Resource for egalitarian men’s ministries

Coming of Age is a result of the Young Male Spirituality Project, a joint effort of Lutheran Men in Mission, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Luter Seminary (St. Paul, Minn.) to find out why young men are staying away from the church in droves, a pattern that surveys are showing is increasingly alarming.

The Project interviewed eighty-eight young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five to find out about their lives, faith, and faith practices. The interviewees consisted of men of four ethnic groups from six different areas of the United States, who had a wide range of different religious experiences. Some of the men interviewed had never been church members, some went to church as children but then left, some came to faith and membership as young adults, and some had been believers and active in church their entire lives. The one-hour interviews uncovered lively and engaging life stories that revealed each man’s unique faith path, core beliefs, and purposes and relationships with God. The results were reported back to the young men for verification of fullness and accuracy.

The interviews uncovered eleven common themes of concern such as the importance of male mentors. One major theme was the stress and meaningless of work, which was seldom seen as a spiritual part of their lives. On the other hand, they did consider the importance of sports and nature (outdoor activities) to be part of their spirituality, i.e., those activities in which they saw themselves as most alive, connected to others, and at their best.

Other concerns that were covered in the interviews included family relationships, life-defining experiences such as crises, service to others, and spiritual hunger (usually expressed in non-religious language). Very few of the interviewees had an in-depth knowledge of Jesus’ life and ministry and did not relate him much to their belief in God—even the ones who were church members. Their vague spiritualities seemed more like what Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton noted in Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers as “moralistic therapeutic deism,” which consists mainly of “happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward” via any remote god one chooses.

This window into young men’s spirituality presents daunting challenges to churches. Though the advice offered by the authors is not new, it is certainly helpful and welcome. They call for churches to implement new approaches, such as “Go out to them, rather than waiting for them to come to the church” or “Go there, listen, and walk alongside.” Add “cyber ministries,” “adventure ministries,” and “mentor (life coaching) ministries,” both for men only and/or for both men and women, depending on demand. They also call for a new vision for women and men to become an “authentic, egalitarian, mutual humanity” and recommend that churches study their book or Mary Stewart VanLeeuwen’s book, My Brother’s Keeper.

The book’s main audience may be Lutherans and egalitarians, but it certainly deserves a wider audience due to its easy reading style, its clear explanation of the problem, and its helpful advice for pastors and lay leaders. Although some and maybe even most of the advice is directed at helping men, much of the advice is likely to also be of help to many if not most women.

**NEW Coming of Age**

EXPLORING THE SPIRITUALITY AND IDENTITY OF YOUNGER MEN

by David W. Anderson, Paul G. Hill, & Roland D. Martinson

Augsburg Fortress, 216 pages

List: $15.99  CBE member: $13.59

Endorsement: “With compassion, solid theological understanding, and great creativity, Coming of Age provides a guide for denominational leaders, pastors, Christian educators, and education committees that can not only renew men’s ministries, but transform the Church as we know it. To say that this book is important is an understatement. It is a challenge to the Christian community for change, renewal, and an increased commitment to be a transforming community where a new partnership is developed. Where a new equality between men and women is practiced. And a community where people are accepted where they are, as they are, and equipped for life in the real world. This book is a winner!”

— Dr. Curtis A. Miller, Past-President of the North American Conference of Church Men’s Staff and former Associate of Men’s Ministries, Presbyterian Church (USA)

**My Brother’s Keeper**

WHAT THE SOCIAL SCIENCES DO (AND DON’T) TELL US ABOUT MANLUSURINITY

by Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen

InterVarsity Press, 255 pages

List: $17.00  CBE member: $13.59

This helpful resource explores biological, psychological, biblical, and cultural aspects of masculinity. It also includes practical applications for raising sons, sexuality, and dealing with addiction. The book also casts a vision for a Christian worldview that encourages men and women to honor God’s creation of human beings by blessing one another.

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