homage to the genera's tradition.[40] Yet *The Sword in the Stone* is also recognized (by its critic) as a source of "delight" for young people interested in the "sword-and-sorcery" genera.[41] In that *The Sword and the Stone* has sustained attention over the years, perhaps there is a quality to this story that younger and older people find either captivating or beautiful. Two scenes from this film illustrate the sublime beauty of

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[38] Stock, "Reinventing an Iconic Arthurian Moment," 71. Neomedievalism uses medieval period as a setting, but imbues its writing with fantasy elements and projections of more modern cultural sensibilities.

[39] Jackson, "The Once and Future Sword," 209–210. Arthurian ledged celebrates peace and moral strength. At the same time, Arthurian ledged also depicts without comment, a strongly patriarchal structure, oppressive class structure, and an acceptance of extreme violence.

[40] Beatie, "Arthurian Film and Arthurian Texts," 71.

[41] Beatie, "Arthurian Film and Arthurian Texts," 65.

Arthur's call.

Wart—also known as Arthur—and his older brother Kay, have gone hunting. Wart is tagging along and Kay is not keen on his presence. Having spotted a deer in the distance Kay prepares his bow and arrow, while Wart climbs a nearby tree for a view of the prey. Slipping, Wart falls on Kay, who releases the arrow, which misses the deer, that is then lost in the woods. Kay addresses Wart in response:

> "Why, you clumsy, little fool!"
> "Oh, Kay, please, I'm sorry. I couldn't help it. Please."
> "If I ever... If I ever get my hands on, on you, I'll, I'll ring... your scrawny little neck, so help me, I will."
> "I'll get the arrow, Kay. I'm sure I can find it."
> "Don't tell me you're going in there. Why, it's swarming with wolves."
> "I'm not afraid."
> "Well, go ahead. It's your skin, not mine. Go on, go on."[42]

It is seen in this short dialogue the film signals that Wart's sense of self is depleted as a result of his relationships within his foster family. This is particularly true of his relationship with his older foster brother. Wart finds his place in the family by being helpful on the fringes of family life, or at least if possible, not getting in the way of others. Wart has low expectations about what he can make of his life, and his goal at the age of twelve is to keep his head down and perhaps, if lucky, become a squire one day.

It cannot be said that Wart is typical of all twelve-year-olds. His humble demeanour may even be an outlying character trait within his age bracket; there are many young teens who at twelve are just beginning to find their voice and establish their presence within their social networks. Donald Capps observes that the teenage years are about learning self-governance.[43] In self-governance a person learns to become

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[42] Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone*, transcribed script.
[43] Capps, *The Decades of Life*, 24.

themselves by discovering or establishing a stable sense of identity. But Capps also places the vice of shame as the chief struggle in the second decade of life.[44] In this context shame creeps into a young person's consciousness when doubts about the viability of one's identity arise, or as doubt about one's ability to self-govern surfaces. It is possible that despite the noise and bravado, those in the early-second-decade of life *feel* like Wart feels, even if they don't seem to act the part. In that Wart is quiet and humble, he is not behaviourally typical of the second decade of life. However in that Wart is attempting to find his place in life, his situation is archetypical of the second decade in life.

As *The Sword in the Stone* progresses, Wart matures slowly under Merlin the magician's tutorage and care. Kay also develops his knightly skills and enters a tournament. This is a special tournament as it has been agreed upon that the winner would be crowned king of England. Wart is enlisted as Kay's squire, but as the tournament is set to begin, Wart realizes he has forgotten Kay's sword. Wart runs off to the town inn where the family is lodged for the tournament, but nobody is present to let Wart in, and he cannot retrieve Kay's sword. Wart spots however, a sword in a stone in a nearby courtyard. Wart grabs this sword and dashes back to the tournament.

Upon delivering the sword to Kay, it is discovered that this particular sword from the stone is a very special sworn. It is said that only the true and rightful king of England could pull this sword from the stone. Wart doesn't fully appear to grasp what his having pulled the sword from the stone means. The crowd doesn't believe Wart's report that it was he who pulled the sword from the stone. In order to test the validity of Wart's claims,

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[44] Capps, *The Decades of Life*, 25.

the crowd abandons the tournament and gathers around the stone the sword was pulled from. The sword in question is returned to its place in the stone, and various noble and strong knights attempt to take the sword from the stone. Yet none succeeds. At this point, Wart steps forward and takes the sword. Witnessing Wart's ability to lift the sword, the assembled crowd including Wart's adoptive father and older brother take a knee and bow before him. These events are overwhelming for Wart, and the film cuts to a scene in the court of the new king:

> [*Narrator*]
> So, at last the miracle had come to pass in that far off time upon New Year's Day, and the glorious reign of King Arthur had begun.
> [*Wart and Archimedes the Owl*]
> "I can't be a king, Archimedes. I don't know anything about ruling a country."
> "I told you to leave the thing in the stone, boy."
> "I'll, I'll run away, that's what I'll do. They'll just have to get somebody else."
> "Better take the side door, Wart. Out the side door."
> [*The side door opens and the crowd yells upon seeing the new king*]
> "Hail, King Arthur! Long live the King!"
> "There's another door. Over there, over there! Come on, come on!"
> [*The alternate door opens and the crowd yells upon seeing the new king*]
> "Long live King Arthur! Long li..."
> "It looks like we're surrounded, boy."
> "Oh, Archimedes, I wish Merlin was here."
> [*Merlin returns from Bermuda, apparently ready to again coach and mentor the young boy who had become king. Wart exclaims:]*
> "Merlin! Merlin!"[45]

There is the sudden elevation of Wart's status with the prestige of kingship. At the same time there is the overwhelming sense of duty that comes with the call. Wart is put in a position where a decision has to be made about the call he has received. Should he accept the call and reign as a good king? Or should he continue to, like Archimedes had suggested, run and hide from the call he was given. Seemingly intuitively, Wart understands that a decision must be made at this moment. A king is not typically a good

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[45] Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone*, transcribed script.

king if the king does not want to be king for the king must accept the roles and responsibilities for of the position for themselves. The king must care about the position in order to govern well. At the return of Merlin, who himself understands and foresaw Wart's pulling the sword from the stone, Wart finds the confidence to choose the call he received, and to take ownership of the duty that the call entails.

The viewer is implicitly invited to sense what Wart is experiencing in these moments. A well-written protagonist is a character that viewers can identify with; they can imagine themselves in the role. The viewer senses the weight of Wart's decision concerning his calling. The viewer also understands that the decision cannot be made by anyone else. As Wart decides to live into the calling and kingship, the viewer finds in the young man's willingness to serve a sense of satisfying beauty. Wart's acceptance of the call is both a noble and humble act at the same time. In his acceptance, he has been given an honour not of his own making. This sense of beauty in calling may also be elevated among adolescents who are engaging the Christian life.

In the first chapter of the gospel of John, the evangelist recounts Jesus' calling of Philip and Nathaniel. Jesus "found Philip" and said to him, "follow me." (John 1:43). After this, Jesus seeks out Nathanael. Jesus gives Nathanael a sign of his divinity, and with a speech about what Nathaniel would come to experience, implicitly calls him to follow as well. While Andrew and Peter had initially followed Jesus as a result of a commendation from John the Baptist (vv.35–38), Jesus is portrayed as seeking out Philip and Nathaniel. The narrating evangelist casts the calling of the disciples in a more personal way, than the synoptic writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke) had done.[46] The call of Jesus is deeply personal; he sees and knows those who he calls. The call that is issued by

[46] Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 183.

Jesus, is a personal call.

Karl Barth observes that when God calls, the calling is not a question necessarily about what we are to be *doing*, but of who we *are*.[47] Barth does want to affirm that the call of Jesus has ethical implications for the acts and practices of our lives.[48] Scripture affirms that we are to live "in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." (Eph 4:1 NASB) But being called by God is also a statement about who we are. The "one who issues the command," says Barth "is also my Creator."[49] The experience of being recognized and called by one's creator is a very special event. Yes there is a very important ethical dimension to this event, but there is also an element of feeling honoured to serve. The ancient Christian writer, Cyril of Alexandria (378–444 A.D.) characterizes the call of Jesus as a noble call. Cyril imagines that Jesus calls those who "would be noble" and answer the call.[50] The fact that the creator knows and sees and calls, is a beautiful thing.

The experience of the humble Wart in *The Sword in the Stone* is perhaps akin to the experience of being addressed by one's maker. Wart's true form is known by the divine presence in the film. Wart is called upon in front of the nobility and countrymen to lead the Britons. This calling is not issued because of any inherent ability Wart possesses to make himself desired as king. Despite Wart's own humble self-assessment, the divine presence reveals that Wart is the rightful ruler. Overcome with the magnitude of this revelation, Wart is tempted to shy away from his role. Recognizing Wart's continued humility, Merlin, a keeper of divine and magical understanding, promises to be present

[47] Barth, *Ethics*, 176.
[48] Barth, *Ethics*, 177.
[49] Barth, *Ethics*, 174.
[50] Cyril, *Commentary on John*, 87.

and sustain Wart as he embraces his unexpectedly noble calling.

In some cases young people may encounter the Christian life as a set of demands churches, or families, or youth workers want them to accept and abide by.[51] The Christian life is quite a bit more significant than a set of expectations the church makes of its young people. Relaying the message of scripture as the call of God both rightly frames the experience of call, and emphasises a significant truth: that our maker sees us and knows us and calls each of us. Keeping a sense of call present in Christian nurture moves the impetus for the Christian life away from the expectations of well-intentioned church communities, and rightly centers the Christian life in Christ's invitation.

Practical Touchstone: Challenge and Choice

It is possible that the singular voice of God's call may become lost amid the human voices. Modern youth ministries are busy places. Adolescents attend youth meetings, go on retreats, participate in small groups, attend church, serve at summer camps, participate in fellowship activities, and more. In these forums there are a lot of people telling youth how to live and trying, as one commentator reflected, to "keep them Christians."[52]

It is helpful to remind adolescents periodically who it is that is addressing them through the scriptures, and through the witness of the church. Being addressed by the divine in the form of a call, as demonstrated by Wart or the disciples, is a momentous occasion. Centering young people's attention on God's address to them is more than a

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[51] Root (*Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 107) finds that youth ministry can implicitly become an exercise in combating advancing secularism. Anxious about retaining their young people, churches find themselves relating to young people objects to be secured against secularism, as opposed to people who are responding to God's actions in their lives. Root is not alone in his assessment. James K. A. Smith reports that churches can at times approach young people as those who need to be cleansed from secular influence or infection (Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 29).

[52] Hiemstra et al., "Renegotiating Faith," 48.

classroom tool to collect their attention. David F. White has observed that Christian "calling" is an invitation to find one's purpose by participating in God's story.[53] The language of calling (as used here) is not meant as a synonym for vocation. Calling in this sense is a way of being-in-the-world as a Christian person. Parker Palmer writes that "our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood" and thereafter "find our path of authentic service in the world."[54] Though Palmer is finally concerned with vocation in the context he is speaking, he makes a careful distinction between vocational call and the call Jesus gives to all toward the Christian life. It is this latter meaning of call that is being used in this present discussion.

It is important that young people recognize who it is that is calling them. As much as the content of the call is conveyed through congregational life, a youth pastor, or a young person's parents, it is not the church's call, or the youth pastor's call, or a young person's parent's call. The call that a young person hears is the call from God. As Barth observed, the call is the command of God not just generally, but to a specific person.[55] There is beauty in the experience of being addressed by God Himself. As God addresses us with calling, a response is invited; the call needs to be either accepted or declined.

The action of choosing a response to God's call is an important event. In choosing, we make our decision our own. As expressions of human desire, thought and action must be rooted in the human will.[56] Iris Murdoch places the human will at the center of the human being for the reason that human responsibility depends on the willing

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[53] White, *Dreamcare*, 15.

[54] Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 16–17.

[55] Barth (*Ethics*, 174) speaks of God's command and call saying, "it meets me according to the what and how of my being, so that indirectly my what and how become witness to the reality of the divine command..." He continues reflecting on the fact that the one who issues the command is also his Creator. Barth writes "...I am what I am at this moment, are the work of *one* hand, the act of the Creator" (174).

[56] Recall from the first chapter, Paul Tillich's discussion about the place of a "genuine choice" as the evangelistic goal and the starting place of the Christian life (See Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 201–202).

faculty of being to be the essential 'core' of who we are. Murdoch explains her choice saying: "Our personal being is the movement of our overtly choosing will. Immense care is taken to picture the will as isolated. It is isolated from belief, from reason, from feeling, and is yet the essential center of the self. 'I identify with my will.'"[57]

Whether or not Christians are able to agree wholly with Murdoch could be a debate. From a Christian viewpoint some accounting for the soul or spirit within our personal being still needs to be made. Dallas Willard has placed the spirit, heart and will at the center of human being, each cooperatively directing the movement of personal being.[58] Stanley Grenz observes that God and humanity are both characterized as persons as they both exercise their will in freedom. The personhood of God is recognized in part as He "relates to the universe in freedom."[59] Grenz also observes that we "designate each other as persons, in that we are all free to act. Our actions are beyond the total control of others."[60] Jonathan Edwards maintained that it is through willing agreement and consent that we move into community with God.[61] For Edwards, human personhood is a social creation. Living into the social being of our personhood takes an act of will and consent.[62] But the point here is not exactly to embark upon a careful study of human ontology. Instead the point is to identify that the will is a central faculty of what makes human beings, human beings. Given the significance of the will to being and relationship, it is seen that loving relationship with anyone, least of all one's creator, involves a willing response to God's own person.

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[57] Murdoch (*The Sovereignty of Good*, 7–8) links the will the ability to be responsible: the will is "separated from belief so that the authority of reason, which manufactures belief; may be entire and so that responsibility for action may be entire as well" (8).

[58] Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 38, 40.

[59] Grenz, *Created for Community*, 55.

[60] Grenz, *Created for Community*, 55.

[61] Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 9.

[62] Todd, "What is a Person?" 122–23.

There may be an impulse against framing the Christian life in terms of an ideal that may be either accepted or rejected. Perhaps those who offer Christian nurture might feel that more is required of faithful Christian nurture than turning to adolescents with a choice for or against the Christian life. This is a fair sentiment. As illustrated in the second chapter, there are two well-developed bodies of literature that demonstrate both Christian practice and Christian education are also critical dimensions of Christian nurture. Yet the point being made here, is that amid our efforts in practice and education, at some point young people should be alerted to the fact that they are not just involved in a religious social experiment. Instead, the living God is addressing them and calling them deeper into the Christian life.

There are several instances in scripture where a people are given an opportunity to make a choice for or against the life of faith. Among these instances two might stand out from this set: the charges that Moses and Joshua give to the people of Israel.

When Moses was one-hundred-and-twenty years old, he and the people of Israel found themselves on the far side of the Jordan river, about to enter the Promised Land. This moment is the culmination of forty years of anticipation, and the culmination of Moses' leadership of the people from slavery in Egypt, to a promised land. Full of years and understanding that it was for Joshua and not for him to lead the people into the land, Moses speaks one last time to the people and his words are recorded in the last chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. Moses gives an account of how God has acted in the plain sight of the people. He describes how God has brought them out of slavery, and had led them now, to the edge of the Promised Land. He reviews the commands of the covenant made between God and the people of Israel. Moses anticipates for the people what

struggles will lie ahead as they cross the Jordan river, urging them to live faithfully as God's chosen people. And before turning leadership over to Joshua, Moses issues a choice for the people to make. Moses says to the people:

> See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I commanded you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgements, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away on worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. (Deut. 30:15–18a NASB)

Many years later, after the conquest of the Promised Land had come to an end and the people of Israel were firmly established in their new homes, Joshua gathered the people of Israel together. He too, full of years, spoke to the people he had led through the turbulent conquest of the land God has promised them. Aware that his time was also coming to an end, Joshua also sets before the people a choice. With an echo of Moses before him, Joshua extends a choice and a challenge to the people:

> Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Josh 24:14–15, NASB)

In the words of both Moses and Joshua, a calling is articulated and a challenge is issued. The calling given to the people is an opportunity for religious, moral, and intellectual conversion.[63] In this moment of decision as the people consider the charge issued by Joshua or Moses, God's commands are clearly stated, but Yahweh Himself

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[63] Hamlin (*Joshua*, 202) speaks specifically of Joshua's challenge. He cites previous infidelity of the people, and identifies in Joshua's speech the elements of an invitation to conversion. Religious conversion to find joy in YHWH again, moral conversion into a new system of values, and an intellectual conversion toward new "insight in to the nature of reality" (202).

does not appear to take control of the decision's outcome.[64] Simone Weil observes that human being cannot offer anything meaningful to God, except the self.[65] The value of worship comes in the degree the self is given to God. The movement of the heart that is worship occurs as we *want and choose* to give ourselves to God in worship.

It is a common ministry intuition to distill the content of bible studies, discussions, and youth messages (*etc.*) into a single memorable idea. This single memorable idea might introduce a discussion, be touched upon periodically to ground a youth talk, or used as a means of wrapping up study. These junctures are also ideal opportunities to remind adolescents who it is that is addressing them, and what is expected of them in response.

There is value in precisely articulating who is issuing a challenge. In any given scripture study, certainly, it may be the youth pastor or volunteer speaking. And yes, the passage being considered is from scripture. Critically though, neither pastor nor even scripture speaks God's words on their own authority. God in his Spirit makes His appeal through both.[66] The message being communicated, if indeed faithfully interpreted and articulated, is from God Himself. It is one thing to tune out the youth pastor, or what is perceived as simply a historical document.[67] But it seemingly takes a person of profound indifference to tune out an address from God Himself.

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[64] Hubbard (*Joshua*, 555) identifies that "Yahweh now stands off-scene, apparently leaving the moment of decision for Joshua and Israel to handle through the ritual dialogue that follows" (555).

[65] Weil (*Gravity and Grace*, 71) remarks, "We cannot offer anything but the 'I,' and all we call an offering is merely a label attached to a compensatory assertion of the 'I'" (71).

[66] Calvin (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 42) argues scripture represents God's words in conjunction with the "persuasion" of the Holy Spirit.

[67] There are pedagogical considerations that could also be made here. Indifference to a lesson may also be a product of a lack of personal connection to a lesson's content. Briefly it will be helpful to connect a lesson's topic to young people's experience and emotional life. John Dewey observed that genuine interest correlates with personal effort in learning (Dewey, *Interest and Effort in Education*, 14). This genuine interest arises as with an emotional connection to content (20). Interest also arises as a subject relates to a learner's experience (23). Indifference to a message

Having identified who is issuing the challenge, there is also value in framing scripture's teaching as a challenge, as opposed to an instrument of control or demand of God or church. The idea of 'challenge' is able to hold together the notions of calling, and the command of God. While holding together the ideas of calling and command, the language of 'Challenge' also remains accessible for adolescents. Recall that for David F. White, calling is a matter of finding one's God-given purpose.[68] The idea of command used here finds its footing in Bonhoeffer's treatment. In Bonhoeffer's mind:

> ... the purpose of the commandment lies not in the avoidance of transgression, and not in the torment of ethical conflict and decision, but in freely accepted, self-evident life in the Church, in marriage, in the family, in work and in the state ... [God's command] is concerned with the positive contents and with man's freedom to accept these positive contents. [69]

The emphasis in Bonhoeffer's treatment of "command" is on the understanding that divine commands provide boundaries for the Christian life.[70] Bonhoeffer is concerned with the human agent's ability to respond freely to God's commands. The commands of God should not be seen as controlling dictums or demands. Instead they are firm statements about how human agents are able to participate in "the fulfilled will of God."[71] A helpful means of framing the commands adolescents encounter in scripture is by speaking of these commands as 'challenges.' The language of challenge captures the idea that God's commands are serious, but avoids the depersonalizing element of being told what to do. A challenge, just like a call, must be accepted.

It is a beautiful thing that God calls us, and that we are able to hear his voice. It is also a beautiful thing that He helps us to meet the challenges of the Christian life through

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[68] White, *Dreamcare*, 15.
[69] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 279–80.
[70] Ziegler, "Graciously Commanded," 132.
[71] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 209.

His Spirit. It would be a shame if during scripture study or discussion, adolescents were to misunderstand who is speaking to them and the nature of this call.

Sophie's World—Wonder

As the themes of God's character and God's call are lifted up, it is appropriate to make space for a response. Wonder is such a response. Those who are grasped by wonder stand with their attention fixed and centered. In wonder we relate ourselves to something that cannot be fully addressed by language or understanding. Abraham Heschel speaks about the experience of wonder saying "wonder is a state of mind in which we do not look at reality through the latticework of our memorized knowledge ... spiritually we cannot live by merely reiterating borrowed or inherited knowledge."[72] Wonder is knowledge of things that lie beyond what can be expressed but nonetheless known through experience.

The experience being grasped by wonder—like the sublime—is an experience accompanied by strong emotion.[73] Yet unlike the sublime wonder is most strongly connected to the specific emotion of adoration.[74] The adoration that occurs within wonder finds its rightful object and home in the person of God revealed in Jesus—though many

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[72] Heschel (*Man Is Not Alone*, 12) elaborates, saying: "...the world of things we perceive is but a veil. Its flutter is music, its ornament science, but what it conceals is inscrutable. Its silence remains unbroken; no words can carry it away. Sometimes we wish the world could cry and tell us about that which made it pregnant with fear-filling grandeur. Sometimes we wish our won heart would speak of that which made it heavy with wonder" (16).

[73] Fredrickson ("(My) Seven Wonders of the New Testament," 42) offers a helpful definition of wonder: "By the term *wondrous*, I mean to call attention not so much to aesthetic qualities, to any beauty these passages might have, but to the emotions I have experienced reading these texts thinking about them long after the words have been shut up between the covers" (42).

[74] Gerlier ("Incomprehensible Praise," 94) points out there is "a figurative connection between wonder and adoration, between standing still and crossing over..." (94). Gerlier means to signal that in wonder we 'cross over' into divine things. He says "occasioned by wonder, philosophy in the highest sense is primarily a spiritual praxis, irreducible to theoretical knowledge, and opening up a horizon for insight in its own unique manner" (96). Wonder anticipates a reality more ornate that what is beheld. The Christian mystical tradition emphasises that God is incomprehensible and infinite (95). Wonder is the means of approaching God who is incomprehensible and infinite.

have been unable or unwilling to make this connection. Wonder as a feeling of adoration *itself* does not reveal God. But those who do follow Jesus have lifted up their eyes, finding "real beauty and wonder in the world that others cannot see" for their eyes have been lifted up to God.[75]

The place of wonder in nurturing a young person's relation to the transcendent is touched upon in Jostein Gaarder's young adult novel, *Sophie's World.* In this story, Gaarder imagines a friendship between a teenage girl and a philosopher. In an introductory letter the mysterious philosopher sends to Sophie, the philosopher writes:

> Hello again! As you see, this short course in philosophy will come in handy-sized portions. Here are a few more introductory remarks:
> Did I say that the only thing we require to be good philosophers is the faculty of wonder? If I did not, I say it now: THE ONLY THING WE REQUIRE TO BE GOOD PHILOSOPHERS IS THE FACULTY OF WONDER.
> Babies have this faculty. That is not surprising. After a few short months in the womb they slip out into a brand-new reality. But as they grow up the faculty of wonder seems to diminish. Why is this? Do you know? ...[76]

Engaging this faculty of wonder exhorted by the philosopher, Sophie finds herself within a series of strange and intriguing events through which the philosopher teaches her about the history of philosophy. Despite what might be intuited about the level of interest for a novel concerning the history of philosophy, Gaarder's imaginative journey through the history of philosophy was exceptionally well received by his audience. The novel has been translated into 22 languages and sold 1.7 million copies in Germany where it was originally published.[77] Gaarder's sense that his readers have a 'faculty of wonder' was correct. He is able to evoke the unsolicited sense of wonder that emerges from experience and curiosity. At the same time, his text avoids a pedagogical tone, even as a pedagogical

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[75] Granquist, "Have We Lost Our Sense of Beauty and Wonder?" 2.
[76] Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, 15.
[77] Ziolkowsi, "Philosophy into Fiction," 547.

agenda informs his writing. Inspired by this achievement in *Sophie's World*, Sir Christopher Ball has argued that the profession of teaching might find some guidance and inspiration in Gaarder's success. Ball maintains that "the true learning society we all seek will require a new breed of teachers—more like guides than instructors, more part-time than full-time, more philosophers than pedagogues."[78]

As *Sophie's World* unfolds, points of wonder arise for the reader as Sophie encounters each new philosopher and their ideas. One such point with a religious dimension is Sophie's discovery of Søren Kierkegaard. At the point where Sophie encounters Kierekgaard's writings, the mysterious philosopher has been identified as a father figure named Alberto. Both Sophie and Alberto have become aware that they are not actually real people, but characters being written within a story about the history of philosophy. Together, Sophie and Alberto discuss what it means to exist, and if their experience of living—albeit only upon the pages of a novel—might mean that they could be real. As the so-called father of existentialism, Sophie and Alberto look to Kierkegaard for help with their plight. In their exploration of Kierkegaard's existentialism, Sophie and Alberto find that Kierkegaard is also a profound religious thinker. Identifying as Christian themselves, Sophie and Alberto take a moment to wonder about the substance of faith. Gaarder records their unfolding conversation:

> "...fundamental questions such as these can only be approached through *faith*. Things that we can know through reason, or knowledge, are according to Kierkegaard, totally unimportant."
> "I think you'd better explain that"
> "Eight plus four is twelve. We can be absolutely certain of this. That's an example of the sort of 'reasoned truth' that every philosopher since Descartes had talked about. But do we include it in our daily prayers? Is it something we will lie pondering over when we are dying? Not at all. Truths like those can be both 'objective' and 'general,' but they are nevertheless totally immaterial to each

[78] Ball, "Commentary: Sophie's World," 6.

man's existence."
"What about faith?"
"You can never know whether a person forgives you when you wrong them. Therefore it is existentially important to you. It is a question you are intensely concerned with. Neither can you know whether a person loves you. It's something you just have to believe or hope. But these things are more important to you than the fact that the sum of the angles in a triangle is 180 degrees. You don't think about the law of cause and effect or about modes of perception when you are in the middle of your first kiss."
"You'd be very odd if you did."
"Faith is the most important factor in religious question. Kierkegaard wrote: 'If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith."
"That's heavy stuff."[79]

What Alberto and Sophie discuss about Kierkegaard and faith is important in its own right. Yet of specific concern here is the wonder with which Sophie approaches the understandings she encounters in her adventures with Alberto. The character of Sophie sustains patient attention as she encounters new philosophical perspectives. Sophie listens carefully, pressing Alberto to explain and clarify his lessons. There is also a hunger-like character to Sophie's attention. She wants to know more. In her wonder, she feels unsatisfied with partial understanding. With her patient questions she holds the object of her wonder steadily in her gaze. She prods and tests the object of her wonder, carefully turning the object over, taking the whole of the object in, looking for detail she may have missed.

Eugene Peterson has observed that the resurrection accounts in each of the gospels depict the disciples being "suffused with wonder."[80] Wonder, finds Peterson,

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[79] Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, 381. The citation Gaarder uses is found in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Translated by David F. Swenson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941, page 182.

[80] Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 119.

causes us to become beginners: when we are filled with wonder we are children again, unable to master or control either our wonder, or the object of our wonder.[81]

In the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke's gospel two disciples are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They are saddened and confused. They had trusted in Jesus, believing him to be the messiah, but instead they witnessed his crucifixion on a Roman cross. As these two disciples walk, they discuss the events that had unfolded. At a certain point as if by chance, a stranger on begins walking with these two disciples. Entering into their conversation, the stranger begins to explain why it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and die. When the trio reaches Emmaus, the two disciples extend an offer of hospitality to the stranger, who after some convincing agrees to stay for a meal. During the meal, the stranger took the bread, and with a blessing began to break the bread and give it to the disciples. At that moment the disciples recognized the identity of their guest, but immediately upon recognizing their Lord and master, Jesus vanishes from their presence. These two disciples, amazed and dumbfounded, speak to one another, "were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32 NASB).

The burning heart experience precedes Jesus' in full self-revelation in person. It is as if the learning on the road to Emmaus is a calculated precursor of Jesus's self-revelation around the table.[82] There is a quality of amazement and wonder present, both as these disciples are taught the scriptures on the road to Emmaus, and as Jesus reveals himself at the table. Henri Nouwnen suggests that the words Jesus spoke on the road to

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[81] Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 120.

[82] Denaux (*Studies in the Gospel of Luke*, 295) observes that the disciples first go through a stage where "interior insight has been prepared," and thereafter, experience Jesus' self-revelation (295). Denaux observes a similar pattern as Mary Magdalene hears her name spoken by Jesus at the Easter tomb (John 20:15–16), and as the disciple who Jesus loves marvels at the miraculous catch of fish (John 21:6–7).

Emmaus were of a sacramental quality.[83] In learning about what the scriptures taught, Jesus became increasingly present to these two disciples. The wonder with which the disciples respond to Jesus' teaching on the road creates what Phil Zylla calls an "authentic encounter." In wonder, a subject offers undivided attention to the object of their wonder. Says Zylla, "the function of attention is the basis for authentic encounter. Without the function of attention, authentic encounter cannot take place. The meeting and being met grow from looking, and this, in its core, is a form of prayer."[84]

The experience of wonder in general, and the experience of wonder specifically with regards to theological beauty, is not a response that can be created or compelled. Wonder is a reflexive response, generally to a startling or surprising stimulus.[85] Wonder (or awe) in general is experienced in response to stimuli that are perceived as vast, powerful, or not easily accommodated into pre-existing experience or understanding.[86] Wonder is not therefore, a learned skill or a conditioned behaviour. Yet wonder may be evoked by revealing that which is vast, powerful, or not easily accommodated. This is the experience of Sophie in *Sophie's World*. Through problem-posing lines of reasoning, Sophie's faculty of wonder is exercised and extended to encompass the history of philosophy. It is possible that such problem posing lines of reasoning, and the critical inquiry that follows, might also be able to evoke theological wonder.

Practical Touchstone: Problem Posing

There is value for both young Christian and mentor, in a mutually directed exploration of

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[83] Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 54.
[84] Zylla, "Shades of Lament," 769.
[85] Frijda, *The Emotions*, 19.
[86] Keltner and Haidt, "Approaching Awe," 310.

creation, spirituality, and God. The saying that 'God is an ocean' is helpful here. While some people are content to believe they have understood God by dipping their toe in shoreline waters, there is so much more wonder and mystery to experience and explore for those who dive deep. A practical way to invite adolescents into this exploration of the depths of God is through exploring theological mystery from the perspective of a young person's lived experience. Beginning such exploration in lived experience both validates a young person's experience, and invites personal investment in the search for understanding.

An approach to this type of exploration may be directed by Paulo Freire's ideas concerning 'problem posing' education. Freire's system was not developed for use in Christian nurture, but as a basic approach to seeking understanding, the 'problem posing' approach can serve as a helpful guide for a mutual search for theological understanding between young Christian and mentor.

Some have critiqued the use of Freire's pedagogy for Christian education. The most credible critiques worry that Freire's omission of revelation as a source of truth is an error that wrongfully elevates his focus on the human capacity of critical reasoning.[87] Others such as John Stott find benefit in Freire's system. For Stott, the act of reasoning together is an invitation from God (Isaiah 1:18), as well as the avenue through which a young person comes to offer a "thoughtful, loving and free response" to the God who

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[87] Not all critiques of Freire are worth airing or evaluating here. For example, several critiques are concerned with Freire's socialist instincts. These critiques are written from a Protestant White American perspective and raise suspicion about the fact that Freire cites Karl Marx – a known socialist and atheist.

A more substantial critique has been mounted by Terry Moore. Moore has argued that Christian truth is a matter of revelation, and inaccessible by careful critical reasoning skills (Moore, "Conscientization and Christian Education," 463). Moore is right in that Christian faith depends upon revealed truth. Yet Moore fails to appreciate that reason can still play a role in coming to accept revealed truth. Reason is employed in both recognizing revealed truth as revealed, as well as understanding the meaning of the revelation received.

addresses them.[88] Critical thought, while not the sole means of coming to see the world in a particular way, is nonetheless part of shaping how we each experience and understand the world. If we are looking to help teenagers "see" the world from a Christian perspective, there is value in addressing how problem posing dialogue could be good practice in Christian nurture. On this account, a short survey of Freire's educational thought will be given.

Problem Posing and Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire developed his system of education as a means of lifting Brazilian lower class people out of grinding poverty. In 1947, while teaching reading and writing in northeast Brazil, Freire came to believe that "authoritarian" teaching methods, even when aimed at promoting literacy, continued to be a tool of oppression.[89] Freire found the curriculum issued by the cultural elites in Brazil was tilted toward the elite's interests, and ignored many of the educational concerns and need of the poor.[90]

Raised a Catholic and with a concern for the plight of Brazil's poor, Freire became an advocate of liberation theology as a means for helping the poor and oppressed of his native country.[91] In his view, treating students as depositories for information did not promote within them the critical consciousness of self and society that was needed for

[88] Stott (*Between Two Worlds*, 176) felt that preachers ought to assume that listeners had at least a nominal capacity for critical thought. Honouring listener's critical thoughts allows an idea to be developed over a sermon. Sermons should not be "theological communiques" that can manipulate and dehumanize (175–76). Stott cites Freire extensively to make these points.

[89] Blackwood, "Freire's Educational Praxis," 204.

[90] Blackwood, "Freire's Educational Praxis," 205.

[91] Dale and Hyslop-Margison, *Paulo Freire*, 46.

the poor to act in their own interests.[92]

Freire believed that critical consciousness must be awakened; one cannot be "informed" concerning how to hold a critical consciousness, but rather, one must discover critical consciousness for themselves.[93] Freire envisioned a particular form of education, for the awakening of students' critical consciousness. He called his system problem-posing education. In this system, teacher and student enter into dialogue concerning a topic both student and teacher have identified as important. Both play a role in shaping the direction of the learning at hand, coming together (ideally) to perceive the world in a manner not possible as individuals, but possible as a result of critical dialogue. Freire describes his system as such:

> In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. Although the dialectical relations of women and men with the world exist independently of how these relations are perceived (or whether or not they are perceived at all), it is also true that the form of action they adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. Hence, the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action.[94]

Freire's system avoids providing "menu-like answers" to problems raised in education.[95] He takes this position on the observation that individual and social change

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[92] Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73) condemns what he terms the "banking concept" of education. If students are receptacles of information given to them, students do not arrive at convictions or critical thought capable of objecting to the systems of oppression they find themselves in.

[93] Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 108) says: "I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me. Even if the people's thinking is superstitious or naïve, it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas—not consuming those of others—must constitute that process" (108).

[94] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 83. An example of such dialogue is given by Freire; a peasant is asked if the world would exist if people were to disappear. His response is that the world would, for there would be no one to give language to describe the world. The implication of this conversation—the reader is invited to see—is that the peasant affirms that culture is a human construct. As a human construct, culture may be constructed in a just manner, as opposed to the unjust cultural setting in which he lives (82).

[95] Giroux, "Pedagogy of Bearing Witness," 120.

cannot be reduced to one particular method, applicable across broad contexts.[96] Instead, each instance where Freire's pedagogy is employed, the manner of its use is determined by the context. Says Freire "What is ethically required of progressive educators is that, consistent with their democratic dream, they respect the educands, and therefore never manipulate them."[97] Problem posing education aim at aiding a self-directed learner, discover and understand that contents of their reality.

The labour of Christian nurture, and the pedagogical aspiration of Paulo Freire, aim at different outcomes. One aims at alignment with Christ, and the other at the liberation of the poor from oppressive systems. There is however, a note of harmony between these two endeavours. Both Christian nurture and liberative pedagogy have at their center people who are reflecting deeply about the world they find themselves in. Freire's educational solution for the plight of the poor was in shaping pedagogical practices that nurtured what he called "critical consciousness." In critical consciousness, one integrates one's reasoning in accordance with the nature of reality.[98]

Wonder and critical consciousness are related to one another. Wonder precipitates critical consciousness, for wonder fixes attention on an object not immediately grasped by established understanding. Critical consciousness also precipitates wonder, for in critical consciousness we deepen and reimagine our understanding of reality. Moving

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[96] Giroux, "Pedagogy of Bearing Witness," 121.

[97] Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 67.

[98] Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 42. Critical consciousness stands in contrast to other types of consciousness: Freire perceived there was a "magic consciousness," in which people adopted a fatalistic attitude toward life, supposing that the supernatural realm determines their lot in life, and there is little point in working against this determination (41). There is "naïve consciousness," where one superimposes one's wishes upon reality, and "fanatical consciousness," which occurs when one pathologically demands an irrational configuration of reality (42). Each consciousness yields corresponding actions. Naïve consciousness leads to naïve responses, magic consciousness to magic-oriented action, fanatical consciousness to radicalism, and critical consciousness to critical action.(42) Freire believed that critical consciousness must be awakened; one cannot be "informed" concerning how to hold a critical consciousness, but rather, one must discover critical consciousness for themselves (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 108).

from a formerly surface-level understanding toward a fuller or deeper picture of reality offers an opportunity to wonder at new perspectives being revealed. Critical consciousness and wonder are very much like two partners of the hermeneutic circle. Initial understanding provides a basis for interpretive method and new understanding. New understanding then provides a basis for further interpretive method.[99]

Freire's pedagogical impulses are best placed within Christian nurture in a dialogical format. In a person to person setting this sort of dialogue could organically arise if both parties have understood and accepted that a problem posing dialogue should be part of the nature of their relationship. In this setting, the nature of the relationship tends toward mentorship. Christian nurture is also often approached in a group setting. Sunday school classes and youth meetings, and sermons are settings not as typically conducive to the sort of problem posing dialogue Freire envisioned.

Yet there are means of approach a group, within the spirit of a problem posing dialogue. Consider the types of questions a young person might have about the spiritual life. These could include questions they have already formulated, or perhaps questions that are percolating but not yet given form by words. It is a fair assumption that a young person has some interest in investigating the questions they hold. It is also a fair assumption that in the theological arena, their questions may lead to wondrous answers.

As already identified, both God's character and God's call are beautiful. At the same time as being beautiful, who God is and what He has done is also wondrous. That God who is wholly other calls us to serve Him is wondrous as well. The wonder of God's

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[99] Ricoeur (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 352) describes the relationship of understanding to hermeneutics: "Such is the circle: hermeneutics proceeds from a prior understanding of the very thing that it tries to understand by interpreting it" (352). The hermeneutic circle relies on interpretive intuition to operate; an interpreter projects an understanding into the world in order to interpret the world. Says Ricoeur, "we must understand in order to believe, but we must believe in order to understand" (351).

person and God's call are themes to be addressed carefully, for it will be important to speak in such a way that the same wonder that a leader has experienced is made accessible to young people. Coming full circle in this dissertation, it is worth pointing out that carefully selecting language to convey wonder is the orientation to nurture that the descriptive discourse aims at (recall chapter one). Continuing, a curatorial approach is a critical perspective to adopt when conveying the wondrous character of this truth (recall chapter four). The biblical injunction to "lift one's eyes" is a movement of human will. But such an action is made possible through the progressing awareness that there is something beautiful and wonderful to look at. The person who offers Christian nurture will do well to think of their craft as participating in God's work, as they carefully and delicately work to portray God in His beauty to young people.

Conclusion

The explorations of this chapter focused on three ways young Christians develop their theological vision. Three themes are identified that can serve as useful guides within the metaphor of curatorial practice. First, the character of God was examined. Who God is, and how he has acted, has every bearing on how and why the Christian life is lived. Giving attention to who God is, and how he has acted is giving is to focus attention on the source of true beauty Himself. Second, the fact that God calls us was reflected upon. That God, who is beauty Himself, sees and calls us, is a wondrous truth. God really does address young people, and our Christian nurture would do well to convey this weighty reality to the young people we care for. The knowledge that God calls and speaks to them may be worth responding to. Third, the theme of wonder was identified. Wonder is

connected to adoration, and that which we find wondrous we also adore. To work to display the wonder of God is also to participate in God's revelation of Himself.

Appending such a summary of this chapter, a caveat must also be made. Shaping and nurturing Christian aesthetic vision among teenagers is not *only* a matter of addressing these three themes. These themes have been shown to be significant, yes, but there are more than three themes to attend to in the labour of Christian nurture. There are other touchstones too that have not been attended to here. For example, experience of God in nature and community might also be explored. The point in raising this concern is to affirm again that this dissertation's main emphasis has been to advocate for a renewed sense of the importance of aesthetic sense within our practice of Christian nurture. It is important to address what practice looks like from within such a paradigm, and this has been the concern of this last chapter. But it would be inappropriate to assume that the whole of the paradigmatic approach to Christian nurture that celebrates beauty is resolved once and for all in the three themes explored in this final chapter.

Over the course of this dissertation a paradigmatic approach to Christian nurture that celebrates aesthetic vision has been advocated for and explored. The core argument has been that our evangelical North American efforts in Christian nurture have undervalued the experience of theological beauty. It is in this context that these three touchstones are offered. If we were to be persuaded in hopefully a meaningful way by the exploration that has unfolded through the previous pages, lifting up God's character, God's call, and theological wonder are great places to begin drawing adolescents' attention to God's beauty. It is assumed however, that practitioners who share this conviction about theological beauty might 'keep in step with the Spirit' in their own

contexts. The themes of God's character, God's call, and our wonder are means to approach nurture, but nurture must also 'keep in [*dynamic*] step' with God's actions in a young person's life. 'Keeping in step' means giving attention to young people's life situations, and drawing out relevant theological understanding along the way. Approaching Christian nurture with a conviction about theological beauty means being attentive to where God's beauty can be seen and drawing young people's attention to God's beauty accordingly.

Finally and lastly, it is appropriate to end with a summarizing quote. Edward Farley reminds us that beauty is not a sensation, but "rather, the experience is located in the imagination and involves a reflective and imaginative response."[100] An experience of God's beauty and God's person cannot help but shape the imagination. Apprehended by God, our eyes raise with vision in a way not formerly possible. With new vision, the Christian life which was formerly unintelligible is presented as the only adequate response to what we have seen. It is the right impulse for practitioners to want to secure orthodox Christian confession from the young people in their care. The opportunity for such a genuine Christian confession arises in Christian practice, Christian education, and critically, experiences of theological beauty. In addition to inviting young people into practice, and leading young people in education, practitioners will also draw the attention of young people by pointing out where they might be able to see God's beauty for themselves.

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[100] Farley, *Faith and Beauty*, 59.

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