The 1996 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture
"Christ and the Adolescent: A Theological Approach to Youth Ministry"

Introduction

I am honored to introduce the first volume of the Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture, presented in Daytona Beach, FL, and Princeton, NJ, in the spring of 1996 by James W. Fowler, Robin Maas, and Robert Wuthnow. The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture are designed to foster original research on youth and the church. As part of a new venture in ministry sponsored by Princeton Theological Seminary, the Institute for Youth Ministry they describe a shift occurring in the churches thinking about youth and ministry. Instead of ghettoizing youth into clubs apart from the congregation, the church's mission with youth views young people as integral to the total mission of the church, and youth ministry as a theological task which is not only about youth ministry, but about youth's ministry as well.

The 1996 lectures, titled "Christ and the Adolescent: A Theological Approach to Youth Ministry," address mainline churches who have suffered grievous losses in their attempts to address teens. These losses come at a time when public institutions are calling attention to the important role churches play in adolescent development. Churches agree: We believe we have something to contribute to youth in the person of Jesus Christ-and therefore Jesus Christ, not age-level education, pastoral counseling, or recreational programs, must be the starting point for youth ministry.

We asked each of our lecturers to approach this theme from the perspective of their own disciplines. James Fowler posits a new shape for youth ministry that recognizes nuances of human development; Robin Maas uses biblical exegesis to redefine the spiritual journey of youth and the adults who mentor them; and Robert Wuthnow analyzes the sociological significance of service learning trends for the church's ministry with teenagers. Together they point to a new direction for ministry with young people.

We approach this direction humbly and with hope. We know that the church's renewal depends not on the church of tomorrow, but the church of today-a church in which youth can be integral missionaries to their elders and world. May this volume challenge and nourish the ministry God has laid before you.

Godspeed,

Kenda Creasy Dean
Director, Institute for Youth Ministry

1996 Lectures
Robin Maas
"Christ and the Adolescent: Piper or Prophet?"
"Christ and the Adolescent: A Decision for Love"
"Christ and the Adolescent: Written in Stone"

James W. Fowler
"Perspectives on Adolescents, Personhood, and Faith"
"Adolescence in the Trinitarian Praxis of God"
"Grace, Repentance, and Commitment: Youth Initiation in Care and Formation"

Robert Wuthnow
"Youth and Culture in American Society: The Social Context of Ministry to Teenagers"
"Religious Upbringing: Does It Matter and, If So, What Matters?"
"Unto the Least of These: Youth and the Ministry of Caring"

PERSPECTIVES ON ADOLESCENTS, PERSONHOOD, AND FAITH

James W. Fowler

INTRODUCTION

We begin with an exploration of adolescent experience through perspectives that are both timeless and timeful. On the timeless side, I want to share the theological significance of adolescence as an important period of our life cycles, constituted by biophysical changes that are universal and that have constituted part of human experience for as long as we have known it. On the timeful side, I will offer some perspectives on the experiences of adolescents in this late-twentieth-century era, and in this particular national and cultural setting of North America and the United States. Then, drawing on some limited but interesting windows into the theological world of contemporary adolescents, I will conclude with some reflections on the possibilities of doing Christian theology with our youth today.

My intent in these three essays is to keep a distinctively theological focus in addressing our concerns and tasks as ecclesial ministers with youth. I will attempt to keep my use of developmental and social scientific perspectives in the service of theological analysis and Christian formation, for us and for the youth with whom we minister.

James W. Fowler directs the Center for Ethics in Public Policy and the Professions at Emory University in Atlanta, GA, where he also serves as the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Theology and Human Development at the Candler School of Theology. Fowler has won awards from the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. His best-known book is Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Development and the Quest for Meaning.

ADOLESCENTS, PERSONHOOD, AND FAITH

I have a growing friendship with a twelve-year-old boy whom I will call Tom. We have known each other for several years, but only recently have we had opportunities to interact in ways that really allow us to know each other. Tom is small for his age. His voice shows no signs yet of changing. You can see his preliminary interest in girls when he interacts with them in youth group meetings and in school. Developmentally I see Tom as being at the very peak of the virtuosity of the concrete operational thinking that shows up in bright youngsters of eleven or twelve. Right now, Tom spends hours working with a computer game called "Sim City," which simulates the building and development of a complex city. Tom seems to take naturally to the systems thinking involved in holding together the range of possible moves and the implications he might make from them to arrange the city's housing, manufacturing, financial, educational, and religious centers. But he is not reflexive in his use of these abilities. As Piaget might say, he does not yet "think about his thinking."

Similarly, Tom has not yet developed "mutual interpersonal perspective taking." So far as I can tell, he does not yet "see others seeing him" or "see the Tom that others see." The beautifully uncluttered clarity of his vision and assessment of situations—which gives his utterances and insights a kind of uncanny acuity—are formed without having to attend to his own or others' *interiority*. As Robert Kegan might say, Tom does not yet **have** his interests, his needs, his goals, and his experiences. He simply **is** these qualities. He has not yet reflectively identified these aspects of himself as part of what constitutes his uniqueness and singularity. Nor has he focused on the *interiority* others are or have—their uniqueness and singularity, due to their particular interests, needs, goals, and experiences. Thus, in a wondrously charming and intelligent way, for Tom—poised now on the lip of adolescence—the world, as seen through two-dimensional lenses, presents endlessly fascinating puzzles to solve, data to master, and techniques to learn. But the world he attends to with such engaging interest doesn't yet include attention to the continents and seas within persons—either Tom himself, or those who will most intrigue and confound him.

Tom stands on the threshold of a door that opens into a new kingdom of relatedness. From seeing his interactions with others like a chess game, where the rules are clear and where strategies and defenses obey patterns that can be seen and anticipated, he must move into a different world. We know that he must pass from the "flatland" of two-dimensional relations into a world of relational swamps and seas, into a kingdom of volcanoes and underwater continents that will require navigational skills and depth-sounding sensors which he will only gradually assemble and learn to use.

He will make this passage of mind and awareness even as he undergoes an equally dramatic transformation in his bodily and emotional expe-

rience. Hormones—either natural or supplementary—will likely soon kick in to accelerate Tom's growth. From barely five feet in height he may stretch up as much as ten inches in the coming year. His piping, unself-conscious boy soprano voice probably will give way—either suddenly, with funny oscillations between high and very low, or more gradually with a steady deepening of its timbre—to a voice in the lower register of vocal range. He will begin to use deodorant, welcome pubic hair, and experience the ambivalent pleasure of erections at awkward times and places, as life energy surges into his expanding genitals.

Tom has been poised at this plateau of late childhood, expanding the virtuosity of late concrete operational thinking and not consciously embracing the new complexities that soon will come. In the last year his friend Leah has already crossed the threshold into this more complex, three-dimensional world of mental, bodily, and relational transformation. Recently she participated in the rite of buying her first bra and beginning to wear it with initial self-consciousness and pride. She is beginning to sense the rhythm of her menstrual periods and the painful cramps that mark their onset. With the relational orientation that Carol Gilligan, Mary Belenky, and others have helped us name, Leah spends a lot of her time and attention in conversations with her closest friends, sharing feelings and reactions and talking about the qualities of their friends and acquaintances that might help explain their actions and their reactions to things.

Leah is quite aware that she is being seen and reacted to by others. She is deeply into mutual interpersonal perspective taking. She brings living freshness to the couplet I once coined to try to capture how youngsters in Leah's developmental place let each other serve as mirrors for their first steps toward self-consciousness and self-reflection. "I see you seeing me; I see the me I think you see." She also exhibits something of the awareness—and the power—of being that kind of mirror for others: "You see you according to me; you see the you you think I see." Hers is a world beginning to be filled with the mystery of the depths and qualities of personality—her own and others. Hers is a world where an emerging sense of self-conscious "I-ness" is profoundly dependent upon an interactive, communicative "Thou-ness" she finds in her friends and other important relations. She senses how she can hurt and wound others with her mirroring; she perceives that she can also use that power to support and flatter. At the same time, her own emerging identity—the more-or-less coherent meaning she has to others and to herself—is profoundly tied up in her relational world. On some days she feels that apart from her relations to the friends who matter most to her, she has no being or meaning that can give her an identity of any consequence.

Studies in the construction of gender identity tell us that Leah and Tom are likely to have significantly different experiences as regards claiming their respective femaleness and maleness. If interpreters like Carol Gilligan and her colleagues like Sandra Bartky are right, Leah is already

receiving direct and indirect mirroring and counsel that put substantial pressure on her to give up activities and ways of being she found satisfying at ages nine or ten. She will receive subtle and stronger feedback that urges her to curb her interest in competitive physical activities, and to develop a sense of relative incapacity in relation to study areas like mathematics and science. She will experience subtle pressure to cultivate a strange kind of dependence that leaves plenty of room for her male counterparts to assume initiative and control. Her teachers—even or especially her women teachers—may give unconscious signals that suggest they find the contributions of boys in her classes more interesting and valuable than they find hers. In the social construction of her female identity, she will experience pressure to make her face and body objects of art, and to shape her horizon of interests to complement, not compete, with those of the male world. All this, we say, is changing, and it is. But cultural patterns this deeply structured and this powerfully reinforced by an unending barrage of artful commercial images, do not respond quickly to real change.

In integrating these changes in mental, physical, and relational transformation, Tom and Leah will surely encounter many of the existential mysteries that led the great Augustine sixteen hundred years ago to write of his own youth: "And I became a problem to myself."

With both Tom and Leah we encounter bright youngsters from intact families, where fidelity and consideration mark the family's pattern of relationships. They belong to a community of faith where they experience being known and valued. They have educational advantages and encouragement. Tom's love for reading and his growing computer virtuosity mean that he lives in an expanding world of mind and experience. Leah's love for music and drama, as well as reading and social studies, find support and encouragement in her home and school. Leah and Tom will likely grow up to be among what William James called "the talented tenth" of their generation—young persons of whom leadership and contribution can be expected.

In introducing you to these two young persons, I have been trying to remind us of some of the *timeless* aspects of adolescence. In looking into these lives we see youth in the process of entering the remarkable phase where, in all cultures worthy of the name, young people are supported and held accountable in moving from late childhood into physical maturity and acquiring the necessary development and training to assume their places as adults in their societies. The middle class-ness, the intact families, the relation to their communities of faith in Tom and Leah's stories are not normative or universal factors in their *content.* Rather, the normative and universal features inhere in the factors that mark the end of childhood and the psycho-biological transformations that inaugurate movement into adolescence. The patterns and content of cultural preparations for entering preparatory adulthood vary from culture to culture and from class to class. But the need for them, and the nature of adolescence, show marked timelessness and universality.

Before we turn to the *timeful* aspects of adolescence, as experienced in its diversity and challenge in North America and the United States, we need to reflect for a few moments on the spiritual quests and readiness that come with the developmental revolutions of adolescence. It should be instructive to us that in the period when Protestantism seemed most confident about how to build a fresh bonding with adolescents—with those who grew up in the church, as well as those who could be attracted to it from outside—it did so by way of intense religious experiences.

Institutionalized through the revivalist movements of the late nineteenth century, conversion-like experiences were also features of the first and second Great Awakenings of the 1730s and the 1830s. In these movements adolescents found themselves addressed deeply and personally by soulful, stirring music, combined with imagery and words that formed deep emotions in them. They heard preaching that personalized the possibility of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It offered forgiveness for their sins of omission and commission. It promised the possibility of walking with the Lord through the trials and triumphs of this life. Having watched adults and their older brothers and sisters "get saved" or "dedicate their lives to Christ," they felt the heart nudge of the Spirit's address many times. They knew their time would come. This revivalist culture of Protestantism also provided an honored way back to Christ and to the community of faith for those who had never belonged, or who strayed away for a time like lost sheep. Only those of us who know the hot tears, the feeling of a cleansed heart, and the sense of a commitment made and ratified by the love and affirmation of God in Christ can fully understand the power of this experience for generations of adolescents.

As a way of meeting adolescents at their points of readiness, the revivalist invitation to judgment and salvation was indeed powerful. It addressed the new capacity (and need) for seeing oneself in the eyes of significant others by drawing youth into the experience of being seen, known, and chosen by Christ. It addressed the newly emergent readiness for personal relations, where one has to own one's feelings, and where the sense of alienation, as well as the sense of restoration and blessing, register deeply in the newfound places of subjectivity. It told the story of God's love meeting our sin and separation from God by a costly grace in Christ's death. Christ's call to return and join in the bringing of God's kingdom gave youth a larger story in which to embrace and order the multiple stories of their young lives. These transactions took place in the high dignity and seriousness of congregations caught up in the flood tide of what Emil Durkheim called *collective effervescence.* The drama of an emotional encounter with the living God, leading to the making of a commitment to Christ, and then followed by the affirmations and rejoicing of family and friends, brought a new sense of identity and led to the forming of deep resolves in young hearts.

In a later lecture, I will return to the question of rites of initiation and the development of what I call *commitment mechanisms.* We will return

to the question of how we may provide opportunities for the spirit of God through the people of God to address today's youth, creating the possibility for a life-reorienting encounter with the Most High. Now, however, I turn from this sketch of some of the *timeless* dimensions of adolescent experience to concern with some very *timeful* and particular features of the experiences of adolescents in the present diversity of our different societal settings. This section I call "Romance and Realism: Toward Theologies of Hope and Dread."

ROMANCE AND REALISM: TOWARD THEOLOGIES OF HOPE AND DREAD

Students of the generations have characterized youths in today's United States as part of a cohort that has been the most aborted in history. Observers say that today's teens, whether conscious of it or not, carry a collective sense of survival guilt because of the large number of their brothers and sisters or agemates who died as fetuses, never having their opportunity at life. They are also part of a generation that has experienced an unprecedented amount of family fracturing, through the divorce of parents and the resulting absence of one or the other of their biological parents. Add to these factors the climate of violence that surrounds their lives. They see overwhelming violence, in quantity and destructiveness, in the media they watch; violence in the streets where many of them live; violence on roads and highways; violence in their schools. Then we note the reportage of an unprecedented level of domestic violence, including sexual abuse inflicted on one in every four girls and on one in every six boys. Even the violence in the talk shows around them and in the rock and rap music to which they listen floods them with verbal and visual images of the degradation of human bodies and dignity, and cultivates the sense of a "waste them," throw-away attitude toward human life and dignity.

Nowhere is this "waste them," throw-away attitude more present than among black youth—especially males—in our society. In a sadly familiar statistic, we are told that more than one quarter of all young black men are incarcerated, with many others involved in parole or under court supervision. The erosion of a culture that supports schooling, and the seductiveness of the economic payoffs of drug trafficking, have made creating alternatives to street life with its dangers difficult to successfully commend. For many black youth, the myth of the "pretty corpse" reinforces a sense that gang life and making it big in the streets is the best way to go, even if it leads to an early death.

Sexuality among many of today's teens has been stripped of its mystery and power. Exposed to unprecedented explicitness in the portrayal of sexual activity and innuendo, they have come onto the stage in an era when trends toward laxness and lack of sexual restraint may actually be reversing. The AIDS and HIV epidemic has finally begun to create an environment of caution. Coupled with this, a stiffening of parental and school

attitudes which provide support for waiting and for safe sex seems to be taking hold. At the same time, the growing visibility and voices of gay and lesbian persons provide a new ethos of exploration of difference, and a widening of the available range of cultural models for the construction of gender among the young.

For many youths there seems to be growing caution about drug use. Use of beer and other forms of alcohol consumption, however, continues to grow rapidly and to involve children at ever-younger ages. Absence of supervision after school hours grows apace, and the ready availability of alcohol in many homes make addiction and alcohol abuse a serious problem in all sectors of the teen population. Tobacco companies have been astonishingly successful in recruiting younger and younger teens into the ranks of addicted smokers, with most beginning at about age twelve.

While there are substantial numbers of youth who resist addictive substances and who lead purposeful lives, the numbers of those who find it hard to connect with and flourish in the nation's schools seem to be growing. Economic challenges affecting the parent generations exacerbate the problems of parent-youth bonding. Widespread corporate downsizing in the nineties, coupled with changing technologies that require fewer employees and need from them much more specialized skills, has contributed to a shrinking of the middle classes in all racial and ethnic groups. With single or two parents working more of their time—often at two or more jobs—to make ends meet, teens are getting less quality adult time and attention. This carries over into the difficulty of recruiting volunteers for leadership in scouting, the YMCA and YWCA, church school and youth groups, and coaching for youth sporting leagues. These factors all represent challenges for the shaping and flourishing of our ministries with youth.

The kinds of factors I have been citing account for the fact that many of today's youth approach their world and their sense of the future with what I call "holocaust eyes." They sense the loss of many of their contemporaries to death or to prison or to a marginal quality of life with a limited future. They have had hammered into them a profound sense of concern about the ecological endangerment of our globe due to global warming and the excessive release of pollutants. They feel the increased crowding and competitiveness for life space in our cities and in the world. The feel the gap between a parental generation's moral teachings and their actual behavior and determinative values.

But the other side of the picture is equally impressive. Many of today's youth are growing up with a richly expanded knowledge of their world. More computer literate than any other generation so far, some of them have been the beneficiaries of the use of the Internet and the research possibilities it opens up. They frequently develop an impressive sense of sophistication and empowerment for modeling, understanding, and developing approaches to some of the biggest challenges our planet faces. Moreover, this set of viewers of the third generation of the Star Trek series

and its reruns seem to have caught a deep sense of interest in persons and cultures different than themselves. Many of them have internalized the "Prime Directive" in their approach to those who may be different than themselves. They are sensitive not to disturb the natural evolution or development of another society or nature. They have developed a strong vision of a world where all persons and groups deserve respect.

Among their slightly older brothers and sisters whom we encounter through our work with undergraduates at Emory, we find that the students often present with a kind of rhetorical burnout—a fatigue with and suspicion of idealistic talk. They have a jaded sophistication born of watching too much TV where the commercials are more compelling than the programming, and where wry cynicism is the favored form of humor. They come to college filled with parental and guidance counselor injunctions that they choose their direction early and build a resume of extracurricular activities so that they can successfully "market their majors." Among these gifted young people, however, we have found an encouraging response to our program on "Leadership, Life Work, and Vocation." They have led us to expect that our retreats and seminars can help them get in touch with and bring from sparks to flame what I have come to call "the latent hope for a credible calling."

THE GOD OF ROOFTOPS AND OF INTIMATE LINKAGES

As part of a research team related to Emory's Youth Theology Institute, I reviewed interviews with a representative sample of "scholars" in the institute's first two years. I also read both sets of the long paper-and-pencil interview, the Life Meaning Inventory, which we administered to all the scholars. I want to reflect for a moment on what seemed to me the most characteristic theological responses of these talented seventeen-year-olds. The title of this final section of my talk reflects my dominant impressions: "The God of Rooftops and of Intimate Linkages."

As a generalization, one can say that a significant majority of the scholars interviewed believe in God. Most of them believe that God is faithful and can be counted upon to give them strength and support in their lives. What intrigues me, however, is that the God of most of them is a private God. They have a God who sustains them personally, but seems to have little or no impact on the larger patterns of society or in history. Moreover, their God, generally speaking, is a derivative of Benjamin Franklin's maxim: "God helps those who help themselves." While God may inspire and strengthen them, there seems to be little by way of a truly gracious God who loves and cares for us, not because of our achievements or productivity, but simply because, in God's view, we are of utmost value. Finally, for most of them, their God is a God who values achievement, can be counted on to support and encourage success, but seems to love conditionally.

Within that general framework, boys and girls showed different emphases in their images of God. For boys, the times when they felt closest to God most often involved moments of solitude when they found themselves in a secure place, usually high—a rooftop or a mountain—where they prayed or meditated alone. For girls, on the other hand, God seems to be present in and through relationships of love and mutual support, whether with a mother or father, a grandparent, or with friends. Striking for both boys and girls was how much of their faith and concern involved their efforts to provide emotional support and care for a single parent who was leading their household, and for helping to deal with conflicts between the separated or divorced persons who are their parents.

Except for a few scholars who came from conservative religious backgrounds, most of the students lacked any order of words, religiously speaking, for articulating their meanings. Part of what we found exciting was the sense that for many of the scholars the interview provided a place where they made the effort to bring into words their images of faith and their experiences of the presence and reality of God. They found themselves stimulated by an environment where they were hearing presentations that offered resources and models for theological thinking. They also found stimulus from the discussion groups, where they digested together the thoughts and feelings generated by their classes, their service learning, and their conversations with friends.

We did not find much by way of resistance to thinking and articulating theological meanings. In fact, scholars showed a great deal of interest. What did strike me was the relative shallowness of their groundings in their own traditions, and their frequent surprise at elements of richness they began to sense there.

Some Theological Openings with Teens

Now, as I bring this lecture to a close, let me reflect a bit out loud with you about where some of the openings for theological meanings and connections with today's youth may lie. Recently my pastor, John Simmons, shared a quote from a relatively young colleague from my United Methodist tradition. As the minister of a big and rapidly growing United Methodist church, this man was asked to address a large gathering of other clergy about how to attract young people to their churches. John found himself deeply disturbed when this church-growth expert shared his conviction that anyone who wanted to attract today's youth and young adults to their churches should generally avoid references to the cross or the crucifixion. The implication was that youth—and often their parents—want pizza, palaver, and positive thinking.

Young people, whether in the suburbs or the city, know that we are in a world where suffering and danger are real. Some of them may collude with conspiracies to ignore and screen out the threatening factors in our

environments. Joyce Mercer has found in her research with adolescent girls that they seem to restrict their acknowledged experiences of violence to the overt expressions of physical attack or abuse they encounter. She believes that for them to acknowledge the day-by-day friction of conflict and threat, or the too-numerous incidents of verbal abuse or sexual groping in halls or other crowded places, would be to admit to themselves how truly violent their lives are. It would be too overwhelming. There must be a side of even our most privileged and protected youth where they admit to themselves that something seems to be deeply awry in our world.

Isn't this precisely the message of the cross? Isn't this what the death of Jesus unmasks and lays bare about our world? Is this not precisely where the Christian Gospel and the cross of Jesus Christ can make more sense of their real experience than any of the denial strategies or warm fuzzy spiritualities youth are offered? Wherever we take the cross seriously it shows us that many things are profoundly awry in our society.

It seems to me that today's youth may respond deeply to the church's witness that God is with us in the midst of this awry-ness in Jesus Christ. Because of Christ's presence in our world and through love's victory over death in him, we can listen with hope and trust to the more than thirty-eight times in the Gospel where he says, "Be not afraid."

In place of the God that loves us because of our achievements, it is freeing to know that God comes to us in Christ expressing an infinite cherishing. What worth it gives us to accept God's call to friendship and partnership! Through Christ a relationship of empowerment, by the power of God, is there for us. God would have each youth know and feel to the core the divine love that reaches out to us, confirms us, and calls us to covenant faithfulness in Christ.

The cross of Christ is crucial to Christian witness to youth because it shows the extent to which God's love and mercy goes in order to bring us back into relation with our creator, the one who made and loves us to the core. The Christ of the cross makes it emphatically clear to teens caught up in or threatened by violence that God is in solidarity with them. And to those who feel deeply alienated from power and wealth in this society, or from our utopias of family life, the cross affirms that Jesus Christ stands with them in their suffering, and bids them trust in the God who brought him through crucifixion to new life. Jesus Christ shares in the losses, the fear, the suffering that children and youth experience in this land and in our world. Jesus Christ never gave up trust in the love and power faithfulness of God.

But youth also require another kind of linking with Jesus the Christ. This must come at the point of his profound trust in the power of God to work with and through human beings to bring about a commonwealth of love and justice to fulfill creation. Their faith cries out for convincing testimony to that most neglected doctrine in contemporary theology, the doctrine of divine providence. "Is God powerful?" they ask. If so, why do so

many people suffer and perish, and why do those opposed to God "get by with it?" They cry out for a credible witness to the presence and power of God in and over the processes of nature and history. We and they are in deep need of a viable way of imaging and resting our hearts on God's visible and invisible action that can undergird all human activity and commitment toward a kingdom of God on this earth.

Once in a round of interviewing young adolescents I spent an hour with a twelve-year-old youngster who grew up in an agnostic home. He had an older brother of fifteen who was a militant atheist. The older brother had a pet parrot that he had named "God." When the parrot squawked and made its grating parrot noises, the older brother shouted, "Shut up, God!" The younger brother would become furious and try to defend the sanctity of the divine name. In this hostile environment this twelve-year-old had developed one of the strongest sets of theistic convictions I have encountered in all my interviewing of youth.

As I began to realize how clear and strong was this young man's commitment to God, I asked him, "What difference do you suppose it would make in the world if the God you believe in did not exist? How would it be a different world if God were not?" He paused thoughtfully for a moment. Then he answered, "We can use the example of my fish tank, my aquarium. My aquarium is meant to be a perfectly balanced ecological system. The fish eat the plants and live on the oxygen the plants give off. The plants live on the waste from the fish and the carbon dioxide they put into the water. There are snails in the tank to keep the sides clean, and they live off the algae and the fish waste. So it is supposed to be a self-contained cycle, not requiring me to do anything." He continued, "But my aquarium is not perfect. Lots of times I have to do something to restore the balance. If I didn't, my fish would die." And then he looked squarely at me and said, "And we will never know how much God does every day to keep our world working as well as it does!"[1]

In the next lecture I will pick up this theme of the providence—or as I like to call it, the *praxis* of God, and try to put it into trinitarian perspective. Until then, meditate, if you will, on "how much God does every day to keep our world working as well as it does."