In *Making Jesus Attractive* Gretchen Schoon Tanis has written a unique and important book. The book provides rich insight into the ministry and message of Young Life. However the insights and implications about this particular organization, predominantly from a particular part of the world, are valuable for wider reflection on issues of theology and culture within youth ministry.

The book contains a forensic account of what could termed the theological culture of Young Life. Schoon Tanis’ underlying research question is ‘What Does Young Life believe?’ Through investigating this from the methodological framework provided by Elaine Graham’s contention that Christian communities generate theological understanding as they live out truth claims in their life together, she is able to piece together the core beliefs of Young Life. While at times offering sharp critique of the organization Schoon Tanis writes as something of an insider having had her own faith deeply influenced by Young Life’s ministry as a teenager. This allows for a sympathetic and authentic tone to her account and any critique.

In Chapter 1 Schoon Tanis details the history of Young Life, weaving socio-logical, ecclesiological and cultural insights together to develop an intricate picture of how and why the organization took shape. Alongside this broad contextual history space is given to focus in on the story of Jim Rayburn, founder of Young Life. In particular we learn how Rayburn’s own upbringing and perspectives influenced particular aspects of Young Life’s ministry. Schoon Tanis highlights, for example, how Young Life’s early difficult relationship with the church can be traced to Rayburn’s own contentious relationship and strong opinions about the church. This historical focus, whilst a relatively new aspect of youth ministry research,1 provides a helpful reminder of the cultural situatedness of ministry and the shaping influence that the views, and perhaps prejudices, of leaders might have. The window into the particular story of Young Life can act as a mirror to aid reflection into our own particular situations, stories and contexts.

Chapters 2 and 3 turn to the doctrine and praxis of Young Life, and the relationship between these. The focus on formal doctrine highlights a contrast with other contemporaneous organizations such as Youth for Christ. Unlike

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1 See Ruth Lukabyo, "Protestant Youth Ministry at the University of Sydney in the 1930s," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 15, no. 1 (2016).
these others Young Life was slow in formulating and publishing a statement of faith, preferring to articulate the faith it professed through praxis. This faith, Schoon Tanis explains, is centred on the Young Life leaders being Jesus for the young people and offering opportunities to respond to the gospel. Relationship with Christ and responding to the gospel are core. Further reflection on the person of Christ is not necessary beyond this relational and response centred praxis. Fascinatingly the interplay of praxis and theology of the organization was highlighted during Schoon Tanis’ period of research. A Young Life staff member had his employment terminated due to a disagreement as to what could be included within the proclamation of the gospel in a Young Life club. In reflecting on this Schoon Tanis highlights what she calls the drawback of ‘loose theology’ that developed from such a praxis-based model. Perhaps, she suggests, a tighter or richer articulation of doctrine and theology earlier in the organization’s history might have prevented this difficult episode. Indeed this episode led to such reflection within Young Life and the production of a ‘non-negotiables’ document in the following years.

In concluding these chapters Schoon Tanis captures the essence of her argument thus far – that Young Life are more comfortable in their praxis of ministry rather than their theological articulation. Their theological understanding of issues such as Christology, soteriology, discipleship and ecclesiology flow from their established relational understanding of faith, consequently creating a loose theological framework. This is one of a number of moments where the questions raised and conclusions drawn about Young Life can lead to reflection more broadly on the reader’s own youth ministry understandings. How is the balance and interplay of ministerial praxis and theological articulation in our own ministry and work with young people?

Chapter 4 turns to the cultural expression of Young Life, as it is demonstrated in particular through magazines and camps. Through these Christianity is presented as an attractive, strong and patriotic faith. Young Life camps provide the ultimate experience of such a faith. They are billed as the ‘best week of your life’. Core tenets of Young Life’s ministry such as ‘making Christianity attractive’ and ‘it is a sin to bore a kid with the gospel’ are encapsulated in this cultural expression. It is not difficult to see how these ideas have explicitly or implicitly become part of the overall culture of evangelical youth ministry. The chapter is enhanced by the inclusion of photos of magazine covers highlighting the particular ways in which Christian life was shown to be exciting and attractive – photos of young couples in canoes proved especially popular! Whilst easy to find this humorous it also provides a challenge as to the attractiveness of the gospel that is offered to young people. It is also striking at how intentional Young Life are in putting the young people at the centre of their thinking and praxis at all times.