

# CLOTHING AND REVERENCE AMONG YOUTH

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## Summary:

This paper is a consideration of the relationship between dress and a sense of respect. It focuses primarily on youth culture but broader application is possible.

Length: 17 pages

## YOU CAN DRESS A TEEN TO VISIT THE QUEEN BUT YOU CAN'T MAKE THEM BOW TO THE KING: CLOTHING AND REVERENCE AMONG YOUTH

Matt, a 16 year old Chinese-Canadian with an atheist dad and a Buddhist mom, got baptized at our church, three months after becoming a Christian. On the day of his baptism, he wore his customary baseball cap, pulled down low over his forehead, removing it only for the actual baptism. At the monthly elders meeting two days later, Matt was the subject of discussion; what was discussed, however, was not the fact that he had brought his entire family for the service, or that he had given God all the glory for the miraculous appearance of fuzz on his head (Matt had been bald from birth – hence the reason for the omnipresent cap), or the fact that his conversion was due to the testimony of another converted Chinese teen from a Buddhist family. No, what was discussed was the fact that he wore a baseball cap in church...and what should the pastor do about it.

In many ways, the issue of clothing and worship is as old as humanity. Apparently Adam and Eve's attempts at clothing themselves fell short of the mark and "God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21, NIV), not mentioning why the fig leaves didn't cut it for him. Matt's pastor wasn't the first (nor will be the last)<sup>1</sup> to look forward longingly to the day when white robes (Rev. 7:9) are not only in fashion, but the only option. But in the meantime, questions of what is appropriate dress for corporate worship will plague many a pastor and dominate too many elders meetings, particularly in regards to youth and the casual culture, Keifert's "intimate society"<sup>2</sup>, that the typical North American church finds itself in.

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<sup>1</sup> Why wait till eternal glory? Keifert suggests that the "newly baptized may continue to wear their white garments" for a six week period. Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

And herein lies the tension: adolescence's struggle to find identity, significance and belonging while at the same time searching for a meaningful spiritual experience with a transcendent God. More specifically, how can jeans, t-shirts, piercings and bare midriffs be reconciled with the Bible's teachings of a majestic and Holy God who "is to be revered above all the gods" (Ps. 96:4, NLT) and who requires proper worship ("Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.", Heb.12:28-29)? Is it simply a matter of reinstating dress codes for corporate worship (and fall into those endless debates about what constitutes a "short" dress and how long is too long for male hairstyles)? Will the appropriate clothing bring about reverence for God or will worship copied from an idyllic state (tunics? suit and tie?) only result in discontinuity?<sup>3</sup> These are some of the questions I will engage with in trying to answer the question: "How do millennial youth show reverence to God in their corporate worship?" In wrestling with this question I hope to be "keeping the heritage of the faith and offering it in new forms faithful to that heritage."<sup>4</sup>

As with most things, it is always easier to chart where we are going when we have first looked at where we have been. Ostensibly, it seems logical to look at what early Christians wore and why, distill the information and extract the ageless principles, bridge these to the current culture and then apply the results. This sounds easier than it is, simply because first century Christians were too engrossed in waiting for Christ's second coming and avoiding persecution that "they certainly had no desire to adapt or create specifically Christian clothing."<sup>5</sup> Refreshing as that sounds, a 1950 year interim has unfortunately dulled our anticipation and in the absence

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>4</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for a Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Erdmans, 1995), 141.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London, Eng.: Batsford Ltd., 1984), 11.

of persecution (at least in the North American context), wrested our focus from an eternal perspective to one with a decidedly temporal bent.

As a result, Christendom is rife with discussions, council decisions, regulations and papal declarations concerning dress. Human nature being what it is, “the wearing of particular clothes to mark particular occasions or functions appears to be so nearly universal in the history of human society that it may be regarded as a natural cultural law”<sup>6</sup>, so it wasn’t long after the establishment of the New Testament church that we see signs of special clothing, especially for clergy<sup>7</sup>. Up until then most Christians worshipped in house churches, making any special garments a moot point (something worth considering in today’s ‘church growth’ paradigm). It is interesting to note that historians agree that Christian vesture was derived from the formal secular dress of the Roman Empire and not of Levitical origin, an idea that only arose in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>8</sup> It wasn’t until the fourth century, when the Edict of Milan removed the ban on Christianity, that this adopted Roman dress was widely accepted (and reserved) specifically for clergy, formalizing the trend to separate the dress of clergy from that of the laity. Of all the garments derived from the Roman secular dress in the first six centuries of Christianity, only the white tunic (*tunica alba*) or alb had a “particularly Christian meaning attached to it”<sup>9</sup>, and that more for expediency<sup>10</sup> (the more often white linen is washed the whiter it becomes), than for any specifically Christian reasons (white being the favored color to wear at *any* religious ceremony at that time).

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<sup>6</sup> W. Jardine Grisbrooke, “Vestments,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 488.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, during the reign of Sylvester, Bishop of Rome in 253-7, deacons were ordered to wear the dalmatic (a variation of the tunic) in church. Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London, Eng.: Batsford Ltd., 1984), 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> W. Jardine Grisbrooke, “Vestments,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 489.

<sup>10</sup> Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London, Eng.: Batsford Ltd., 1984), 12.

Since in many religions there was “a tendency for the formal ordinary dress of a formative period of that religion to become ecclesiastical vesture and so to survive long after it [had] disappeared from use in any other context”<sup>11</sup>, origins of these “Roman” vestments were lost in the Middle Ages. This led to the surviving vestments taking on mystical and sacred connotations, leading to the assumption that they had developed from the robes of the Levitical priests of the Old Testament.<sup>12</sup> This confusion with origin led to many conflicting declarations as to what was acceptable and what was required, and as vestments changed with the fashion of the day or available materials, this confusion increased.

As the church became increasingly dominant as a political entity (and wealthier), the vestments became progressively more elaborate and costly, widening the gap between clergy and laity. The focus of formal religious functions tended to be on the clergy and there is no record for what laity was required to wear in corporate worship, apart from restrictions of certain colors or items that were reserved for clergy. To a certain degree, laity was there to pay the bills and watch the clerical show (Hmm...sounds like some churches I know).

This momentum to so widely differentiate between clergy and laity, a concept largely alien to the early church (see Acts 2:44; 1Cor. 12:12-13), was part of the impetus of the Reformation that saw the abandonment of vestments. They came to be regarded as part of a rejected doctrine and many of the reformed traditions rejected ecclesiastical garb altogether. Ironically, it is within the protestant movements that we have the most discussion on what worshippers are to wear at a corporate worship service, arguably because all participants were now seen as part of

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<sup>11</sup> W. Jardine Grisbrooke, “Vestments,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 489.

<sup>12</sup> Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London, Eng.: Batsford Ltd., 1984), 27.

the “royal priesthood” and should thus reflect that reality. William Henry Foote commented on some eighteenth-century Christians, saying,

A church-going people are a dress-loving people. The sanctity and decorum of the house of God are inseparably associated with a decent exterior; and the spiritual, heavenly exercises of the inner man are incompatible with a defiled and tattered, or slovenly mein.<sup>13</sup>

This “dress-loving” did not focus on extravagance but on the “best and carefully preserved dress”<sup>14</sup>, cleanliness and simplicity taking the place of finery. This simplicity was fueled “by a concept of worship as a public event whose holiness or sacrality was never meant to be exclusive or mysterious.”<sup>15</sup> Since the protestant movement emphasized the spoken and printed word, particularly the preached word (Luther having said, “The ears are the only organs of a Christian”), the visual aspects of a service, including the dress of both clergy and laity, was downplayed.

It is only very recently that we are seeing a resurgence of the visual aspects of worship “as American culture becomes more and more preoccupied with what it sees.”<sup>16</sup> This resurgence is partially responsible for renewed interest in liturgical worship, with its highly visible rituals, resulting in protestant services introducing liturgy,<sup>17</sup> and liturgical services adopting protestant freedoms. And this is where youth, searching for significance, are trying to discover for themselves something bigger than the sum of their experiences. They are not content with merely hearing about God, they want to experience a visceral encounter that engages all their senses. And here is where those jeans and t-shirts, piercings and bare midriffs, collide with what their elders say are appropriate indications of reverence.

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<sup>13</sup> Leigh E. Schmidt, “A Church-going People are a Dress-loving People”: Clothes, Communication, and Religious Culture in Early America,” *Church History* 58 (Mr 1989): 36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Charles G. McDaniel, “Raiment for the Lord’s Service,” *Christian Century* 92 (D 24 1975): 1188.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1188.

<sup>17</sup> For example see the article by Dorothy Siebert, “Why are Mennonite Brethren Joining Liturgical Churches,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 43 (Jan 2004): 4.

Notice, I said *appropriate indications of reverence*. I did not say that there is an appropriate standard of dress, because the Bible does not teach this. Those who contend that as New Testament believers we are all priests (1Peter 2:9), and thus need to dress with special clothes just as the Old Testament priests did, would surely not also expect believers to continue offering sacrifices? Even those who argue for vestments for clergy are not basing their arguments from scripture. Grisbrooke argues that “any move towards the abandonment of distinctive liturgical vesture is folly...it can only suggest a contempt for the continuity of the Christian worshipping tradition which is pastorally intolerable.”<sup>18</sup> Does this mean we continue in the worshipping tradition of Clement, Bishop of Rome 90-100, who said of St. Peter, “My dress is what you see, a tunic with a pallium,”<sup>19</sup> and ignore the fact that the tunic as worn by the Apostle hasn’t existed as vesture for more than 1600 years (while the pallium never did)? Do we continue to assume that only clergy has a specific dress when this was clearly not the case in the early church? Do we continue with the excesses of the Middle Ages? Which tradition is he referring to? Scripture is silent on the issue and as we saw above, vesture only became common place several centuries after the beginnings of the church and only as an adoption of Roman formal dress. Clearly, the desire for vestments or the desires to eradicate them are both based on cultural norms and personal preferences, not on biblical dictates.

The question that needs addressing is: in the context of meeting a transcendent God, does my clothing reflect my level of reverence towards God? Immediately, many would answer “Yes!” exegeting 1 Samuel 16:7 (“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” NIV) with the proviso that the outside is a reflection of what’s in the heart. The

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<sup>18</sup> W. Jardine Grisbrooke, “Vestments,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 492.

<sup>19</sup> Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London, Eng.: Batsford Ltd., 1984), 12.

common scenario expressed is: if you were going to meet the queen, wouldn't you dress up for her? Of course, very few would consider dressing inappropriately, but then, the monarchy has clearly established protocol requiring such attire. But has the Lord indicated that He expects us to dress-up? Or are we simply assuming that the Lord must be like the Queen? When we worship God, we worship the Kings of Kings, but we also worship our father and friend. Does corporate worship always require me to approach God as King (and thus be reflected by my clothing) or can I also approach him as my father (and again, have my clothing reflect this aspect)?

This tension is more apparent in those traditions that allow more freedom in their worship services, making clothing restrictions appear contradictory. The Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination, illustrates this predicament. In a recent AG perspective paper, endorsed by the church's Commission on Doctrinal Purity and the Executive Presbytery, this was their position on dress at worship services:

Though there are no biblical cautions about appropriate dress for the worship service, the dress of both men and women should show at least as much respect as we would expect to show in the presence of an important government leader.<sup>20</sup>

No reason was given for why this would be a suitable standard, or even why a standard was necessary. Then they quoted Lev. 19:30 "Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD" as a reminder for worshippers to show reverence in church buildings stating, "Reverence and respect for church sanctuaries and facilities must be taught to children if they are ever to appreciate the biblical importance of showing reverence for God."<sup>21</sup> But in a different paper they admit that Sabbath observance is not binding in the New Covenant begging the question: "Why then reverence for the sanctuary?" Is this a case of trying to find "controlled freedom"? All this because the AG was perturbed by the amount of casualness in its

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.ag.org/top/beliefs/christian\\_character/charctr\\_20\\_reverence\\_.cfm](http://www.ag.org/top/beliefs/christian_character/charctr_20_reverence_.cfm)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

congregations, a reflection of the society around it. We can probably hear the ‘high church’ advocates chuckling to themselves over this, until it’s pointed out that casualness is usually not a problem in their octarian<sup>22</sup> congregations. Ouch!

The situation is further confused when we still have islands of respect in our casual society that seem to defy logic. For example, when Sean Combs (aka Puff Daddy) or Marshall Bruce Mathers III (aka Eminem) appeared for their court dates, they were dressed in suits and ties, in spite of the fact that there was no dress code.

The fact that the courtroom has maintained a distinction between the casual and serious, the sacred and profane, in effect while the Mass has not, indicates that current irreverence for the Mass is not just a product of larger cultural decay. The courtroom shows that we can still maintain reverence in our culture.<sup>23</sup>

Again, the question remains: “What prompts this reverence?” Can we force or manufacture reverence through dress codes or as the above story illustrates, can reverence materialize in the right setting, or perhaps, for the right motive.

Perhaps this last one needs our attention. Combs and Mathers showed reverence quite possibly because they realized that their future depended on the outcome of the courts decision. They were motivated (fear? greed?) to alter their behavior for the benefit of the court. Of course, it is entirely possible that this was only a self-serving action that did not reflect an inward attitude (Do ya think!?), and since “the LORD looks at the heart”, such portrayals (or imitations!) of reverence do not meet God’s requirements (“worship God acceptably with reverence and awe”). But wouldn’t a proper motivation illicit a proper response? Perhaps the key in encouraging young people to revere God is to first give them an accurate picture of who God is. The struggles that those churches who value freedom over form have to produce respect

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.lichfield.anglican.org/other/largechurches2/bobjacksonnov.ppt> The actual average age for Anglicans, worldwide, is over 50 but many congregations are a lot higher.

and reverence may lie in the fact that the picture of God they generate is too intimate. The opposite is true for the more form oriented churches, who, although they may generate respect and reverence, do so in a similar way that courts achieve it; by fear and intimidation. They miss out on the intimacy that is promised to God's children ("How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" 1John 3:1). The tension between these two is captured by Ps. 25:14 which says, "Friendship with the Lord is reserved for those who fear him" (NLT). It seems logical that we need both but our practice seems to be poor, prompting Dawn to ask, "Can we think together along the lines of both/and?"<sup>24</sup>

But assuming that we were able to create the right balance of fear and friendship, of intimacy and transcendence; what would the display of reverence look like? Here, I believe, is where we have the crux of the problem: everyone has their opinion on what reverence should look like, meaning, no one knows how it needs to be manifested. In our "intimate society", where comfort is worshipped, where community has come to mean 'those like me', where the individual's needs rule supreme and where tolerance is our highest god, can we even begin to discuss what reverence should look like? Miss Manners, in her March 3<sup>rd</sup> column (2003) wrote profoundly when she said, "... try and explain that to people who recognize no greater authority than entertainment, and therefore know of no higher show of reverence than applause."<sup>25</sup> Bingo!

In regards to those jeans and t-shirts, piercings and bare midriffs that show up at corporate worship services, is the outside truly a reflection of the heart? In an effort to answer that question, I created a survey (see appendix A) that was completed by 71 teens (after weeding out those few individuals who seemed to answer every question with "fart". Kids have no respect

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.adoremus.org/0901Scalia.html>

<sup>24</sup> Marva J Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for a Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Erdmans, 1995), 4.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.jsonline.com/lifestyle/advice/mar03/126414.asp>

these days!). In preparing this survey, I worked with some presuppositions on my part. The first, as already indicated, is that I believe the scriptures have no prescription of dress for either clergy or laity in the context of public worship, i.e. there is no biblical dress code. Secondly, I am assuming that millennial kids may have different markers for what reverence should look like that may be counter to a previous generation. Thirdly, I believe that clothing is not the indicator of reverence with teens as much as it was with previous generations. Having said that, part of the survey's purpose was to try and discover what sorts of markers do indicate reverence for teens. The responses are in appendix B.

Questions three to five of the survey deal with issues of respect and thus deal with reverence indirectly. I included these, however, since respect is such a key buzzword in our 'tolerant' society and has become so over-used in school settings, coming to mean a tolerance for other people's opinions and lifestyles. That being the case, I needed to clearly define respect against reverence so as not to confuse the two in the minds of the respondents and move them away from seeing respect/reverence as pseudonyms for acceptance (as we will see, I believe I was unsuccessful in this). These questions are there, then, to prime the pump. It is worthwhile noting that the action that most demonstrates respect (question 4 of appendix B), is 'not interrupting when someone is talking', a possible corollary to educators insistence on equating respect with tolerance/acceptance. In the same question also note that clothing fared poorly as an indicator of respect, again, possibly reflecting societies push to be more accepting of difference. This helps to explain such ironic situations as the Vatican experiences each summer when tourists flock to see religious landmarks, such as St. Peter's Basilica, but are turned back because

of inappropriate clothing (bare arms and legs).<sup>26</sup> The faithful don't see their summer attire (particularly since temperatures are so hot) as being incongruent with entering churches.

As Puff Daddy's court case demonstrated, people are still concerned that reverence plays a part in our society. In a recent column, Craig Russell, a self confessed hippie, remarks how

I started wearing suits to class. And it resulted in a number of curious things. First, students did take things I said more seriously. They paid more attention in class. And it occurred to me that they interpreted my suits as caring not only about myself but about them. It pleased them that I would take the time and effort to look good for them, especially when they knew full well that I certainly didn't have to do it, that it was totally a free choice on my part.<sup>27</sup>

His purpose for dressing up was his desire to contest the ugliness and hate that seemed to dominate in the culture around him, and reflected a desire for people to respect each other and get along. The response to question six echoed this in that most respondents thought that everyone in society should show reverence and that it was important, again, possibly reflecting the current attitude that we need to be more accepting of others in our society. This analysis may be flawed in that those who didn't attend church had values significantly lower in answering the question, 'is it important for society', indicating that reverence is either misunderstood (many had question marks here) or that it doesn't have as strong a connotation as respect [the non-churched felt respect (question 3) was very important] in accepting others.

Linking reverence with acceptance in the minds of teens is probably not so farfetched when we look at question seven. Overall, there was a strong correlation between religious services and reverence, but a full point difference between 'your own religion' and 'a religion you think is wrong'. However, the non-churched did not distinguish between these two, even marking both higher than the churched teens, suggesting again that reverence is tied to accepting others who

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/07/16/world/main563585.shtml>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.strike-the-root.com/3/russell/russell14.html>

are different or what they think or believe. This clearly reflects a postmodern mindset that holds all beliefs on the same level and celebrates tolerance above discernment.

Question eight is where things got interesting. The strongest response was to ‘joking about the customs’, where 72% indicated that this never showed reverence, again, correlating strongly with the perception that the highest good was acceptance. Statistically, there was no difference between the responses of churched and non-churched teens. The fact that ‘wearing nice clothes’ scored lowest came as no surprise; what was surprising was that non-churched teens scored this option higher than the churched teens, even though it was lowest on their list as well. This seems contradictory, unless it reflects a rebellious attitude on behalf of the churched teens that have been more likely told about how to dress for church (or perhaps give hope for those who desire to see our teens dress better)<sup>28</sup>. At any rate, the number one action that might demonstrate reverence was quietness, which seems to bode well for those churches that include silence as part of their service (liturgical, structured) and also confounds those who plan services to be busy, upbeat and loud...assuming, of course, that teens are interested in showing reverence. The fact that ‘removing your hat’ also did well, indicates that this may have ritualistic overtones and not be associated with dress (I’m thinking now of national anthems at sporting events). The fact that kneeling out-performed dressing-up seems encouraging, again, for those planning liturgical services where kneeling still occurs and also for those who are inclined to think that the millennial generation is beyond redemption. I think most would agree that a church of kneeling but poorly dressed (by whatever definition) youth shows a higher ‘reverence’ quotient than a

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<sup>28</sup> Patricia Pearson, “Preteen Temptress,” *Macleans* March 8/2004. Pearson writes, “You will be glad to learn that a backlash is impending in the fashion industry against absurdly revealing clothes. The trashy sexpot look -- obediently adopted by 12-year-old girls everywhere, much to their parents' dismay -- is suddenly *tout fini*.” [http://www.macleans.ca/culture/article.jsp?content=20040308\\_76770\\_76770](http://www.macleans.ca/culture/article.jsp?content=20040308_76770_76770)

church of well dressed (again, by whatever definition) youth who show no other indication of reverence.

Question nine showed the same results for clothing, the main difference being that fully half of the respondents didn't even consider clothing as a viable means of showing reverence. This difference increases when we look at only non-churched teens. Here, only one third considered clothes as a way of showing reverence. This under girds my opinion that many in the millennial generation do not associate how one dresses with reverence and has huge potential ramifications for those churches insisting on dress codes. This also reflects much of the discussion surrounding the pros and cons of vestments and echoes the opinion of many, including Mark Ashton (an Anglican vicar)<sup>29</sup> and Kent Hughes, who states that “priestly vestments and clerical dress are out of date”.<sup>30</sup>

By far the strongest responses were for ‘behavior’ and ‘attitude’, which is a reassuring sign for the future of the Church, assuming behavior refers to some sense of obeying God (or at the very least, doing right). This suggests that youth understand the correlation between the condition of the heart and the outside appearance, but in this case appearance being defined by your actions, a more Biblical approach than merely your physical appearance. This again bolsters my argument that the millennial generation doesn't see appearance as an issue but refers to more substantive criteria.

Having said that, the question still remains: how do we plan corporate services so that youth can meet a transcendent God and demonstrate reverence in a relevant manner? Well, there are two aspects to this, one physical and the other spiritual, for lack of better terms.

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<sup>29</sup> Mark Ashton, “Following in Cranmer’s Footsteps,” in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D.A Carson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 102.

<sup>30</sup> Kent Hughes, “Free Church Worship,” in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D.A Carson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 140.

First, the physical aspect. Not surprisingly, youth are action oriented and chafe when not able to experience for themselves. Dressing up for church does not constitute an experience and requiring them to do so may be counterproductive, particularly if they do not see any significance behind it. Rather than drawing the line in the sand at this point, it might be more productive to introduce elements in the service, such as kneeling and silence, that move youth in the right direction and are also acceptable for others in the congregation (albeit challenging – when was the last time we’ve experienced these elements in our services?). If these actions are meaningful, and bring youth to a place where they are able to meet God, then the Holy Spirit can also convict them on changes they need to make in their own lives, dress included. Looking at some of the written responses to question five, part one (appendix C) and question ten, part one (appendix F), one can see that some youth are conscious of dressing inappropriately (see number 44 and 51 of appendix C), and it might just be that a significant encounter with God will prompt them to follow their conscience.

Another facet to consider is the fact that the culture they are growing up in demands acceptance of ‘differentness’ and so they have become quite accepting of those around them. Ironically, Christians sometimes come off as very judgmental, exclusive and intolerant, not the sort of image the New Testament portrays of Jesus. When we demand acquiescence on the non-essentials such as dress, what message does that spell out, particularly when in their eyes, dress is of no consequence? Perhaps it would be wiser to emphasize Phil. 2:3, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” and let our concern, love and respect for them give them a reason for wanting to change.

The spiritual aspect first involves us changing our dress code to line up with the one found in Col. 3: 12-14,

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

If we were to clothe ourselves with these characteristics, what would we look like? Gal. 3:26-27 gives us the answer: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have *clothed yourselves with Christ*." How would this then allow teens to experience the transcendent God? Ex. 34:30 offers an illustration; "When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him." Moses didn't concern himself with dress, the correct day, the right music or even a sanctified building (He lived in a tent and so did God!), but he was able to bring others into the presence of God. They saw his face, and knowing he had been with God, they were afraid. Immediately they sensed God's presence and fell into a state of reverence.

Perhaps teens (or anyone else in our congregations) are irreverent in their worship because we have not been with God? We approach God in the same irreverent manner but perhaps better dressed and wonder why those jeans and t-shirts, piercings and bare midriffs have the audacity to do the same. Perhaps ushering teens into the transcendent presence of God will first require us to be with him and clothe ourselves with him. And perhaps that's all it will take for others to follow suit. It sure would simplify planning meetings.

*Then cloath therewith mine Understanding, Will, Affections, Judgement, Conscience, Memory;  
My Words and Actions, that their shine may fill My wayes with glory and thee glorify.  
Then mine apparel shall display before yee that I am Clothed in Holy robes for glory.*

Edward Taylor

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