Editorial

Joy is arguably part of the fabric of the Judeo-Christian tradition and is essential to its logic. The ubiquity of joy in the Jewish and Christian scriptures bear witness to God's making and redeeming the world. The Hebrew Scriptures plainly drip with joy: Psalm 16 boldly declares that "in God's presence there is fullness of joy" (16:11); the life of Jesus is flanked on one hand by the glad tidings of his birth (Luke 2:10) and the joy intended for the world as its true redeemed *telos* (Heb. 12:2). Joy is characterized by St. Paul as among the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and he famously admonishes the church at Philippi to "rejoice always" (Phil. 4:4). The three parables of Luke 15—the lost sheep, lost coin and prodigal son—all depict God's joy at the redemption of the lost. So pervasive is this theme and so central to Christian thought, that joy can be seen as a distinctive virtue of the Christian life. Further, anyone who has ministered with or related with young people over time knows that something like joy plays a distinctive role in the developmental journey as youth traverse their passage from childhood to adulthood.

In 1904, G. Stanley Hall, the first theorist of adolescence, observed the middle years between childhood and adulthood as the "vernal season of the heart" – the springtime of the heart when "life glistens and crepitates."¹ He claimed that adolescence is uniquely and wondrously attuned to the plentitude of the world – prone to delight in romance, comradeship, religion, and new experiences and discoveries. Hall saw such adolescent joy and wonder as key to their further study and vocation. This joyful attunement has been largely neglected by social scientists, yet those who work with youth appreciate that joy is part of the very fabric of adolescent life—indeed, it may be one of the gifts they offer to the Church and the world. And yet, we know that for many young people throughout the world, joy is not easily discernable. If adolescence is a time open to joy it is also for that reason vulnerable to social, political, and familial

1 Hall, G. S. (1904). *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education* (Vols. I & II). New York: D. Appleton & Co.

pressures that suppress joy. To some, a focus on joy may seem pollyannish and naïve. Nevertheless, scholars such as Miroslav Volf, Jürgen Moltmann and Willie Jennings insist that in the Christian tradition joy cannot be reduced to mere circumstantial happiness but is a resource for God's *shalom*. Jennings says, "I look at joy as an act of resistance against despair and its forces. ... Joy in that regard is a work, that can become a state, that can become a way of life."² In this view, joy is an important if neglected asset, not only in theology, but generally for human life and flourishing.

Back in 2015, Yale Divinity School's *Center for Faith and Culture*, under the direction of theologian Miroslav Volf, secured a Templeton Grant to consider the role of joy for the Church and the life of the world. In their wisdom, they recognized that exploring joy in adolescent life and faith was crucial. Over sixty scholars participated in the youth portion of the Yale project, including several members of IASYM, some of whom have written books on the topic.³ In a one-time departure from our usual member-generated materials, this issue of JYT features several articles from that study. The lone exception is a time-sensitive article providing guidance for working with children during the covid-19 pandemic we are currently still experiencing. In a time of pandemic and mass calamity, perhaps joy can represent a form of resistance for our youth and the communities that hold them.

In the first article Robert A. Emmons and Marc Afshar explore joy as a concept that is best thought of as an emotion-virtue composed of delight in that which is ultimately good, and ultimately linked with gratitude. Gratitude is an affirmation of the good and a recognition of where that good is sourced. They explore the connection between the two, and with a special focus on youth thriving, especially how gratitude practices can potentiate joy.

In the second article, Dori Baker and Patrick Reyes address the systemic culture of violence as an inhibitor of joy for young people in North America today. They define joy and flourishing through a liberatory theological lens and offer a framework that mirrors the way of Jesus by *naming* violence as a primary inhibitor to adolescent joy; *connecting* isolated individuals and organizations who are addressing this issue through liberative pedagogies; *building* communities of practice which strengthen one another and share contextually

2 "Theology of Joy: Willie James Jennings with Miroslav Volf (Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fKD4Msh3rE>).

3 See Kenda Creasy Dean, Wesley W. Ellis, Justin Forbes, Abigail Visco Rusert *Delighted: What Teenagers Are Teaching the Church about Joy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry? Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020); David F White (Editor), Sarah F Farmer (Editor) *Joy: A Guide for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: GBHEM, 2020).

adaptable resources, and *illuminating* practices that lead to new systems of influence and cultural change.

In the third article, Kate Ott and Lorien Carter explore sexuality and relationships as major aspects of teen development. While many youth ministry programs treat sexuality as a risk (or sin) to be reduced, they urge faith leaders to recognize teen sexuality and relationships as a positive dimension of joy and flourishing. In addition to a robust theological conversation, they describe the increased risks to adolescents who experience high levels of disapproval from families. They suggest specific ways to integrate healthy and holistic approaches to faith-based sexuality education that cultivates joy and flourishing related to teen sexuality and relationships.

In the fourth article Beth Corrie, David Hooker and Itihari Toure argue that 1) a vital aspect of development is empowering adolescents with a faith-informed, community-focused, critical consciousness; 2) young people are formed in community, and joy cannot be fully experienced except communally and in the pursuit of just peace; and 3) the church has opportunities to intervene at critical junctures in youth formation to help them see the importance of pursuing communal just peace for their own ability to live the good life. They offer examples of practices that foster such joy, including *The Eight Bowls ritual* for generational identity marking and the *Game of Life*, part of a three-week intentional community of the Youth Theological Initiative (YTI).

In the fifth article, Sarah Holmes, Astrid Sandsmark, Ronelle Sonnenberg, and Shantelle Weber explore the role and function of children's ministry during the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic, including a comparison of observations from Norway, South Africa, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom. They examine emerging ecclesiologies, sacramental practices and pastoral care of families during this time of crisis. They provide recommendations to aid churches in ensuring that children's ministries value the child as part of the body of Christ, foster intergenerational role modelling and solidarity, and help rather than hinder children on their spiritual journey.

With great joy we offer these articles for your consideration.

David F. White