Editorial

For the past four years this journal has thrived under the excellent leadership of Dr. Jos de Kock from Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam Netherlands. Under his leadership the scholarly study of youth ministry has made significant strides, especially as we have clarified our methodologies and practices of ministry amidst diverse and changing contexts. His editorship has been a great gift to us all and I know you will join me in offering gratitude to Jos for his fine work over these years. I am honored to accept the role as editor-in-chief beginning with this current issue, and I pray that the journal will maintain the excellence it enjoyed under Jos's guidance.

With this changing of the guard I would like to remind readers and contributors of this journal's unique role. As it happens, there are many journals concerned with adolescent development and social science methods and interpretations of adolescence. There are also other journals concerned specifically with techniques and practices of youth ministry. Yet, there is no other journal that seeks to articulate the significance of youth in specifically Christian theological terms – the language, story and tradition that shapes our methods and practices. Theology is especially important as we consider the contested nature of adolescence. Until very relatively recently theologians have, for example, regarded youth as a species of childhood subject to original sin and in need of correction and training, or else youth have been regarded as indistinguishable from adults in terms of anthropology and ecclesial practice. Only in the last quarter century or so have scholars recognized the need for the Church to reflect more deeply about the theological nature of youth, not merely as a developmental category or a consumer niche, but as youth *qua* youth before God.

We live in a shrinking global context in which youth are increasingly vulnerable, for example, to now pervasive (if haunted) secularity, the rending of our social fabric, ethnic, nationalistic and sectarian violence, and market exploitation as service workers and consumers. Yet, we also consistently see young people taking on prophetic roles, especially around issues of social, economic

and environmental justice. While youth are as vulnerable as perhaps any time in the modern era, still we experience them as creative, relational, joyful, curious, insightful, and nourishing for the entire human life cycle. As I write this 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, after having sailed solo across the Atlantic to lessen her carbon footprint, is admonishing the United Nations regarding global climate change: “How dare you? You have stolen my dreams and my childhood,” She has also prophetically warned that money and eternal economic growth are “fairy tales” especially while our house is burning! Her charge begs for theological interpretation of youth and their role in a threatened world.

These are all themes that must be taken up as we attempt to articulate their significance in theological terms. How does the modern invention of adolescent and their various new social locations suggest ways to articulate anew, for example, doctrines of theological anthropology, ecclesiology, Trinity, Christology, Pneumatology, or soteriology. Of course, theology, at its best, must attend to questions of social science and ministry technique; there are no pure theologies that exist in a vacuum. As Kathryn Tanner has insisted, Christian theology always speaks in the idioms of the culture that surround it. But, make no doubt, whatever idiom – whether social scientific or popular cultural or dogmatic – we seek to articulate the significance of youth for the reign of God and the significance of God for youth. Our answers to these questions are not separable from our life and ministry alongside young people.

Since this journal features authors from across the landscape of Christian traditions, the theologies of youth that we envision will be colored by our various Christian expressions: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Mainline or Evangelical Protestantism, Pentecostalism and other variants that we bring to the table. But whatever our tradition we are caught in a tension – we do not have access to the inner being of God and our words are never sufficient even for the glimpses we do catch, but nevertheless we must speak (or dance, or cry, or sing) our praise, else “the stones themselves will cry out.”

In the first article in this issue, *The Digital Way: Re-imagining Digital Discipleship in The Age of Social Media*, Jodi G. Hunt observes that youth today are more engaged with technology than ever before and yet remain one of the most emotional and spiritually disconnected generations. Although Catholic youth ministry and its practitioners have, to a great degree, perfected the use of technology in ministry, it has not adequately prepared Catholic youth for the digital world. Hunt helpfully reimagines ways of reshaping youth ministry's engagement with the digital world guided by Thomas Groome's shared praxis and Catholic social teachings on human dignity.

In the second article, *I don't think I ask questions really': The Findings from a Qualitative Study of Religious and Spiritual Questioning Among 16–19-Year-olds*,

Phoebe Hill offers findings from a small qualitative study of young people's religious and spiritual questions. Hill explores the nature of their questioning, and their apparent lack of religious or spiritual curiosity. She explains why these young people may not be curious about religious or spiritual questions. Helpfully she explores how the interview itself may foster religious and spiritual questioning for young people.

In the third article, *Has 'the incarnational model' been a Theologically Helpful Influence on Modern Youth Ministry?* Tim Gough problematizes the recent influence of incarnational models of youth ministry in which voices like Pete Ward, Dean Borgman and Andrew Root have appropriated the doctrine of incarnation. Gough helpfully explores the limits of these approaches, especially when considered alongside other orthodox doctrines of Trinity, Atonement and Creation.

In the final article, *The Four Speeches Every Youth Leader Has to Know the Preaching of Jesus as Model for a Public Rhetoric for Youth Ministry*, Bård Norheim draws on the findings of a larger research project titled *The Four Speeches Every Leader Has to Know*. Drawing on rhetorical theory, analysis of actual speeches, biblical rhetoric, and a phenomenological and narrative approach to leadership and speaking, Norheim proposes a four speeches-typology – the opening speech, the executioner speech, the consolation speech, and the farewell speech.

The issue concludes with reviews of two recent books. Gretchen Schoon Tanis reviews Katherine Turpin's book *Drama Tweens: Engaging the Bible with Younger Adolescents* in which Turpin offers narrative and dramatic approaches for engaging younger youth in biblical exegesis. Author D. Canales reviews Theresa O'Keefe's book *Navigating Adulthood: A Theology of Ministry with Adolescents* in which the author frames Catholic youth ministry theologically.

It is my deepest hope that the questions these authors explore, and the conclusions they reach will spark your imaginations about greater possibilities for youth ministry in your context and for God's inbreaking reign.

David F. White

Editor-in-chief

dwhite@austinseminary.edu