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The Juvenilization of American Christianity

by Thomas E. Bergler

“Governed by elders,” Presbyterians are those who, by definition, place a premium on mature leadership. Yet maturity is not valued as highly among Christians in America today as it once was, either as a quality of leadership or as a goal of the Christian life. Instead, qualities of youth, such as energy, enthusiasm, idealism, spontaneity, etc., are seen by many as more desirable. Granted, maturity can be overrated. But how did this come to be? To answer this question, Thomas Bergler, Professor of Christian Thought and Practice at Huntington University, Indiana, wrote The Juvenilization of American Christianity (Eerdmans, 2012), which won Christianity Today’s Award for Best Book in Church/Pastoral Leadership in 2013. Tom continues to wrestle with how juvenilization occurred and with how churches should try to address its challenges. In the following pages, he summarizes some of his main points and in the next issue of Theology Matters he will offer us further insight into how juvenilization might be addressed.

Richard Burnett, Managing Editor

Over the past seventy years teenagers and youth ministers have made the churches in America more adolescent in their beliefs and practices. This juvenilization of American Christianity has both revitalized the church and fostered spiritual immaturity. The necessity of appealing to young people by adapting the faith to their preferences opens up the possibility that Christians will stay stuck in adolescent modes of relating to God. It does not help that most new youth ministers are emerging adults who are groping their way through an ambivalent transition to adulthood. Meanwhile, the very nature of adulthood is changing in ways that make the adult journey more similar to the adolescent search for

identity, belonging, and emotional comfort. As a result of these factors, Christians of all ages are tempted to engage in life-long, individualistic self-definition projects in which the church is just one more product to consume and spiritual maturity is optional.

To meet the challenges of juvenilization and the new immature adulthood, youth ministry educators need to equip youth ministers to be discerning cultural gate keepers for the church. They need to develop a more sophisticated, realistic theology of culture that sees the church as of intrinsic value. Youth ministers need to be practical theologians who can use a well-developed theology of spiritual maturity to evaluate and reform their ministry practices.

Christian Youth Groups

The history of youth ministry in America over the past seventy years shows that the old saying “youth are the future of the church” is literally true. Attending tonight’s youth group meeting is like jumping into a time machine and visiting the church of the future. For example, everything Bill Hybels did in growing Willow Creek Community Church was already being done in the Youth for Christ rallies of the 1950s. This parallel is not just a coincidence. Hybels honed his skills in creating a seeker-sensitive church while he was a youth minister.¹

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Juvenilization is the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages. The juvenilization of American Christianity has had revolutionary effects. Church life today is more informal, emotionally intense, and entertaining than it was in the 1930s and 1940s. Adults now commonly praise the idealism, passion, or spiritual searching of young people as the gold standard of spiritual authenticity. Christians of all ages participate in work camps and mission trips in unprecedented numbers. Most believe that churches should be involved in racial reconciliation and other social or political causes. Many think that “falling in love with Jesus” is a great way to describe the Christian life. Millions assume that the primary role of God and the church in their lives is to help them feel better about their problems.² Pastors try to plant and grow churches by studying the local culture and “felt needs” of the people they are trying to reach. In sharp contrast to other western nations, church attendance and belief in God have remained at high levels in the United States over the past fifty years.³

These and many other changes in American church life began as experiments in youth ministries in the 1940s and 1950s. Youth environments seemed to some adults to provide a safe place to quarantine and contain threatening changes like rock music or racial integration. Other youth leaders tried to sneak changes into the church using young people as a Trojan horse. Meanwhile, by threatening to vote with their feet, teenagers pressured adult leaders to provide youth-friendly versions of Christianity. No matter what adults intended, youth ministries digested youth culture and sent its nutrients, and sometimes its poisons, into the church.

The rise of universal secondary education and the emergence of a new and more pervasive commercial youth culture during the 1940s created the central dilemma of juvenilization. Churches could adapt to youth culture at the risk of creating an immature faith or they could ignore youth culture and potentially forfeit the interest and commitment of the young. Unfortunately, most youth leaders of the day did not realize what was at stake. They were distracted by frightening current events like the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War which many people of the day lumped together under the label “the crisis of civilization.” Since Hitler and Stalin had supposedly ridden to power on the backs of young people, a wide spectrum of Americans believed that only by solving the “youth problem” at home could civilization be saved.⁴ But if civilization might be destroyed any day, why worry about the long-term effects of remaking the church in the image of youth?

Four basic approaches to youth culture and juvenilization emerged in the 1950s. By actively trying to mobilize young people to save the world, the youth ministries of this era helped millions of young people come to faith and believe that they could make a difference in their world. But each youth organization’s way of adapting to youth culture also had negative long-term effects on the churches it was trying to serve.

Evangelical youth leaders adapted to youth culture the most aggressively. They promised teenagers that they could have fun, be popular, and save the world at the same time. Billy Graham, who got his start as an evangelist while working for Youth for Christ, told teenagers in the 1940s that “the young people around the world today who are having the best time are the young people who know Jesus Christ.” Promises of happiness and popularity were common in Youth for Christ circles during the 1950s.⁵ Young Life founder Jim Rayburn insisted “it’s a sin to bore a kid.”⁶ Evangelical adults demanded that teenagers abstain from drinking, smoking, petting, dancing, Hollywood movies, and rock and roll.⁷ They also urged teenagers stand up for Jesus at school and witness to their friends. But in return, teenagers demanded a sanctified youth culture that included “funspirations,” “singspirations,” Bible quiz competitions, senior banquets to replace the prom, Christian movies, Christian pop music, Christian celebrities, and even a Christian hot rod club called the Boltin’ Bishops.⁸ Leaders justified this youth culture Christianity by asserting that YFC was not a church and its rallies were not church services.⁹ But by the 1960s, musical pioneer Ralph Carmichael conceded to his fellow YFC leaders that whatever music people sang at the time of their teenage conversions would be the music they would want to sing in church for the rest of their lives.¹⁰ He was right. Over time, most beliefs and practices that began in Evangelical Christian youth environments migrated into the adult church.

Evangelical youth leaders, much like those who market the church today, claimed they were not changing the content of the faith. But here is what one teenage member of Youth for Christ said in an interview about Elvis Presley. “The fact of the matter is, I’ve found something else that has given me more of a thrill than a hundred Presley’s ever could! It’s a new friendship with the most wonderful Person I’ve ever met, a Man who has given me happiness and thrills and something worth living for.”¹¹ Although it may have been good that this girl did not swoon over Elvis, she did speak for millions of young Evangelicals who were coming to believe that the ideal Christian life should be characterized by frequent emotional “thrills” and “happiness.” Perhaps because Evangelicals believed so strongly in a “personal relationship” with Jesus as the center of Christianity, they did not question what might be lost when that

relationship was equated with an erotic, emotional attraction to a teen idol.

As a result of their aggressive juvenilization, Evangelical churches have done better at keeping their children in the faith and have therefore grown relative to Mainline Protestant churches.¹² Evangelical Christianity is also less dour and legalistic today than it was in the 1930s and 1940s. On the other hand, Evangelical Christians have higher expectations that church will be entertaining, emotionally fulfilling, and otherwise tailored to their preferences than ever before. These expectations make it harder for church members to make sacrifices to pursue spiritual growth. Evangelical youth ministries helped create the therapeutic American culture religion which runs counter to the biblical call to spiritual maturity.¹³

At the opposite extreme, many influential Mainline Protestant youth leaders avoided grappling with the preferences of young people and assumed they could easily co-opt their energy for a social action crusade. At national conferences, Methodist teenagers formed interracial friendships and learned about the evils of segregation.¹⁴ At camps in North Carolina and Arkansas, young Methodists boycotted meals and other activities when camp leaders refused to house African American speakers on the grounds.¹⁵ Methodist teenagers participated in interracial work camps that on at least one occasion provoked threats of violence from the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁶ Perhaps because some young people seemed more open to racial integration and other progressive political causes than adults, Methodist youth leaders came to idealize teenagers and their supposedly innate political progressivism. Addressing a 1952 meeting of the National Conference of Methodist Youth, student leader George Harper praised young people as a natural “opposition party” in church and society but warned that “the followers of the easy life will never extend freedom in today’s world; they won’t even keep it for themselves.”¹⁷ As Harper’s remarks hint, millions of Mainline Protestant teenagers were more interested in living a normal middle-class life than in making sacrifices to change the world. While this fact should surprise no one, Mainline Protestant youth leaders of the era seemed mystified by it. For the national Methodist youth convocation of 1959, a planning committee made up of adults and young people concocted a mix of jazz, modern dance performances, drama, existentialism and explorations of the poetry and spirituality of the “beatniks” to try to shake up the “silent generation.”¹⁸ This hip Methodism was certainly entertaining and controversial, but it won few converts to the liberal political agenda.¹⁹

In a letter to Youth Department leaders complaining about the conference, Rev. John N. Grenfell of

Wisconsin wondered why the church could “discard” its programs of evangelism because of their “emotional appeal” and yet replace them with interpretive dancing and jazz. “Since when did jazz fail to have any appeal or stimulation for the emotions?” he asked.²⁰ Grenfell was closer to the mark than even he may have realized. For some time Methodist youth leaders had been distancing themselves from what they regarded as the outdated and hopelessly conservative spirituality of revivalism. But they had failed to create an equally compelling spirituality that could sustain social gospel Christianity.²¹ Instead, they turned to jazz and existentialism as a substitute for Christian spirituality.

After several decades of trying to mobilize “naturally” idealistic teenagers for social action, progressive Methodists grew understandably frustrated. As early as 1960, it became commonplace for national Methodist youth leaders to argue that teenagers needed to be “free to rebel.” They complained that Christians had been too concerned with “preserving an institution” and needed to move out into the world.²² This view that set spiritual authenticity and the institutional church in opposition to one another took hold among liberal Protestant leaders well before the dramatic days of the late sixties “youth rebellion.”²³ But encouraging the anti-institutional sensibilities of adolescents turned out to be a bad way to help them love the church.

The most progressive young Methodists learned from their leaders to see the church as a hindrance to the work of social justice. John Newman served as a Methodist youth representative to the civil rights movement in the early sixties. He doubted that the Methodist Youth Fellowship could work with civil rights organizations or “any other social or political action group” because the average Methodist teenager only knew “his own middle-class white ‘churchy’ world.”²⁴ Meanwhile, those young Methodists that John Newman criticized found few compelling activities in their churches that could capture their imaginations and loyalty. As a result, even though Methodist youth programs were right to oppose racism and segregation, they failed to win the loyalty of subsequent generations, leading to numerical decline in the church over time. Attempts to juvenilize the church through idealizing teenage politics and deploying edgy entertainment failed. To this day, Mainline Protestants commonly idealize the power of young people and underestimate the need for intense spiritual formation in order to mobilize teenagers for activism. A good cause is not a substitute for a compelling adolescent faith environment. It is even possible to juvenilize the faith without appealing to young people.

African American leaders did not form separate youth groups as often as white churches did. Instead, they mobilized young people for the civil rights movement

by calling on them to be even better Christians than their parents. Ironically, it was some of these same young people who eventually rejected the black church culture of Christian maturity in favor of a juvenilized politics of protest.

One of the most common youth activities in the black church was a monthly Youth Sunday in which young people played prominent roles in the worship service. Pastors like Kelly Miller Smith of First Baptist Church in Nashville used these monthly opportunities to encourage young people to devote themselves both to a personal relationship with Jesus and to the cause of racial justice. For one Youth Sunday, the morning's music included hymns like "The Son of God Goes forth to War" and the "Are Ye Able?" designed to inspire young people to heroic deeds. Smith preached on the topic "The Discipline of Difficulty." The program also included an invitation to a special meeting that afternoon featuring civil rights leader Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth.²⁵ Rather than creating a separate Christian youth subculture, black churches like these encouraged young people to see themselves as partners in the church's dual mission of spiritual consolation and social activism.

Pastors like Smith both modeled civil rights activism and helped young people participate. He led the way in trying to integrate the public schools in Nashville, and when school officials resisted, he organized a "Youth March for Integrated Schools." He also led the local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and encouraged James Lawson (a former officer of the National Conference of Methodist Youth) to train local black college students in the art of non-violent protests. His church served as a staging area for the young people who participated in the lunch counter sit-ins of 1960.²⁶ These students learned to dress up, carry themselves with dignity, and express Christian love in the face of verbal and physical abuse. Indeed, African American leaders made much of the contrast between these mature protesters and the leather jacketed "hoodlums" who harassed them.²⁷

John Lewis, a young participant in the early seminars on non-violence remembered, "We talked a lot about the idea of 'redemptive suffering,' which from the first time Jim Lawson mentioned the phrase made me think of my mother." As Lewis and others came to accept the theology and spirituality of non-violence, they came to see it as a more authentic version of the faith in which they had been raised. Lewis later recalled,

I'd finally found the setting and the subject that spoke to everything that had been stirring in my soul for so long. This was stronger than school, stronger than church. This was the word made *real*, made whole. It was something I'd been searching for my whole life.

Lewis would later also compare his first civil rights arrest to a Christian conversion experience.²⁸ Lewis and some of his peers were in the process of creating a new spirituality of social protest that seemed more real than the faith in which they had been raised. This spirituality empowered them to bring down the walls of segregation, but it also began to drive a wedge between the generations that would prove harmful both spiritually and politically in the decades ahead.

Although some adults criticized the young protesters for having a "crucifixion complex," others, like Kelly Miller Smith disagreed. As he fought back tears while watching young people march away to possible imprisonment, beatings, or even death, he came to see the oppositional politics of the young as a form of redemption. "Because of these demonstrations the soul of America is in the process of redemption," he declared.²⁹

Some African American church leaders were mesmerized by the student civil rights movement; others opposed it. Neither group gave sufficient attention to the changing culture and spiritual needs of the majority of African American young people. One young woman declared, "I have no interest in your so-called institutional Christianity but I will go on searching for the real meaning and true values in the Christian faith. And I will continue to avoid your organized religion because it is more church-centered than individualized."³⁰ She seemed to think that the church was bad not just because it had not done enough for racial equality, but because it was not "individualized" enough to her.

Meanwhile a new youth subculture was emerging among the full-time leaders of the civil rights movement. In 1966 Stokely Carmichael ousted the more religious John Lewis as Chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, denouncing him as "a Christ-loving damn fool."³¹ The fact that such language could work shows just how far the student movement had moved from its Christian roots. Instead of trying to look and act more like adults, young civil rights protesters increasingly identified adults and their institutions as worthless. And this new juvenilized civil rights politics won the battle for the loyalty of the young. Significant numbers of late 1960s young people distanced themselves from the black church because they found it embarrassingly out of touch with their lives. Beverly Hill Lawrence remembered, "My generation was one that fled churches filled with those who appeared to us to be helpless, sitting and waiting for (a white) God to intervene and solve problems for them. Many of my friends and I admit now that at times the idea of going to church was simply embarrassing, because it taught people to wait for change to come."³²

Although some of the young people who left the church in the late sixties and early seventies would return twenty years later, in the meantime the church lost many young, gifted leaders who could have helped it deal with the daunting challenges of the post-civil rights era. And those leaders lost touch with the faith communities that could have helped them recover from the physical and emotional traumas they endured in the movement.³³

For decades African American churches had not done much to juvenilize their church activities. So as the decade of the 1960s wore on and intergenerational tensions rose, teenagers lost patience with what they regarded as adult-centered church life.³⁴ Meanwhile, young political leaders preached revolution and denounced churches as part of the “establishment.” Post-civil rights teenagers found themselves caught between an unresponsive church and a juvenilized version of black politics that demanded their full religious devotion. The result was a loss of young people and a period of chaos in youth work in the black churches.

Roman Catholics adapted too much to youth culture in some ways and not enough in other ways. They created an interlocking network of institutions that made growing up Catholic a powerfully formative experience. After recounting at some length the sights, sounds, and smells that made the Catholic world of his boyhood so memorable, Garry Wills concluded: “All these things were shared, part of community life, not a rare isolated joy, like reading poems. These moments belonged to a *people*, not to oneself. It was a ghetto, undeniably. But not a bad ghetto to grow up in.”³⁵

Catholic schools and local chapters of the Catholic Youth Organization promoted an all-American Catholicism that combined devotions like the rosary and Eucharistic adoration with flag-waving anti-communism and strict morality, especially with regard to sexual purity. This youth subculture was very well adapted to the morally conservative, upwardly mobile Catholic population of the 1950s.

A typical Catholic youth club offered plenty of social activities, with a dash of religious observance, all designed to keep young people out of trouble and in the Catholic fold. For example, twenty-five-year-old Florence Hangach of St. Mary’s Parish in Chardon, Ohio, noticed early in 1953 that Catholic teenagers in her rural community frequented Protestant church social functions. Alarmed at the possibility for spiritual drift and “mixed marriages,” she helped parish teenagers organize the “Mariateen Club.” After eight months of square dances, song fests, swimming parties, and weekly religious discussions with Fr. James Maher, the club had fifty members. The national Catholic youth publication *Youth Newsnotes* editorialized, “thus

Catholic youngsters, who may otherwise have lost their faith, are now providing themselves with Catholic fun and frolic—and Catholic truth.”³⁶ Catholic leaders effectively used fun and frolic to appeal to teenagers, but in the process they created a more adolescent version of Catholicism. They also burdened teenagers with a defensive, negative posture toward the non-Catholic world.

Although millions of young Catholics eagerly participated in dances, sports teams, youth masses, and other activities, many chafed under the sexual and intellectual restrictiveness of Catholic schools. Mary Gordon remembered that the Josephite nuns who taught her tried to get the girls to feel “beleaguered” by enemies ranging from “Communists, Jews, Protestants, or atheists” to “pornographers, intellectuals, and sociologists, almost without distinction.” In hindsight she also recognized a parallel in the attitude toward men that the sisters hoped to instill in young Catholic women: “Not only were you beleaguered as a Catholic, but you were beleaguered by males, who were out of control.” Mary was not alone.

Numerous young Catholics who grew up in this era remember having their questions about the faith silenced rather than answered. Many more remembered a heavy burden of guilt and fear surrounding sexuality.³⁷ But the parts of teen culture that Roman Catholics tried to suppress by force came back to haunt them later. In the 1960s, innovative Catholic youth leaders tried to create more youth-friendly programs like the Search Weekend which used teenage leaders to encourage young people to make a personal commitment to the faith, rather than just be forced to obey its rules. They also called for new ways to teach teenagers about sexual morality.³⁸ But these initiatives were too little, too late. When everything in society, including the Catholic Church itself, began to unravel in the late sixties, Catholics were ill-equipped to adapt. The institutions of the Catholic ghetto began to crumble, but Catholics were too divided and confused to provide a coherent spiritual formation program for their young people. As a result, the Catholic Church experienced a mass exodus of young adults in the late sixties and early seventies. American Catholic spiritual formation efforts have yet to recover. One study of the religious attitudes of young adult Catholics conducted in the late 1990s found that they had overwhelmingly negative memories of their religious education. They remembered fun, but little substance. Leaders drilled into them the importance of social concern, but did little to explicitly connect that concern to the Catholic faith. Some Catholics are now developing their own Christian youth subcultures that parallel those of Evangelicals. The Catholic experience suggests that trying to suppress youth culture by force does not work in the long run. In the end, juvenilization of one kind or another will happen.³⁹

These diverse paths of juvenilization found in four different church traditions reveal that the need to adapt the faith to adolescents is real and cannot be ignored. In each case, leaders suffered from shallow, short-term thinking about their adaptations to youth culture. Even when they succeeded in keeping young people involved in Christian activities, youth ministries did so by catering to the anti-institutional and therapeutic tastes of teenagers. In their desperate bid to save teenagers, save the world, or both, youth ministries tended to sacrifice some elements of biblical maturity.

A New Kind of Adulthood

In theory, people should leave behind adolescent versions of the faith when they enter adulthood. But a new kind of adulthood is emerging that looks a lot like the old adolescence. Because of the dynamics of juvenilization, youth ministries have been a key social space in which the church has made its peace with this new form of immature adulthood. To make matters worse, new youth ministers are often groping their way through their own confusing transition to adulthood which makes it harder for them to guide the teenagers in their care.

It is well established by now that the life stage of adolescence lengthened over the course of the twentieth century. Today adolescence starts early, not just because puberty comes earlier, but because companies market skimpy clothing, cosmetics, and raunchy entertainment to pre-teens.⁴⁰ The transition to adulthood has become so delayed on the other end that psychologists have identified a new life stage called “emerging adulthood.” These emerging adults have a hard time finding their way to adulthood and are not sure they want to go there anyway.⁴¹ Just ask any group of undergraduate students if they think they are adults. They will not know what to tell you.

It would be possible to imagine a society in which people tried desperately to escape their imprisonment in an unnaturally long-life stage between childhood and adulthood. But most Americans have not rebelled significantly against extended adolescence because it seems pleasurable. When the term “teenager” was first coined, most adults still wanted young people to grow up as soon as possible. For example, in the 1940s, articles in *Seventeen* taught teenage girls to aspire to adulthood and advertised household goods they might purchase when they graduated from high school and got married. But already, a teenager interviewed in the 1940s newsreel *Teenage Girls* claimed, “We just like to live and have a good time. We’re not in a hurry to grow up and get all serious and morbid like older people.”⁴²

Over time, this adolescent desire to stay young and avoid the perceived liabilities of adulthood has

permeated society. Beginning in the 1960s, advertising experts discovered that adults would buy products that promised to make them feel young and hip.⁴³ But as more and more media products praised youth as a time of freedom and self-expression, adulthood seemed boring, restrictive, and inauthentic by comparison. By now, the assumption that youth is better than adulthood is widely accepted. This cultural belief is visible whenever adults tell teenagers that “this is the best time of your life” or when college students say, “this is my time to have fun.” Christian youth leaders have often contributed to the worship of youth by praising young people as model Christians and looking to them to save the world. Adolescence can be a wonderful stage of life; so can adulthood. The danger comes from idolizing immaturity at any age.

The consumer economy tends to promote extended adolescence. People who know who they are, who think carefully about purchases, and who exercise self-control are harder to persuade to buy products they do not really need. In contrast, impulsive people who are searching for a sense of identity, who are looking to salve their emotional pain, who desperately crave the approval of others, and who have lots of discretionary income (or are willing to spend as if they do) make ideal consumers. Encouraging people to settle into some of the worst traits of adolescence is good for business. Not all businesses and advertisers operate on this basis, but enough do to encourage the cult of youth and discourage people from growing up.⁴⁴ Immersed as we all are in the culture of consumption, it becomes increasingly hard to embrace the self-denial and character formation necessary to achieve what used to be called mature adulthood.

Yet it will not work simply to tell people to “grow up” or to stop being so driven by their emotional needs. Structural changes in society are starving people of meaning, identity, belonging, and emotional comfort. Many adults work in jobs that are high on frustration and low on meaning. Job security has decreased. Divorce, remarriage, and single parenthood have become commonplace.⁴⁵ Happiness seems to have decreased in western industrialized nations as economic prosperity has increased.⁴⁶ Geographic mobility is high, especially among more educated segments of the population. Clubs, political organizations, neighborhoods, and families that used to help people gain a sense of belonging and identity are either no longer functioning effectively or are not available.⁴⁷ In an increasingly fluid society, young people grow up knowing that they need to figure out for themselves who to be, what to do, and what to believe. Indeed, most late modern people *want* to define themselves and chart their own course. This sense of forming the self by oneself can be exhilarating, but it can also be burdensome and terrifying. The

pressure causes some to take the path of least resistance and settle for the quasi-adulthood offered by the entertainment industries and consumerism.⁴⁸

In the past, the transition to adulthood was signaled by objective events like getting a full-time job, getting married, having children, or establishing a household. Responsibility, self-denial, and service to others were considered valuable adult traits. Americans now define adulthood using subjective criteria that highlight self-discovery and personal fulfillment. This “psychological adulthood” is ambiguous and self-defined.⁴⁹ It becomes increasingly hard to know when one has really become an adult or even if adulthood is desirable. There are potentially as many definitions of adulthood as there are people, with few shared standards and little social accountability.

The connection between adulthood and maturity has been severed, or at least severely attenuated. Adults are free to define themselves in almost any way they choose, whether or not their personalized version of adulthood is beneficial to themselves, to their communities, or to their children. For example, most contemporary Americans take it for granted that it was bad for adults of previous generations to stay married “for the sake of the children.” Yet divorce can also be harmful to children and adolescents.⁵⁰ Church leaders should be particularly concerned about the fact that children of divorce are less likely to be religious and to be members of a faith community.⁵¹ Meanwhile, phrases like “be yourself,” “respect yourself,” “stand up for yourself,” and “you have to love yourself before you can love someone else” have become unquestioned cultural beliefs about how to behave in relationships.⁵² The self-absorption and identity searching which are common in adolescence are now bleeding into “normal” adulthood. The “systemic abandonment” of teenagers that Chap Clark found in his ethnographic study of a Southern California high school may have been at least partly caused by these changes in adulthood.⁵³ Thankfully many people still aspire to maturity and achieve it. But in the brave new world of immature adulthood, there are fewer supports for those wanting to grow up and many tempting detours along the way.

Youth ministers and other church leaders need to recognize that juvenilization and the emergence of a new kind of adulthood push them to turn the faith into another product to be consumed. These same forces also push them to idealize adolescence and devalue maturity. Many adults will tend to participate in church activities as consumers who are looking to meet the needs of their “inner adolescent” which include identity, belonging, and emotional comfort. These needs are increasingly viewed as ends in themselves. All other relationships and life experiences, including the individual’s

relationship with God and the church, become instrumental means toward the end of self-development.

But it is the increasingly frayed fabric of people’s daily lives that causes them to have deep emotional needs and unstable identities. While we may wish to wean people from their emotional dependencies and help them find godly sources of identity, we cannot simply ignore the effects of extended adolescence. Not only adolescents, but also many adults in the church need to be guided to spiritual maturity.

Youth ministers themselves are often entangled in extended adolescence. Parents and church leaders still assume that the best youth workers are young adults who supposedly can relate better to teenagers. Further, many take it for granted that youth ministry leadership is a temporary stage on the way to a “real” adult leadership role. Poor pay, low status, and low levels of volunteer support have sometimes conspired to make this a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But extended adolescence is not simply imposed on young leaders by older church members. Many youth leaders start their work during their twenties, the very years in which the transition to adulthood is most demanding.⁵⁴ It is not hard to find people who are at least initially drawn to youth work because they do not want to grow up. Over the years I have met too many aspiring youth ministers who loved hanging out with teenagers but had a hard time relating to adults in the church. Not surprisingly, these young men and women often did not do so well at helping teenagers aspire toward maturity either.

Too many undergraduate youth ministry students have a negative image of the adult church and see many of its ways as obstacles to authentic Christianity. Melissa Wiginton in her work with the Fund for Theological Education has had contact with numerous young people preparing for ministry. She contends that “most bright, capable, passionate young people entering theological education or preparing for ministry are not deeply committed to the church as an institution even as they recognize the need for and gifts of community in the life of faith.”⁵⁵ My experiences with youth ministry students both in the classroom and during evaluative internship site visits over the past eight years confirm her claim. Many young leaders are ambivalent about the church. Sadly, a good number of them probably learned their prejudices against the church in a youth group.

This sense of distance from the adult church is not all bad. It sometimes provokes young leaders to ask probing questions which can lead to positive reforms in the church. In an age-segregated society, teenagers sometimes have a hard time identifying with older

adults, so it is helpful to have role models who are closer in age. When those young leaders demonstrate Christian character and love for the church, they can motivate teenagers to embrace the best elements of the faith. But when youth leaders are stuck in extended adolescence, they are not well equipped to help teenagers aspire to Christian maturity and to love the church.

An earlier version of this essay appeared under the title, "Taming the Juvenilization of American Christianity: Developing Youth Ministry Leaders Who Can Help the

Church Grow Up" The Journal of Youth Ministry 9, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 7-34. The next edition of *Theology Matters* will feature a sequel to this essay which focuses on ways to overcome juvenilization, drawing on insights that Bergler elaborates in his second book, *From Here To Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).*

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The Significance of Ernst Lohmeyer for Christian Witness

by James R. Edwards

A Chance Encounter

I had never heard of Ernst Lohmeyer until I was in my late twenties. I came across his name in the same way I came across many names at the time, as another scholar whom I needed to consult in doctoral research. In the mid-1970s I was writing my doctoral dissertation on the Gospel of Mark in then McAlister Library at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. A premier commentary on Mark at the time was Ernst Lohmeyer's *Evangelium des Markus (Gospel of Mark)*, a commentary that proved unusually helpful in my doctoral research. I knew nothing about its author, but the front matter of the book said the following:

Although it is a joyful occasion to welcome the second edition of Prof. Lohmeyer's *Commentary on Mark*, it is at the same time regretful for both academy and church that the author himself can no longer undertake its publication. His hand-written changes on which the new edition is based reveal how continuously he labored to improve and expand his book, until a higher power carried him off to a still-unresolved fate.

The note about Lohmeyer's mysterious disappearance stayed with me by the sheer power of its intrigue. In 1978 I received my Ph.D in New Testament, and in the following summer I returned to East Germany as translator for a small group of American Christians visiting East German congregations. We were in Greifswald, the city where Lohmeyer was arrested and imprisoned. In our final meeting, while enjoying *Kaffee und Kuchen*—coffee and cake—in the basement of *dicke Maria*—"Fat St. Mary"—I suddenly recalled that Greifswald was where Ernst Lohmeyer had "mysteriously disappeared." Until that moment I had not made this connection. His fate and the city of Greifswald suddenly seemed like two live wires that I should try to connect. "Isn't Greifswald where Ernst Lohmeyer taught?" I interjected suddenly. "Does anyone know what happened to him?"

The warmth and conviviality suddenly dissipated as though someone had thrown a light switch. I had no idea why. The pastor of Fat St. Mary, Dr. Reinhard Glöckner, did. He rose, brought the meeting to a hasty and awkward conclusion, and said to me, "Jim, let's take a

walk." In a society where listening devices were placed in radios and TVs, in light sockets and under reception counters, where social settings such as this invariably had listening ears, a walk usually guaranteed privacy. We walked along Brüggstrasse to the point where it exited through the old city walls. There we took a right and walked along a gravel path. Glöckner broke the silence. "Jim, we cannot mention the name of Ernst Lohmeyer in this city!" I had been raised in a society where an overly free inquiry might offend social etiquette, but it would not kill a healthy meeting. Why would a question cause such offense? Glöckner explained why. "Lohmeyer disappeared at the hands of the communists," he said in veiled exasperation. "He was certainly killed by them, although we don't know any details. People who are liquidated by the communists are considered enemies of the state, and whoever inquires about their fate is considered an accomplice. Accomplices are enemies of the state! Your question jeopardized everyone in the room this afternoon!"

Pastor Glöckner's reprimand left me profoundly divided: I regretted endangering others by what I said, but I was indignant at what had happened to Lohmeyer. The murder of a man of Lohmeyer's character and stature seemed a particular evil, but worse still was the forty-year attempt of the communist government of East Germany to expunge all memory of him. Behind the wall on our right was a row of tired buildings. One of the more prominent buildings was a four-story Orwellian structure constructed of red brick with small windows high in its walls. This building had been a prison. I did not know it at the time, but in this prison Lohmeyer spent the last months of his life, and in its courtyard, he may have met his death. I made a silent resolution. It was hazily formulated, and I could not have expressed it clearly, but it was resolute. If the opportunity ever presented itself, I would try to get to the bottom of Lohmeyer's fate.

In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down, and communist East Germany was history. Finally, after fifty years, the mysterious circumstances related to Lohmeyer's disappearance and death could be investigated. I received a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service to

investigate his mysterious death and disappearance, and I returned to Germany to make a nuisance of myself in attempting to solve a murder mystery.

Who was Ernst Lohmeyer?

Perhaps the best way to think about the lives of others is not simply when they lived, where they lived, or what they did, but rather what made them significant, why should they be remembered, and in what ways they might be meaningful models for our own lives. Four aspects of Ernst Lohmeyer's life have greatly affected my life, even changed it, and I share them with you in hopes both to inform and perhaps influence you as well. The four points of significance I wish to note are Lohmeyer's role as a scholar-theologian, his courageous witness against both Nazi and Soviet-communist oppression, his leadership in times of crises, and his commitment to his marriage vows to his wife Melie.

Lohmeyer: Scholar Theologian

Everything in life prepared Ernst Lohmeyer to be a scholar-theologian. Born in 1890 into a pastor's family in northern Germany, he received not only a premier education in a German gymnasium, but his father's additional tutoring in Greek, music, philosophy, and theology. He was better educated when he entered the universities of Tübingen, Leipzig, and Berlin than I was when I graduated from university. By the time he was twenty-four, he had earned two Ph.Ds, one in theology at Berlin (1912), and a second in philosophy at Erlangen (1914). (A note about the intellectual climate at the University of Berlin at the time may be of interest here: In the forty years between 1900 and 1940, thirty-two Nobel prizes were awarded to professors at the University; in the forty following years from 1950-1990 when the University was in the communist sector of East Berlin, only *one* Nobel prize was earned at the University of Berlin. That tells you something about the influence of communism on intellectual creativity and productivity.) Lohmeyer continued his scholarship during five and a half years as soldier in World War I, studying and writing from 5–7 every morning in his tent. When he was released from military duty in October 1918, he published a book on the Roman emperor cult and received a call as Professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg. He received an honorary doctorate from Heidelberg three years later and was called to succeed Rudolf Bultmann as professor of New Testament at the University of Breslau, the easternmost city of then-Germany (today it is in Poland). Lohmeyer remained at Breslau until the mid-1930s, where he published eight scholarly books, twenty-two scholarly articles, and formed friendships with some of Germany's top Jewish intellectuals—including Richard Hönigswald, Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, and Jochen Klepper. In 1930 he was named Rektor Magnifizenz of

the University of Breslau. Ernst Lohmeyer was a theological supernova. He was one of the leading intellectual stars in a star-studded sky of German intellectuals.

What made Lohmeyer a great theologian?

- He was an independent thinker. He thought for himself rather than following trends, he mastered original sources rather than repeating secondary literature. His writing is not derivative, but alive with free and fresh insights.

- His primary theological objective was always the *meaning* of the Bible, especially for theology and the church, rather than simply in his history, or sociology, or theories of textual development. He strongly resisted the dismemberment of the New Testament according to source theories that dominated early twentieth-century German Biblical scholarship.

- He was adamant about the significance of Jesus for the New Testament, theology, and the church. This sounds obvious today, but it was not then: leading scholars like Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius relegated Jesus to the Old Covenant, maintaining that Christianity started not with Jesus but with Paul and the early church.

- Lohmeyer was convinced that Christianity was the fulfillment of Judaism, not its enemy. The New Testament could not be rightly understood apart from the Old Testament. Here too he was a pioneer, because the hyper-Lutheran influence on New Testament studies, especially as it was distorted by Nazism, caused many German theologians to look on the Old Testament with disdain and on Jews with hatred.

Lohmeyer's command of original sources was phenomenal, his writing style was imaginative and bold, he was hugely productive, and he was courageous in opposing trends that desired to shape the academic life and the church into organs of a totalitarian state. Had his life fulfilled his trajectory, he would have been one of Germany's most famous scholars of the 20th century . . . but I wouldn't have written a book on him. I would not have needed to, because he would have been as well-known as Bultmann, and second only to Karl Barth.

Nazism

In a violent attempt to wrest Germany's reputation from infamy following World War I, Adolf Hitler repudiated the Treaty of Versailles, and especially its humiliating War Guilt clause, and rearmed Germany to withstand the rising tide of Russian Bolshevism. Nazism arose to regain German pride and German power. Nazism glorified the myth of the German *Volks* and demonized

outsiders, foreigners, immigrants, international relations, and Slavs, Gypsies, and above all Jews. Germany defined itself and its destiny on the basis of fear. Fear leads to distortions of reality, which in turn leads to irrational and sometimes catastrophic responses to reality. Germany descended into inner migration and self-imposed isolation. Nazi Germany built walls, both physical and ideological. Slogans replaced reasoned speech; extremism replaced measured and thoughtful discourse; fears replaced facts; moderation and the middle ground were abandoned; seeking to understand adversaries was called cowardice and attacked by both the extremes of right and left; propaganda—the original “fake news”—displaced truth; power replaced justice. “Germany First,” “Germany Alone,” the triumph of nationalism and maligning of internationalism were the Nazi rally cries. Everything outside the closed inner-circle of Germany and German *Volk* was an enemy, destined for annihilation.

Lohmeyer was clear-sighted and courageous in realizing that such political madness and malignancy required more than hand-wringing or pamphleteering. It required decisive action. He joined the Confessing Church, and was indeed one of the few professors to do so. In a public protest against Nazism, he signed the Confession and Constitution for German Professors. He fought to retain Jewish professors at the University of Breslau, and to protect them from assaults by the National Socialistic German Student Association. When Nazi students stormed the university lecture halls in an attempt to attack Jewish professors—a scene not dissimilar to the attack on the Capitol last January—Lohmeyer and Rosenstock-Huessy strung barbed wire across the stairway to protect Jewish professors on the third floor.

Ernst Lohmeyer resisted Nazism at its deepest and most malevolent level, its *anti-Semitism*. He wrote a courageous letter to Martin Buber, whose book “I and Thou” was destined to be one of the most influential books of the twentieth century. Buber was a Jewish polymath—narrator of the tales and stories of the Hasidim, translator of the Hebrew Old Testament into elegant German, recipient of the first Frankfurt Prize, the highest award Frankfurt awards German citizens. In 1935 this great savant and humanitarian was stripped of his citizenship, of all his honors and degrees, and placed under house arrest. Gerhard Kittel and Walter Grundmann, both Nazi theologians, wrote personal attacks against Buber. Lohmeyer weighed in on the side of Buber with a letter of advocacy that, in my judgment, ranks among the most significant statements of theological social righteousness of the Twentieth Century. He summarized the spirit of the times thus: “Every assured consensus has vanished, discourse is now polarized and combative.” Regarding the church’s complicity with Nazi anti-Semitism, Lohmeyer wrote:

“We have never drifted further from the Christian faith than we have at present. . . . It is a bitter experience for me that in our Christian and theological publications one so easily succumbs to politically tainted slogans. . . . More bitter still is that once the defamation is politically or socially carried out, no theologian and no churches speak the word of their Master to the victim, ‘You are my Brother!’ . . . I hope that you will be in agreement with me in this, that the Christian faith is Christian only insofar as it bears the Jewish faith in its heart; I do not know if you will be able also to affirm the reverse, that the Jewish faith is Jewish only insofar as it preserves within itself a place for the Christian faith.”¹

Martin Buber was expelled from Germany. Lohmeyer himself was stripped of his university post at Breslau, where he had been both president and brought international acclaim to the University. An unsuccessful attempt was even made to strip him of his two doctoral degrees. Buber and Lohmeyer both became exiles in Germany—Buber as a Jew, Lohmeyer as a Christian.

Here is what I love about Ernst Lohmeyer, and what I hope you will love as well. He did not enter the fray on the basis of winning, but on the basis of the moral and theological truth at stake. The idea of contending for issues on the basis of their winnability never crossed his mind. He was not a utilitarian who measured engagement on the basis of outcome. He was an unalloyed virtue ethicist, an idealist, a Platonic idealist, a Kantian idealist, and above all, a Christian idealist who engaged issues on the basis of virtue and merit, and on nothing else. The battle worth fighting was not the battle that could be won, but the battle that virtue—truth, justice, love for the other—demanded one to fight, irrespective of outcome. Lohmeyer said to Nazism and communism what Martin Luther said to Emperor Charles V, “Here I stand! I can do no other!” The one and only virtue for Lohmeyer was always to live—and, if necessary, to die—as a man worthy of the freedom that was both given and required of the tradition of Christian humanism.

Leadership in Times of Crisis

Ernst Lohmeyer was an unlikely leader. He made no effort to surround himself with admirers, formed no cliques or “schools of thought,” and paid little attention to public acclaim. He was frequently seen as an *Einzelgänger*—an independent or loner. Despite this—or perhaps *because* of it—he was twice elected to university presidencies. In Germany, university presidents are elected by fellow faculty members (and not by boards of trustees, as in America). Lohmeyer was twice chosen by faculty votes to pilot universities through the most perilous waters of the twentieth century—through National Socialism at the University of Breslau and through Soviet communism at the

University of Greifswald. In each instance he was chosen to lead because he possessed two qualities that I believe are always and everywhere desirable in leaders, especially in times of danger and crisis: he was intellectually formidable, and his character was unimpeachable. Ernst Lohmeyer was a man of intelligence and integrity, of learning and respect.

When leaders speak truth, when they display courage, when they unmask tyranny for what it is, they have a redemptive effect on the communities that look to them as leaders. This is especially true in a university setting where students look to teachers and administrators with a trust that the ordinary populace does not expect of politicians and celebrities.

Lohmeyer's inaugural address as president of the University of Breslau is an example of such leadership. Lohmeyer was named president of the university in 1930, fully three years before Hitler was sworn in as chancellor of Germany. Nevertheless, the university systems throughout Germany, including their administrations and faculties, were already capitulating to Nazi ideology. The German university embraced Nazism earlier and more completely than virtually any other segment of German society. Those who heard Lohmeyer's inaugural address at Breslau surely expected him to declare that the history of Germany was reaching its crowning goal in National Socialism. Lohmeyer called upon the power of history, however, to turn the university from such madness. Midway through his address he hit Nazi supporters and sponsors in their solar plexus. One civilization and people, he declared, more than all the others—more than Babylon, Greece, Rome, Egypt, India, Persia, Germania, China, Mexico—has tutored the world in the meaning of faith and history. That people is “the Israelite-Jewish people,” to whom God said, “Those who were not my people, I will call my people; and those who were not loved, I will call my Beloved” (Romans 9:25). Lohmeyer's German is important here, for the German word for “people” is *Volk*—a word that had assumed virtual sanctity in National Socialist propaganda. The small and seemingly insignificant Jewish people bore witness to a synthesis of faith and history that occurred nowhere else in the world. From this marginal *Volk*, the world was introduced to the saving faith of the *individual*, faith reduced to *one*, the Messiah not only of Israel but also of the world. That one individual came from the Jewish people. He alone is the consummation of faith and human history, as the Gospel of John attests, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory.” The “Word become flesh,” declares Lohmeyer, relieves the world of looking for saviors and messiahs elsewhere than in Jesus Christ.

Lohmeyer's inaugural address was a *tour de force* of intellectual history. It resembles C. S. Lewis's *The*

Abolition of Man in grounding a moral universe in the deepest roots of human history. But it was more than a survey of the *past*. Without once mentioning “National Socialism,” or its tenets, slogans, or caricatures, Lohmeyer subjected the Nazi myth of hate and fear to the crushing weight of historical reality and truth. The individual cannot be dissolved into the *Volk*. The state cannot be deified. *Macht*—raw power—cannot be glorified as the chief virtue of the state. The historical and religious witness to the eternal moral order cannot be replaced by arbitrary values of a false ideology. Finally, and above all, the testimony of God to the gospel of Jesus Christ has been revealed solely and ineluctably through “the Israelite-Jewish religion,” for “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). The object of Nazism's poisonous venom and brutal violence is, ultimately, the very cradle of Christianity. Lohmeyer's inaugural address at Breslau was a devastating intellectual and theological denunciation of Nazism even before it officially came to power.

Lohmeyer did more than speak truth to tyranny, however. As I noted earlier, he also *enacted* it. When two of his students removed a Nazi hate-Jew flyer from the Theology Department bulletin board, the University of Breslau required Lohmeyer to identify the students. Lohmeyer refused to do so, knowing that their identification would result in their expulsion from the university and perhaps their incarceration in a concentration camp. In consequence of Lohmeyer's refusal to divulge the names of the two students—siblings named Hanna and Robert Bedürftig—the university subjected him to the humiliation of a public apology before the entire student body.

In summer 2019 I received a letter from a seventy-eight year old woman in Poland. This is what she wrote. “I have just finished reading your biography of Lohmeyer entitled *Between the Swastika and the Sickie*, and it completes an unfinished circle in my life. For the last fifty years I have had three photographs on my bed stand—one of my mother, one of my father, and a third of Ernst Lohmeyer. I never knew what happened to Professor Lohmeyer. He was the professor who saved his student assistant Hanna Bedürftig, and her brother Robert, when they removed the flyer from the Theology Department bulletin board. Hanna Bedürftig later became my mother, and her brother Robert my uncle. As her daughter, I feel my own life is in a very real sense also indebted to Professor Lohmeyer.”

Love

Lohmeyer married the first woman he dated, Melie Seyberth, who was the true love of his life. It was an uncommon marriage, and it was expressed in uncommon bonds. Their courtship began during World War I when Lohmeyer, a soldier on the Eastern front,

wrote letters to Melie back in Germany. Thenceforth, but especially in their nine-and-one-half years of separation during World Wars I and II, letters became a primary medium of love between Ernst and Melie. Theirs was a relationship—to rely on a common expression at Whitworth University—of “mind and heart.” No couple better exemplified Aristotle’s description of friendship as two bodies with one soul than Ernst and Melie Lohmeyer. Writing was as natural to them as walking and breathing, and a medium of their holistic love that no other medium satisfied. In the five-and-one-half years when Ernst and Melie were separated during World War I, they wrote 2100 letters to one another, all hand-written, and most between two and four pages long.

But true love is seldom unchallenged, the Lohmeyers’ included. Lohmeyer’s battle in Breslau to defend both his professorship and the university from Nazi devastation strained their marital relationship. His four-years absence in World War II further strained it. When he returned home to Greifswald after two-years’ absence on the Eastern front in Russia, Lohmeyer’s visage was so altered that Melie did not recognize him, and when she did, she was so distraught that she did not embrace him. In his effort to reopen the University of Greifswald in the Russian Sector of East Germany after the war, Lohmeyer found himself embattled in defense against a communist takeover of the University. Melie and he were not always agreed on how to deal with the Soviet attempts to usurp of the University of Greifswald, of which Lohmeyer was president. In retrospect, Melie was more often correct in her assessment of the Soviets than Ernst was. When Lohmeyer was arrested by the NKVD the night before he was to be installed as president of the University of Greifswald on February 15, 1946, his physical relationship with Melie ended forever. They never saw each other again.

Separated, fated to die, and without opportunity to mend the torn fabric of their relationship, Lohmeyer smuggled one letter out of prison to Melie—a ten-page letter, written in minuscule handwriting that is barely legible. The purpose of the letter was not to report on prison conditions or on his interrogations, trial, mistreatment, and sufferings. The purpose was to express his undying love for Melie and restore their marriage. He had experienced in prison what he considered a miracle—“the finger of God,” as he called it. The finger of God was the strength to reconcile their marriage. “Would God have taught me all He has in prison simply to allow

it to perish behind these prison walls?” he asks. He ends his long letter—the final letter of several thousand he wrote to Melie in his life—with this line: “If only you will still love me, if only I can be certain of your love? Then it is again possible that you will embrace me in your arms!” The reference to “embrace” recalls Mellie’s failed embrace when he returned from the Russian front. In the handwritten original of Lohmeyer’s letter, it is impossible to tell whether he punctuated the last sentence with a question mark or an exclamation mark. Melie, fortunately, made a typescript of Ernst’s handwritten letter for her children to read. In her typescript, she supplies the final punctuation—an exclamation mark! That exclamation mark is her final embrace of Lohmeyer, that both she and Ernst longed for. Forgiveness and reconciliation are possible even in separation.

The Sovereign “Finger of God”

Ernst Lohmeyer was born and educated at the apogee of German civilization. With the rise of Nazism in Germany, however, which was followed by Soviet communism in East Germany, Lohmeyer was fated to end his life at the nadir of German civilization. He was witness to the most catastrophic events of modern history, including the descent of his noble German civilization into barbarism. Lohmeyer’s uncommon abilities destined him to play leading roles in the dramatic events of his time, but his abilities did not equally destine him or anyone else in preventing or controlling or to any significant degree averting the catastrophes which befell his nation, its institutions, his church, and his own life. But if greatness—at least *Christian* greatness—consists not in determining destinies but rather in faithfulness to Jesus Christ in the unheralded duties of charity and personal sacrifice which present themselves in all times and walks of life, then Ernst Lohmeyer was not only a witness in his own time but is also a witness for our time and beyond. Like the Apostle Peter, who in early life dressed himself and went where he pleased, but in later life was called to go where he did not want to go, so too Ernst Lohmeyer’s early years of scholarly achievement and promise yielded in mid-life to the higher summons to places and duties that he did not choose but which he could not avoid if, like Peter, he too was to heed the call of Christ—“Follow me” (John 21:18–19).

James R. Edwards, Ph.D., is the Bruner-Welch Professor Emeritus of Theology at Whitworth University.

Life, Disappearance, and Execution of Ernst Lohmeyer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 119–20.

¹ For an English translation of Lohmeyer’s letter to Buber, see James R. Edwards, *Between the Swastika and the Sickel. The*

Theology Conference

Living in the Power of Jesus Christ From Generation to Generation

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Todd Billings is the Girod Research Professor of Reformed Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. After serving as an elder in the PCUSA while a doctoral student at Harvard, he later became an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America. He is the author of six books, including *Union with Christ* (winner of a *Christianity Today* Book Award), and most recently, *The End of the Christian Life*.

Jeffrey Bullock has been President of the University of Dubuque, college and theological seminary, since 1998. He has led a transformation that has resulted in growing the endowment by nearly \$250 million, and enrollment growth that has quadrupled the size of the University. He has published several academic works and is a Presbyterian minister who, prior to coming to Dubuque, focused on congregational revitalization in churches in Pittsburgh and Seattle.

Stephen Crocco recently retired from the position of Library Director at Yale University Divinity School. Prior to serving at Yale, he held similar positions at Princeton and Pittsburgh theological seminaries. Steve is an ordained PCUSA minister, has served as an interim pastor, and preaches regularly in PCUSA congregations. He is also a founding board member of the Theological Book Network.

James Edwards taught religion at the University of Jamestown, North Dakota for nearly twenty years, and theology at Whitworth for twenty years. His published works include commentaries on Romans, the Gospels of Mark and Luke, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, *The Divine Intruder*, and *Between the Swastika and the Sickle: The Life, Disappearance, and Execution of Ernst Lohmeyer*. He is on the board of advisors of *Theology Matters*.

Richard Gibbons is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, South Carolina. A native of Scotland and graduate of the University of Glasgow, he is a much sought-after preacher and teacher of the Bible and Reformed theology, has led missions in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and currently serves as co-moderator on the ECO denomination's Theological Task Force.

Jennifer Powell McNutt is the Franklin S. Dyrness Associate Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College. She is author of the award-winning book, *Calvin Meets Voltaire: The Clergy of Geneva in the Age of Enlightenment, 1685–1798*, a specialist in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, and a Fellow in the Royal Historical Society. She and her husband, David McNutt, are ordained ministers in the PCUSA, co-presidents of McNutshell Ministries, and parish associates at First Presbyterian Church of Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

Richard Ray is chairman of the board of the Presbyterian Heritage Center, Montreat, North Carolina. He has served as a pastor in Arkansas, Virginia, and Tennessee, managing director of John Knox Press, professor at Stephens College and Pittsburgh Seminary, and president of King University, Bristol, Tennessee. He has served on the board of the Grandfather Home for Children, Calvin Studies Society, and is on the board of advisors of *Theology Matters*.

Joseph Small served as director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Theology and Worship from 1989-2011, following pastorates in Towson Maryland, Westerville Ohio, and Rochester New York. His extensive ecumenical theological engagements include ten years as co-chair of the international Reformed-Pentecostal Dialogue. He currently serves on the Board of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology.

Lorenzo Small is pastor of First United Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, North Carolina. After several years in the corporate world, working for companies such as 3M Corporation and Eli Lilly & Company, he was called to preach, served as a Baptist minister, and was later ordained and installed as pastor of Pleasant Ridge Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, South Carolina. He is a graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary (Charlotte).

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