The 2001 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture
Proclaiming the Gospel in a Wired World

Introduction

Cell phones, e-mail, MTV, the Web, Palm pilots, and pagers fill our lives and the lives of young people. Teens live in a world where "religious chat rooms and web sites act like spiritual supermarkets, offering an assortment of belief systems all within one click" (Newsweek, May 8, 2000). Whether you laud the changes technology has brought or long for yesteryear, there is no denying that today's wired world affects how we share the good news of Jesus Christ. Those who are engaged in ministry with youth are translators—charged with the daunting task of making connections for young people who are more familiar with gigabytes than with grace.

Rather than offering instructions on how to use e-mail, set up chat rooms, and design multimedia presentations, the 2001 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture examine the theological implications of modern technology and globalization. They help us to reflect on our modes of proclamation—not just preaching and worship but also storytelling, relationships, justice-seeking, service, teaching, and the daily practice of Christian life. They provide inspiration that will refuel us for bearing witness to Jesus Christ with youth in the wired world.

Thomas Beaudoin engages us in a provocative discussion of the relationship of the church to consumer media capitalism. He argues that consumer media capitalism functions strategically as an anonymous spiritual discipline, thus creating "theocapitalism." Beaudoin then proposes a tactical plan for Christian theology and pastoral ministry to contest the strategic discipline of theocapitalism. His lectures offer challenging insights on ministry in today's wired world as well as practical directives for discipling young people in this context.

Marva Dawn raises concerns about blind acceptance of contemporary fads and asks how we can teach youth to question their use of technology. The gospel, says Dawn, calls us to be hopeful realists about the wired world and enables us to de-idolize those elements of culture that begin to take primary place in our lives. She gives ten Christian practices that can help us to clear a space for the focal commitments of our faith in today's culture. Dawn then urges readers to take greater care in how they use words, and she provides insights from Luke's account of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24) on how we might proclaim the gospel to young people.

Richard Osmer takes us on a rafting trip through the white water of globalization, exploring this cultural shift's influence on adolescents through the global media, the globalization of risk, and the new pluralism of globalization. Drawing on the research of the Princeton Project on Youth,

Globalization, and the Church, he explains why we experience globalization as catching us up in currents of change that are beyond our control and discusses the practical implications for ministry with young people. Osmer calls the church to provide young people with three indispensable gifts for their white water journey: a creed to believe, a code for the road, and a dream to esteem. These gifts for the journey are developed out of the practices of catechesis, exhortation, and discernment found in Paul's ministry and are illustrated for today through case studies of two very different congregations.

Finally, Katherine Paterson blesses us with the gift of story. We are important, she persuades, not because we can teach our young people about the wired world or because we must warn them away from it, but because we are the church and we have a story to tell. Paterson explores how we might tell our story to the young who think they have nothing to learn from us. She challenges us to see the "invisible youth" by looking at young people as they really are and loving them as such. Perhaps, she notes, youth would welcome from us a vision of who, in God's sight, they really are, in a sharing of stories that illumine and heal.

May these lectures inspire you and equip you to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the young.

Faithfully yours,

Amy Scott Vaughn
Director of Leadership Development
Institute for Youth Ministry

2001 Lectures

Thomas M. Beaudoin
Celebrity Deathmatch: The Church Versus Capitalism?
After Purity: Contesting Theocapitalism

Marva J. Dawn
Technological Devices or Engagement in Practices?
The "Humiliation" of the Word or Its Restoration?

Richard R. Osmer
Riding the Raft: Ministry with Youth in an Age of Permanent White Water
A Checklist for the Journey: Biblical Foundations of Ministry with Youth

Katherine Paterson
I Love to Tell the Story
The Invisible Youth

A Checklist for the Journey: Biblical Foundations of Ministry with Youth

Many of us make checklists when we're about to take a trip, especially when we're going to be gone for a while and we've got a lot to do before we leave town.[1] We write down those things that we absolutely can't forget to pack or take care of: 1. Give the key to next-door neighbor. 2. Pack "blankey" for our toddler. 3. Put the first-aid kit in the car. 4. Remember the hanging bag with your dress clothes. This lecture is a kind of checklist for those working with youth. Most of your work with young people lasts for a relatively short period of time. Then, they are off to college or a new city and job. What are the things that you want to be absolutely certain that they take with them when they leave for the next stage of their life's journey?

We will be harking back to the issues raised in my first lecture and bringing them into conversation with the apostle Paul's writing. I will be working as a practical theologian who believes that we can identify certain core practices in Paul's ministry with his congregations that are authoritative and need to recontextualized in our congregations today if they are going to be the church. The checklist I'm going to offer you is generated out of these practices. I will illustrate how the process of recontextualization takes place by looking at two different youth ministries that have been studied as part of the globalization project by Dan Cravy and Caz Minter. Following standard research etiquette, I've changed the names of these congregations and some of the details of my description to protect their anonymity. The two ministries could hardly be more different.

Soho Presbyterian Church is located in a university town on the West Coast. It is a middle- to upper-middle-class church of 3,800 members and is predominantly white. It has a very large number of activities and programs for youth, run by a large department called "Youth Mission and Ministry." The department has its own youth pastor, receives help from numerous adult volunteers, and involves the young people themselves in planning and leading the program. The Sunday evening program for junior highs is called "the Rock" and for senior highs, "the Edge." The Edge has two hundred youth participants from thirty-three different high schools and thirty adult "sponsors."

The Savior's Temple is located in one of the poorest neighborhoods of a large city on the East Coast and is predominantly Puerto Rican. About sixty-five percent of the residents of the neighborhood where it is located live below the poverty level. The high school dropout rate hovers around seventy percent, and it is estimated that two-thirds of all drugs coming into the city have their port of entry in their neighborhood. Its residents are four times more likely to be killed than those in any other area of the city. About fifty percent of the residents are under the age of twenty. Joel, the youth pastor, came to the neighborhood on a kind of mission project in 1988 and, in his own words, "never left." He moved into the community, married in the community, and is raising his child in the community.

You could hardly have two congregations more different. They serve as a nice test case of the idea that core practices found in the ministry of Paul can be recontextualized in our congregations today. These practices offer us a checklist for the journey. In summarizing this checklist, I thought back to my professor of homiletics in seminary, Gardner Taylor. Dr. Taylor was the senior minister of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, one of the most prominent African American congregations in the New York City area. One day, he told the class he was going to sum up his approach to sermon delivery in one, simple dictum: *Start low; go slow; strike fire; retire.* Since I've been able to remember this for many years now, I've been struck by the power of alliteration and rhyme as memory devices. With apologies to Dr. Taylor, I want to sum up my checklist in a similar dictum. As you send your young people off on the next stage of their journey, make sure you have given them *a creed to believe, a code for the road, and a dream to esteem.*

A Creed to Believe

At the end of the last lecture, I asked you to run the rapids one last time. You had just passed through your third set of rapids. Your arms and back ached, and you were soaked to the bone. Immediately in front of you was another set of rapids, with two more not far beyond them. You were exhausted already, but there was no place to land, not even a branch to hold on to. We had just been talking about the new pluralism of globalization and the challenge this poses to young people around the world. They want to be open to new people and ideas, on the one hand, but they also are struggling to hold on to their own identity—their personal identity and their cultural identity. I also pointed out that many young people are having difficulty handling the "truth question." In the face of the new pluralism of globalization, many are settling for relatively simplistic forms of individualism (it's up to

the individual) or relativism (all perspectives are equally valid) when they are asked to sort out matters of truth.

This lecture is not the place to try and resolve the "truth question" on philosophical grounds. I am more interested in the ministry issues this research raises. Let me put them in the form of a question: How do we affirm the fundamental intuition of our young people that openness and tolerance are a good thing and, simultaneously, teach them that it is important to hold on to their own identity, values, and beliefs? If we simply affirm tolerance and openness without also giving them a creed to believe, then we have in effect abandoned them to the permanent white water of the new pluralism of globalization. They are going to encounter one new perspective after another new perspective after another new perspective without any place to land…not even a branch to hold on to.

Several years ago, I came across some research on children's playground behavior that gave me a new perspective on this set of issues. Throughout most of the modern period, we have been taught that holding on to a creed with passion and conviction inevitably makes you less open and more intolerant. This research made me wonder if this is really true. The researchers were studying children's behavior on playgrounds. They accidentally stumbled on to an important insight. It seems that if a playground has clear boundaries around it in the form of a fence or hedge, then the children feel free to play all over the place. If a playground does not have any clear physical boundaries, then the children spend most of their time playing in the middle. Clear boundaries apparently allow them to feel safe enough to play all over the place. It has a freeing effect.

My guess is that something comparable also takes place when young people form clear faith "boundaries." Far from making them more intolerant of others, boundaries can have a freeing effect, allowing young people to feel secure enough about their own faith to tolerate others who believe differently. While the new pluralism of globalization makes this more difficult, it also makes it more important. That is why first on my checklist is helping your young people form a *creed to believe*. I am using the term *creed* here metaphorically. I do not mean to imply that when your young people leave your ministry they should have memorized the Apostles' Creed or part of a catechism, as important as these might be. By *creed* I mean understanding and confessing for themselves the basic elements of the Christian faith. If this is to take place, then they must participate in a practice that presents the gospel to them and challenges them to give their life to it.

When you examine Paul's letters, it is clear that Paul's entire ministry

is based on the proclamation of the gospel. This is what we would expect of a person in a missionary situation. If you look at Paul's letters closely, however, what is striking is the way he continues to re-proclaim the gospel to his congregations. An excellent example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 15. There he writes

> Now I would *remind* you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn *received*… For I *handed* on to you as of first importance what I in turn had *received:* that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve…Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles…But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain.
>
> (1 Corinthians 15:1-10, emphasis added)

Paul describes himself as reminding the Corinthians of things they've heard already. He uses the language of handing on and receiving to describe this. These are technical terms from Paul's Jewish background that were used to describe the passing on of tradition, and this is what Paul is doing here. He is reminding the Corinthians of an early Christian creed that he first taught them when establishing the congregation.[2]

I am going to call this re-proclamation of the gospel and handing on of the core elements of the Christian tradition the practice of *catechesis.* While it overlaps evangelism, its focus is different because it is directed toward persons who are members of the Christian community already. We would do well to probe Paul's language of handing on and receiving to understand what this is all about. This language conjures up a number of images in my mind—passing a baton from one runner to another in a relay race, delivering a letter by hand instead of by mail. Perhaps, you can think of others. The core image here is passing something from one person to another by hand. Catechesis is about delivering the gospel *by hand,* passing on Christian Scripture and tradition *by hand.* This cannot be done in a mechanical or rote fashion. It means coming face-to-face with others, taking their particular situation into account.

This, in fact, is precisely what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15. Some of the members of the Corinthian church have begun to adopt a highly spiritualized understanding of the gospel.[3] This has led them to reject belief in the resurrection of the dead. The idea of God raising up dead corpses is repugnant to

them. Paul reminds them of the creed he handed on to them, a creed in which the resurrection of Christ is prominent. He, then, tries to explain to this group what they are giving up when they abandon belief in the resurrection. He is delivering the gospel by hand, addressing the burning issues and needs of this particular group. This is the heart of the practice of catechesis.

Do we see anything like the practice of catechesis in the youth ministries of Soho Presbyterian Church or the Savior's Temple? Yes, we do. Indeed, what is striking is how similar their catechesis of youth is. Both congregations hand on the gospel, first and foremost, through the way they relate to young people. Before they utter a word about the love of God in Jesus Christ, they show this love in the way they accept and care for their young people. We might call this catechesis through relationship. Let me share with you the story of Wanda, one of the "miracles" of the Savior's Temple. I will be drawing on Caz Minter's description.

Wanda's mother was a heavy drug user who often was absent from the home, that is, during the periods they had a home. When her mother was clean and not with an abusive man, Wanda remembers things being great. But that never lasted very long. Finally, Wanda's mother left her and her sister with a neighbor and did not come back for over a week. The sisters were sent to foster homes. Wanda's story then unfolds through a series of homes, confronting her with new situations of abuse and forcing her to run away at points. By the time she reached her teens, she was heavily into the drug scene. Nothing in Wanda's life was consistent or secure. She could not be sure of any relationship or institution, except one—the Savior's Temple. The church family provided her with the only stable and affirming relationships she had. The youth minister, Joel, and his wife even took Wanda into their home for a while. They stayed on her about attending school every day and coming home at a decent hour every night. They set clear boundaries for her. They helped her find housing she could afford and roommates with solid lives. They saw potential in her and encouraged her to stay in school. The whole church celebrated when she graduated from high school. Everything Joel and the other youth leaders said to Wanda about the gospel was given authenticity by the acceptance and support they gave to her. This is catechesis through personal relationships, and it had a miraculous effect on Wanda's life.

When we travel across the country to Soho Presbyterian church in circumstances so different, it is striking how similar the heart of their catechesis is. As Dan Cravy describes the program, it is all about relationships—forming "deep friendships" in the youth group and deepening one's relationship with God. The leaders are very intentional about this. In his

write-up of this ministry, Dan paraphrases their theological understanding of their ministry. He writes, "Because God chose to demonstrate his love for us by closing the distance between God and humankind in Jesus Christ—by coming to us in the flesh, entering into relationship with us, and suffering on our behalf—we must, likewise, go to high school students where they are and initiate relationships with them that both demonstrate God's great love for them and point them to a relationship with the living Christ." This means, concretely, that adult sponsors and staff regularly go to the high school, call students on the phone, and, more and more, keep in touch through e-mail. And the young people respond. When asked what makes the Edge the Edge, the students almost all pointed to the relationships of trust and acceptance that were formed in the group.

In pointing to the importance of relationships that embody the gospel as the first and most important part of the catechesis of youth, I am not saying anything new. Most good para-church and congregation-based youth ministries have known this for some years. We might say that this approach to ministry is as old as Jesus and Paul. We find Paul himself pointing to something similar in his very first letter, 1 Thessalonians: "So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us" (2:8).

While handing on the gospel in and through relationships is the heart of the catechesis of youth, it does not stop there. It also includes opportunities to think about the faith. In recent years, my ideas about this dimension of catechesis have been influenced by educators like Howard Gardner and David Perkins who have begun to write about the importance of a "culture of thinking" in education.[4] I have come to believe that there are two keys elements to the creation of a thinking culture: providing young people with a sufficiently rich vocabulary and conceptual framework to think with and giving them plenty of opportunities to practice thinking in dialogue with others who are more advanced then they are. The importance of learning a vocabulary of faith is pretty obvious. It's impossible to acquire competence in any field until you've mastered its basic vocabulary. To play baseball, you need to know the names of the bases and positions and what a strike and ball are. To practice law, you need to know what a brief or tort is. An important part of our catechesis with young people is teaching them the basic vocabulary of the faith.

Equally important, however, is teaching them how to use this vocabulary reflectively and critically. In nonacademic settings, this occurs primarily when people join an ongoing conversation that gives them the opportunity to practice using their new vocabulary and to deepen their understanding over

time by talking with others who are more advanced then they are. In effect, they are challenged to "think up." Soho Presbyterian Church's youth ministry, the Edge, embodies this in a particularly nice way. It is clear that young people who participate in this ministry are invited into an ongoing conversation about God. It takes place in many different ways in many different settings over the course of their four years in high school. Young people have the chance to overhear this conversation, to offer their own insights, to debate, to think, and to wonder in silence. It's the richness of this ongoing conversation more than any single program that makes it so effective. As Dan Cravy puts it, "the Edge is a ministry that values the mind."

Here are some of the ways that the Edge creates a culture of thinking in its ministry with youth. On specially designated nights the pastor comes to the meeting and addresses written questions. During the week, the group offers numerous small group Bible studies. These are same sex groups of the same grade level that meet with two adult sponsors. The Sunday evening talks are intentionally oriented toward the eleventh graders in the group, forcing the freshmen and sophomores to "think up." The church membership class for senior highs challenges participants to "look at and question the Christian faith." Students are required to list reasons why they should not join the church before they can decide to do so. The church staff regularly reworks the curriculum for Sunday morning to make sure that it pushes the students intellectually. And perhaps most important of all, the entire program is set up to have the youth leaders design and lead all aspects of the ministry, including writing their own talks on Sunday evening. They are not merely passive receivers of the faith. They have to articulate the faith in their own terms in front of their peers. To participate in the Edge is to enter a thinking culture.

I am confident that young people involved in the Edge for four years would move on to the next stage of their life's journey with a creed to believe. Through the catechesis of personal relationships, they would have experienced anew the lure of the loving, forgiving, and accepting God of the gospel. They also would have been given the opportunity to join a rich and deep conversation about this God. Over time, they would have acquired the language by which to articulate their creed and been given the opportunity to think about what it means.

A Code for the Road

That's the first item on my checklist: a creed to believe. The second is: "a code for the road." I realize that the term "code" can set off a variety of associations, some positive and some negative—dress code, honor code,

code of valor. Some of these provide you with an explicit set of rules telling you how to behave. You can't wear a baseball hat in class or T-shirts with profanity on them. If you see someone cheating and don't report them, then you are just as guilty as the person who is cheating. A code can be a set of do's and don'ts, but it also can be an ideal to live up to. It is my understanding that the Marines have the code that they are never to leave a fallen comrade. This sort of code is not so much a set of rules as it is an ideal. It does not provide a specific set of do's and don'ts. It doesn't tell a Marine to rush headlong into enemy fire or what to do if three or four comrades are down and a medivac helicopter is coming in. Instead it is an ideal to live up to, to strive toward. That is what I mean by a code for the road. By the time young people leave your ministry, you want to try your best to help them develop an inner ideal of the sort of person a Christian ought to be morally. It's an ideal to live up to and strive toward.

I'm calling it a code for the *road* for one simple reason. In a world of permanent white water, your young people are going to encounter people and ideas that you can't possibly anticipate. An inner ideal will travel with them in ways simple do's and don'ts will not. Part of this has to do with the speed of change and the way it has altered the relationship between the generations. The social psychologist Kenneth Keniston spotted this several decades ago and called it *generational discontinuity*.[5] The life scripts followed by the generation of parents do not necessarily hold true for the generation of their children. There is too much discontinuity from one generation to another.

In my father's generation, for example, men worked outside the home, and many women did not. My father worked for the same large corporation for over thirty years. Over the past three decades, the economy has changed in ways that make this life script increasingly implausible for most young people. For one thing, many women are now choosing to work outside the home. There actually are more women in higher education today than there are men. Moreover, it is no longer likely that young adults will stay with the same corporation doing the same basic job all of their lives. They are likely to work with three or four different companies, and they will probably have to acquire new job skills along the way. A whole new set of moral issues has accompanied these changes. Couples are having to sort out how to balance career and parenting in ways that are fair to everyone. Young adults are having to sort out the ethics of making a commitment to a law firm, corporation, or medical practice. It is difficult to anticipate the sorts of moral challenges your young will face as they continue their life's journey. Your job

is to help them form an inner ideal of what a good person is like. This will travel with them. It's a code for the road.

Here again, I think the apostle Paul has something to teach us. One of the new insights emerging from my recent study of Paul's letters is the importance he placed on the practice of *exhortation.* In virtually every one of his letters, Paul at some point challenges the members of his congregation to live moral lives that are pleasing to God. This is the heart of exhortation: the challenge to live up to a moral ideal. Sometimes, Paul is gentle in his exhortation—praising and cajoling. Sometimes, he is pretty critical, pointing out where the congregation has fallen short and even getting angry with them. But the thread running through all these rhetorical moves is the note of challenge. In exhortation, Paul is challenging the members of his congregations to lead moral lives that are pleasing to God. I realize that exhortation sounds old-fashioned, and some of you may feel more comfortable using the term "moral formation." The important thing is to see what is at stake in this practice and to examine your own ministry in light of it.

I want to lift up two aspects of Paul's practice of exhortation that have something to teach us today. I've linked each of these with one particular passage, but you can be assured that there are many other passages that are similar in the Pauline corpus. First, Paul points his congregations to moral exemplars who are to be imitated. First Thessalonians 1:6-7 is a particularly nice example: "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia." This is a rich passage, but I have time for only a few brief comments.

Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of his own example when he was with them. Immediately before coming to Thessalonica, he had been treated terribly at Philippi, experiencing some form of suffering and persecution.[6] But this didn't stop Paul. When he reached Thessalonica, he went right head with his ministry, openly proclaiming the gospel with courage. In acting this way, Paul saw himself as following the example of faithfulness and courage of his Lord. Now, he is praising the Thessalonians because they have followed his example and the Lord's. They have acted with courage in the face of the suffering and persecution they've experienced at the hands of their neighbors. Indeed, they are now an example for others. The imitators have become the imitated! This is probably the most important aspect of the practice of exhortation. Young people learn to be moral by imitating exemplars of the Christian life. They, in turn, become examples for others. If we want our

young people to form a code for the road, then we have to expose them to people who embody that code.

A second aspect of exhortation has to do with the moral teachings Paul consistently offers his congregations. To illustrate this, I've also chosen a second passage from 1 Thessalonians, although I could have used almost any of Paul's letters.

> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you knows how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God…Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another…But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one. (1 Thessalonians 4:2-12)

Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of a moral teaching that he gave them when he first formed the congregation. In short order, he covers sexual conduct, love among the members of the church, and relations with outsiders. While personal example, no doubt, is the most important way of teaching people how to be moral, Paul supplemented example with instruction. It is striking how these same issues—sex, love among Christians, and relations to non-Christians—are still with us. Yet, I am struck by how many congregations shy away from offering their members, particularly their young people, moral teaching on these important areas of life.

While they might not be using the term "exhortation" to describe what they are doing, the youth ministries of both Soho Presbyterian Church and the Savior's Temple are very much engaged in the practice of exhortation. When you read Caz Minter's description of the Savior's Temple, what he writes about the leaders of this ministry is particularly telling. He's writing about Joel, the youth minister, and other part-time staff who were raised in the neighborhood and came through the Temple's program: "They eat and sleep in this community; raise families in this community; live Christ-like lives in this community; and they have been doing it for a long time. While the programs have varied and adapted over the years, the people who infuse them with life have been consistent." They embody a life of self-giving. No doubt, more than anything they say it is the life they live that has the greatest

impact on young people in the community.

But it also is important to point out that there is a strong element of challenge in the way the leaders relate to young people. Take the case of Ralphi, who grew up in the church and experienced all the hardships of life in the neighborhood. He was raised by a single mother, whose boyfriend dealt drugs. He was homeless for part of the tenth grade and then his family pretty much fell apart. As he looks back at that part of his life, Ralphi shares that it was Joel and another leader named Coz who enabled him to survive. They not only offered him love and acceptance, he says, but they interjected a badly needed dose of discipline into his life. He points to his participation in one of the church's mission trips as a turning point. These mission activities are a big part of the Temple's youth ministry. Teams of students travel regularly all over the United States and Central America to share and serve. Some of these teams are singing groups; others build houses. In fact, they do all kinds of things. And they do them in lots of different places. They travel to the white surburbs, the slums of Mexico, and many places in between. Joel says an incredible transformation takes place in young people like Ralphi when they learn for the first time that something is actually expected of them and that they have something to offer. They learn that they are important and capable of contributing to others. This is exhortation: the challenge to live toward a moral ideal. And the paradoxical payoff is that as the young people of the Savior's Temple are challenged to give themselves in service to others, they get back a new self filled with dignity and self-respect.

No doubt, exhortation means something quite different to a group of privileged, middle-class, white teens growing up in a university town. Here again, however, I am struck by the similarities of the two ministries as much as the differences. Both place great emphasis on mission. They use it to challenge their young people to get out of their comfort zone and to take some risks. Like the Savior's Temple, Soho's the Edge constantly challenges young people to take part in some form of mission. Teams of students and adults regularly work in night shelters, serve food in soup kitchens, tutor at-risk elementary school children, invest in the lives of youth in Scotland and Ireland, and work for justice in Guatemala. The symbol of all this mission-oriented activity is perhaps the yearly Easter Project in which the group travels to Mexico to build homes with other students. Last year, they raised $95,000 in a silent auction to buy supplies for the trip. The trip challenges this group of middle-class kids. Almost all of them find the poverty of Tijuana shocking and discomforting. When they come back home, they see things with a different set of eyes.

Participation in mission, thus, is an important way for the challenge of exhortation to take place in both the Savior's Temple and the Edge. There are two other aspects of the Edge's "exhortation" that I also want to lift up: the way they cultivate moral exemplars among the students themselves and the way they teach their young people to bring a critical lens to the surrounding culture. The leaders of the Edge intentionally try to cultivate a cadre of older youth leaders who model for the younger members the service orientation of the group. According to Dan Cravy, students are explicitly taught that "their leadership is to be modeled on Jesus Christ, who led by humble service." Those who are involved in this leadership must first demonstrate their readiness by their personal involvement in service-oriented aspects of the Edge. The criteria by which a teen becomes a leader in the group is not popularity or school-status; it is small signs that he or she is trying to live a life of service. Every year, the student leaders are taken on a weekend retreat to plan the program of the upcoming year. But, perhaps, the most important thing they do is study biblical models of servant leadership and begin to think through what this entails back home. The imitators are becoming the imitated.

Let me conclude this section by pointing to one final aspect of the Edge's moral formation. It invites young people to think critically about the surrounding culture. If the global media cascades around young people all around the world today, providing them with models of life and love, then the church must do a better job of helping them step back from these cultural flows and examine them critically in light of the moral teachings of the church. The Edge does this all the time and in a variety of ways. Here is just one of many possible examples. I'm quoting from a brochure that describes a Sunday morning offering:

> Grunge theology is a time to think critically about faith and culture. We will explore several mediums that are powerful influences on us today: music, television, and advertising. What does the gospel of Jesus Christ have to say about the barrage of ideologies that we are faced with in popular culture? Bring your Bible and your brain to Grunge Theology.

A Dream to Esteem

I have covered two of the three items on my checklist for the journey: a creed to believe and a code for the road. That brings me to the final item: a dream to esteem. As I take this up, I want to remind you of some of the things that were said about risk and globalization in my first lecture. Coming

of age in a world of global risk is a particularly powerful challenge to adolescents. Young people are inherently risk-taking. They are willing to take risks on behalf of the loftiest, most idealistic dreams. But without a dream to esteem, they are apt to take risks that are self-destructive or self-centered. It's hard to be idealistic in an age of global risk. The problems seem too big, too far away, too overwhelming. In our research, however, we found that at least some religious communities are up to this challenge. They are giving their youth a chance to take risks on behalf of a larger dream, and it is making a huge difference. Their youth were the most thoughtful about the global risks facing the human community, the most critical of those institutions that are creating these problems, and the most invested in trying to make the world a better place to live. The third and final item to add to your checklist then: Don't let your young people leave your ministry without giving them a dream to esteem.

Here again, I think the apostle Paul has something to teach the contemporary church. I particularly think we have something to learn from the way he teaches his congregations to engage in the practice of discernment. If you look closely at Paul's letters, you find him telling his congregations to use discernment in a number of areas. They are to discern the members best suited to accompany Paul when he takes the collection to Jerusalem. They are to discern the words of the prophets to distinguish those given by the Spirit from those that are not. People who carry out church discipline are told to discern their own lives first in order to see more clearly their own strengths and weaknesses, so they don't fall prey to spiritual pride. Paul gives us his most general statement about discernment in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." This single verse could easily be the subject of an entire lecture. Our time is short, however, and my comments must be brief.

When Paul bids his readers not to be conformed to the world, he has in mind the patterns of the old age under the power of sin and death. These "lords" of the old age have been defeated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But they still are powerful and try their best to seduce us into following them. Paul warns us not to be fooled by them and not to conform our lives to their ways. Rather, we are to be transformed through minds that have been renewed or made new. The root of the term translated "renewing" here is the same used by Paul elsewhere to talk about the new creation, God's promised transformation of the world taking place with the return of the Lord. In effect, he says we are to have "new creation minds" in order to discern the will of

God. Our thinking must be captured by God's promised future for creation if we are to resist the powers of the old age and discern God's will for the present.

The person who has provided me with the best image of what this involves is New Testament scholar Louis Martyn. Christians, he argues, must learn to use bifocal vision. Bifocal glasses, you recall, have lens with two portions, one to see things near and one to see things far. This is how people with new creation minds see things. They have bifocal vision. When they look at things near, they see the new creation struggle taking place—the powers of the old age are contending with the promise of the new. Even amid this struggle, however, they can discern the signs of the new creation already beginning to emerge. When they see things far, they see the ultimate outcome of this struggle—God's promised future for creation made known already in God's triumph over death in Jesus Christ. The practice of discernment is about learning to use bifocal vision—seeing the new creation struggle in the present and, simultaneously, seeing the ultimate outcome of this struggle in the future.

In a world of global risk, when change is so fast and the problems so vast, teaching young people how to engage in discernment is especially important. While neither of the youth ministries of Soho Presbyterian or the Savior's Temple use the term *discernment* to describe what they were doing, both of them very much immerse their young people in this practice. They are teaching them how to use bifocal vision—to discern the small signs of the new creation already breaking in to their lives and communities and to nurture them in hope born of their confidence in God's promised future. While I want to focus most of my attention on the Savior's Temple, let me mention in passing a few of the ways the Edge is doing this.

Much of this is done in conjunction with activities I have mentioned already. Prayer, for example, is an important part of the Edge's weekday Bible studies. Participants are encouraged to discern God's will in their everyday lives. Mission trips, likewise, include structured opportunities for reflective discernment. On the group's recent trip to Tijuana, for example, it stayed in an orphanage. At the end of the day, the group sometimes would gather outside in silence, staring through the orphanage fence into a brown valley of makeshift shacks. As the Spirit moved them, individuals would ask questions aloud about who they are and their responsibility as Americans and followers of Christ. They were learning to see the new creation struggle in things near but to do so in light of God's promised future.

The best way of understanding discernment in the youth ministry of the

Savior's Temple is to begin by describing the cross that stands on top of their building. An artist from the city made it for them because he believed that it embodied what the congregation is all about. They display it proudly and point it out to visitors. The cross is a compilation of scrap metal, pieces of garbage that were thrown away. The artist picked them out of the refuge and carefully sculpted them into a cruciform shape. It is a symbol of the suffering and brokenness of the neighborhood that is somehow miraculously refashioned into a sign of hope and glory. Caz Minter explains the meaning of this: "For the people of the Savior's Temple, there is a core concept here. God does not throw away the inner-city, the young, the poor, the oppressed, the broken. Instead, he redeems and transforms them. [God] does not wipe them off the earth and start fresh as much of our society would like to do; instead [God] makes *them* new, restoring them to be the children he wants them to be."

The people of the Temple discern their own experience and their neighborhood through this scrap metal cross, garbage turned into a sign of glory. It allows them to discern hidden possibilities of change and hope that the world can't see. It has led them to start a flourishing ministry of the arts in the midst of a neighborhood of death. Where many institutions, including the church, see the hip-hop music and graffiti that are so popular in the neighborhood as a sign of total degradation, the young people of the Savior's Temple see them as God's art and have brought them into the church. They have started an art group, providing supplies and a place to meet. Young people show up every week to paint, sculpt, and create…all in the context of the church. Each year they sponsor an art exhibit that draws in the whole neighborhood. They've also opened a small recording studio, allowing young people from their community to explore the musical talent God has given them. Their discernment according to this scrap metal cross extends further still. The youth group has bought several of the surrounding row houses and converted them into community-serving facilities. What once were crack houses are now after-school houses for children, weightlifting gyms, game rooms, drug recovery homes, and cheap apartments for new high school graduates. When a row house is abandoned in their neighborhood, they clean it out, board it up, and paint it to maintain the property value of the surrounding homes. This is God's neighborhood, they say, and that makes it worth investing in.

This is discernment. Seeing things near as part of the new creation struggle. Seeing things far: knowing the ultimate outcome of that struggle. This is how the young people of the Savior's Temple begin to form a dream

to esteem. If discernment can take place in this youth ministry, it can certainly take place in yours.

Conclusion

This is my checklist for the journey: a creed to believe, a code for the road, and a dream to esteem. It has been developed out of three practices found in the ministry of Paul: catechesis, exhortation, and discernment. In an age of rapid social change, they are the most important gifts we can give to our young people as they embark on the next stage of their journeys.

NOTES

1. This essay originated as a lecture delivered orally. I have sought to preserve the oral character of the lecture, and its informality, in this essay.

2. Richard Hays, *First Corinthians,* Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 255.

3. Ibid., pp. 252-82.

4. David Perkins, *Smart Schools* (New York: Free Press, 1992) and *Outsmarting IQ: The Emerging Science of Learnable Intelligence* (New York: Free Press, 1995). Martha Stone Wisk, ed., *Teaching for Understanding: Linking Research with Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

5. Kenneth Keniston, "Social Change and Youth in America," in *The Challenge of Youth,* ed. Erik Erikson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1965).

6. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians,* Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 1-7, 15-19.