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Mentors, Manhood, and the Mountain: Helping Emerging Adult Men Navigate the Climb from Childhood to Adolescence to Manhood in the World (Conclusion)

David L. W. Pfeiffer

In part one of our study (*Journal of Theology*, Summer 2021, Volume 59, Issue 2), we saw that there is a crisis. Many young men are “twenty-two going on sixteen” and are stuck in adolescence. They are unsure, afraid, or just not caring about how to leave adolescence behind.

As parents and concerned adults, we are often afraid too. Michael Gurian said, “We do far too much and expect far too little.”¹

In this second part of our study, we will explore ideas for how to address the crisis with the help of mentorship.

Mentorship: Helping Them Up the Mountain Climb

In each phase of the climb, a young man is looking for direction, meaning, and purpose. As he gets closer to that high school senior year, he tries to “zoom out” in order to get a better view of the terrain. He wants to see what the adult world looks like.

Adults keep asking him questions. So what are you going to become? What are your plans after high school? What is going to be your major? He might have an answer, but it is mostly a rehearsed, canned answer—an answer he himself may not understand, nor attach meaning to it. He is looking at the mountain climb that is before him. He knows others have successfully made it, but he doesn’t see how he is supposed to do it. He needs a guide. He needs someone who has gone up the mountain who can tell him what it was like and how to approach the journey. This is where the important work of mentorship enters the conversation. The young man needs a guide to help him navigate his way up the mountain.²

¹ Michael Gurian, *Saving our Sons* (Spokane: Gurian Institute Press, 2017), 162-171.

² Unfortunately, American society just doesn’t know how to help him through this crisis. Too many structures and practices are already purposely or unthinkingly put in place that do not prepare the young man to step out from the guarded railings of adolescence and be ready to take the risks and responsibilities that will teach him who he is as a man. In the words of C.S. Lewis (*The Abolition of Man*): “In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”

I. What Do We Mean by “Mentorship,” and Why Do Young Men Need It?

In his 2007 book, *Boys Adrift*, Leonard Sax recounts the words of Larry Merculieff, an Alaskan native who lives on a group of islands off the coast of Alaska.³

Mercullieff served as the deputy director of the Alaska Native Science Commission and laments the changes he has seen taking place among his native Alaskan tribe. The young men living on the islands are dropping out of school in favor of wasting their time with drinking and getting into trouble. Seventy percent of young men on the island are either incarcerated, disabled by alcoholism or drug abuse, or dead from suicide.

Although traditional tradesman jobs in construction and mining have remained steady, the young men are not taking these jobs. They don't want to work. At least, they don't want to work hard, despite the prospect of substantial pay increases. But, according to Merculieff, it was not always so. The old Alaskan recalls, “When I was growing up, I learned to hunt the sea lion with the older men of my tribe. I learned about patience. I learned about using my senses. All my senses. I would go out on the ice with the older men and we would sit for hours, waiting for the sea lion. Hours.”

Survival on these isolated islands of Alaska was once dependent on the sea lion. Hunting the sea lion required patience, silence, and skill. If you didn't strike at the precise moment when the sea lion's lungs were full of air, it would sink to the bottom and you would lose your catch and your livelihood. It was a skill that needed to be learned. But it was not learned by telling, explaining, or instructing. It was learned by watching. The younger men followed the older men's lead and acted alongside them. “You watch him out of the corner of your eye. He fires first, then all of us fire within a tenth of a second of his shot. All the shots hit the animal in the head. That's how it is supposed to be. And that's how it was, every time. The animal dies instantly, floats on the water, and we retrieve it.”

Today, this tradition is no longer being learned. The young men on the islands of Alaska go out hunting on their own. The older men are not respected and are not involved. There is no patience, no silence. They go out to drink beer, laugh, joke, and make noise. When a sea lion comes, they scramble recklessly to get their guns and shoot it. They wound it, but they fail to kill it.

³ Leonard Sax, M.D., PhD., *Boys Adrift* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 123-126.

Then follows the worst of all outcomes: it swims off and dies. As Merculieff puts it, "They weren't watching the sea."

No one is teaching the young men to watch. In the ancient Alaskan tradition, young men and old men were together. They went out together. They came back together. They slept in the same underground men's houses together. In these small huts the men were bonded for a season, and the art of hunting was passed from one generation to the next. This is the story of mentorship; it is the act of guiding and showing a man how to watch, learn, and follow.

Mentorship describes the guiding influence of older adult men as well as whole communities of men. The word *mentor* relates to the Indo-European root *men*—which has to do with thinking. A mentor demonstrates ways to think about the world, ways to see the world, and ways to learn how to act in the world. Mentors are personally involved in showing a young man the way toward manhood while offering help as they make the journey together.

This is about more than just having an older man around. A father can be around his son and the young man can learn from the older, but *what* does he see and learn? Does he see a guy sitting on the couch with chips and a remote? Does he see a tech addict on his smartphone at the dinner table? Does he see a man treating his wife poorly? Does he see unapologetic selfishness? Just "being around" is not what we are talking about. We are talking about intentional actions. We're talking about being together for a purpose—to accomplish something real and meaningful together.

As seen in the native Alaskan story, young men learn from older men by spending intentional time together. Whether intentionally or unconsciously, they are learning something from them. When the older men are absent, when a father is absent, they learn something from that too. They reach puberty and begin to look for ways to leave their mother and head out. But who will show them where to go, what to do? They fill that absence with other influences. If a good man is not there to look to, something or someone will be there to influence our youth instead. This tends to be a gang or a group of young men who have similar experiences and who are feeling similar pains. This is why mentorship is needed.

A mentor does not have to be a much older man, and the relationship does not need to be formally classified as mentor-mentee. Mentors come in all

ages, all walks of life, and within all kinds of relationships. A friend can be a mentor, and so can a teacher, a co-worker, or a coach. An uncle can be a mentor. In fact, a whole community can act as a mentor. A whole congregation can become consciously aware and intentionally purposeful in the role it plays in helping young men up the mountain.⁴

Barna research demonstrates that one of the most influential factors among Millennials who stay engaged in church is having relationships with adults. “Those who stay were twice as likely to have a close personal friendship with an adult inside the church.”⁵

In contrast, those who did not have such a relationship were not likely to remain. “Seven out of ten Millennials who dropped out of church did not have a close friendship with an adult and nearly nine out of ten never had a mentor at the church.” According to the research of Christian Smith,⁶ one of the biggest impacts adults can have in the spiritual formation of the youth is simply to care. To be involved and to take an active interest in their lives does make a difference, even if it seems as if the youth don’t care that much. “New members of any society are always inducted into the group by elder members who form them in different ways to become active participants.”⁷

The two crucial contexts of faith formation among youth are the family household and the congregation family.⁸

In the words of Sax, “To become a man, a boy must see a man.” Manhood

⁴ In *Saving our Sons*, Gurian lists four rules of healthy male maturation. Rule number three is that boys need a three-family-system that expands into multiple other adults who create and maintain a “safe emotional container” for the boy.

The first family is mom and dad. The second family is extended family members and other closely attached individuals. The third family includes the individuals and groups who provide the scaffolding around the first two families. This includes teachers, counselors, clubs, and teams. Most basically for our context, the third family is a Christian congregation of caring adults.

⁵ <https://www.barna.com/research/5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church>.

⁶ *Souls in Transition: The Religious Lives of Emerging Adults in America*, Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, Oxford University Press, New York 2009.

⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 285.

⁸ In a section of *Souls in Transition* titled, “The Power of Socialization,” Smith comments that the idea that “parents of teenagers are irrelevant in the minds of the youth” is a myth and is totally false. He points out that youth want the input and engagement of parents and other adults. A church of adults who show they care and want to listen makes a huge difference (p. 284).

is not something that is inherently received. This is where boys and girls differ. For the most part, girls are brought into womanhood through biological changes. God prepares her body for bearing children and this is marked by monthly menstruation. She is brought into womanhood through her body's readiness to bear children. On the other hand, as Glenn Stanton with Focus on the Family puts it, "Manhood has to be passed on from one generation to the next. It does not come naturally." Manhood comes from outside and mentorship can supply the necessary influences to help this transition along in a healthy way.

Let's look at how these factors and this need for mentorship can impact a young man's climb up the mountain.

II. Mentoring Men up the Mountain Climb

A consideration of the life of King David makes the challenges and transitions of the mountain climb come alive. As a youth, David was with the sheep. He was the youngest son, and he learned the responsibilities and risks of being a shepherd from his older brothers. *"When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it"* (1 Samuel 17:34-35).

In this first phase of David's youth, he learned to work with his hands, to guard and defend the vulnerable lambs of the flock. He took the risks of battling lions and bears in order to tend to his responsibilities of taking care of his father's flock. At a young age, David knew risk and he grew in responsibility, two of the essential contexts for growth in young men.

What can we do to allow our boys to take on these challenges? Surely, they are not likely to face the life-threatening claws of a bear. But what can we ask them to do in order to protect, to provide care, to sacrifice?

The first climb up the hills to the foot of the mountain is a time to learn climbing. That is to say, it is a time to work with one's hands. Boys are hands-on, curious creatures.

Sticks for swords was the way that the young page learned knighthood in the Middle Ages. Sticks are still a ready tool for boys to pick up, to use in "battle," for building forts, and to be at the ready when the men-in-training go out on adventures. Getting outdoors and off screens is essential for growth, both mentally and physically. Putting hands in the dirt and making mud pies

gives experience in the things the Creator has made and provided. Building up and tearing down, cleaning up and organizing—there are so many skills for which young boys have capabilities if we can just make the time and space for them to experiment.⁹

One of the ministry efforts that we are trying to implement at our church is to offer the children (boys in particular) hands-on activities with older members of the congregation. In our Christian Day School we are working to set aside Friday afternoons for members to come and teach a “hands-on” life skill such as gardening and woodworking.

Do you have men in the congregation with certain specialized skills or interests that they could share with the boys? Remember, this is not just about grunting and grilling activities, but it is also about art and music. Classes such as these done in the right way can allow a boy to flourish. Even something as simple as thirty minutes when a boy is allowed to bang on a drum can be an outlet for boy-energy that otherwise would be pent up until it spills out in negative ways. Learning to use one’s hands and body in skills which bring glory to the God of creation will equip a boy to find happy fulfillment in hobbies and projects later in life.¹⁰

Getting high school students and college-age youth involved with hands-on ministry can make a significant difference. Usually by this point they have been confirmed and have completed the classroom studies that prepare them for their first communion. What they often lack is a chance to see this classroom knowledge put to use and applied to real-life situations in the world around them.

⁹ For more on the influence of tech on our youth, refer to chapter six of *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World*, John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, 2017.

In chapter six, Stonestreet refers to a book by Sherry Turkle: *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Basic Books, New York, 2017.

Also consult Dr. Kathy Koch's *Screens and Teens. Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2015.

¹⁰ Check out Brett McKay's personal mentoring story on the Art of Manliness website: <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/mentors-for-men>.

Jason Jimenez with Summit Ministries gives a talk on adult role models. He argues, based on his research, that the number one conviction of high school age youth is the desire to make a difference. Sixty percent of those interviewed said they want to impact the world. Seventy-six percent are worried about the planet. Twenty-six percent feel fulfillment by being involved in volunteer work. In short, they want to make a difference.

In our congregation, we are working on opportunities for service and fellowship. A youth group might volunteer at a homeless shelter or visit elderly members to help them clean up their yard. These activities require a motivated group of older members who want to get involved with this sort of youth ministry.

We are also making plans to invite adults to come and present life-talks with our young adults (ages 14-20). The topic may be simple like learning a hobby, or it might be serious like discussing drug abuse. Having men and women come who have lived through life experiences and are able to share their stories helps to show the young adults what the climb entails. Most importantly, they can learn from the adult world that perfection is not attainable—it is OK to fail, to make mistakes, and not to have all the answers. It is important to learn how to heal through the power of Jesus Christ.

Emerging adults have questions. They have doubts. They have struggles. Where can they go to talk about their addiction to pornography? To whom can they talk about their doubts whether Jesus is the only way or not? If it is not “safe” to share the spiritual conflicts they are having, and if they feel the adults don’t have those conflicts, then they will likely just fade away in despair or rejection. As John Stonestreet puts it, “In our experience, seekers become mockers if they’re not allowed to wrestle with their doubts.”

The question is not whether they have these questions, but to whom they are addressing these questions, if to anyone at all. If older church members share their own struggles and the questions through which they have lived, it will help the youth know that there is a place for them to struggle too. It is important for a congregation to make room for this practice of questioning and searching. “We share our mutual woes, / Our mutual burdens bear, / And often for each other flows / The sympathizing tear” (TLH 400:3).

One thing we make a point to do during the confirmation years is to visit other churches and observe their worship. We’ve visited a Greek Orthodox church, a nondenominational praise church, and a highly liturgical Episcopalian church. Parents have recognized that eventually the guardrails will be taken

down. Their children will meet people from other churches who worship and think in ways different from their own upbringing. This is a chance to guide them rather than guard them as they step off the path and meet people on other paths. Mentorship is more about guiding than guarding.

After David's early years of shepherding, there was a lot of climbing, running, and hiding when he was on the run from King Saul. He was in and out of caves. There was no certain path laid out for him to get to the throne of Israel to which God had anointed him. Instead, there was a series of battles, of conflicts, and of life-threatening betrayals. The very king whom he wanted to serve was trying to kill him. He had played the harp for Saul (1 Samuel 16:23) and had slain the giant (1 Samuel 17:51) to save Saul's kingdom. David should have been on his way upward, but there was an unseen enemy bent on halting the divine plans.

Along this treacherous way, David was not alone. Not only was the LORD steadily at his side, but God also gave David a friend and mentor, Jonathan. Jonathan was likely several years older than David; he may have been as much as twenty years older. Jonathan struck the balance between honoring his father, the fading king of Israel, and helping his friend David—the soon-to-be newly-crowned king. The Bible says that *“the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul”* (1 Samuel 18:1).

A soul-mate, such as Jonathan was to David, can be a life-saving gift from God to a struggling youth. An older friend is even better. A good friend can help a young boy navigate the dangerous world of emerging adulthood. A young man is running, hiding, and searching for his path to the throne where he will one day rule with Christ as a humble leader in our Lord's Church. A mentor is simply a friend who helps him safely find his way there.

One handhold at a time, the college age youth makes his climb. At this point, mom and dad can only do so much to help. One of the key elements of a young man's transition out of adolescence is that his parents let go. They are

no longer over him as supervisors, but they are now alongside him, more like consultants. If he wants their help, which basically all emerging adults do, they are there to assist.¹¹

Finding that older guide in the congregation who is a good and reliable friend can prove invaluable during this time. We can't program this into the ministry of the congregation. The younger-to-older friend/mentor bond happens on a personal, soul-knit level. The important part is that the mentor is someone who is guiding and not guarding. He is alongside the young man, taking him away from his childhood home. He is a bit outside of the safety zone and the guardrails to which the emerging adult is accustomed. These are mentors who show a young man what it all means—how to sacrifice, how to fall, and how to enter the cave.¹²

Perhaps the most important cave in which David found himself was the cave of lament. While hiding from Saul in the rocky crags of En Gedi, David wrote, *"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities have passed by"* (Psalm 57:1).

Again and again, David would return to those dark caves of sadness and hope where he would cry out his complaints. The darkest cave of all was not

¹¹ McConvile suggests a helpful rule of thumb: Help your twenty-something only up to 49 percent. Anything over that will hinder rather than help the transition.

Editor's Note: The clear blessings of Christian leadership via mentor beyond parents does not preclude the possibility that an emerging youth's strongest mentor may well be a parent, particularly a father for a young man. The extent of this depends largely on the kind of relationship that exists between a father and son. In some cases, the critical need of an outside mentor is reduced because the father-son relationship is so strong. Adding a non-parent mentor provides a wider breadth of experience and so forth for the young man, but it would be sad indeed if a parent disengaged because it was "now time for a mentor," or because he felt that he could not adapt and be the guide rather than the guard of his son's younger years.

¹² The cave analogy is an allusion to the wisdom poetry found in the Bible. In Job 28, Job steps outside of his ongoing dialogue with his friends to give this speech. *"Surely there is a mine for silver, And a place where gold is refined"* (Job 28:1). He uses the analogy of mining a cave to understand the mysterious search for wisdom in this world. It is not on the surface. One must go down deeper to understand the hidden mysteries of God. Answering the questions of suffering, the questions of "why?" involve us in the work of mining. A study on the wisdom literature and Job bears this out more fully and I believe it is integral to understanding the way of wisdom, the rule of Christ, and Christian discipleship for men in this world.

sought for safety from his enemies around him, but it was discovered because the enemy had penetrated his own soul.

David fell into this cave when the lust and laziness of his palace-gazing trapped him in the adulterous and murderous events of 2 Samuel 11. He lost track of himself. He lost track of his purpose as the king of Israel, and he lost track of his weakness as a sinful man. His lust was born out of his inattention to his own weakness. The power and prestige of his successful campaigns had rendered him lazy so that he did not go off to lead his men in war as he once did and as he should have done. The pride and pomp of his throne rendered him unaware of his weakness as a sinful man, leaving him open to lust for taking what was not his—another man's wife.

To address His wayward child, God sent a prophet. The prophet Nathan told a story. He told the parable of a rich man who stole away a poor man's lamb. David recognized this was a total violation of the honor of manhood, namely, to prey on the weak. Through that story, God led David to see the foolish failure of his kingly rule. He was a fallen man. Nathan was sent by God as another mentor in David's life. Nathan was the man who was needed to show David the fall and the cave.

The third phase of the path to manhood is the cave. While we cannot explore this fully here, let it be said that a young man needs to fall, needs to discover that he has failed on the first path—trying to get to the top of the mountain, which can never be done by fallen mortals. He must now enter the cave of the soul to learn what he is all about. Applying God's Word within "the cave," the young man will more deeply understand the LORD, and He will deal with his wounds and his shame.

For example, the statistics show that by the end of college, seventy percent of boys have been looking at pornography. This is a sad and almost unavoidable wound that most young men will experience. If they do not have someone to advise them, cleanse them with words of absolution, and show them a way forward, this can remain a nearly permanent sore. The painful wound that pornography inflicts will affect the man's future marriage and his relationship with his Lord for decades to come.

A mentor can be an uncle, pastor, an older friend, or a group of men. Each of these men can show how he has gone this way or that way and what it was like. Each one can tell the stories that will lead "David" to see that he needs to lament, cry, and call upon God for deliverance.

A mentor will teach the young man how to find those handholds—learn skills that will help him find hope and joy in the manifold gifts of God’s creation. A mentor-friend can help the boy to come back out of the cave as a man shaped by the healing work of Christ. He will see that Christ Jesus is by his side and in charge and ruling his life. He will be assured that the Lord has a purpose for him and that the way of Jesus is an amazing and enlightening experience. When a boy-turned-man comes out of the cave, he sees the world differently. He is then blessed to be able to come back down the mountain and help the next generation of young men make the journey anew.

III. Rites of Passage and a Practical Manual for Mentorship Ministry

So how does a mentor become involved? How does this happen on a practical level? It happens naturally, organically, and by the work of the Spirit. In this sense, it is not something that can simply be planned into a congregation’s youth ministry. Yet, this does not mean that we cannot put into action concrete, well-considered, scripted plans. An active ministry toward emerging adults can involve older men leading the way and getting involved in meeting younger members. It is my opinion that the best way to engage opportunities for mentorship to flourish and to nurture growth among our young men is to introduce and implement a rite of passage.

Rites of passage are important because they allow a boy to know something has changed and to have a tangible way of measuring how he is different before and after the rite. Rites of passage clarify the transition and make a clean break of it so that those involved know what it means. For example, “a man cannot be both married and unmarried, ordained and lay, dead and alive.”¹³

In our study we have seen that in the case of emerging adulthood, there is no clear transition. There are little changes along the way but no culminating event that marks the completion. A young man feels like he is both a boy and a man at the same time and does not know when he is fully accepted into the world of men. If they are done in a meaningful and intentional way, rites of passage can help our boys to know when they are accepted as men and what that acceptance means.

¹³ *Leaving Boyhood Behind: Reclaiming Catholic Brotherhood*, Jason Craig, Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, IN 2019 (Chapter 2).

By “intentional” we mean that the congregation—men in particular—become involved in this effort.¹⁴

Perhaps the most influential catalyst in helping a boy become a man is the involvement of older men in his life.¹⁵ This starts with an active group of men who meet regularly. It really starts with just two or three men in the congregation who are interested in being involved in this intentional planning and work. If you can manage a men’s group which meets in people’s homes or which goes on outings, you will be able to bring up these ideas. With just two or three reliable Christian men involved, a congregation can begin to make a difference at key points of their youths’ lives.¹⁶

During emerging adulthood (ages 13-30) there are certain key moments of transition. We will consider three important events at which point a transition is taking place. The first is confirmation. The second event is graduation from high school. The third event is acceptance into voting membership in the congregation, which usually requires the young adult to be at least eighteen years old. There is no one-size-fits-all package. Circumstances and gifts in the congregation will determine how to proceed and what may work.

Typically, confirmation is a congregation’s way of welcoming a young student into communicant membership and participating in the Lord’s Supper for the first time. This usually coincides with the completion of eighth grade and the sending off of the young man to high school. We may be used to a scripted question and answer format in order to complete this rite. Consider

¹⁴ In the early twentieth century, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) organized the Walther League to get the youth involved in discipleship, conferences, and volunteer work. Originally this began as an all male society, led by men and made up of young men under the age of twenty-five. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has made its own efforts in organizing a boy-scout-like program called the Lutheran Pioneers.

¹⁵ *The Washington Post* featured a series in which they interviewed black men aged sixty and over. These black men had core values which had been passed on to them from the previous generation: “Working hard is the basis of everything.” They called work the foundation for “dignity and manhood.” Thirty years ago young men would congregate at older men’s houses. “The neighborhood was like another mama and daddy” (Sax, *Boys Adrift*, 204).

¹⁶ “In the 1970’s the boys’ clubs shut down. Things changed. The teenage boys didn’t want to talk to the older men anymore. . . . When the boys’ clubs shut their doors, there was no other convenient venue remaining where grandfathers, fathers, and teenage boys from different families could come together, shoot the breeze and share their experiences. The typical American teenager doesn’t hang out with middle-aged adults on the weekend anymore. The typical American teenager hangs out with other teenagers” (Sax, *Boys Adrift*, 205).

how this time could also be used as an opportunity to let the confirmand express his faith in his own words. In our congregation we call it a “testimonial” (as in testifying to what your faith is) rather than an “examination.” We have the students present something of their own making: an essay on a biblical topic, a report on the building of a model tabernacle, a slideshow of biblical artwork which the student has studied, and so forth. This way the young student begins to take personal ownership of what he believes, and he learns to put it into his own words. In my experience, reading something is a lot less scary and more fulfilling than reciting answers from memory in front of a group of adults.

This transition is also a good time to help young men take on more responsibility in the congregation. In our congregation, already in sixth grade, the boys become acolytes by which they learn to light the candles and extinguish them at each worship service. They also assist the pastor during Holy Communion. Upon graduating eighth grade, the boys and girls become part of a youth group which is called “young adults.” The summer in which they complete their eighth grade year they are welcomed to participate in an annual youth Sunday worship service. The service is arranged by the young adults, and the young people take on different roles in the service. The eighth grade graduates usually begin with ushering and then, as they get older, they take on Scripture readings and prayers and eventually one might lead the liturgy or deliver the sermon. These young men should become familiar with ushering and be part of an ushering team already in high school. The parents need to be committed to the schedule for this to work. If we really wanted to enhance this rite of passage, we would include a formal blessing from the older men as the young man becomes part of the ushering team at the end of one of the worship services. Responsibility is a hallmark of growth into adulthood.

As the high school years pass by, the men of the congregation should keep track of these young men and make plans. The next event, namely, graduation from high school, is a time when a youth really knows that things are changing. It could be argued that a rite of passage is needed at this time more than at any other time in a man’s life, except for marriage.

The rites of passage that a young man begins to go through in the high school years and those that exist at the end of high school are mostly vague, lacking the right purpose, or are being directed by peers in an unhealthy way. This is the time for something intentional to be done before the years drift by and the twenty-something disappears, no longer comes to church, and no longer really cares.

The following is one example of a rite of passage for this time in a young man's life.

The goal was to welcome a son into a community of men. It was focused on a single young man who had just graduated from high school and was ready to head off to college.

There were a total of six men "hosting" the event—the father and five of his friends who all had a relational connection to the youth. The men met Friday evening at a friend's property in the mountains where they talked about the plan for the weekend and offered prayers for its success.

On Saturday morning, Joshua was dropped off by his mom at the entrance to the dirt road about a half mile from the property. He was told to bring nothing and wear old clothes. His mom gave him instructions to walk to the property (he knew the way) and follow the signs. As he walked he was slowly joined by men along the path. Each man asked him a question and said he should ponder these things: What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean for a boy to enter manhood?

When the boy and the men who had joined him on the path arrived at the destination, they were greeted by his father who set the stage for the weekend and asked his son for his answer to the questions. Over breakfast together they all talked more about this and how the key to this process was being welcomed to manhood by other men.

After breakfast they dove into a work project together on the friend's property. The goal was to build a gate to the property, using a tree Joshua had felled with his grandfather's ax as the top piece. The idea was to have a difficult project in which the men would all work together and leave a lasting mark and gift to the hosts.

That night over dinner the men nursed their wounds and had a really nice steak dinner around the fire. After dinner each man read to Joshua a letter he had written for him. Each had a pre-assigned topic that matched his personality and relationship with Joshua: creativity, faithfulness, work, fatherhood, planning/vision, family/husband. The intent was that each letter would be something that they could pray about that night and then also be something upon which Joshua could reflect. The night finished with prayer around the fire and a final invitation for Joshua to join the fellowship of men.

Whether you might do something just like this or adapt pieces of it, you can see the value in the intentional work of these men. What can you do to show the same love and interest in the young men who are reaching this transition in your congregations?¹⁷

The men would need to plan and experiment with this. Keep in mind, a rite of passage needs to be something more than just camping. To be effective, it needs some intentional actions and words involved to demonstrate to the young man that an important change is taking place. The summer following graduation is a good time for something like this to take place.

As men get involved in the emerging adult's life throughout high school and specifically in the graduation rite of passage, the young man will have connected with one of the older men who can act as a mentor through the confusing college years. This is a time when mom and dad will have to let go of some involvement in the young man's life. He will rely on his parents for support and advice, but it is important that other men are also helping to guide him up the climb at this point.

The third specific opportunity for men in the congregation to act intentionally is when a young man is given the right to vote. The age at which this happens is determined by a congregation's constitution and circumstance. Typically, the voting age is eighteen, but it could be part of a years-long process beyond age eighteen. If the young man has gone off to college, he might need to complete his college studies before returning and completing this last stage in finding his place among the men of the congregation. College transfers into a congregation would be handled in a similar way. The goal is to welcome young men into the circle of men who are involved in the leadership work of the ministry with an actual ceremony that acknowledges this transition.

If a group of men were to be involved in a high school senior-year rite of passage or several activities that stretched from high school into college, then the initiation into voting membership would be the culmination ceremony. Whether it happened right at eighteen or at twenty-five, we would want to let our young men know it is coming. We will want them to know that it will

¹⁷ Gregory Jantz offers helpful ideas for doing this. He tells the experience of putting his own son through a rite of passage in his church. He also offers resources for congregations to do something similar. Gregory L. Jantz, PhD and Michel Gurian with Ann McMurray, *Raising Boys by Design* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2013), chapter 11.

happen in church, or after a worship service, or at a voters meeting. There should be some sort of liturgy as well as prayers and blessings offered for the young man. It could involve the young man reading something or making a confession of faith. This is the sort of initiation that in ancient times would have taken place at age twelve or thirteen. Since the educational and societal structures have delayed the maturation process, something like this doesn't coincide with confirmation anymore. The right to vote offers the next and final event in which a young man can take part to acknowledge his acceptance into the congregation as a man.¹⁸

Conclusion

Our young men are getting stuck. Why would a young high school graduate be unwilling to finish the work of one class needed to move forward? In the example of the Native Alaskan men, we see how ancient traditions were purposeful in helping boys make their way forward and on up the mountain. The way to become a man and be accepted by the community of men was fairly clear and straightforward. The older men welcomed the emerging men along on the hunt. They experienced the risk of the hunt and the discomfort of the cold wilderness. They learned patience and silence. Most importantly, they saw what the older men were about. As the elderly Alaskan recalled, "It was learned by watching. We watched the older men and when they acted, we acted with them."

Many of the old traditions have been lost. The young men on the island are not watching. They are not following the older men and learning from them. They are not being immersed in the risky and difficult work of bringing home food and honor to their village. They are missing something significant. The role of older men being involved in teaching what it means to be a man is being lost. As a result, our young men are, likewise, becoming lost.

I believe this is where we can respond. There is a wealth of opportunity for parents and men in particular to become involved in guiding our young men out into the wilderness and showing them the way. They are watching already. They need us to come down from the mountain and get alongside them, to act

¹⁸ It would be helpful to have some pastors working on this and sharing their experiences. As we try out some of these ideas in our own congregation, I hope to put together "A Manual for Mentorship Ministry" which will bring together an outline of these ideas based on our experiences and feedback in our congregation. If other pastors would like to be involved and to share their thoughts and experiences, I would welcome the input.

with them. Let's learn what they are doing and thinking, and show them what we are doing and thinking. Let's offer them activities to work with us. Let's show them what a Christian man looks like, what he cares about, and what he struggles with. Best of all, let's pray with them. This doesn't have to be a formal ministry program. It is more about caring. Still, I am convinced that restoring rites of passage through intentional men's groups could go a long way to resolving our young men's fears and depression about reaching out for the next handhold.

More than anything else, we want to show our young men how to find hope. In response to the "deaths of despair," Aaron Kheriaty points out three major reasons why young Americans have lost their hope.¹⁹ For one thing, they have "lost the narrative of their lives." They've lost a sense of their part in a greater story to the point that many consider themselves among the "nones" of religious surveys. Our young men are watching. Let's show them how to live in that hope, to know their purpose, and to know they belong.

As Kheriaty puts it, "Hope cannot be delivered by a medical prescription." There is a greater story. The narrative of our lives is that we are part of the overarching God-story. This is born out of creation and although the creation groans with birth pains, we still see this life of the Garden breathing and singing all around us. We are "waiting on tiptoes" to see what God is preparing for us. *"Hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance"* (Romans 8:24-25). Even now we are living in the first sketch, a world redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which will be restored to the crystal river picture of a tearless Eden in the end.

The second thing he points out as the reason for hopelessness is that we have experienced a "weakening of social connections." In other words, young men are lonely. Let's remind them that we are part of a community born out of the Spirit. We belong to God's family. He is our Father and we are part of something eternal. The Holy Christian Church is an eternal family. We can bring that eternal homecoming image right into their lives, especially for the prodigal sons. Love these men and care about them as God cares for us. Then they will not feel alone, and they will be encouraged to take ownership of the community because the community has taken ownership of them. With the

¹⁹ Aaron Kheriaty, "Dying of Despair," *First Things*, Aug/Sept 2017 print edition (firstthings.com/article/2017/08/dying-of-despair).

help of the Lord, the older men can prove this to the younger men more than anyone else on earth.

Kheriaty says the last reason is a loss of the ability to value oneself. There is no transcendent understanding of worth. It is as if each thing is the same value as the next. There is no beauty, no ugliness, just neutrality. But we are worth something. Some of what we do is ugly. But what God does is always beautiful. His redemption of our lives is beautiful and it is a treasure beyond comparison. We were bought with a price. God's adoption covenant, declared in baptism, gives us eternal value and joins us to Christ. No matter what our peers say or what the world around us advertises, God has redeemed His own image through Christ and has put into us the gifts and potential for servant dominions in all walks of life. Let us discover those gifts, highlight their potential, and show these young men that they are worth something to God and to us.

As I was reflecting on the concerns for our young high school students at Immanuel Lutheran College (ILC), I asked an older man what could be done. He was a quiet man and pondered the question. What can be done? I'll paraphrase his response:

We need to learn that it's not about you. It's about God. Rules can keep us in line, but only the rule of God in your heart will really keep you. Only the working of the gospel can accomplish this. These young people hear the law quite a bit. In fact most of what they see all day is law. They need to know that the gospel is really as free as we say it is. These students might seem free-spirited, but they actually are not. God is the only one who sets them free. He is the only one who will really stick with them. At ILC we say that you make friends for life. That may be true, but it may not. Jesus is the true friend whom you can trust always in every situation. It's about God.

Now those are the words of a mentor.

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In Memoriam

Arthur E. Schulz, Jr.

(1929-2019)

Arthur was born November 24, 1929, at the Roseland Community Hospital on the south side of Chicago. His parents were Arthur E. Schulz, Sr. and Frieda (Buenger) Schulz. He was born just a few weeks after the Great Depression began. He was baptized into the name of the Triune God on December 22, 1929, at Zion Lutheran Church in Roseland by Pastor M. Piehler and thereby became a child of God and an heir of eternal life.

Arthur's family lived only briefly in Roseland and in pursuit of employment, they settled in the village of Elizabeth, Illinois. They became members of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church—affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)—where Arthur was confirmed by Pastor Erwin A. Wiedbush on June 27, 1943.

The Lord directed events so that Arthur would prepare for the pastoral ministry. In the fall of 1943, he enrolled at Concordia Lutheran High School and College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He graduated from high school on June 6, 1947. He graduated from college with honors on June 10, 1949.

Arthur continued his college education by going to the Concordia Seminary in St. Louis in the fall of 1949. Due to doctrinal issues, he transferred to Bethany Lutheran Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota—affiliated with the Norwegian Synod (now the Evangelical Lutheran Synod—ELS). There he continued as a student from September 1950 through May 1953. He learned fully to appreciate the wonders of the Gospel, through dedicated teachers such as Dr. Norman A. Madson, Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker, Prof. G. O. Lillegard, and others.

Following completion of seminary, Arthur received a divine call from Zion Lutheran Church, Tracy, Minnesota. He was ordained and installed into the pastoral ministry on December 13, 1953, by vacancy Pastor David L. Pfeiffer. Pastor C. M. Gullerud was President of the Norwegian Synod at that time.

On July 9, 1961, Arthur Schulz married Olaila Hanson, daughter of Pastor and Mrs. Clarence Hanson. Her father officiated at the wedding. The Lord blessed Pastor and Mrs. Schulz with their first daughter, Pamela Marie, on June 1, 1962.

During the synodical controversy, the Norwegian Synod voted to suspend fellowship with the LCMS in 1955. However, a complete severance was not made. As discussions continued, Arthur left his calling at Zion Lutheran Church in Tracy and moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where he joined the newly formed Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) via membership at Messiah Lutheran Church. Arthur received the call to serve Prince of Peace congregation in Hecla, South Dakota which was affiliated with the CLC. He accepted the call and was installed on July 21, 1963, by Pastor H.E. Rutz, of Jamestown, North Dakota.

The Schulz's second daughter, Karen Esther, was born on May 25, 1965.

Arthur received a call from congregations in Stoddard and Onalaska, Wisconsin, which he was led to accept. He was installed by vacancy pastor, Professor John Lau, on October 13, 1968.

During the following years, Arthur accepted two more calls. The first was to St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Stambaugh, Michigan, where he was installed on February 5, 1984, by Pastor Walter Schaller of Marquette. It was here that the old but beautiful parsonage burned with a fire that originated in the wiring.

Arthur accepted a final congregational call to Trinity Lutheran Church in Millston, Wisconsin, where he was installed on August 14, 1994, by Pastor Paul Gurgel. Arthur served at Trinity until his retirement on December 31, 2005. After retirement, he continued to be a member at Trinity, while living in Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

Arthur enjoyed translating many books and devotions from German to English. Arthur especially relished the pure gospel message—forgiveness and salvation in Christ. He was involved in doing indexing for the *Lutheran Spokesman*. He enjoyed time with his family and spending time on his computer.

Arthur Schulz departed this life on Wednesday, May 8, 2019, at the Black River Memorial Hospital in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. The length of his earthly journey was 89 years, 5 months, and 14 days.

On May 17, 2019, a service of committal service was conducted at Riverside Cemetery in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, followed by a memorial service of triumph at Trinity Lutheran Church in Millston.

Pastor: Richard Kanzenbah / **Hymns:** TLH 201, TLH 648, and two additional hymns printed below / **Organist:** Professor Emeritus David Lau / **Soloist:** Pastor Bruce Naumann / **Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 15:12-22, 51-58; John 11:19-27, 32-45 / **Sermon:** Psalm 73:21-26, **Theme:** No Better Guide, No Better Glory

A Friend

Written by Arthur Schulz

Tune: Azmon (TLH 281)

To me has come a Friend indeed,
Christ Jesus is His name;
In good days and in times of need
He always is the same.

This Friend is no mere mortal man,
No weak Defender here!
He rose from death, and now invites:
“All men, to Me draw near!”

Dear Jesus, Savior, heav’lly Friend,
Please guide me by Thy hand,
E’er keep me in the narrow way
To reach my fatherland!

Oh, How Blest Are Ye Whose Toils Are Ended¹

Living Christian

Oh, how blest are ye whose toils are ended,
Who through death have unto God ascended!
Ye have arisen
From the cares which keep us still in prison.

¹ This hymn is a conversation between a living Christian and a Christian who has died. The words of the living Christian were written in German by Simon Dach in 1635 and translated into English by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (cf. TLH 589). The words of the departed Christian were written in German by Paul Pfeffer during the years 1651-1710. This hymn was translated into English by Paul E. Kretzmann.

Christian who Has Died

Ah, indeed, I now have left forever
That sad world whose toil is prone to sever
From that sweet treasure
Which I now enjoy by Jesus' pleasure.

Living Christian

We are still as in a dungeon living,
Still oppressed with sorrow and misgiving;
Our undertakings
Are but toils and troubles and heart-breakings.

Christian who Has Died

From the dungeon of the vale of sadness
God has taken me to realms of gladness;
Life's tribulation
Cannot reach me in my heav'nly station.

Living Christian

Ye meanwhile are in your chambers sleeping,
Quiet, and set free from all our weeping;
No cross or sadness
There can hinder your untroubled gladness.

Christian who Has Died

No more now can grief and pain beset me,
Nor can sorrow, woe, or trouble fret me;
Jesus, my Savior,
Here surrounds me with His love and favor.

Living Christian

Christ has wiped away your tears forever;
Ye have that for which we still endeavor;
To you are chanted
Songs that ne'er to mortal ears were granted.

Christian who Has Died

Ah, what happiness has Jesus given
Since no weeping mars the joys of heaven!
Angelic voices
Sing the hymns in which my soul rejoices.

Living Christian

Ah, who would, then, not depart with gladness
To inherit heaven for earthly sadness?
Who here would languish
Longer in bewailing and in anguish?

Christian who Has Died

Sin and death are now left far behind me;
Tears of sorrow do not flow to blind me;
My home eternal
Has been given me by grace supernal.

Living Christian

Come, O Christ, and loose the chains that bind us;
Lead us forth and cast this world behind us,
With Thee, th' Anointed,
Finds the soul its joy and rest appointed.

Christian who Has Died

So farewell, then, all my friends and neighbors;
Do not faint beneath earth's pains and labors.
In faith united
You to heaven's home will be invited. Amen!



Exegetical Brief
The Interpretation of Psalm Eight

Arthur E. Schulz, Jr.

Psalm 8

To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath. A Psalm of David.

O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent is Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!
Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen—
Even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air,
And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent is Your name in all the earth!

Editor's Note: Pastor Schulz presented this exegesis as a pastoral conference paper in February 1986. Bible passages in the original work were quoted from the King James Version. In this reprint, the passages have been changed to the New King James Version.

That Psalm Eight refers directly, exclusively, and intentionally to the Messiah is evident from the two following lines of investigation.

I. The Internal Evidence

If the contents of the psalm are examined, it will be found that there are direct references to a superhuman and divine subject.

- A. The subject of the psalm is given a *name* which in other passages of Scripture is reserved for Christ, בָּנָן אֱלֹהִים, the Son of Man, υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.
- B. Divine *honor* is ascribed to this “Son of Man.” He is crowned with *榮耀* וְכָבוֹד וְחֶדֶר, glory and honor, two terms which are prevalently employed in the Old Testament of God.
- C. Divine *position* is likewise predicated to the subject of this psalm. In the second half of verse seven and following, it is stated that *כָל*, everything, without exception, is placed under His feet. Such an unlimited rule cannot be attributed to any mortal being.
- D. The psalm describes someone who was made to lack God; in other words, to be without God, for a time, and then to be crowned with divine glory and honor. This refers, evidently, as the New Testament also emphasizes, to the humiliation and subsequent exaltation of the Savior.

II. The External Evidence

This psalm is quoted in the following passages of the New Testament as being directly and exclusively messianic.

Matthew 21:15-16 — *But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’”*

The Savior, after receiving the homage of the children, applies the words of Psalm 8:2 to Himself and asks, “*Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’*” In other words, Jesus tells those who are with Him that they should not be displeased when the little children sing “Hosanna to the Son of David” to Him because just this was meant when David wrote Psalm 8:2. The situation seems to

indicate also that the Jews accepted this psalm as Messianic for not only did Jesus use this quotation without any explanatory introduction, but there is no protest registered on the part of those who heard the savior utter these words.

Hebrews 2:6-9 — *But one testified in a certain place, saying: “What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.*

In this passage, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 8:4a and refers these words directly to Jesus. First, he shows that Jesus is infinitely higher than the angels because the world has been put into subjection unto *them*, while it *has* been subjected to Jesus, according to the words of our psalm. “*You have put all things under His feet*” (Psalm 8:6). But beside showing this, the passage from Hebrews also explains the words of Psalm 8:5 directly of Jesus, “*We see Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor.*”

1 Corinthians 15:27 — *“He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.*

Here the apostle Paul stresses the הָבָד in the words of Psalm 8:6 which he quotes, “*He has put all things under His feet.*” The apostle unhesitatingly refers the psalm to Christ and demonstrates that when David wrote that “all things” were placed under His feet, “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

The Rationalistic Interpretation

Regardless of this strong internal and external testimony for the Messianic nature of Psalm Eight, higher criticism has generally rejected the Messianic interpretation and described the theme of the psalm as a contrast between “the glory of man as creature with the glory of the Creator.”

This interpretation will become impossible when it is realized, not only that the New Testament applies the psalm directly to Christ, as has been shown, but also that the statements of the psalm itself do not meet the requirements of this interpretation.

Granting for the moment that the psalm speaks of man, these rationalistic interpreters overlook the fact that it speaks of someone who is called an **אָנָשָׁן**—a weak mortal person—and that this **אָנָשָׁן** has been deserted by God. Therefore, when they speak of “the glory of man,” they ignore a very important part of the psalm. But the psalm does not simply speak of man, either in his lowliness or in his glory because the rule of everything—including the planetary system—is certainly not ascribed to man. This last can be stated only of Jesus.

The Typical Interpretation

Those who accept the typical interpretation of the psalm hold first of all, as do the rationalistic interpreters, that there is only an obviously indirect reference to Christ (the first and foremost being to the dignity of men). Some typical interpreters designate this as an incidental reference.

Calvin adopted this typical interpretation which, in principle, is also shared by von Hofmann and by Hengstenberg. With a noticeable inclination to his own peculiar “idealization” theory, Hengstenberg says, “Although David, in the first instance, speaks of the human race generally, the writer of the Epistle [to the Hebrews] might still justly refer what is said to Christ, in its highest and fullest sense. . . . The matter of this psalm can find its full verification only in the future; and for the present it applies to none but Christ.”

Hengstenberg and other strictly typical interpreters take the attitude that the New Testament quotations of this psalm are not quotations of fulfillment, but quotations which are merely adapted and applied to Christ as they might be (although with less force) adapted and applied to man. Hengstenberg says, “It is enough that the idea uttered in the psalm” is exemplified (not exclusively fulfilled as we claim) in Christ, and he asserts that it is incorrect to refer the whole psalm to Christ.

It should be noted, however, that the same reason which prevents the rationalistic interpretation of this psalm also excludes the possibility of interpreting it typically, first of man and then of Christ. In addition, there are the fundamental objections against the typical procedure which were pointed out before.

It should also be noted that while this psalm is thoroughly Messianic, it is also possible to have parallels in language in other psalms which are non-messianic. Thus, Psalm 144:3 contains a thought that is quite similar to what is found in Psalm 8:5. But the whole context of Psalm 144 is non-messianic.

“The Son of Man”

According to the direct Messianic interpretation of Psalm Eight which we have accepted, the expression **בָּן־אָדָם** must be explained as “the Son of Man”—not in the general sense in which this term is sometimes used in the Old Testament when it refers simply to man (e.g., Numbers 23:19, Job 25:6, Ezekiel 2:1), but in a very specific and individualized sense.

The specific reference of **בָּן־אָדָם** to Christ becomes evident from the following considerations.

The testimony of this psalm. Everything that has been said to prove the Messianic nature of this whole psalm indicates that **בָּן־אָדָם** in this psalm must refer to the Messiah. It has been shown that the subject is not “The glory of the Creator contrasted with the glory of the creature,” but that all of this psalm deals directly and exclusively with the Messiah.

The testimony of Daniel. The designation “Son of Man” is also applied to the Savior in the highly Messianic passage in Daniel 7:13-14.

*“I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom the one
Which shall not be destroyed.*

Here, the Messiah is called **בָּן־אָדָם**, the equivalent to the Hebrew in Psalm 8:5, **בָּן־אָדָם** and a world-wide dominion is accorded to Him, just as in our psalm.

The testimony of the New Testament. The “Son of Man,” was also a favorite name by which the Savior designated Himself. The four Gospel

accounts record the fact that Jesus, adopting this title for Himself in seventy-eight instances, speaks of Himself almost exclusively as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. This title implies that the Christ was a real man, yet of a very special class, hence the definite article, “*The Son of Man*.”

Dr. Stoeckhardt calls attention to Cremer’s remark to the effect that this designation is prevalently employed in the New Testament when the lowliness and humility of the Savior are to be emphasized. Thus we read, “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (Matthew 8:20).

There are, however, several passages in which this term is employed in the New Testament where the “Son of Man” in His exaltation is meant. For example, “*when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory*” (Matthew 19:28).

Both the humiliation and exaltation correspond strikingly with the “Son of Man” mentioned in Psalm Eight who was humiliated and then exalted.



The Leipzig Debate

Nathanael N. Mayhew

Why is the Leipzig Debate important?

Students of Martin Luther's theology are well familiar with the weaknesses of his early writings when he was still growing in his understanding of God's Word. While historians laud the significance and impact of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*, theologians see the *Ninety-five Theses* in a different light. At that time, Luther still had much to learn. From a historical perspective, the posting of the *Ninety-five Theses* was an event that created shock waves throughout Germany and Europe, and it marked the beginning of the Reformation. But, from a theological perspective, there were other events following October 31, 1517, that were of even greater importance in the history of the Lutheran Reformation.

One of these events is the Leipzig Debate which took place from June 27-July 13, 1519. This event may not be as familiar as the nailing of the *Ninety-five Theses*, or Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms, but this event was critical in the development of Luther's thought and understanding of the Scriptures in relation to the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Lutheran historian W.H.T. Dau writes that Luther's strong stand at Worms in 1521 was "due to the Leipzig Debate and the preparations for it."¹

It is time well-spent to consider once again this significant event in the life and spiritual development of Martin Luther. As we re-familiarize ourselves with the Leipzig Debate, we will consider its impact on the world both then and now.

Who was John Eck?

Luther was only one of several important participants in the Leipzig debate. Another man who played a prominent role was John Eck.

John Eck was three years younger than Luther. He was born on November 13, 1486, and given the name Johann Maier. In adolescence, he spent two years with his uncle who was a pastor in Rottenburg. His uncle recognized the

¹W. H. T. Dau, *The Leipzig Debate in 1519, Leaves from the Story of Luther's Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), VI.

young man's outstanding intelligence and academic ability and enrolled him in the University of Heidelberg at the young age of eleven.

It was during his time in Heidelberg that young Maier changed his name. It was customary at that time for students to do this, and Maier took the name of his birthplace. Since he was born in Eck, he became known as Johann Eck—a name that would become famous in Reformation history.

Before the first year ended, Eck left the University of Heidelberg and entered the University of Tübingen. There he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree just before his thirteenth birthday. He continued his education and added a Master of Arts degree within fifteen months.

Over the next four years, Eck studied theology and law at three different universities, being forced to move because of disease outbreaks. He finally settled in Freiburg, where he earned a Bachelor of Theology degree in 1505.

He was ordained a priest less than a month after his twenty-second birthday, but he needed to obtain a Papal dispensation because he was under the age that was required by canon law. Finally, he obtained a degree as a Doctor of Theology in 1510 at the age of twenty-three.

During these years, Eck earned a living by teaching. He became known for his oratorical ability and his skill at debate. One biographer described Eck as “a man of prodigious memory, torrential fluency, and uncanny acumen—a professional disputant who would post to Vienna or Bologna to debate the works of the Trinity, the substance of angels, or the contract of usury. Particularly exasperating was his propensity for clothing the opprobrious with plausibility and driving an opponent to incriminating conclusions.”² Eck gained a reputation as a gifted but aggressive and abusive debater. This demeanor hurt the relationships he had with many colleagues and motivated him to apply for a theology position at the University of Ingolstadt, where he would remain for the rest of his life.

Two other qualities of Eck may have contributed to his combative nature. As somewhat of a prodigy and one whose interests were quite diverse, he was both conceited and arrogant. These characteristics are demonstrated by numerous accounts from his life prior to meeting Luther. He also had a drive for notoriety and fame. Knowing these features of Eck's personality will help us better understand the events which led to the debate at Leipzig.

² Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Meridian-Penguin Books, 1995), 82.

Luther and Eck

The relationship between Luther and Eck started a couple of years before the debate and was completely unrelated to any thought of debate at the time. Eck first became acquainted with Luther through Christopher Scheurl, who taught law at the University of Wittenberg and was a former colleague of Luther, Melanchthon, and Carlstadt. Scheurl moved from Wittenberg to Nuremberg to take a position as a city counselor there.

Nuremberg is in southern Germany and only about sixty miles from Ingolstadt where Eck taught. Scheurl learned of Eck, met him, and even invited him to his home. Thinking that it would be beneficial to join these great minds, Scheurl introduced Eck to Luther and some of the other Wittenberg theologians by sending letters to his former colleagues. These introductions took place in early 1517, before the publication of the *Ninety-five Theses* after which Luther would become well-known in all of Europe. At this point, Luther was just another theologian and academic from the city of Wittenberg, but Eck was still excited to get to know Luther better. Throughout the coming months a number of letters were exchanged between Luther and Eck, and a friendship began to develop.

The friendship began to sour in September of 1517. Luther had prepared a series of theses on the dangers of scholastic theology, which was prevalent and commonly accepted in theological and academic circles of Roman Catholic Europe. This philosophy accepted the teachings of Aristotle without question, while viewing God's Word as inferior and without value. Due to his study of the Scriptures, Luther could no longer agree with such views. Luther shared these theses with friends and colleagues at other universities, but they were not well-received outside of Wittenberg.

In these theses we find a glimpse of the theology that was developing in Luther—the theology which would become a mark of the University of Wittenberg in the following years. In these theses Luther highlighted the total depravity of mankind and the utter inability of mankind to keep the law of God, as well as the total grace of God which accomplishes salvation for sinners solely through the work and merit of Christ. The theses also dealt indirectly with the authority of the church. His next set of theses would also speak to this issue, but from a different perspective. Concerning these lesser known theses of Luther, one historian has written: "These theses represented a fundamental

break with traditional theology, but the attack on the theory of a great institution aroused less attention than his attack on its practice was to do.”³

Luther passed these theses on to Scheurl to give to Eck, asking for feedback, but the requested feedback never arrived. This would not be the case with the next set of theses Luther would publish.

The Battle Begins

The heat began to rise in October when Luther published another set of theses, this time on the sale of indulgences. As with the previous theses, they were intended for discussion and debate among theologians and were considered by Luther to have nothing more than local significance. In his mind he was simply addressing a situation that had developed in his own backyard due to Tetzel’s selling of indulgences to the people of Wittenberg.

Luther penned the theses in Latin and did not intend for them to be spread to the common people. He had no idea the theses would have the impact they did. Luther did not even send these ninety-five theses to Scheurl or others to whom he had sent the previous theses. He sent them to the bishops who were in authority over him, simply out of courtesy, and with a request to help stop the sale of indulgences. Interestingly, no one even came to debate the topic. But the publishing of the *Ninety-five Theses* spread far and wide. Like dominoes neatly arranged, the *Ninety-five Theses* set off a series of events that would change the political and spiritual landscape of the western world.

One of the bishops to whom Luther sent a copy of his theses was Albert of Mainz. Ironically, it was Albert who was Tetzel’s “handler” and who had given Tetzel permission to sell the indulgences which caused Luther such consternation. Albert gave the theses to the theologians of Mainz, asking for their opinion. He then sent a copy of the *Ninety-five Theses* to Rome with a request that Luther be dealt with as a heretic.

Once Luther was charged with heresy by the pope himself, the head of Luther’s Augustinian order organized a disputation at Heidelberg in April of 1518 for Luther to present his doctrine to his fellow Augustinians. Here he avoided the topic of indulgences and focused instead on theology and a critique of Aristotle. As a result of this presentation, he was able to win over important supporters through his thorough and persuasive arguments. The

³ Lewis W. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation 1517-1559* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 75.

pope would have demanded that Luther be turned over to Rome, but with an upcoming election for Holy Roman Emperor, the pope needed Elector Frederick's support and wanted to do nothing to estrange him.

When Eck finally read a copy of Luther's theses in the early months of 1518, he saw it as an opportunity. He boldly announced that he would be eager to debate with Luther on this topic. Eck also published a rebuttal to Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*, which he called *Obelisks*. This was a jab in itself, since an obelisk was a typographic symbol which was used at that time to note something which was false.

Eck's rebuttal was not a constructive, measured criticism of Luther's work, but rather, personal and vicious in nature, even calling Luther names. This attack came as a complete surprise to Luther, who thought that Eck was sympathetic to these concerns. He was also hurt by Eck's approach, which seemed to publicly oppose and even humiliate Luther, instead of writing to Luther directly about his concerns and disagreement.

One historian's description of the nature of this battle well summarizes not only the events that we are discussing, but the Reformation as a whole. "This was a war, more than anything, about authority. . . . On the one side was the pope's unquestioned and illimitable authority. On the other was the authority of the Scriptures."⁴

Luther did not want to reply to Eck's *Obelisks*, but he was encouraged by his Wittenberg colleagues to respond to Eck's attack. In May, Luther composed a rebuttal which he called *Asterisks*. This was an appropriate title for a response to *Obelisks*, for an asterisk was a typographic notation that indicated that whatever was marked in such a way was of great importance. Luther, in contrast, did not make his *Asterisks* public, but sent them privately to Eck, hoping to settle the dispute in a Christian manner. While this may have eventually calmed matters down between the two men, a new development added fuel to the fire.

From Luther to Carlstadt

Unknown to Luther, his colleague Andreas Carlstadt had taken it upon himself to respond to *Obelisks*. Carlstadt composed 406 theses against Eck's *Obelisks*. Unlike Luther's measured response, Carlstadt's theses were strong and harsh, making matters worse.

⁴ Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 130.

When Luther learned of Carlstadt's theses, he again tried to prevent the matter from escalating by sending a letter to Eck and asking him to reply to Carlstadt calmly. Eck seemed to follow Luther's advice. He replied to Carlstadt's theses in August with what he called his *Response*. In it, Eck proposed two options for dealing with their disagreement. The first was that either Eck or Carlstadt's propositions be submitted to the pope for a verdict, or that a public debate be held between the two of them. He suggested that the debate be held at the University in Rome, Paris, or Cologne in April of the following year. This suggestion marked a new stage in the development, which would culminate in Leipzig the following year.

Over the next few months, letters were sent back and forth between Eck and Luther as they worked out details for a public debate. Luther became the coordinator on the Wittenberg side, representing Carlstadt, who had been challenged to debate. The men in Wittenberg were not in favor of the three locations Eck had presented and suggested the Universities of Erfurt or Leipzig instead. Finally, Eck chose Leipzig for the location, and both he and Luther began to work on securing permission for the debate.

Operation Leipzig

If you are familiar with the historical backdrop in which the Reformation was set, you may be aware of the role political maneuvering played during this time. The relationship between the church and the state complicated matters and was primed for manipulation from a human perspective. There is an example of this in the background leading to the Leipzig debate. How thankful we can be that the LORD works though the self-interest of men to bring about His intended purpose!

The University of Leipzig was under the control of Duke George of Albertine Saxony. As divine providence would have it, Duke George was a cousin to Elector Frederick the Wise, ruler over Wittenberg. Sadly, there was an unhealthy rivalry between the two that was handed down from their fathers.

When Leipzig was chosen as the location for the debate between Eck and Carlstadt, Eck wasted no time in sending letters to the University and to Duke George, requesting permission to hold the debate in Leipzig. Luther also wrote to the University for permission. Duke George saw this as an opportunity to upstage the University of Wittenberg, since his theologians at Leipzig would be the judges of the debate. But not everyone felt as he did. The theologians at Leipzig University wrote to Duke George telling him that they thought it best to

remain neutral in this debate on indulgences and the authority of the church and to decline the request to host this controversial event.

Duke George was angered at his weak-kneed theologians and was brutally harsh in his response to them, essentially overruling them and forcing them to comply. Aside from the theologians, the other University leaders at Leipzig were supportive of the debate. As a last-ditch effort to prevent the debate, the Leipzig theologians reached out to their regional bishop. The Bishop also was opposed to the debate, stating that Duke George had a duty to the church to prevent the debate from taking place.

The back-and-forth continued for several months into January of 1519. Finally, the bishop played his final card and warned that the debate could not be allowed since the pope had forbidden any public discussion on the *Ninety-five Theses*. Still, Duke George refused to concede and demanded that his Leipzig University make plans to host the debate, shrugging off any potential fallout from Rome. "The theological debate between Eck and Carlstadt, therefore, was arranged without the consent and against the wishes of the Leipzig theologians and the ecclesiastical powers. It had been anathematized in advance."⁵

More Theses

Eck, who had been in regular correspondence with Duke George since October, must have been confident in the final outcome of this decision. Already in December, Eck prepared and published *Twelve Theses* as the subjects to be debated at Leipzig. Eck requested that the debate begin on June 27, 1519. As a master debater, Eck prepared his *Twelve Theses* and framed them in a way that he thought could not be defended without certain condemnation from Rome. In his theses, Eck included the issue of the authority of the pope which would certainly solidify the downfall of the Wittenberg theologians.

Even though Carlstadt was the supposed debater from Wittenberg, Eck's *Twelve Theses* made it very clear that Luther was the real target. Luther could see this as clearly as everyone else. In February, Luther replied with twelve counter-theses, the first time Luther had publicly published anything against Eck. Finally, Eck came clean and admitted that his theses were directed at Luther, not Carlstadt. Eck reworked his *Twelve Theses*, adding a new one to

⁵ Dau, p. 57.

bring the total to thirteen. The title of these new theses included the name of Luther and made no mention of Carlstadt. Luther once again parried with counter theses which were published in May.

Though Luther had been cautious in his correspondence with Eck throughout this period, we see a different Luther emerge in his thirteen counter-theses. He didn't pull any punches in this rebuttal. He addressed the controversial topics of good works, purgatory, and indulgences as well as the even hotter topic concerning the authority of the Roman Catholic church and the papacy. Many of Luther's colleagues tried to get him to drop the issue of papal and church authority, but nothing could dissuade him. Eck brought up the subject in his theses and now it would have to be addressed. "In his mind, there was no doubt that the truth would win, whatever became of him. He had not asked for this fight, but neither could he hide from it. The more he saw that the facts were on his side, the more emboldened he was to present them, to uphold the truth. What especially irked him was the idea that the church — and Eck — were twisting the Scriptures to make their silly points."⁶

And so, the stage was set for debate. Only one question remained: Who would meet Eck on the stage?

(to be continued)



⁶ Metaxas, p. 168.

Book Reviews

David T. Lau

John E. Helmke: *Philipp of Hesse – Unlikely Hero of the Reformation*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2018, paperback, 229 pages.

Throughout Martin Luther's career as a reformer of the church, he enjoyed the protection of his Saxon rulers: Frederick the Wise, John the Steadfast, and John Frederick the Magnanimous. We could call all three of these rulers heroes of the Reformation, since without their protection Luther would not have survived his powerful enemies in both the empire and the Roman church. God wanted Luther's teachings to be given the opportunity to establish themselves in the minds and hearts of the German people and therefore provided him with the protection he needed.

But very early the Saxon electors enjoyed the support of the very young Philipp of Hesse (1504-1567), who was named landgrave of Hesse when he was only thirteen years old. Still a teenager, Philipp visited Martin Luther shortly after he arrived at Worms for the famous Diet of Worms (1521). When Luther refused to recant his writings and was declared an outlaw, Philipp gave safe passage to Luther as he traveled through Hessian territory after the Diet. It was not long before Philipp became a Lutheran. The other Philipp—Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's associate—explained Christian doctrine to Philipp by means of a little pamphlet called *Epitome*. By 1525 it became clear that Philipp of Hesse was a convinced Lutheran as he made plans to reform the Christian churches in Hesse.

However, Philipp's plans were complicated by the fact that through a marriage arranged before his intended wife was even born, Philipp's father-in-law turned out to be Duke George of Saxony, a fierce foe of Luther and everything Lutheran. George's daughter Christine became Philipp's wife in January of 1524.

By this time the Reformation was making good progress, and the various states of Germany were either siding with the Reformation or against it. Duke George led the way in forming an alliance of princes opposed to Luther. Philipp of Hesse responded by organizing an alliance of Lutheran princes, including John the Steadfast and his son, John Frederick. At the Diet of Speyer in 1526, Philipp took the lead among the Lutheran princes. The Diet was a great success for the Lutherans because it was resolved unanimously that "every State shall so live, rule and believe as it may hope and trust to answer before God and his imperial Majesty" (p. 56).

With the help of Luther, Melanchthon, and a theologian named Francis Lambert, Philipp made great strides in reforming the churches of Hesse in 1526 and 1527. He even succeeded in establishing a non-Catholic university in Marburg—and still he was only twenty-three years old.

But there were several problems in the Lutheran alliance that Philipp championed. First of all, Philipp believed a lie about a Catholic plan to attack the Lutherans and overreacted in attempting to thwart the non-plan. Confidence in him as a leader waned. Philipp also was being influenced by Martin Bucer of Strasburg, who differed from Luther in his understanding of the Lord's Supper and was always trying to find common ground between Luther and Zwingli.

Several incidents in 1529 brought matters to a head. The emperor and his Catholic allies were determined to bring about unity in the empire. At the Diet of Speyer in 1529, they submitted a proposal that heavily favored the Catholic position over against the Lutherans. Philipp of Hesse and five other non-Catholic princes and fourteen cities “protested” against the Catholic proposal and as a result were called *Protestants*. The name has stuck.

Shortly after the Diet of Speyer, Philipp of Hesse arranged a colloquy at Marburg in an attempt to establish unity between the followers of Luther and Zwingli. The result of this colloquy was a written agreement on almost all doctrines, except the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Author Helmke asks the question: “Are we to fault Philipp for attempting that which seemed humanly impossible, to bring to consensus two theological titans against their will? No option was suggested for them to part agreeing to disagree. That would have been unthinkable even for Philipp. Zwingli and Oecolampadius were no less inflexible when holding their position than Luther and Melanchthon were in holding their own” (p. 93).

Because of the failure of the Marburg Colloquy to establish agreement on the Lord's Supper, the Protestants were not united at the Diet of Augsburg of 1530. Martin Bucer and Ulrich Zwingli and their supporters each submitted their own confessions. Philipp of Hesse, however, and several other Lutheran leaders signed the *Augsburg Confession*, written by Melanchthon with the help of Luther and others.

Even though he was still a young man, twenty-five years old at the Diet of Augsburg, Philipp now was a recognized leader of the Lutheran party, together with Elector John of Saxony and his son, John Frederick, who also signed the *Augsburg Confession*. In the decade that followed, Philipp moved reform forward in his own territory and proved to be an able leader otherwise as well. The Anabaptists, who opposed infant baptism, had to be dealt with, and

Philipp distinguished between those who were disturbing the peace and those who obeyed the law, showing considerably more restraint than most of the other leaders.

But Philipp had one weakness that threatened to destroy all of his accomplishments as well as his own eternal salvation. His marriage with Christine did not satisfy his sexual urges, even though the record indicates that he fathered ten children with her in the course of their long marriage, and it seems she died as she was giving birth to an eleventh child. His father-in-law George learned that Philipp made a habit of visiting prostitutes early in his marriage and could not seem to resist this temptation. Seeking advice from others, including Luther and Melanchthon, Philipp concluded that the best course of action for him was to marry a second wife, one whom he truly loved. Helmke explains: "Melanchthon had no problem with Philipp's request (to marry a second wife). Seven years earlier he had made his position on bigamy clear to Henry VIII. Luther gave Philipp his approval but added words of caution. Both Luther and Melanchthon stipulated that the wedding was to be kept secret. For them, it was a confessional situation. Philipp had confessed his sin, received absolution, and asked for their advice. Now he was to treat their permission with all the confidentiality of the confessional" (p. 139).

The wedding of Philipp and Margarethe took place in secrecy, with Melanchthon and Bucer as witnesses. But it did not remain secret. "The rumors spread like wildfire. Philipp had dared to insult the emperor by ignoring his decree of death for anyone found guilty of bigamy. By his rash and insensitive act, Philipp had put both himself and the future of the Reformation in great danger" (p. 140). Once this second marriage became known, Philipp did not attempt to annul either his first marriage or his second. He continued to live as husband to both wives. But Christine insisted that the two wives and their families would remain separate from each other and live in separate homes in separate cities. Philipp divided his time between them. In 1541 "both wives conceived and gave birth nine months later to healthy sons. Margarethe was now nineteen. Her son was born on March 12, 1542. Christine was now thirty-five. Her son was born forty-two days later, on April 22. Both sons were named Philipp" (p. 153).

After the secret was out, Luther and Melanchthon found it difficult to explain their advice. Philipp continued to defend his bigamy and did not repent of it. Helmke relates: "Philipp was bitter about Luther's refusal to support him. He felt he had followed Luther's well-known advice published twenty years earlier when he wrote that he hated divorce and counseled bigamy in special

cases. . . . Melanchthon had also served as a witness at the wedding that he and Luther were now rejecting as immoral. Philipp felt abandoned" (p. 148). This certainly was not a shining episode for Luther or Melanchthon.

Even though Philipp was disappointed with the reaction of Luther and his associates, he continued to support the Lutheran teachings in the years that remained. Helmke uses the wording "unlikely hero" to describe Philipp because of this scandal and others. As a signer of the *Augsburg Confession*, Philipp was a hero of the Reformation. Also in the war that followed Luther's death in 1546, Philipp was a hero by his refusal to give up his loyalty to Luther's teaching. The emperor's forces won the Schmalkald War against Philipp and John Frederick and their league. Both Philipp and John Frederick were held as prisoners until 1552. Philipp's release came about through the intervention of his son-in-law, Maurice of Saxony, who had turned against the emperor. By this time Christine was no longer alive, and the rule in Hesse had been turned over to his oldest son, Wilhelm IV.

As far as the struggle between Lutherans and Catholics was concerned, the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555 "provided that rulers could choose either Catholicism or Lutheranism as their religion and that of their people. Those subjects that refused to accept their ruler's religion were free to move to a land where the ruler was committed to their choice of faith. Only Catholicism and Lutheranism were recognized in 1555. Anabaptists and Zwinglians were excluded, and the Reformed movement was not strong enough to be recognized at the time" (p. 191). Also in 1555, Philipp's daughter Agnes was married to the son of Philipp's ally and fellow-prisoner John Frederick of Saxony.

Margarethe, Philipp's wife, preceded him in death by eight months. She died in July of 1566, and he in March of 1567—just ten years before the publication of the *Formula of Concord*, which brought a blessed end to most of the theological controversies among the Lutherans and established Lutheranism's confession of faith as distinct from the Reformed.

Helmke's very interesting biography of Philipp of Hesse establishes the truth without a doubt that all the heroes of faith, beginning with Noah and Abraham, had their serious flaws, including Philipp of Hesse and also Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. But, as it is written, "*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*" (Romans 5:20). Philipp's only hope was that grace of God in Christ, as is true of us also.