

IN WHAT WAYS CAN ATTACHMENT THEORY HELP US TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF YOUTH MINISTER?

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DECLARATIONS

This dissertation is the product of my own work and does not infringe the ethical principles set out in the University's Handbook for Research Ethics.

I agree that it may be made available for reference via any and all media by any and all means now known or developed in the future at the discretion of the University.

Signed

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Date: 04/07/19

ABSTRACT

Attachment Theory states that an individual's relationship with their primary caregiver in early childhood has a profound impact on their development. Patterns of interaction observed within this relationship are recorded in an internal working model which determines how this individual will relate to others. The internal working model operates subconsciously; however, research shows that the information stored within the internal working model can be accessed and modified during adolescence.

This dissertation explores the ways Attachment Theory informs the role of the youth minister and considers how a youth minister can facilitate a young person's attachment to God. A review of the relevant literature demonstrates that a relationship with God can qualify as an attachment bond. Further investigation into the development and organisation of internal working models highlights the dominant influence of a primary attachment relationship. However, a theological understanding of the Trinity, the relationship at the core of God's being, offers an alternative perspective: that humanity was created, primarily, to be in relationship with the Triune God.

Discussion on the nature of a relationship between a youth worker and young person recognises that the youth worker cannot fulfil the role of attachment figure within professional boundaries. Yet, new social experiences can engage with information stored in an internal working model. Therefore, as this dissertation concludes, the youth minister facilitates a young person's attachment to God by inviting the young person into a relationship where they can experience the presence of the living God.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Before initiating a discussion on the relevant literature of Attachment Theory, it is important to consider the age-specific context and purpose of this piece of research. Adolescence is the label given to the period of development between childhood and adulthood; a transition which has a significant impact on *'all areas of life: physical, social, emotional, cognitive and educational development'* (Taylor, 2003, p2). This transition is not a *'sudden event'* but a long process of adjustment (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p109). Adolescents must adjust to biological changes, new relationships and increasing independence, all while navigating a kind of identity crisis as one experiments with answers to the questions *'Who am I?' and 'Who am I going to be?'* Most, as Taylor (2003, p2) points out, *'will negotiate these by using their own strengths and the support of immediate family and friends.'* But for others, adolescence can be a much more turbulent period causing confusion, anxiety and isolation. As a youth minister I have observed young people whose behaviour is unpredictable. Some *'continually 'make a scene''* (Brisch, 2009, p21) and as a result are often rejected by their peers when their behaviour, however misguided, was actually born out of a desire to belong. In contrast, I have noticed others who try to hide and are consequently overlooked by their peers, and sometimes significant adults, who are led to believe that this person is fine on their own. In reality, issues of self-esteem are at play—some young people *'feel unworthy of taking anyone else's time'* (Taylor, 2003, p5) and so learn to cope on their own, even when they are craving close relationships. It is difficult to know how to help young people whose actions tend to trigger markedly different responses to those they were hoping for. Bombèr (2009, p34) appeals to those working with adolescents to view such behaviour as a *'means of communication,'* stressing that it may be necessary *'to learn a completely new 'language', in order to make sense of what we observe in our interactions with these young people.'* I believe this *'new language'* to be synonymous with Attachment Theory.

Attachment Theory draws a connection between a child's relationship with their primary caregiver and the development of an internal working model of how to relate to another. Learned patterns of interaction create certain expectations of others based on previous experience. Therefore, a child's primary attachment relationship can determine their internal representations of all future relationships. The aim of this dissertation is to identify the ways in which Attachment Theory can help us to better understand the role of youth minister. I will specifically seek to answer the question: How can a youth minister facilitate a young person's attachment to God?

In my research, I will consider the characteristics of an attachment bond in order to determine the eligibility of God as an attachment figure; I will conduct a deeper investigation into the operational dynamics of the internal working model and assess how God can engage with this mechanism. I will also analyse the research on pathways to God as an attachment figure. In addition, I will consider the suitability of the youth worker as surrogate attachment figure and discuss the implications of my findings in relation to the role of youth minister.

I will begin with a review of the relevant literature on Attachment Theory but before doing so, it may be helpful to define some key terms:

Attachment Bond (and Attachment Figure)

Attachment is a type of affectional bond which describes the *'enduring relationship'* (Ainsworth et al., 2015, p17) that ties a person to a *'unique individual'* who is *'interchangeable with none other, from whom inexplicable, involuntary separation would cause distress, and whose loss would occasion grief'* (Ainsworth, 1985, p799). This *'unique individual'* is referred to as an attachment figure. A *'primary attachment figure'* (used interchangeably with *'primary caregiver'*) is typically a parent—someone whose *'role is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon, to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary'* (Bowlby, 2005, p12).

Internal Working Model (IWM)

An internal working model is a mental record of *'day-to-day interactions'* (Bowlby, 2005, p146). Patterns of interaction stored within an internal working model become so *'ingrained'* (Bretherton and Munholland, 2016, p83) that they function as *'our "gut-level" sense of how significant relationships work'* (Hall et al., 2009, p231). Constructed from experience, an internal working model also generates *'expectations that affect subsequent experience in close relationships'* (Thompson, 2016, p332).

Youth Minister

A youth minister is a person whose work with young people is founded on the belief that *'Jesus is alive and active in the world'* today (Root, 2007, p83). Their ministry is a response to *'the call to follow'* Jesus (Bonhoeffer, 2001, p19) and participate in *'God's mission of love'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p80). The youth minister intentionally seeks to build genuine relationships with young people so that they may come to know and encounter the living Christ for themselves. The youth minister holds on tightly to *'a young person's deepest identity'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p85), affirming from within the relationship that each young person is *'an individual of worth'* (Taylor, 2003, p11), because the youth minister knows the person stood before them to be *'the beloved of God'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p85).

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction to Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory *'is based on the proposition that the way we relate to others throughout our lives... is shaped by our first relationship with our primary carer'* (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p45). John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist who is widely regarded as the father of Attachment Theory, saw this first close relationship as being a *'basic biological need'* (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p49) with *'broad implications for social development and psychological functioning across the lifespan'* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p917). It is believed that through this initial attachment bond, typically between mother and child, one develops *'working models'* (Bowlby, 2005, p146)—internal records of interaction—which inform all future relationships. A central feature of Bowlby's (2005, p12) work (also attributed to Ainsworth) is the recognition of the need for the primary caregiver to provide *'a secure base from which a child... can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there.'* He continues that the role of the caregiver is *'one of being available'* and *'ready to respond when called upon.'* A child who has repeatedly experienced this instinctively attentive behaviour from their caregiver may form a secure attachment. A secure attachment will instigate an internal working model through which the child will see themselves as *'worthy of love and attention'* with an expectation of others to be *'responsive and reliable'* (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p57). The opposite can be described as an insecure attachment, where a child's internal working model is based on *'coping'* (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p57). An insecure attachment can occur when a child's primary caregiver (or attachment figure) is unreliable, unpredictable or even unavailable. In this case, the child will learn to manage their expectations in relation to their caregiver—a defence mechanism designed to protect themselves from pain and rejection.

Mary Ainsworth, an American-Canadian psychologist who had experience working as Bowlby's research assistant, designed the Strange Situation Test—an observation of interactions between a mother, child and stranger. As a result, Ainsworth et al. (2015) defined two types of insecure attachment—*avoidant* and *resistant (or ambivalent)*. The first, as previously alluded to, is where the child has *'learnt to minimise needs for attachment'* due to insensitive caregiving (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p58–59). Patterns of previous interactions imply that the attachment figure's ability, or desire, to meet the needs of the child are insufficient; as a result, the child will avoid turning to the caregiver to escape disappointment. A resistant/ambivalent attachment forms where a child cannot predict the response of the caregiver. *'The attachment is strong but not secure'* (Beckett and Taylor,

2016, p58–59); rather than avoiding the caregiver, the child may adopt attention-seeking behaviour, much like the adolescent behaviour mentioned earlier. In this instance, there is no pattern available to help make sense of interactions and so there is a constant sense of anxiety—when separated the child is worried the caregiver may not return but, when the caregiver is present the child fears their imminent departure. Supplementary to Ainsworth's research is the classification of *'disorganised and/or disoriented'* attachment (Main and Solomon, 1990, p112), used to *'describe an array of previously unrecognised fearful, odd, or overtly conflicted behaviors'* (Lyons-Ruth and Jacobvitz, 2016, p667). In this case *'the carer may simultaneously be the main source of danger or fear, while at the same time the only place to go for comfort'* (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p59). Consequently, the child becomes confused and develops a disorganised working model—a combination of avoidant and ambivalent behaviour. Knowledge of these types of attachment relationships can provide a helpful insight to those working with young people. Due to the development of the internal working model, it is possible to recognise adolescent behaviour as a manifestation of early attachment with a primary caregiver.

The work of theorists such as Bowlby and Ainsworth is heavily focussed on attachment during early childhood and has a tendency to imply that internal working models, built on the patterns of interactions between the child and primary caregiver, *'become more resistant to change over the course of development'* (Kobak et al., 2016, p35). This has often left me wondering how I can support the young people I work with when an internal mechanism, which has already been in operation for a number of years, is unconsciously influencing their behaviour. Similarly, I am concerned about whether an insecurely attached child with a faulty working model can ever form a secure attachment to a suitable caregiver. However, while attachment patterns are firmly established in the early years, some theorists acknowledge the potential of alternative attachment bonds to encourage further development. For the instances where a child is unable to form a secure attachment to a parent, Ainsworth (1985, p799) offers a list of potential surrogate attachment figures who *'may provide a secure base from which the person may gain confidence to explore and reassess his working model of relationships and, equally important, his working model of himself.'* I find it encouraging to see youth workers included in this list; the purpose of youth work aligns with the concept of a secure base—a safe place and safe relationship within which to explore one's own identity and find one's voice.

Surprisingly, adolescence seems to be a particularly opportune time to consider the potential reconfiguration of an individual's internal working model. It is the period in which a young person's task is to *'separate from their primary attachment figures—usually their parents—and seek out new attachments'* (Brisch, 2009, p9). Therefore, an understanding of

Attachment Theory is an indispensable tool for a youth worker. Such knowledge not only offers an insight into the ways young people relate to others based on childhood experience, it also highlights the potentially life-changing impact of the relationship between a youth worker and a young person. Consistently and authentically showing a young person that they are worthy of love could begin to unpick an unhealthy working model and initiate a process of reassessment. However, it is important to be mindful of the fact that forming attachments can be a delicate task. There is a noticeable tension between an adolescent's quest for autonomy and inevitable dependency on a caregiver. During this period of adjustment the attachment relationship becomes a *'negotiated effort'* (Allen and Tan, 2016, p400), where a greater understanding of the other is required in order to foster development. Supporting young people through this period requires a long-term commitment to listen and share in their struggles. It seems that a youth worker is well positioned to assume the role of alternative attachment figure and I intend to revisit this point later in the discussion. On the other hand, if the purpose of the relationship between a youth minister and young person is to *'move the adolescent beyond a relationship with [the youth minister] and into a relationship with Jesus'* (Root, 2007, p115), who is God in human form, the possibility of an attachment relationship with God must also be considered.

God as Attachment Figure

Theologian Gordon D. Kaufman (cited in Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p918) states that *'the idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment figure'* who, as Granqvist and Kirkpatrick elaborate, *'capture[s] the essence of the protective other that a parent represents to a child.'* In support of this proposition, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) have utilised Ainsworth's (1985) four key criteria of an attachment bond to demonstrate how an individual's relationship with God can qualify. Firstly, an individual should be able to maintain proximity with the attachment figure. In human terms, this may seem to present a stumbling block as God is not with us in physical form; however, God is a deity believed to be omnipresent and therefore always in close proximity. Additionally, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p919) highlight the act of prayer as an example of *'proximity-maintaining behaviour.'* We can freely approach God in prayer anytime, anywhere.

Secondly, the attachment figure should be seen as a secure base from which one can explore. Beck's (2006, p126) study concerning *'Attachment to God and Theological Exploration'* validates this criteria as he found that *'God is often a source of support and strength'* giving the believer *'the confidence to face new challenges.'* This is supported by Philippians 4:13 (NIV): *'I can do all this through him who gives me strength.'* The combination of the omnipresent nature of God and this sense of boundless courage creates an optimal learning environment.

Thirdly, an attachment figure should be a safe haven—the person to whom one will seek close proximity when alarmed, observed by Ainsworth et al. (2015, p258) as the *'retreat to the mother'* movement. This criteria is endorsed by Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p924) who hypothesise that *'regulation of distress'* is the key reason individuals turn to God as a surrogate attachment figure. Again, the act of prayer offers supporting evidence here. There is a noticeable tendency to turn to God in times of crisis on a personal, national and even worldwide level. This can be seen by the prevalence of *'#prayfor...'* across social media in times of adversity.

Finally, Ainsworth (1985) believes that separation from an attachment figure should cause an individual to experience anxiety. This is a difficult box to tick in relation to God. As already discussed, God is omnipresent so how can one be apart from God? Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p921) direct the argument towards eternity and the potential experience of *'true separation from God'* in Hell. However, I wonder if there is a case for anxiety caused by the fear of separation, rather than actually being apart from God. A potential threat of separation could be anxiety associated with not feeling *'good enough'* or feeling unworthy of God's love. Although God's love is known to be unconditional, internal working models such as that of the insecure avoidant could cause a perceived distance in one's relationship with God. In summary, using Ainsworth's four criteria it is reasonable to suggest that God can fulfil the role of an attachment figure. Furthermore, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) explore the conditions under which someone may turn to God as an attachment figure.

Pathways of Attachment to God

Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) present two perspectives concerning attachment to God: *The Correspondence Pathway* and *The Compensation Pathway*. The Correspondence Pathway mirrors the notion of a secure base and is therefore closely associated with the securely attached who, it is predicted, will *'become actively religious insofar as their caregiver were'* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p928). The opposite can be said of those with experience of an insensitive attachment figure—a caregiver whose actions contradict their supposed beliefs can cause cynicism of religion. The Compensation Pathway correlates with the concept of a safe haven by suggesting that *'people are more motivated to experience God in situations of distress'* (Granqvist et al., 2012, p805). This is consistent with Bowlby's (2005, p3) observation that *'attachment behaviour is activated especially by pain, fatigue and anything frightening.'* From this perspective, a relationship with God can help a person *'compensate for deficient caregiver bonds'* and fill an *'attachment void'* (Beck and McDonald, 2004, p93). Consequently, this relationship *'waxes and wanes over time depending on the current need to regulate distress'* (Granqvist et al., 2012, p806). The

challenge to the validity of both pathways is that *'turning to God is comparatively risk free'*—*'responsiveness can always be imagined and need never be experienced as disconfirmed'* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p925). There is an extent to which we cannot confirm a relationship with God with empirical data. Nevertheless, a theological perspective contributes to a knowledge and understanding of the relational nature of God which is more substantial than a figment of one's imagination.

Father, Son and Spirit

Trinitarian theology offers an insight into what could be perceived as God's internal working model. To echo Kaufman's starting point, *'Father, Son and Spirit are all names indicating relationship'* (Zizioulas, 2006, p5). The language of God as Father is familiar and is the way in which God has chosen to reveal himself to us. This implies that the relationship between a parent and child is the most adequate earthly example of the relationship God intended to share with humankind. However, the relationship within the Trinity existed before creation and there is more to be learned. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p921) reflect that *'it is easy to imagine how an [Attachment Figure] who is simultaneously omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent can provide the most secure of bases.'* I believe this to be true, but think they are missing a vital component: their description of God as a secure base focuses on presence, knowledge and power yet neglects the importance of the relationship at the core of God's being. The relationship of the Trinity, as Zizioulas (cited in Gunton, 2003, p95) enthuses, *'is permanent and unbreakable.'* We are invited into this loving relationship and we cannot fall away from it—it is *'unbreakable'*. There is a definite case that we are undeserving of such a relationship but through Jesus as Saviour we are judged worthy of love. No earthly relationship can compare. As a result of the Fall, *'there is a pathology built into the very root of our existence, inherited through our birth, and that is the fear of other'* (Zizioulas, 2006, p1). Even the most loving human relationships cannot truly be unconditional; perhaps as a kind of self-preservation, we cannot wholly give ourselves to another in the way that God offers himself to us. There is indisputable evidence that we can form secure attachments, but it is possible that our human understanding of a secure attachment is limited. There is an argument to put forward that God is *the* ultimate attachment figure. To quote 1 Corinthians 13:8 (NIV): God's *'love never fails.'* He is incapable of letting us down. The supernatural God, however, is a non-corporeal being which presents some significant obstacles for future research.

Research Obstacles

An invisible God is not well-suited to the contemporary scientific worldview. In relation to assessing the viability of God as attachment figure, empirical research would be dependent on self-report as God, being a non-corporeal figure, is not readily available for interview. As

Beck and McDonald (2004, p100) have learned, *'sceptical readers may suggest that attachment bonds with a Deity are simply too slippery to operationalize, if they exist at all.'* This can also be seen through the use of language such as "imagined" and "perceived" which appear throughout relevant literature. The difficulty of assessment stretches across the field of Attachment Theory. It is noteworthy that Ainsworth (1985, p798) herself recognised *'a lack of procedures for assessing attachment.'* Significant developments in research methods of attachment have been made, such as the *Adult Attachment Interview* (George, Kaplan, and Main, 1996) and the *Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory* (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998, cited in Beck, 2006, p127), but most models are reliant on self-report. Ainsworth (1985, p798) warns such evidence should not be taken at *'face value'* as an individual's understanding of self can obscure reality and cause discrepancies. Consequently, my research on this topic will be library-based. By engaging further with the literature on Attachment Theory I hope to be able to investigate the extent of God's influence as an attachment figure; to allow the theory to underpin my understanding of the dynamics of a relationship with God and to give thought to how this knowledge informs my ministry.

In summary, a review of the relevant literature on Attachment Theory reveals that an individual's internal working model *'of how to relate to others'* (Brisch, 2009, p9), developed in early childhood, can be reassessed during adolescence. The argument that God can act in the capacity of surrogate attachment figure has been demonstrated within the framework of Ainsworth's (1985) four criteria of an attachment bond. In addition, there is sufficient research to indicate that *'religious beliefs and behavior are interpretable in terms of attachment dynamics'* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p917). This dissertation will conduct a deeper investigation into the attachment dynamics of adolescence, particularly to expand understanding on the development of a young person's relationship with God and, as a result, inform the effective practice of youth minister.

CHAPTER THREE

Internal Working Models (IWMs)

An argument which presents God as *the* ultimate attachment figure is inevitably challenged by the theory that an attachment relationship is a '*basic biological*,' and therefore physical, need (Beckett and Taylor, 2016, p49). Although a relationship with God fulfils Ainsworth's (1985) criteria for an attachment bond (as already demonstrated), it is important to acknowledge that Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) lay the foundations for God as *surrogate*, as opposed to primary, attachment figure. A primary attachment relationship has a '*key survival function*,' particularly in relation to the physical needs of food and protection during early childhood (Bowlby, 2005, p136). While God may be considered Provider (Matthew 6.31–33), God is not able to physically nurture a child in a way that a mother (or primary caregiver) can. This is problematic because '*development is a cumulative process*' (Sroufe, 2016, p1008). Key attachment relationships develop '*during the infant's first year*' (Cassidy, 2016, p16; Howes and Spieker, 2016, p316) and represent '*an inner core of an emerging self that, while certainly open to modification, remains an important feature of the developmental landscape*' (Sroufe, 2016, p1008). Therefore, it becomes necessary to give further consideration to the development and organisation of internal working models, in order to determine the extent to which God, as an attachment figure, can engage with a young person's understanding of self and other.

Development of Internal Working Models

Put simply, an internal working model can be described as '*our "gut-level" sense of how significant relationships work*' (Hall et al., 2009, p231). This gut-feeling is founded on consistent patterns of interaction between a child and primary caregiver, patterns that become firmly established in the child's first year. These patterns, as observed in day-to-day life, create certain expectations about the caregiver's ability to sufficiently meet the child's attachment needs and, as a result, '*enable immediate forecasts of the caregiver's responsiveness*' (Thompson, 2016, p332). The resulting attachment behaviour can be categorised as secure attachment, insecure avoidant or insecure resistant attachment, or disorganised/disoriented attachment (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Main and Solomon, 1990, p112). The type of attachment relationship a child develops with their primary caregiver is significant because '*each pattern tends to be self-perpetuating*' (Bowlby, 2005, p143) and this has serious implications for future development. A child who forms a secure attachment to their primary caregiver is likely to be a joy to care for—given that they see themselves '*as worthy of love, care and protection*' (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p927). Having identified patterns of caregiving that have nurtured and affirmed such a level of self-esteem, they do

not need to employ attention-seeking tactics (this is not to say that parenting a securely attached child is without difficulty). On the other hand, the challenging behaviour of an insecurely attached child is *'likely to elicit an unfavourable response from the parent so that vicious circles develop'* (Bowlby, 2005, p143). For example, patterns observed by the anxious-avoidant child which prove the caregiver to be consistently unresponsive and unreliable create a self-preserving distance in an attachment relationship. We then see a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy—the child is unable to maintain proximity to the caregiver and so withdraws, the caregiver does not adequately respond to the child's decision to retreat and therefore maintains the distance within the relationship. These self-perpetuating patterns alert us to the fact that the images a parent (or primary caregiver) holds of a child, *'images that are communicated not only by how [a parent] treats him but what [a parent] says to him'* (Bowlby, 2005, p146), have a serious impact on a child's internal working model and therefore on a child's development. In addition, Bowlby (2005, p149) warns of the danger of the child *'developing a false-self'* as their personality grows to fulfil the expectations of the parent/primary caregiver, whether the caregiver holds an image that is a true representation of the child's worth or whether their image fails to fully recognise all that the child was born to be.

The implication that the primary attachment relationship has the potential to determine a child's development at such an early stage seems somewhat fatalistic, particularly in the case of an insecure attachment relationship. A child's internal working model at its earliest formation is unique to the relationship between child and caregiver and, if it were to remain that way, there would be the potential for new attachment relationships to create new patterns. There would be hope that a child who had an insecure relationship with their primary attachment figure could in later years form a secure attachment with a suitable alternative caregiver, given that one relationship would be independent of the other. However, *'as the child grows older, the pattern becomes increasingly a property of the child himself, which means that he tends to impose it, or some derivative of it, upon new relationships'* (Bowlby, 2005, p143). This reinforces the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy: characteristics of a child's first relationship with their primary caregiver *'become incorporated into personality'* and consequently travel with the child into all future relationships (Thompson, 2016, p334). As a youth minister I find this quite discouraging; I fear Attachment Theory undermines the value of youth work by imposing restrictions on the impact of investing in a young person's life. It is as though an understanding of Attachment Theory advises those who work with young people to find ways to simply work with or manage the person before them, rather than encourage further development and promote change.

Attachment Theory does acknowledge that *'most infants have multiple attachment figures'* but *'it is important not to assume that an infant treats all attachment figures as equivalent'* (Cassidy, 2016, p15). Thompson (2016, p333) understands that *'social experience is formative to the development and potential revision of early IWMs.'* This implies that new relationships *can* leave a lasting impression on an internal working model. The difficulty is that learned patterns from an attachment relationship to a primary caregiver *'tend to persist and are so taken for granted that they come to operate at an unconscious level'* (Bowlby, 2005, p146). Internal working models become *'a code or "language" that is nonverbal, it is not necessarily inaccessible to conscious awareness'* (Hall et al., 2009, p231). In order to raise *'young people's awareness of the range of decisions and choices open to them'* (NYA, 2004, p7) we must alert young people to their subconscious decision-making process regarding relationships, to enable them to access their own records of implicit relational knowledge (Hall et al., 2009, p213) and make informed choices. This is the purpose of this piece of research: I believe an understanding of Attachment Theory is crucial to the practice of any who work with young people—we have to be able to hear or recognise there is a language being spoken before we can address it.

Interestingly, the task of adolescence (separating from primary caregivers and seeking new attachment relationships (Brisch, 2009, p9)) creates some much needed space for self-reflection. Allen and Tan (2016, p402) note that *'as the adolescent comes to need caregivers less to maintain a sense of emotional equilibrium and felt security, he or she is freed up to evaluate more critically the caregiver relationships.'* Therefore, adolescence provides an opportune moment to exercise new cognitive capacities and scrutinise an already well established internal working model. Consequently, creating opportunities for young people to experience *'new ways of being with another'* (Hall et al., 2009, p232) has the power to teach a new attachment language. It is near impossible, however, to deny the dominance of the primary attachment relationship. In an attempt to measure the influence of alternative attachment relationships, I will examine the organisational structure of the internal working model in the case of multiple caregivers.

Organisation of Internal Working Models

There are four potential organisational structures of internal working models: *monotropy*, *hierarchical*, *independent* and *integrative* (Howes and Spieker, 2016, p318; Van IJzendoorn et al., 1992, p10). The word *Monotropy*, as chosen by Bowlby (1997, p309), means to be *'fed or raised by only one person'* (Van IJzendoorn et al., 1992, p6). It is perhaps the most linear explanation for the organisation of an internal working model, implying that the relationship with the primary caregiver (usually the mother) is the only attachment relationship of importance. From this point of view, *'we may derive the prediction that only the infant-mother*

attachment is related to later socioemotional functioning' (Van IJzendoorn et al., 1992, p10). Consistent with Attachment Theory's emphasis on a child's relationship with their primary caregiver, it is plain to see how Bowlby arrived at this prediction. However, there is room to argue that this structure is outdated. Due to changing family conventions, progressive societal norms and an unstable economic environment, raising a child is often the responsibility of more than one attachment figure. In addition, I think it is fair to say that *'the attachment relationship with the mother is not the prototype for all others'* (Bretherton, 1985, p29). If the opposite was the case then *'the quality of the infant-mother attachment should be congruent with the quality of the infant-father attachment'* (Bretherton, 1985, p29) but it is not true that one attachment relationship mirrors another. Therefore, it must be possible to organise attachment relationships in order of influence and this is where the *hierarchical* structure comes into play.

A hierarchy is the most widely supported organisational structure among theorists, while maintaining that *'the infant-mother relationship is the most powerful determinant of children's socioemotional development,'* it also accepts other attachment relationships may be predictive of future development but *'in a weaker sense'* (Van IJzendoorn et al., 1992, p10). The *independent* structure also acknowledges the influence of multiple caregivers, proposing that a number of caregivers can be *'equally important in determining later socioemotional functioning'* but each has their own *"specialization"* (Van IJzendoorn et al., 1992, p10). In this way, attachment relationships *'are independent both in quality and in their influence on development'* (Howes and Spieker, 2016, p318). As already mentioned, in early childhood the internal working model is believed to be the property of the relationship (Bowlby, 2005, p143), allowing the possibility that a child-caregiver relationship (where the caregiver is a professional childcare provider) can be independent of the primary child-mother relationship (Howes and Spieker, 2016, p318). Given that the internal working model will soon become the property of the child, rather than the relationship, the independent structure has a limited timeframe and, as a result, the hierarchical structure becomes the focus for those concerned with intervention in adolescence. It is worth noting, however, that the attachment hierarchy is believed to become *'more flexible and multi-dimensional'* over time (Allen and Tan, 2016, p400). As a consequence, *'by adolescence the attachment system can be assessed in terms of a single overarching state of mind'* (Allen and Tan, 2016, p401). This leads us on to the *integrative* structure *'in which the child integrates all of his or her attachment relationships into a single representation'* (Howes and Spieker, 2016, p318). Therefore, *'socioemotional development involves the quality of the entire attachment network'* (Van IJzendoorn et al., 1992, p10). A hierarchy of attachment relationships certainly seems true of childhood development but the integration of internal working models could be a better reflection of adolescent development and adulthood. Nevertheless, it remains possible that the primary

attachment relationship will exert the strongest influence on any structure precisely because of the primacy of the relationship.

On initial reflection, the imposition of internal working models on future relationships seems to be the natural course of development and one's relationship with God is not exempt from that pattern. For example, a child who has observed a consistent pattern of insensitive caregiving may begin to see themselves as unworthy of love, care and protection. If a relationship with God was to model the opposite, that the child is of ultimate value to God, their internal representations of self may still speak louder. Based on their attachment history, the child is also likely to have issues with trust, even when a new attachment figure proves themselves to be someone they can depend on. This does not mean that one cannot form a secure attachment to God, but it does become necessary to consider the position of God within an organisational structure of attachment relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR

God as Attachment Figure

The research analysed so far implies that God, as an attachment figure, can influence the development of an internal working model. However, the level of influence will inevitably be in conflict with the primary attachment relationship. God may have a place within one's attachment hierarchy but is unlikely to be found at the top of the pyramid. God can move within the integrative structure but again, any potential impact is limited by the profound emphasis on the relationship between the child and their primary caregiver. While it appears impossible for God (or any alternative attachment figure) to compete with the dominant influence of the primary caregiver, Ainsworth (1985) warns that the strength of an attachment should not be confused with the quality.

Attachment Quality

In agreement with Hinde's (1976, p11) notion of '*penetration*,' Ainsworth (1985, p800) appreciates that '*the nature of a relationship between two individuals grows out of a total history of their interaction.*' Put another way, the quality of an attachment relationship can be determined by the '*centrality of one person to another's life—the extent to which a person penetrates a variety of aspects of the other person's life*' (Cassidy, 2016, p14). This perspective opens the door to the potential influence of an alternative attachment figure on future development. It is possible, given Ainsworth's (1985, p800) emphasis on a total history of interaction, that someone who plays a long-term role in the life of an individual could begin to challenge the influence of the primary attachment relationship. As a result, whether the child-parent relationship sits at the top of a hierarchical structure or exerts the most influence on an integrative internal working model, there remains hope that suitable alternative attachment figures can have a positive, potentially restorative, influence on an adolescent's development.

Progressing with Ainsworth's (1985, p800) and Hinde's (1976, p11) assessments of the quality of attachment relationships, the omnipresent nature of God adds another branch to the discussion. In the person of the Holy Spirit, God has the power, and the desire, to permeate every aspect of a person's life. While Attachment Theory arms us with knowledge about how human development may affect a relationship with God, it lacks consideration of the power of God on human development. A deeper investigation of trinitarian theology may propose an alternative perspective on '*our "gut-level" sense of how significant relationships work*' (Hall et al., 2009, p231).

God-Given Relationality

Kaufman's notion of God as '*an absolutely adequate attachment figure,*' along with Granqvist and Kirkpatrick's (2016) supporting assessment of an attachment bond and recognition of the pathways to God, are based on our understanding of the development of human attachment relationships and the fulfilment of human needs. This is the problem of Attachment Theory in relation to God—the imposition of our fallible working models onto the supernatural God who, paradoxically, is believed to be the Creator of that which we observe. The Reverend Professor Colin Gunton, '*one of the most distinctive and powerful voices in British theology*' (Holmes, 2003), discerns that '*our views of what it is to be human are projected from what we believe about God*' (Gunton, 2003, p83–84). If a relationship with God is a figment of human imaginations, devised to '*compensate for deficient caregiver bonds*' and to fill an '*attachment void*' (Beck and McDonald, 2004, p93), then our understanding of who God is and how to be in relationship with God will be defined by and confined to limited human experience. In contrast, acknowledging the existence of God as a '*permanent and unbreakable*' relationship of three persons (Zizioulas cited in Gunton, 2003, p95) who created the human race '*not out of need or lack but out of plenitude of love*' (LaCugna, 1991, cited in Miner, 2007, p119), broadens our grasp of what it truly means to be human. As Gunton (2003, p113) states: '*the human person is one who is created to find his or her being in relation.*' I do not think that this revelation stretches an understanding of Attachment Theory beyond its current remit; however it does have implications on the perceived timeline of attachment relationships.

A human person is a being primarily in relation to God, therefore the 'primary' attachment relationship formed in a child's first year becomes secondary. This does not deny the developmental significance of a primary attachment relationship, instead it implies that our ability to give or receive care is a consequence of being made in the image of the Triune God. Miner (2007, p119) highlights this by stating: '*the capacity for, and actuality of, relationship with God is primary*' (Miner, 2007, p119). Humans exist for the purpose of being in relationship with their Creator and, as Miner (2007, p119) continues, '*we relate to others because we are capable of relating to God by being made in the image of God.*' Our capacity to form relationships is God-given. In addition, we are relational because God is relational. From this point of view, '*divine relationships can be seen as a model of human relationships*' (Miner, 2007, p115) as opposed to human relationships (whether secure or insecure) being the pathway to divine relationships.

Furthermore, while internal representations of self and other may affect an individual's relationship with God, such a relationship cannot be defined by these representations just as God is not defined by them. Our understanding of who God is does not change who God is (Hebrews 13.8). The relationship is, quite rightly, unbalanced. While the imposition of an

internal working model on a relationship with God cannot change the very nature of God, a relationship with God does have the power to transform an individual's working model, and the person as a whole. Similarly, we may relate to God in the way that our internal working models determine, but that does not change how God relates to us—God's love is unconditional. God is independent of any structure of internal working models yet God's influence is omnipresent. Irrespective of God's position within a person's attachment hierarchy, the love of God deeply surrounds the whole structure. God is able to work within a person's hierarchy of attachment relationships to draw people closer, but is not restricted by or dependent on the quality of such relationships.

Engaging with the fact that a primary attachment relationship is recognised as being a biological/physical need, it is worth highlighting that this theological perspective affirms our relationality. We are created to be in relationship with God, but also with each other (Genesis 2.18). An understanding of who God is and who God made us to be can encompass Attachment Theory, even though the theory does not necessarily create sufficient space for an active God. As already mentioned, theories of attachment to God are based on the development of internal working models and the fulfilment of attachment needs. It is argued, for example, that one either turns to God to mirror the values of their primary caregiver or to compensate for an inadequate attachment—where the needs for proximity, security, and a safe haven are not being met (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016). However, an understanding of trinitarian theology, as outlined, denies that an individual's attachment relationship with God is *'utterly dependent on the relationship with carers'* (Miner, 2007, p119). In light of this perspective it becomes necessary to revisit the correspondence versus compensation debate.

CHAPTER FIVE

Pathways of Attachment to God

Correspondence Versus Compensation

Employing the work of attachment theorists such as Bowlby and Ainsworth as the foundation for their discussion, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p923-924) propose *‘two distinct developmental pathways to religion’—The Correspondence Pathway and The Compensation Pathway*. The correspondence hypothesis draws a connection between human attachment relationships and an individual’s attachment to God. Utilising Bowlby’s concept of the internal working model as the framework for their argument, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p934) predict that a secure attachment relationship with a sensitive, *‘often religious’* caregiver will correspond to the *‘development of a security-enhancing representation of God.’* The patterns of sensitive interactions between an individual and their primary caregiver equate to an individual’s expectations of a God who is *‘implicitly seen as available in times of need.’* Someone who has consistently experienced sensitive care has no reason to expect anything less. It is worth noting, however, that *‘secure individuals are unlikely to need to use the perceived relationship with God specifically to regulate stress’* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p930). Therefore, a relationship with God provides a secure base from which to explore in the confidence that God is ready and waiting to respond should the need arise. In contrast, the compensation hypothesis stems from Ainsworth’s (1985) recognition of a need for a surrogate attachment figure who, initially, acts as a safe haven. An insecurely attached individual *‘may anticipate... that efforts to achieve adequate proximity and comfort from the primary [attachment figure] are likely to be unsuccessful’* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p924) and, as a result, initiate a search for a surrogate. A suitable surrogate would be someone who is *‘stronger and wiser’*—qualities that are ultimately true of God. In this way, *‘an individual’s relationship with God mirrors a child-parent attachment’* in its asymmetrical nature (Granqvist, 2002, p267). The danger here is that a relationship with God is limited by our understanding of child-parent attachment relationships.

One criticism of Granqvist’s and Kirkpatrick’s (2016) hypotheses is that the clearly defined pathways are too narrow. There is a strong implication that there is one pathway to God for those with secure attachment histories and one for those with insecure attachment histories, yet neither pathway is inevitable. Being raised by a Christian parent, however secure the attachment relationship, does not guarantee the lifelong faith of the child. Similarly, while one may seek a relationship with God to compensate for insensitive caregiving, the relationship is only as strong as the need. Research has shown insecure attachment histories to be *‘related to an unstable religiosity (both increases and decreases) based on affect regulation’*

(Granqvist, 2002, p266). Additionally, Miner (2007, p120) raises a question about the consequences of correspondence for the insecurely attached: *'can this person ever find security of attachment to God?'* The correspondence pathway does not address insecure attachment therefore instigating further criticism concerning the perceived mutual exclusivity of both pathways (Hall et al., 2009, 229). Furthermore, these two distinct pathways are dependent on the competence of the caregiver, neglecting both the developing capacities of the individual and the transformative power of God. Perhaps this is because Granqvist and Kirkpatrick have not specifically addressed the nature of a relationship with the God to whom they suggest the pathways lead. As Miner (2007, p119) observes: there is no mention of a *'direct relationship with God: at most, there is human activity with respect to representations of God.'* I will return to this observation later in this chapter.

Two Level Correspondence

In response to such criticism, particularly the focus on the religiosity of the caregiver, Granqvist (2002) has developed a theory of *'two level correspondence.'* The first level, *'socialized correspondence,'* echoes the original presentation of the correspondence pathway, placing emphasis on a *'primary mechanism of social learning of parental standards in the context of a secure relationship.'* The second level, notably referred to as a *'secondary effect'*, reflects *'mental models correspondence between self/other and God'* (Granqvist, 2002, p267). While maintaining that *'attachment to parents, particularly to mother, should constitute the primary frame of reference,'* as is consistent with the discussion so far, Granqvist (2002, p267) leaves the pathway open to the influence of an integrated internal working model. The original definition of correspondence does reference an individual's internal working model, however the assumption is that the internal working model is a direct representation of the relationship with the primary caregiver and therefore God. A secure attachment relationship to a primary caregiver is likely to reflect an internal working model of *'the self as worthy of care, and of others (including God) as willing and able to provide it'* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p934). But the separation of socialized correspondence from the internal working model acknowledges the influence of self and others. This second level also recognises the potential for other factors, such as mental health or alternative attachment relationships, to affect one's sense of worth and, as a result, alter one's mental model of God. In addition to his revision to the correspondence pathway, Granqvist (2002, p261) also redefined the compensation pathway: *'emotional compensation'* describes *'a mechanism of affect regulation, in search of felt security'* which is thought to *'underlie the insecure individual's relationship with God.'* The notion of affect regulation adds further instability to a perceived relationship with God in the sense that *'decreased religiosity occurs... where attachment needs may have the potential to be met'* (Granqvist, 2002, p268). This modification appears to undermine the quality of a relationship which follows the

compensation pathway, suggesting that God is simply *'a projection of human needs'* (Gunton, 2003, p83-84) and may not exist to the individual when those needs have been fulfilled. On the other hand, distinguishing emotion regulation as a pathway to God is helpful as it offers an insight as to why a teenager may unexpectedly turn up at church unaccompanied. It also alerts the youth minister, and others, to the potential vulnerability of the individual (that they may be in crisis).

IWM Correspondence

Despite Granqvist's (2002) amendments to the pathways, criticism persists that correspondence and compensation are presented as *'two alternative, competing hypotheses'* (Hall et al., 2009, p227) when this is not necessarily the case. Socialized correspondence appears only to apply to the securely attached and, while mental models correspondence can relate to both the secure and insecure, this level is only seen as *'a less important "secondary" effect'* (Hall et al., 2009, p229). The compensation pathway remains the only option available to those with insecure attachment histories. However, Hall et al. (2009, p240) argue that *'emotional compensation... [is] better understood as [a] reflection of the underlying dynamics of internal working models, and those represent correspondence at their core.'* The need for emotional compensation is *'socially rooted in the parental relationship'* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p934) and determined by an individual's internal working model. The difference for those who are securely attached is that their emotional needs have been met and therefore correspond to sensitive representations of potential attachment figures, including God. As a result, Hall et al. (2009, p223) propose that *'IWM correspondence is the broadest conceptual framework for understanding attachment and religion, and that this operates at the level of implicit spiritual experience.'* The original debate splits a church congregation in two: the secure and insecure, those who follow the faith of their parents and those who seek emotional compensation. This reduces God to a product of our upbringing designed to fulfil one of two demands whereas *'Gunton's trinitarian theology'* humanises God, asserting that *'God is knowable in the personal senses of knowing'* (Miner, 2007, p119). A critique of pathways to a knowable God requires an understanding of internal working models which can predict *'implicit relational knowing with respect to "how to be with" God'* (Hall et al., 2009, p241). This can help us to understand the ways in which someone might relate to God without imposing an end goal on the relationship (e.g. felt security).

In addition to expanding the correspondence hypothesis, Hall et al. (2009, p233-234) divide the pathway into three specific models: *experiential, motivational* and *religious change* correspondence. Experiential correspondence is where *'internal working models of self and*

others correspond to one's experience of relationship with God. Motivational correspondence recognises that the individual may search for God out of '*motivation for affect regulation*' as according to their internal working model. Religious change correspondence connects '*the way one comes to religion and the stability of one's religiousness over time*' with one's internal working model. The classification of experiential and motivational correspondence aligns with the original correspondence and compensation pathways; religious change correspondence, on the other hand, introduces the possibility that a relationship with God may affect an individual's internal working model. As we have seen, the strength of a relationship forged for the purpose of emotional compensation and affect regulation fluctuates according to the extent of the need. The intensity of a relationship is not necessarily a reflection of quality—affect regulation is goal-oriented and the relationship, therefore, may not penetrate a person's life but is specific to gratifying the felt need (Hinde, 1976; Ainsworth, 1985 and Cassidy, 2016). As a result, '*affect regulation may provide temporary emotional compensation, but it does not necessarily change the structure of IWMs*' (Hall et al., 2009, p233). However, in an attempt to explain a discrepancy in results, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p926) speculate '*that religion as compensation may sometimes be psychologically reparative and conducive of growth.*' They believe it is possible that individuals '*may have "earned" a certain degree of attachment security from their surrogate relationship with God;*' thereby increasing the hope that a relationship with God can have a positive and lasting impact on an established internal working model.

Representations of God

As noted at the start of the chapter, the research surrounding attachment and religion is focussed on '*human activity with respect to representations of God*' (Miner, 2007, p119) as opposed to a genuine two-way relationship between a human and deity. From a theological perspective, this '*reduces God's power to intervene in human affairs directly, and hence reduces God's immediacy and potency as an attachment figure*' (Miner, 2007, p119). The religious change correspondence hypothesis begins to offer an alternative perspective but remains susceptible to the criticism that a relationship with God is a human construction (or representation). This can be seen through the implication that one can '*earn*' attachment security (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p926). The impulse to strive to earn God's love stems from an overwhelming awareness of humanity's brokenness and reflects a misunderstanding of the true nature of God. As Packer (2013, p45) discerns, '*tremendous relief*' can be found in knowing that God's love for an individual is '*utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about [us], so that no discovery can disillusion him about [us].*' As a result, there is no need to strive to earn God's love because God already knows our whole persons and, despite knowing us, God '*desires to be [our] friend, and has given his Son to die for [us] in order to realise this purpose*' (Packer, 2013, p45).

Root (2007, p89) affirms this point in stating *'the incarnation makes it clear that the only criteria for one to be known and loved by God is to be human.'* The proposition still stands that *'religion as compensation may sometimes be psychologically reparative and conducive of growth'* (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p926), but I believe that has less to do with one's implicit relational knowing and more to do with being known by God. True transformation *'is solely the work of God'* (Root, 2007, p192), who lacks due recognition in current theories of attachment.

Acknowledging God as an active participant in an attachment relationship overturns the structures of the correspondence and compensation pathways. Correspondence becomes a *'spiritual task'* because a sensitive caregiver is *'developing a means for a person to be able to experience a relationship with God'* (Miner, 2007, p120). Due to the formation and operation of an internal working model, this may be true whether or not the caregiver has faith in God. Secure images of self and positive expectations of others, as predicted by one's internal working model, should correspond to an openness to a loving God. The challenge for a Christian caregiver is to model authenticity. As Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016, p929) note, *'religious preaching/teaching is not enough,'* the quality of caregiving must also correspond to sincere faith. A Christian whose caregiving contradicts their faith is likely to trigger the opposite effect, imparting an unfavourable representation of God as untrustworthy, unreliable and, in extreme cases, considered a fraud. The need for emotional compensation, on the other hand, can be seen as *'evidence of an 'inbuilt' awareness of the possibility of relationship'*—the physical/psychological symptom of an innate *'yearning for God'* (Miner, 2007, p119). This is a consequence of being made in the image of a triune God—we were made to be relational. In both cases, it is important to remember that God is active in the person of the Holy Spirit. Gunton (1985 cited in Miner, 2007, p117) describes the work of the Spirit as *'God creating authentic human reality in the here and now.'* Here, Gunton affirms yet again that our relationality is God-given; it is the essence of being made in God's image; it is the purpose of our creation. In addition, Miner (2007, p116) states that *'God's Spirit is communicable—it is what enables human beings to be open to God.'* The implication here is that the pathways to God are open to us by the power of Holy Spirit and are not solely determined by the quality of human attachment relationships. In this way, it becomes possible to argue that religious change correspondence is the work of the Holy Spirit, rather than the result of a perceived sense of security.

Summary of the Debate

The correspondence versus compensation debate considers *'whether people's religious beliefs and experiences correspond to their internal working models of attachment figures, or, in contrast... compensate, or substitute for the lack of secure attachment relationships with primary caregivers'* (Hall et al., 2009, p227). Both pathways make accurate predictions

based on the performance of internal working models, yet both neglect the possibility of God as an active participant in an attachment relationship. Acknowledging God as Creator and humanity as created in God's image allows us to reverse the direction of the argument—that we are relational because God is relational, rather than viewing God as a projection of our human relationships. Therefore, it becomes possible to conclude that *'all humans can experience an attachment relationship with a loving God through the Spirit of God and then, equipped by the Spirit and love, can relate to others'* (Miner, 2007, p118). The power of the Holy Spirit is not restricted to the pathways that our internal working models determine. However, the theories discussed remain relevant to the role of youth minister as correspondence can be considered a *'spiritual task'* (Miner, 2007, p120). Further consideration of the role of youth minister must address the ways in which the youth minister can engage with a young person's *'implicit relational knowing with respect to "how to be with" God'* (Hall et al., 2009, p241).

CHAPTER SIX

Youth Worker as Attachment Figure

As already observed, *'one of the defining social challenges of adolescence is that... adolescents must often work not to need to turn to their primary caregivers to meet attachment needs'* (Allen and Tan, 2016, p400). The adolescent is to achieve *'independence from parents, emotionally and socially'* (Taylor, 2003, p2) yet still requires help to *'develop a capacity to meet attachment needs autonomously'* (Allen and Tan, 2016, p400). This is a *'struggle'* (Allen and Tan, 2016, p400) all adolescents experience, irrespective of the nature of their attachment histories. *'Facing these sorts of difficulties, many adolescents... may well benefit from outside support'* (Taylor, 2003, p2). As a trustworthy adult outside of the family network, the youth worker is well positioned to *'support young people's growth through dependence to interdependence'* (NYA, 2004, p3) without undermining the adolescent quest for autonomy from their primary attachment figure. Notably, Ainsworth (1985, p799) listed youth workers, among other respectable adults, as people with the potential to *'provide a secure base from which the person may gain confidence to explore and reassess his working model of relationships, and equally important, his working model of himself.'* The research examined so far implies that the level of influence a youth worker can have on a young person's internal working model, and therefore representations of self and other, is limited unless the relationship meets the criteria of an attachment bond. So, before engaging in discussion on the role the youth minister plays in facilitating attachment to God, further consideration of the nature of the professional relationship between a youth worker and young person is required. As a result, this chapter will seek to determine the eligibility of the youth worker to fulfil the role of surrogate attachment figure, regardless of the worker's view of God as a representation or active participant.

Youth Worker as Surrogate Attachment Figure

As the youth worker helps young people to navigate the challenges of adolescence, it is likely that a *'caring and supportive relationship'* (NYA, 2004, p6) will be sufficient; an attachment bond between youth worker and young person is not a prerequisite of the relationship, particularly given the adolescent struggle for autonomy. However, it is possible that adolescents who carry insecure attachment histories and who, therefore, may have endured desperately inadequate caregiving, will still need to learn how to meet attachment needs through relational experience. This raises the question of the youth worker's suitability to assume the role of surrogate attachment figure in order to create the relevant learning environment. According to Ainsworth (1985) there are four key criteria of an attachment bond, the most acknowledged of which is the provision of a secure base. For a relationship

between a youth worker and young person to fulfil Bowlby's (2005, p12) definition of a secure base, the youth worker must allow the young person the space to try new experiences, experiment with different identities and to test out their beliefs. The young person finds the courage in the security of this relationship to go out in search of these experiences, confident in the knowledge that whatever happens in the *'outside world'* there is someone waiting for them to return, someone who genuinely cares. It seems appropriate for a youth worker to act as a secure base in this way. As someone *'whose own interests or reputations are [less] affected by the behaviour or achievements of the adolescent'* (Taylor, 2002, p11), the youth worker has slightly more freedom as a secure base than a parent; they are in a position to respond *'in love to the real situation'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p81) without passing judgement. The youth worker can *'frame situations'* (Root, 2007, p209) from an independent perspective and send the young people back out into the world. On occasion, I think it is also possible for the youth worker to provide a context-specific safe haven (in the sense that a youth club is a safe space). However, while a youth worker's relationship with a young person may contain some *'attachment components'* (Ainsworth, 1985, p799), my research so far has led me to believe that this is not an attachment relationship.

In the case of an insecure attachment relationship with a parent, it is possible that a young person may begin to see a youth worker as a surrogate attachment figure. The youth worker as surrogate is conceivable given that they have the ability to act as a secure base and, potentially, a safe haven. However, Ainsworth's (1985) remaining two criteria, proximity and separation anxiety, correspond to a level of dependency which would not be considered appropriate in a youth work context. For example, Ainsworth (1985) identifies that one should be able to maintain proximity to an attachment figure. A youth worker *'can bring availability, consistency and reliability to the young person'* (Taylor, 2003, p152), but to be wholly available to the young person raises concerns about ethical practice. The National Youth Agency (2004, p9) states that those who work professionally with young people have a commitment to recognise *'the tensions between developing supportive and caring relationships with young people and the need to maintain an appropriate professional distance.'* Given the relational nature of youth work, the boundaries of a relationship between a youth worker and young person can be blurred (particularly faith-based work in the context of church family). However, it is not appropriate for a youth worker to maintain proximity to a young person all the time, nor is it possible for a young person to seek out the youth worker as a safe haven at any hour. To be available in this way would create dependency on the youth worker that cannot be sustained within professional boundaries. Similarly, the criteria of separation anxiety (Ainsworth, 1985) does not correspond to the role of youth worker. In contrast, separation anxiety could be another indication that this professional relationship has become too close. In this way, an understanding of Attachment

Theory familiarises the youth worker with the warning signs of an unhealthy attachment relationship and helps them to put the appropriate boundaries in place. To enforce such boundaries can feel counter-productive and somewhat insensitive; young people can take offence to a youth worker's attempts to maintain a professional distance, making it hard to grow trust. However, Root (2007, p119) helpfully reframes the argument: *'to be closed to the adolescent is to be for the adolescent. In being closed, we allow the adolescent to recognize us as other, not a personal possession but a distinct human being who is complicated and beautiful in our own right.'* Appropriate boundaries can both nurture and protect a relationship; boundaries nurture the humanity of the other, reflecting that youth work is *'person to person,'* while guarding against a *'producer to consumer'* relationship which can place unfair demands on the other (Root, 2007, p119). Even so, *'person to person'* youth work does not equate to an attachment relationship. Ainsworth (1985, p799) asserts that an attachment bond describes a relationship with *'a unique individual, interchangeable with none other, from whom inexplicable, involuntary separation would cause distress, and whose loss would occasion grief.'* While the relationship between a youth worker and adolescent may be unique to the persons, ultimately the role of youth worker can be fulfilled by another. As a result, it is not possible to qualify a youth worker as a surrogate attachment figure in accordance with Ainsworth's (1985) criteria of an attachment bond.

Nevertheless, safeguarding the relationship between a youth worker and young person from becoming an attachment relationship remains problematic. As we have already seen, due to the profound developmental impact of the primary attachment relationship, the influence of any other attachment figure is limited. While there is hope that alternative attachment relationships have the potential to modify internal working models organised in hierarchical or integrative structures, relationships which are not defined by attachment bonds can only have minimal impact, if any impact at all. However, the youth worker should not lose hope; as Taylor (2003, p11) affirms: *'one of the most valuable legacies of a first positive relationship with an adult outside the family is the experience of being recognised as an individual worth.'* The youth worker can prove that they value the adolescent as a unique person simply by choosing to listen. Despite not being an attachment bond, a *'caring and supportive relationship'* (NYA, 2004, p6) may *'provide the stepping-stone of emotional experience'* (Taylor, 2003, p6) which enables the young person to access the information stored in their internal working model and, in turn, develop the capacity to form a secure attachment to another.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Role of Youth Minister

The terms 'youth worker' and 'youth minister' have been used almost interchangeably in this research paper so far, however it is necessary at this point to make a clear distinction between the two roles. As defined in the introduction, the youth minister practices from the belief that *'Jesus is alive and active in the world'* today (Root, 2007, p83). Even though the youth minister cannot fulfil the role of attachment figure for the same reasons as argued for the position of youth worker, the implications of such an observation vary significantly. This is because the relationship between youth minister and young person was never intended to be the end-goal. As Root (2007, p115) writes, *'we become friends in relationship so we can move the adolescent beyond a relationship with us and into a relationship with Jesus.'* The youth minister must recognise their limitations; they cannot bring about change in their own power as transformation *'is solely the work of God'* (Root, 2007, p192), but the youth minister can reclaim the power of relationship to develop *'a means for a person to be able to experience a relationship with God'*, the One who transforms (Miner, 2007, p120).

An understanding of Attachment Theory informs the youth minister that learning about self and other is acquired through relationship. In order to access the *'implicit relational knowledge'* stored within a young person's internal working model, the youth minister must use *'the same code of emotional information processing: experiencing new ways of being with another'* (Hall et al., 2008, p232). Therefore, it is imperative that there is a relationship between a young person and youth minister. As already established, the youth minister is primarily concerned with building relationships so this knowledge, in itself, is not new. However, Attachment Theory provides vital insight on the operation and influence of the internal working model: there is a strong implication that the youth minister can only effectively model how to be in a relationship with God from within a relationship with the young person. Consequently, it becomes necessary to reassess the nature of the relationship between a youth minister and young person, particularly in the absence of an attachment bond.

Youth Minister as Place-Sharer

Drawing on the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as *'the first theological youth worker'* (Root, 2014, p11), Root (2007, p83) advocates that the role of youth minister is one of place-sharing (*Stellvertretung*): *'Just as Jesus incarnate, crucified and resurrected was fully our place-sharer'* so *'we must ourselves become place-sharers, suffering with and for young people.'* In this way, *'human-to-human relationships'* are *'the location of God's presence in*

the world' (Root, 2007, p83). If Jesus is the youth minister's place-sharer then Jesus is fully immersed in the youth minister's reality; just as the youth minister, also as place-sharer, is fully immersed in the young person's reality. Therefore, Jesus is present in a relationship between youth minister and young person; however, one cannot assume that the young person is as invested in the relationship as the place-sharers. While place-sharing requires the youth minister *'to be open and available to others with as much of [themselves] as possible, as unguarded as possible'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p4), there should be no expectation on the other *'to repay the place-sharing; rather [one] should offer [their] ethical action from the core of [their] humanity with no expectation of return'* (Root, 2007, p126). In this way, place-sharing echoes the asymmetrical nature of an attachment relationship.

The idea that a youth minister practices from the core of their humanity is yet another affirmation of our God-given relationality which reiterates Miner's observation (2006, p119), *'we relate to others because we are capable of relating to God by being made in the image of God.'* Yaconelli (2006, p3) confirms that *'our primary calling as Christians is to be people of relationship'*—to be in relationship, with God and other, is the very purpose of the human race. To repeat LaCugna's (1991, cited in Miner, 2007, p119) reflection on creation: God created the human race *'not out of need or lack but out of plenitude of love'* and it is out of this overflow of love that the youth minister chooses to fully immerse themselves in the young person's reality. Consequently, the youth minister's sense of purpose is bigger than the reality they behold. It is this perspective that allows the youth minister to participate in *'God's mission of love'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p80) and assume the role of place-sharer. For *'even in the midst of the intensity of suffering, hope can never be destroyed. Through the resurrection we are promised that suffering is not eternal'* (Root, 2007, p98). By trusting in this promise the youth minister finds the strength to stand with a young person in their darkest reality and holds onto hope on their behalf.

In addition to suffering with the adolescent, the youth minister must also be prepared to *'suffer from the adolescent'* (Root, 2007, p204). In fact, Attachment Theory seems to suggest that a youth minister should *expect* to suffer from an adolescent with an insecure attachment history. However, this understanding also prepares the youth minister to receive such suffering as they are able to see *'beyond these defensive processes to underlying attachment needs'* (Kobak, Zajac and Madsen, 2016, p35). Patterns of interactions with insensitive caregivers stored within an adolescent's internal working model may cause the adolescent to *'lash out at those who offer support and love, for such people have failed him or her before'* (Root, 2007, p204). Although such outbursts may be directed at the youth minister and may feel personal, he or she should be able to discern that the adolescent is not *'merely expressing [their] free will'* (Root, 2007, p135), rather they are crying out from their

'own dehumanized core' (Root, 2007, p204). Noticing the control exerted by an internal working model allows the youth minister to receive the suffering and share in the young person's pain, without integrating the young person's false image of other into the youth minister's own internal working model. The very fact that the youth minister is not considered an attachment figure makes the youth minister independent of the organisational structure of attachment relationships. While this independence restricts the youth minister's ability to influence a young person's internal working model, it protects the relationship from being defined by the young person's misrepresentations of self and other (at least from the perspective of the youth minister). The independent nature of the relationship also gives the youth minister the power to refuse to let the young person be defined by their false representations of self. As Yaconelli (2006, p85) writes: *'youth ministry is about holding a young person's deepest identity until they are able to see it for themselves.'* In every interaction with a young person, the youth minister should seek to affirm that *'they are the beloved of God, that they have gifts that enrich the world, and that their presence itself is a cause for celebration'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p85).

A Congregation-Wide Ministry

While advocating for a ministry of place-sharing, Root (2007, p193) warns of the danger of *'relational ministry to promise relationships and only provide connection'*. A youth minister does not have the capacity (of emotion or time) to be in a place-sharing relationship with every young person. To act from the core of one's self requires a whole-hearted, all-consuming, continuing effort that is inevitably exhausting. *'To be attentive to youth and aware of God in the present moment is always a struggle'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p7) but to be fully immersed in the realities of more than a few young people is a burden too heavy to bear. For that reason, *'Bonhoeffer pointed us toward a relational ministry of place-sharing that is a community activity, a congregation-wide ministry'* (Root, 2007, p202). Therefore, the role of the youth minister is to *'facilitate encounters between each adolescent and a possible place-sharer'* (Root, 2007, p200), as opposed to personally acting as place-sharer for each adolescent. There is a general misconception among church congregations that *'relational ministry is something that youth workers do rather than youth workers are'* (Root, 2007, p122). In contrast, the youth minister's primary concern is relationship building as opposed to event management—their focus should be people not programs, although such a distinction is not always clear. Confusion arises because programs and events are an effective way to create safe environments for authentic relationships to grow. Bonhoeffer's concept of a congregation-wide ministry raises awareness of the possibility of utilising existing activities to make a concerted effort to pair adolescents with potential place-sharers.

The idea of a community of place-sharers causes us to revisit Ainsworth (1985, p800) and Hinde's (1976, p11) discussion on the quality, as opposed to strength, of attachment relationships. As already ascertained, in the absence of an attachment bond neither the youth minister or place-sharer will feature in a young person's organisational structure of attachment relationships, making it difficult to have any lasting impact on a young person's internal working model. But, given that the quality of a relationship is measured by *'the extent to which a person penetrates a variety of aspects of the other person's life'* (Cassidy, 2016, p14), consideration should be given to the sheer volume of community in comparison to an individual attachment figure. For example, it may be possible for the collective voice of a community of place-sharers to be heard above the voice of an individual, even if the community are positioned beneath a hierarchical structure of attachment relationships. Root (2006, p112) proposes that *'the community's greatest assistance is to provide a new social context that speaks to the adolescent's present social situation, offering words and acts of hope.'* If a whole congregation consistently and authentically speaks words of hope into the lives of young people, perhaps the cumulative influence of a community of place-sharers can begin to engage with internal representations of relationships. Inevitably, the influence of the community will be restricted by their identities as place-sharers rather than attachment figures, but Bonhoeffer's vision for a congregation-wide ministry of place-sharing highlights the importance of connecting a young person to a community. This means that *'going out to youth must include returning'* and *'when [the young people] return, the congregation must be welcoming, providing legitimate spaces for the adolescents to enter the congregational community and be known'* (Root, 2007, p204–205), *'even if doing so causes the community to suffer'* (p112). Therefore the youth minister, while acting as place-sharer to a small number of individuals, must purposefully seek to connect every adolescent to the church community.

A New Perspective

It is important to recognise that *'each of us is a product of our family and cultural background. These give context to our lives, shaping our experiences and expectations'* (Taylor, 2003, p26). The focus of this chapter so far has been on viewing relationships as a learning environment for young people, but the youth minister (or place-sharer, whoever they may be) is not exempt from the learning process. We all *'discover who we are alongside other people; we find our shortcomings, gifts and perspectives as we live with others as family, friends, colleagues and neighbours'* (Root, 2007, p106). As a result, place-sharing relationships can be quite confronting for both the young person and youth minister. In encountering the other, *'the adolescent (as well as the youth worker) is given a new look (a true look) at reality in connection to an other'* (Root, 2007, p175). In this way, an understanding of Attachment Theory equips the youth minister with the tools to assess the ways in which their own

relationship history, and established internal working model, may be influencing this place-sharing relationship. Yaconelli (2006, p71) asserts that *'we love young people by seeing them as they are, not as culture judges them to be or as we hope them to be.'* A youth minister can only truly see a young person for who they are when they are mindful of their own, potentially unconscious, biases.

As previously discussed, Attachment Theory teaches the youth minister that *'social experience'* has the power to alter an individual's internal working model (Thompson, 2016, p333), but this information is accompanied by a strong implication that only an attachment relationship can have a tangible impact. This seems problematic because the relationship between a youth minister and young person does not fully meet the criteria of an attachment bond. However, Hall et al.'s (2009, p223) concept of *'IWM correspondence'* builds a bridge between the place-sharing relationship of youth minister and young person to an attachment relationship between the young person and God. Despite not being an attachment relationship, a place-sharing relationship can serve a young person with *'a new perspective from which to see themselves and the world around them'* (Root, 2007, p16) by authentically modelling something different. By *'practising the presence of Jesus'*— by being *'generous, patient, kind, welcoming, courageous, truthful and compassionate'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p4), the youth minister awakens the young person to the possibility that there is more to life than their current reality. A place-sharing relationship can offer much needed perspective to those with insecure attachment histories but also to those who are secure in their self-worth. When a youth minister embodies *'a sense of delight'* in a young person's existence, the young person can *'sense the very breath of God'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p85). The youth minister cannot change a young person's circumstances, but they can bring the young person into a relationship where Jesus is present, and *'it is Jesus' presence, his capacity to love and be with people that's transformative'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p4).

In summary, *'youth ministry is about seeking courageously to behold the reality of our own lives, the reality (whether it be joy or suffering) of the young people we serve, and the reality of God's love beneath it all'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p7). The youth minister as place-sharer seeks to courageously and vulnerably immerse themselves in the reality of a young person so that they may, by the power of the Holy Spirit, share another reality—the presence of the living God who loves unconditionally. However, the youth minister cannot fulfil the role of place-sharer for every adolescent and so, under the supervision of the youth minister, place-sharing becomes the ministry of the whole congregation. An understanding of Attachment Theory offers the youth minister a deeper insight into their own reality and an awareness of the internal working models, of both the young person and youth minister, which place expectations on all relationships. Attachment Theory also provides a mandate

for the youth minister to act as a role model, given that new relational experience can help a young person to access their implicit relational knowledge. As the youth minister acknowledges *'the Mystery of God within each moment'* they learn to *'relate to youth the way Jesus related to people—authentic and transparent'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p4). Consequently, the youth minister models a way of being with another that can prepare a young person for a relationship with Jesus.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Attachment Theory equips those who work with young people with a fundamental understanding of the developmental impact of attachment relationships. General knowledge of the theory raises awareness that unpredictable or challenging behaviour may be a manifestation of an insecure attachment relationship with a primary caregiver. The youth worker may not know a young person's attachment history, and therefore cannot be certain that such behaviour is attachment-related, but it is still helpful to be attentive to the inevitable influence of internal working models. Despite the limitations caused by the absence of an attachment bond between youth worker and young person, there remains potential for the youth worker to develop a young person's capacity to refine their own internal working model. By asking questions designed to access the implicit relational knowledge stored within a young person's internal working model, the youth worker can begin to challenge an individual's representations of self and expectations of others. In this way, knowledge of Attachment Theory expands on an understanding of the purpose of relational youth work, viewing the relationship between youth worker and young person as a learning environment where the young person gains actual experience of how to be with another. While the dominance of the primary attachment relationship is indisputable, the malleable configuration of the internal working model during adolescence creates the possibility for long-term investment from a youth worker to have a life-changing impact on an individual's self-worth and, as a result, change the course of all future relationships. As Bombér (2009, p45) asserts: *'it is essential that we hold on to hope and high expectations for each young person with whom we work, as this has an impact on all the young person might become.'*

The practical applications of Attachment Theory as outlined above are also relevant to youth ministry, although the youth minister's belief that *'Jesus is alive and active in the world'* today (Root, 2007, p83) significantly changes the perspective from which the theory is applied to practice. For example, a youth minister will seek to affirm the worth of a young person but they will do so confident in the knowledge that each individual is *'the beloved of God'* (Yaconelli, 2006, p85). For the youth minister, God's *'value on our lives is the one that matters'* (Breen, 2015, p31) and *'God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life'* (Bonhoeffer, 2001, p5). Similarly, teaching a young person how to be with another through relational experience becomes a *'spiritual task'* (Miner, 2007, p120), as the youth minister simultaneously models *'how to be with God'* (Hall et al., 2009, p241). Consequently, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick's (2016) correspondence and compensation hypotheses offer further insight on the youth minister's practice. While the pathways are susceptible to strong

criticism, both make accurate predictions concerning a young person's attachment to God. It appears likely that a young person's faith can develop in correspondence with the faith of their parents; just as it is possible to see why a young person may look to God to provide emotional compensation and fulfil the role of surrogate attachment figure in a time of crisis. However, the youth minister should only refer to these distinct pathways for general guidance as the theory is too narrow to apply universally. As previously discussed, Hall et al.'s (2009, p223) concept of '*IWM correspondence*' offers a more broad '*framework for understanding attachment and religion*.' This framework creates the space required to consider the influence of alternative attachment figures and an integrated internal working model, while also avoiding the tendency to define a relationship with God by attachment need. Nevertheless, the youth minister must remain cautious as existing research on attachment and religion does not acknowledge a '*direct relationship with God: at most, there is human activity with respect to representations of God*' (Miner, 2007, p119).

Recommendations for Future Research

The most prominent challenge facing a youth minister who seeks to adopt the theory of attachment into practice is that current literature only acknowledges a *representation* of a God who satisfies attachment needs. As established at the beginning of this dissertation, '*the idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment figure*' (Kaufman cited in Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2016, p918) but therein lies the problem. Despite fulfilling Ainsworth's (1985) criteria of an attachment bond and therefore gaining recognition in current theory as a surrogate attachment figure, God is confined to an "idea"—a figment of one's imagination. This is problematic because the '*Christian faith is no "idea", it is, at its core, first and finally, a person*' (Root, 2014, p182). There is a significant gap in existing research which calls for further investigation into the prospect of God as an active participant in an attachment relationship. Hall et al.'s (2009, p233-234) concept of *religious change correspondence* begins to bridge this gap by implying that a perceived relationship with God can influence a person's internal working model. In this way, religion is credited with increasing the level of felt security but the focus remains on the individual and their personal representation of God. While the idea of God as a human construction is predominately a hindrance to the youth minister, it may be possible to utilise the fact that research has shown faith in God (whether a representation or real) can impact an internal working model. Future research could analyse the changes to an individual's understanding of self over a sustained period of time, in comparison to their felt experience of a relationship with God. Inevitably, the accuracy of such a piece of research would be questionable given the reliance on self-report. However, the findings may just reveal something of a supernatural transformation which points to an active God.

Theological Observations

Undeterred by the gaps in the theory of attachment and religion, it is possible to draw some conclusions based on a deeper theological understanding. One important observation is that *'we relate to others because we are capable of relating to God by being made in the image of God.'* This *'relationality is built in to the fabric of all being because of the nature of God'* (Miner, 2007, p119). Trinitarian theology reveals the *'permanent and unbreakable'* relationship (Zizioulas cited in Gunton, 2003, p95) that exists at the core of God's being. A consequence of being made in the image of the triune God is that *'the human person is one who is created to find his or her being in relationship'* (Gunton, 2003, p113)—the relationship of the Father, Spirit and Son. Therefore an individual finds their being primarily in relation to God. As previously discussed, this changes the power dynamics within the organisational structure of an internal working model. While the developmental significance of one's relationship to a primary caregiver is maintained, this relationship becomes secondary to an individual's relationship with their Creator God. As a result, it is possible to challenge the view, as presented by the correspondence versus compensation debate, that an individual's relationship with God is *'utterly dependent on the relationships with carers'* (Miner, 2007, p119). This is an immensely important discovery as it means that *'we are free from the determinative power of our history'* (Root, 2007, p178). The influence of the primary attachment relationship *'so often held up as the source of all relationships'* (Hinde, 1976, p10) is not definitive. In a relationship with God we find the hope of transformation, hope which is secured through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Reflecting on the work of Bonhoeffer, Root (2007, p99) surmises that *'to know Jesus Christ as the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected One is to know him not as a concept but as a person, a contemporary, living person who encounters us still today.'* As established, the youth minister models how to be with God to a young person from within a relationship, but of greater significance is the observation that such relationships are *'the location of God's presence in the world'* (Root, 2007, p83). The youth minister should not concern themselves with modelling how the idea of God can meet attachment needs; rather the purpose of the relationship between a youth minister and young person should be to bring the adolescent into the presence of the living, breathing, acting Christ. This can be identified as a place-sharing relationship where the youth minister chooses to suffer with and for a young person so that they may catch a glimpse of God's unconditional love for them (Root, 2007, p83). The focus is very much on God's transforming power and, therefore, the role of the youth minister is not to fulfil the role of attachment figure but to facilitate a young person's attachment to God. As the youth minister commits themselves to sharing the reality (or place) of a young person, *'the meeting of [their] concrete persons becomes a concrete reality*

of hope—a foreshadow, though ever broken, of the way life will one day be in the full presence of God’ (Root, 2007, p128). By *‘practising the presence of Jesus’* (Yaconelli, 2006, p4) the youth minister can show the young person that they are not a prisoner of their current reality—we can hold on tightly to a *‘hope that can never be destroyed’* because *‘through the resurrection we are promised that suffering is not eternal’* (Root, 2007, p99). In acting as a young person’s place-sharer it is important to remember that *‘Jesus goes before and beside us’* (Yaconelli, 2006, p7)—the youth minister (or place-sharer) can be assured they are not acting alone because Jesus is present.

Given the intensity of investing oneself in a place-sharing relationship, *‘Bonhoeffer pointed us toward a relational ministry of place-sharing that is a community activity, a congregation-wide ministry’* (Root, 2007, p202). This is significant because it challenges the misconceptions of the role of youth minister. The youth minister’s work can so often be reduced to event management, where success is measured by attendance and *‘adolescent adoration’* of the individual (Root, 2007, p204). In contrast, a ministry of place-sharing should be about investing in the lives of a few and therefore requires sacrifice from many. As a result, *‘the youth minister can be shy and introverted and still move the congregation toward relational ministry of place-sharing’* (Root, 2007, p201). The role becomes one of *‘coordinator (or matchmaker) of adult and adolescent bonds’* (Root, 2007, p201). It is important for the youth minister to know the adult congregation in order to connect each young person to a prospective place-sharer. The youth minister will have to work hard to inspire and train the congregation to authentically take on the responsibility of being a young person’s place-sharer. Root (2007, p214) suggests it may be beneficial to redefine the role of youth minister: to see them *‘not as the [minister] to youth at the church but as the [minister] to the congregation who gives special attention to adolescents.’* Adjusting the congregation’s perspective of the role in this way grants greater authority to the voice of the youth minister and increases the likelihood that the challenge to live as a community of place-sharers will be heard.

Final Conclusion

In conclusion, an understanding of Attachment Theory built on a theological foundation identifies the role of youth minister as one of facilitating a young person’s attachment to God. The challenge for the youth minister is to discern how to apply a theory which only acknowledges God as an “idea” to a ministry which exists so that young people may come to know and encounter the living Christ. The theory concerning the development of the internal working model begins to bridge this particular gap as research demonstrates that implicit relational knowledge can be taught through social experience. Therefore a youth minister can facilitate a young person’s attachment to God by acting as their place-sharer—inviting

the young person into a relationship where they can experience God's presence. However, the youth minister can only act as place-sharer to a few, so their role extends to cultivating a community of place-sharers who connect every adolescent to a '*concrete reality of hope*' (Root, 2007, p128). This eschatological hope frees a young person from the chains of their attachment history. A person is not defined by the images stored within their internal working model. Rather, a person's true identity can be found in their createdness. The human race was created '*out of plenitude of love*' (LaCugna, 1991, cited in Miner, 2007, p119) from the relationship at the very core of God's being. We are made to be relational and therefore '*the capacity for, and actuality of, relationship with God is primary*' (Miner, 2007, p119).

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