

The 1997 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture

“At-Risk Youth, At-Risk Church: What Jesus Christ and American Teenagers are Saying to the Mainline Church”

Introduction

Webster's has two meanings for the term "mainline." The one teenagers know is the practice of injecting narcotics directly into the bloodstream to get a quick high. The second definition means the principle route a train takes to reach its destination.

Pick your metaphor. The term "mainline church" was coined when trains, like churches, were a principal means of getting somewhere people wanted to go. Today, teenagers' understanding of "mainline" paints an ominous portrait of who we are as a church: once-able bodies who, after years of steady injections of American culture into our veins, have a dulled sense of who, what, and where we are.

We have reared a generation of teenagers to "just say no" to such behavior, and they're saying "no" to mainline Christianity in favor of visions of vitality elsewhere, many that endanger teenagers. According to a 1991 study released by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, one in four teenagers is "at risk." The church must work with others to create communities of health and hope for young people.

Young people are also making another point. Their exodus from our pews and programs is a form of "tough love" to our denominations, telling us to shape up, to be who we say we are, and to let Jesus be who we say He is - the Savior, even of the mainline church.

In our "I'm dysfunctional, you're dysfunctional" world, it is easy to settle for therapy when resurrection is at stake. Maybe being "at risk" as a church isn't bad if it calls us back to the authenticity young people expect, and the Gospel requires. Maybe mainline churches and teenagers have something in common: a need to be saved.

These assumptions unite the lectures in this volume. The lectures in these pages provide an outline of "what Jesus Christ and American teenagers are saying to the mainline church" from the perspectives of systematic theology, practical theology, sociology, education, and American religious history (and futurism).

These lectures point to a theological foundation for ministry with young people that views youth as part of the mission of Christ and not as objects to be "won" for the propagation of the church. We approach this direction with humility and hope. The future of the church, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted when he himself was only twenty-seven years old, depends not on

youth, but on Jesus Christ. Still, we are confident that young people are prophets in our midst, and that by attending to the "risk" that accompanies adolescence in 1997, we will be better prepared to take the risk that accompanies Christian faith in any era.

Godspeed,
Kenda Creasy Dean
Director, Institute for Youth Ministry
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YOUTH MINISTRY: HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS NEAR THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Sara Little

INTRODUCTION

My original title was “Historical Reflections at the End of an Era.” But try as I would to push things around, to sketch a chronology that pointed to a conclusion of trends and an open pathway to new purposes and strategies, I could not honestly find that clear and dramatic “end.” Rather, it seems to me that we have come to a kind of transition point, a moment of consolidation and readiness to move on. It may be all the more important, then, to engage in historical reflection when there seems to be a possibility of influencing the future, or, as our theme says, of addressing the question of at-risk youth and at-risk church.

Whatever the title, I knew that I wanted to work in the area of history. George Santayana said in 1907, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” And the longer I live, the more convinced I am of the importance

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of learning from history. Youth work, or youth ministry, as we now call it (for reasons related to history as well as to theology and psychology), is a relatively new function of the church. Technically, I think we might say that the phenomenon we now think of as work with youth began in 1881, with the founding of Christian Endeavor. Of course there were other organizations and activities that were predecessors, but the clearest continuity for what is mostly a twentieth-century development flows from this non-denominational plan.

I hope that dipping into history will be helpful and wish it were possible to engage in a more detailed analytical and evaluative process, but we shall touch on critical points and raise questions about the present. It is important to note before offering historical reflections that “doing” history is a difficult and precarious activity. We all know people who announce an idea as being new and world shaking, only to find out within days that in historical context it was a manipulative lie. Some people use their superficial pronouncements for marketing purposes, or winning personal acclaim for the superior vision they bring. Many of us have been in classes where the teacher lists “good” and “bad” historical periods, avoiding the complexity of motivations, contextual factors, and realistic assessment of what was possible, what was valued, in any given period.

There are many other dangers and difficulties. Let me illustrate the kind of misinterpretation that comes when we fail to prove generalizations with concrete examples, or take popular views and pronouncements without investigation. I remember doing some histories of the United Christian Youth Movement (UCYM) in a class, saying that the theme of its first conference in 1934, “Christian Youth Building a New World,” was an illustration of a kind of liberal optimism permeating youth work at that time. Imagine my horror later when I told Will Kennedy what I had said. Will was a professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and Union Theological Seminary in New York, and the first director of the office of education for the World Council of Churches. He remembered a conversation with Lou Painter, a Presbyterian staff person for youth at the time, who was present at the planning. She remembered, poignantly, the comments of young people who felt they were negligent and had not served Christ or the church well, and who longed to bring the Good News to the world through mobilizing youth. I did a great deal more research and found complex roots for that great theme. Even a couple of weeks ago, while doing some more reading in the area of ecumenical youth ministry, I was astonished at the levels of meaning in the theme and at its power over the next years. Talk about a painful confession on doing exactly what I now warn against!

One of the advantages (some would say disadvantages) of what I am trying to do is that in this “young” twentieth-century development I have been an active participant in each organizational pattern from Christian Endeavor on, beginning in the mid-thirties. Although I have spent considerable time in detailed analysis of historical documents, I have been able to remember, too. Let me illustrate a generalization with a particular event. As many youth did, I continued to partici-

pate in the high school youth group as well as in the college organization, and then, almost overnight, became an adult working with youth. For the three years I taught high school, I served as adviser to a Presbyterian youth group. I should say that I have never felt or thought that we had the answer or that any suggested plan was permanent.

When a bright young red-headed girl came up to me during a youth conference in the '40s (*not* the activist '60s), she raised a question that is with me still. Several powerful speakers, biblical and theological scholars, had raised questions about racial prejudice. She said to me passionately, with tears in her eyes, "You adults! You move us and inspire us and make us feel guilty. Why don't you help us know better what we can *do*? You adults!" She was right, of course. We took her seriously, and I actually think some of the questions she raised sparked some special activities at the conference. In many ways these cherished memories make me want to speak tentatively about matters of generalized interpretation. In that process of studying and remembering, several recurring issues have been raised for me: *leadership*, *social justice*, and *ecumenism*. There are others, too, but these stand out. Watch for these three as I move through the historical approaches, and see what you observe. In what ways has youth work developed leaders for the church and for the world? Has the approach been effective in dealing with social issues? How have young people been able to relate to the worldwide church? Draw on your own memories and studies as I review the changes that have taken place.

As I begin, let me reiterate what I said in 1968, in *Youth, World, and Church*. This was my thesis:

Youth who are members of the church are called to Christian discipleship *now*, as people of God placed in the world for ministry; they are a part of the ministering Body of Christ, within which they are supported and equipped for the fulfilling of their common calling.¹

I still believe what I said then. The statement does not call for a particular structure or strategy; it allows for change in the light of changing contexts. But it does say that young people are a part of the church, and that they, too, as youth, are called to minister.

The procedure here will be to look first briefly at some forerunners of this century's youth ministry, including some consideration of two key terms, *youth* and *adolescence*. Then we shall consider four developmental periods, beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing through the present.

BACKGROUND: YOUTH, ADOLESCENCE, INSTITUTIONAL FORERUNNERS

Are youth alike all over the world? Throughout history? Anthropologist Margaret Mead, author of the classic *Coming of Age in Samoa*, states clearly what might

be a guideline for any historian, that interpretation of what young people are like must reflect the ideas of a particular period. She raises these key questions:

Are the disturbances which vex our adolescents due to the nature of adolescence itself or to the civilization? Under different conditions does adolescence present a different picture?²

Her comparison of the culture of youth in Samoa, a primitive society, with youth in the United States leads to the conclusion that adolescence is not necessarily a “time of stress and strain.” Culture is more of a determinative factor. Still, there seem to be perceptions of youth that seem almost universal. What do you think of when I say the word “youth”? How about this?

Young people today love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, no respect for older people, and talk nonsense when they should work. Young people do not stand up any longer when adults enter the room. They contradict their parents, talk too much in company, guzzle their food, lay their legs on the table, and tyrannize their elders.³

Does that describe youth today? In any case, it is attributed to Socrates, in the fifth century B.C. (or B.C.E.). How about this statement?

What ails the youth of today? Everyone is ready with an answer. “They have grown perverse because we have ceased to administer the old-fashioned discipline,” says one. “It is because we are neglecting conversion,” says another. “They are not perverse,” remarks a third. “What ails them is their youthfulness; ten more years of experience will cure it.” Oriental critics, like Tagore and Gandhi, if we should interrogate them, would say: “The seed that your Western civilization has sown is sprouting in your youths; they are not especially perverse — they merely show the defects of your whole system of life.”⁴

That quotation comes from a 1924 book by a leading religious educator of this century, George Albert Coe. Titled *What Ails Our Youth?*, the book offers a penetrating and, I would say, devastating analysis of youth, all the way from “craze for excitement” to their “most absorbing occupations,” which, Coe says, are “recreations and athletics.”⁵ It is not fair to leave that statement without saying that Coe’s book is a powerful analysis of what has happened — that youth are reacting in “natural ways” to conditions for which their elders are responsible. More importantly, he sees in Christianity the call, the message that youth need more than anything else, and, perhaps without knowing it, long for.

Over the centuries, when people have referred to youth, they have meant almost anything. We have descriptions of national leaders early in American histo-

ry who called themselves “youths” at the age of twenty-four or even up to thirty-two.⁶ Writers often made little distinction between children and youth. Infant schools included those from eighteen months to six years of age. I can think of one account of a seven-year-old boy, hired out by his father to a neighboring farmer, who was able to hire himself out to yet a third farmer. He was called a “youth.” When a youth became financially independent, usually he or she — mostly he — was an adult. The gradual narrowing of age segments by schools brings us today to the junior-high and senior-high ages we usually work with in our church youth ministry. Many people say that our ever-narrowing age segments and specializations have diminished the strength of belonging to a family where one is needed and cared for. But no matter the age, it does seem to be the case that there are certain images of youth, from the time before Socrates, that refuse to disappear.

Whereas *youth* is an old term, with loose usage, *adolescence* is a new, twentieth-century term. Albert van den Heuvel, director of youth work for the World Council of Churches at the time he wrote in the '60s, says that Aristotle wrote one page about adolescence, and then “2000 years later we have 1300 pages by Mr. Stanley Hall, and between the two there is nothing.” Many people have viewed Hall’s two-volume *Adolescence*, published in 1904, as a classic, stimulating alertness to the importance of a now-recognized stage of life as one of great inner turmoil, “storm and stress,” if you will, as well as of great aesthetic sensitivity. The growing use of the term to recognize the needs of youth now made visible by the Industrial Revolution was an occasion for adults to develop institutions that increasingly segregated youth from adults. I cannot resist quoting Joseph Kett, the author of the best history of youth I know, *Rites of Passage*, on his opinion of Hall’s work. “*Adolescence*,” he says, “was a feverish, recondite, and at times incomprehensible book, the flawed achievement of eccentric genius.”⁸ Nonetheless, it helped shape society’s view of youth for at least fifty years, fostering the development of innumerable organizations for youth. Kett’s book, with great care for historical accuracy, traces the development of those institutions in social context and punctures many myths, pointing out the limitations of many adult leaders “with prudish morals and flat imaginations.”⁹

The “adolescence” that Kett describes is more a long process of change, beginning with puberty and moving from a child’s dependence through semi-independence to independence, than it is a clearly definable stage. It is interesting that, so far as I can find, Kett does not use the term “rites of passage.” For him, the primitive rites of passage that gave a clear demarcation between child and adult, in initiation rites lasting from a brief day or two to several weeks, are now replaced or marked by gradual shifts in responsibilities accorded to youth. Church groups and other agencies designate certain key actions as critical — for us, perhaps confirmation, but knowing the trouble we still have with that, I dare say no one would seriously call it a “rite of passage.” In any case, the era of adolescence designates a slow process by which society tries to deal with demo-

graphic changes as ever-increasing numbers of young people flood into the public arena, or tries to deal with societal shifts in values and goals. Somewhere I read, I think in *Youth: Transition to Adulthood*, the important 1974 report of the presidential committee chaired by James Coleman, that architects of change developed schools as “aging vats,” to have something to do for adolescents no longer needed by society.¹⁰ I wonder what President Clinton thinks about a statement like that, given his recent advocacy of extending universal education two more years.

During the long period of time before we began narrowing the broad age range of youth to the narrower period of adolescence early in this century, we adults were already forming many organizations for young people. A thought occurred to me in working through these forerunners. Why is it that so often things we do in church originate outside of the church? Then we adapt them, often losing, I think, a sense of our unique purpose. However that may be, we often think of the YMCA, founded in London, England, in 1844, by George Williams, beginning with twelve young men in his drapery business. It came to us in 1851, with Thomas Sullivan, a retired sea captain. In 1855, the YWCA was started in England in two groups, one of which came to New York in 1858 and the other to Boston in 1866, primarily as prayer groups for women. These two influential agencies are still alive today, with a broadened age group constituency. Like the Y organizations, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, established in 1910 and 1912 respectively, believed that religious and moral values were integral to their purposes. We have Boys Clubs, Girls Clubs, Campfire Girls, and many other organizations, all serving some of the same goals we have in the church, all, in combination with other social and educational groups, trying to respond to adolescent needs and interests.

Recognizing that many forces moved to bring us to the present form of youth ministry, sometimes slowly, sometimes dramatically, we turn next to the church, to direct antecedents of youth ministry today.

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR (1881)

Much of what we do today is directly influenced by the Christian Endeavor Society. There are other organizations of which we should speak, given more time, but I chose Christian Endeavor because it so decidedly focuses on youth in a congregation, in contrast, say, to the Student Volunteer Movement, a group set to evangelize the world in one generation and influenced by Dwight L. Moody and John R. Mott. The Christian Endeavor Society was founded by Francis Clark, the pastor of Williston Congregational Church in Portland, Maine, on February 2, 1881. It had to do with the usual functions of a congregation: worship, study, stewardship, fellowship, and service, interpreted for youth. Note that although the Christian Endeavor Society was started by a pastor, it was directed to youth in general, and, from the beginning, was non-denominational. It “took off like wild-

fire," as they say, with more than seven thousand local societies and half a million members by 1887, only six years later. It is alive and flourishing today all over the world. In 1989, the last year for which I have statistics, it had two million members in seventy-eight countries.

The story is much like that of the Sunday school. Some people even select the Sunday School Movement, rather than Christian Endeavor, as the parent of youth ministry. Founded in 1780 by a Christian journalist, Robert Raikes, to teach children on Sunday, the only day these illiterate children employed in mills had available, the Sunday school quickly spread over the world. The World Sunday School Association became a part of the World Council of Churches long after the Sunday school had become the school of the church. It still functions, just as Christian Endeavor still functions, across the world. I mention this for two reasons. First of all, these two powerful movements developed independently of organized programs in the church, evidently at a prime time, a moment of readiness to meet certain human needs, and took on a life of their own. The organized church, when it became aware of the power of these organizations, moved to co-opt them and to bring them under the wings first of the denomination, then of the congregation. They were fascinating days, in terms of political struggles primarily, I think, although many people consider them theological struggles. Interesting, too, is the fact that, although the church succeeded in bringing both the Sunday school and youth groups under its umbrella, both Christian Endeavor and the Sunday School Movement continue today. This pattern, I think, is generally the case. Independent in origin, movements help shape the church or are finally adapted to the church, and then continue on their own paths. A second point to note is that the initiative was with adults. There are fascinating accounts of initiatives by young people later in this century, but it is important to note that for most of its history, youth work has depended on the leadership and abilities of adults.

What then can be said about Christian Endeavor? Certainly it was one of the most influential forces to shape our approach to working with youth in the church. Youths were so fond of the Sunday night meetings that they often continued to come as adults, respectfully sitting in the back of the room to allow their young successors to be at the front and to speak. It was this success that at least partially motivated denominations to establish youth offices and to "take over" youth work. Congregations that preferred to continue calling their youth groups Christian Endeavor were allowed to do so, but they were encouraged to use newly developed denominational materials. Sometimes a young person did not know much about the affiliations of the group to which he or she belonged.

With that statement, let me move again to personal experience and, in this case, to participation in a significant symbolic action that I did not recognize as such until I began studying religious education. During the late '30s I was quite involved in the youth group in my church, Amity Presbyterian in Charlotte, North Carolina. On one occasion, I am not sure exactly when, I clearly remember going

to downtown Charlotte on a drizzly Saturday night to march in a candlelight parade for Christian Endeavor. I was an officer in the county association. The next day, a Sunday afternoon, I went to a meeting of the Mecklenburg Presbytery Youth Council, in which I was also an officer. That is the last memory I have of Christian Endeavor, partly because of the depressing parade, mostly because activities in our presbytery youth group grew rapidly and simply took up all the time I had. Knowing myself now, I cannot imagine why I did not see and question the overlapping organization and relationships. But I did not. I was present at the demise of Christian Endeavor and the growth of the Presbyterian Young People's League, but I did not understand what was happening.

With that statement, let me turn to the groups that represent the first family of denominational youth organizations, all developed within a relatively short time as adult leaders found openings to take over youth work. A great contribution of Christian Endeavor was its development of "youth leadership, and its appreciation of a Christian unity broader than denominational differences." But it may also be said that Christian Endeavor "cultivated a youth church alongside the church."¹¹

SOCIETY (MID-1920s)

The denominational programs that began in the 1920s, now placing youth "within" the church, developed in such erratic ways that I have not found it possible to designate an exact date for the beginning of the leagues or societies that came to characterize youth work. There were the Epworth League, the Luther League, the Baptist Young People's Union of America, the Nazarene Young People's Society, and many, many more. At least two common goals characterized all of these groups. One was to build youth into the denominations through their participation in a strong program with peer support; the other was to meet the needs of young people and to develop their own leaders by involving them in the denominational program.

The particular group in which I was involved, the Presbyterian Young People's League, had a beautifully logical organization, drawn up by an administrative executive, Dr. John Fairly, with the group divided into a Kingdom Highways plan. A "highway" corresponded to each function of the church, each adult committee. Youth were linked to one another, to the congregation, and then later to the presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. Our society, or league, was a model of the way the church now accepted and integrated youth.

For me, the account I gave of Christian Endeavor leads me to add that the League and Christian Endeavor were coexistent in my congregation. I think we mostly used the denominational material, and at least every other Sunday night, probably more often, I was "on the program." I read my "part," which turned out not to be a bore, but a learning opportunity. I believed what I read aloud! I actually attribute to that activity many of my beliefs about race, justice, and social

action.

During this period, in spite of the clear focus of this denominational approach, there were still unclear areas, especially with respect to the further specialization of age groups. The church was now paying attention to junior highs as well as to college students. The college students who participated in high school activities were often regional and national officers; others moved their loyalties to college groups. What was to come next?

FELLOWSHIP (1936, 1951)

In 1936, the Congregational Christian Church adopted the name Pilgrim Fellowship for the high-school-age youth. Again, the time was on target. By early in the '40s, most major mainline denominations had turned to a new name — Westminster Fellowship (for Presbyterians), Methodist Youth Fellowship, Baptist Youth Fellowship — at least fourteen denominations had such fellowship groups. The term fellowship picked up the importance increasingly attached to the peer group, as well as an understanding of the church as community. Commissions were set up around functions of the church. The youth movement, as we might call Christian Endeavor, had now moved into the church, and the youth connection continued, not only through regional and national links, but also in ecumenical circles. In fact, in 1934 the United Christian Youth Movement had been organized, as we noted earlier. It was a natural unifying agency for the national denominational fellowship councils.

In 1951, denominational and ecumenical interests came together in the common commission plan. The story told is that some young people in school began talking about their youth fellowship activities and discovered they were working in the same commission areas. "Wouldn't it be nice if all our churches had the same commission names, so we could work together across denominational lines?" one of the young people is reported to have said. The result, in one of those rare moments of clarity and action — led by a young person! — was Youth Fellowship with its common commission plan. Of course all the manuals and materials had to be rewritten, but that seems insignificant alongside the importance of the action.

Most of us have either direct or inherited knowledge of these Youth Fellowship years. The Objective of Christian Education for Senior Highs, formulated by a National Council of Churches study committee headed by D. Campbell Wyckoff, was adopted in 1958. It picked up the theological concerns of neo-Reformation theology, with increasing emphasis on the church. These were years when the church moved to what seemed to be at least a momentarily stable place in educational ministry, including youth ministry. One could analyze and comment on the structure and purpose, but I think brief consideration of several key developments in the fellowship years would be more appropriate. They are ecumenism, racial justice, and leadership.

First, note the ecumenical youth activities, already cited. The first world youth conference was held in Amsterdam in 1939, followed by one in Oslo in 1947, and numerous others, where the youth had become a unit of the World Council of Churches, as in Vancouver in 1983. Here, as at national conferences, college youth more often represented high school youth than not. This period, as Ans J. van der Bent suggests in his history of youth in the World Council of Churches, was a time when the church and youth joined forces, and when the world Christian youth community became a recognizable force.¹²

Second, we need to note that young people *were* exposed to matters of racial justice, one of our key issues. In fact, for me, this was one of the most important subjects to consider during the fellowship period. Let me illustrate by using as a kind of case study a conflict where youth challenged the board of the Montreat Conference Center on its policies. Mary-Ruth Marshall, professor of Christian education at Erskine Seminary, writes of the struggle from 1936 to 1949 in a recent issue of *American Presbyterians*, in an article appropriately titled "Handling Dynamite." She says this:

For more than a quarter of a century, beginning in the mid-1930s, the young people of the Presbyterian Church in the United States [PCUS, Southern Presbyterians] took courageous initiatives in the struggle for racial justice and human rights. This dogged and tenacious campaign to secure the rights of black Snedecor Memorial Synod youth officers to attend annual summer meetings of the Youth Council and the Young People's Leadership School at Montreat, with equal treatment and accommodations, brought the young people into conflict with powerful forces. Meeting stone walls everywhere, they persisted....¹³

The Youth Council sent letters to the Montreat board, to the appropriate Assembly agencies, and to adults with youth responsibilities. They were determined to secure equal rights for all youths. I wish I could read some of the letters to you. More, they acted. "If all of us cannot swim in Lake Susan," they said, "none of us will." They were working for unity, for full inclusiveness. As Marshall says,

As successive Youth Councils worked for that unity, they gained and practiced considerable skill in Presbyterian polity. Especially in the decade of the 1950s, consecutive councils tended to base their arguments against Montreat policy on scriptural and confessional grounds. They remained faithful to the denomination, resisting until the very last the temptation to seek another location for their meetings, but did not give up in their passion for fairness and justice.¹⁴

This historical account is one that can instruct us all. Would you say they were

successful? Yes and no. The concessions they won by 1949 were withdrawn in 1950, but “the struggle was resumed.” In 1954, “area leadership schools, with no discrimination, replaced the Leadership School at Montreat.”¹⁵

The third issue, related to leadership, calls us to note that the very structure of groups in the fellowship period, as had been the case in all preceding periods, seemed conducive to the development of leaders. In the fellowship period, as illustrated by the the Montreat case study, the leadership was focused on matters of racial justice. During that period, too, we find numerous comments that youth organizations were notable for the leaders developed for the church. The system itself was conducive to such development. Officers at every level, trained and functioning, learned how to do things. Marshall lists ten of these youth leaders who were “prophetic leaders” rather than “acquiescent followers,” and who became national leaders,¹⁶ all of whom I know. Or take another illustration. Recently, in a theological discussion group, a pastor and college chaplain said that nothing had contributed so much to his growth in faith and his pastoral role as his experience on youth councils and in caravans.

I have always been particularly aware of one component of this leadership issue — the roles of adults and youth. We have already said that the initiatives in this century’s developments were primarily those of adults. Adults, at least through the society period, were still fully in control, moving toward becoming enablers or resource persons. But in the Montreat episode, youth (older youth, I should say, to be fair) emerged clearly as leaders. True, adults worked closely with them. Perhaps we see a forerunner here of the current emphasis on team leadership.

A second component of the leadership question I had been generally aware of, but it came clear to me in this study that it has been inherent in youth work from the beginning. I was astonished that all the leaders Marshall mentioned were men. She’s right, of course; the names signed on the various documents did include a few women, but only a few. Although women emerged as leaders from within the youth advocacy process, in this case it was still the men who achieved prominence. The situation has changed drastically since the 1950s, but we still deal with some of the age and gender issues raised earlier.

Thus there were strengths and inadequacies in this fellowship period, with far more complexity than can be conveyed here.

CONNECTIONS (1990s)

Moving on toward the present, I do not know what to say about the ’60s and ’70s. Denominations lost their sense of direction, with few clues as to what to do structurally. The great moment of insight that came in the ’50s, when youth were proclaimed as part of the church *now*, was true and good, but did not adequately recognize the need for youth also to be aware of one another within a fellowship where they were struggling to find their own identity and direction for life. All the

cultural forces that we know about — the counterculture, new life movements, neoconservatives — are to be noted. So is the increased influence of the parachurch groups, which, though many had emerged in the '40s (Young Life, in 1941; Youth for Christ, in 1944), now assumed greater visibility.

But we have been moving steadily toward reaching a more balanced approach. Our disdain for organization has gradually been recognized, and denominational trends now move toward a corrective — as in the Presbyterian Connection. The constant question about the role of adult leaders seems to be moving toward a consensus as to shared leadership. Ginny Ward Holderness's new book, written with Bob Hay, another youth minister, is titled *Teaming Up*. I recommend it to you. Ginny's last letter to me, written at my request to share her reflections at the end of this century, offers me hope. She actually calls the Presbyterian Connection "wonderful." She mentions other things, too — the large conferences, the recaptured recognition of family ministry with youth, the concern for spiritual formation. Marshall says that in all these shifting scenes in youth ministry, we are now at the point of filling the vacuum we caused by dismantling youth structures and turning so strongly to entertainment, in a way marginalizing our youth. In fact, she says, we should be speaking of "youth ministries" instead of "youth ministry."⁷

It is too early to make judgments about the three issues we have been considering in all the periods up to the present. These tremendously important topics call for lengthy in-depth analysis. But I must say, I do not at this time see adequate provision for developing leaders for the future good of the church and the world, or adequate attention to matters of social justice and of ecumenism. Perhaps we need to do more investigation of the past, as well as analysis of the present and planning for the future.

CONCLUSION

I am not going to try to go into more detail about the present, or about the future, which would entail consideration of technology in education and the influence of the media. I want to offer three brief concluding thoughts, which encompass, but go beyond, the issues to an even deeper level of principles. The first: our study shows that, as Charles E. S. Kraemer (former president of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia) once said, "There are no unfailingly infallible means of grace." There is no one method or plan or program or statement that is guaranteed to work. The delight and the hope lie in a never-ending process. Second, as H. Richard Niebuhr once said, "We must watch for the institutionalization of charisma." A great dream is tamed, controlled, organized — and then the moment of reckoning and change must come. And finally, with van der Bent of the youth office of the World Council of Churches, I want to agree that

it is true that adult Christians tend to escape from the present

into defensive justifications of the past. And young Christians tend to escape from the past into utopian projections of the future. Both risk ignoring the quality of newness which the present always possesses, and which changes the understanding of both as to where they came from and where they are to go. They both, therefore, are called to catch a few glimpses of the wholeness of the *oikoumene*. Their new visions incorporating the inexhaustible truth of the past will then come closer to that unfathomable wholeness of the triune God.¹⁸ ❖

NOTES

1. Sara Little, *Youth, World, and Church* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 11.
2. Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., Mentor edition, 1949 [originally published 1928]), p. 17.
3. Little, p. 34.
4. George A. Coe, *What Ails Our Youth?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), vii.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
6. Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977). For this whole section, I draw on Kett, especially Part One, pp. 77ff.
7. Albert H. van den Heuvel, "A Short and Critical History of Youth Work," *The New Creation and the New Generation*, ed. Albert H. van den Heuvel (New York: Friendship Press, 1965), p. 56.
8. Kett, p. 6.
9. *Ibid.*
10. James R. Coleman, ed., *Youth: Transition to Adulthood* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974). Coleman was chair of the committee making the report. One of the major essays is written by Joseph Kett.
11. Little, p. 14.
12. Ans J. van der Bent, *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth in the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986). See especially Ch. II, "Amsterdam 1939."
13. Mary-Ruth Marshall, "Handling Dynamite: Young People, Race, and Montreat," *American Presbyterians* (Summer 1996), p. 141.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.
17. Mary-Ruth Marshall, "The Shifting Scene in Youth Ministry," *Presbyterian Outlook* (April 28, 1997), p. 8.
18. van der Bent, pp. 121-122.