

## MODEL FOR MANHOOD: JESUS OF NAZARETH

At this conference last year we heard a presentation by Bill Lishman, who took on the amazing challenge of teaching orphaned geese how to migrate. Among other things he had to help them to model other geese, not the ultra-lite airplane he used to guide them. Young birds imprint on the first caregiver they experience, so the process can be tricky. In eastern Tennessee, in the Great Smoky Mountains, they do a similar thing with rescued bald eagles. While the birds recover from injury, human caretakers put eagle “puppets” on their hands to feed their patients so they won’t forget that they are birds in the fit place.

When I was about 10 years old I went roller skating for the first time. After I laced on my skates I encountered the total frustration of an apparatus that did not know the difference between forward and back. When I stood up I discovered that the skates had no brakes. My feet flew out from under me, so I kept landing on my seat on the floor. And I hadn’t even made it onto the skating floor yet. Every time I tried to go forward, I had the equal and opposite reaction of going backward, and that surprising combination of events planted me once again on my seat on the floor. On the verge of giving up on the whole enterprise, I happened to notice a skater just entering the skating floor. My eyes fixed on his feet, and I noticed that he angled one foot in order to push forward on the other. Eureka! I had discovered one secret to gaining forward momentum on roller skates by modeling the behavior of someone who knew how to do it. Once I got out on the floor I still couldn’t go far without falling down, but I was able at least to leave the changing area.

Much the same principle applies to learning a trade or vocation. In the days of craftsmen’s guilds, an aspiring young man would apprentice himself to a master in order to learn how to practice a certain trade. Today young people work as interns to learn about occupations or to gain experience before they are qualified to earn their living in that job. In a similar way, young boys need models of behavior as they mature into men of character and responsibility. Those formative examples may be parents, close relatives or friends, and teachers; too often they come from popular culture—the movies and television shows that teach the wrong lessons about life and values. An important component of our task as educators is to instruct and model traits of character as well as academic content.

The importance of providing young men with adequate models is easy enough to demonstrate, and even more so as society changes and future generations must face ever-increasing challenges. Malcolm Muggeridge, an avowed skeptic until late in his life, expressed it well when he observed,

It has become abundantly clear in the second half of the twentieth Century that Western Man has decided to abolish himself [nod to C.S. Lewis]. Having wearied of the struggle to be himself, he has created his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own impotence out of his own erotomania, his own vulnerability out of his own strength; himself blowing the trumpet that brings the walls of his own city tumbling down, and, in a process of auto-genocide, convincing himself that he is too numerous, and labouring accordingly with pill and scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer in order to be an easier

prey for his enemies; until at last, having educated himself into imbecility, and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he keels over, a weary, battered old brontosaurus, and becomes extinct. Many...have envisaged the future in such terms, and now what they prophesied is upon us (*Jesus, the Man Who Lives*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975; paperback ed, 1976; 33).

It is striking to me that in many of our schools, founded initially as extensions of Christian ministry, often with direct ties to churches, there exists today a deep reluctance to suggest Jesus Christ as an appropriate embodiment of admirable traits of manly character and behavior. In Islam “the practice of the prophet,” or *Sunnah*, is an essential component of behavior. It is based on *hadith*, a saying of Mohammed or a report of his actions. In other words, his actions and sayings are the approved model.

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha who reformed Indian culture in the sixth century BC, gave greater emphasis to behavior than to theological ideas. The actions of his life are as important as the content of his teachings. The narrator of a series on comparative religions says of Gautama, “Buddha is worshipped as a new paradigm of humanity in Bangkok.”

### **Jesus, the Model for Humanity**

The basis for suggesting Jesus as a human example comes from the NT itself. We are so accustomed to studying Jesus as divine, Son of God, Savior of the world, God Incarnate, etc, that we tend to forget his human side.

Jesus-as-example is suggested by Peter: “He left us an example, that we should walk in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21); by Paul: “Follow my example as I follow Christ” (1 Cor 11:1; also 1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17; Gal 4:12); and by Jesus: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24). In other words, the student patterns his actions on those of the master teacher. Many scholars have observed that the favored self-designation of Jesus was “Son of Man.” Jaroslav Pelikan holds that Christians after the NT favored the term “because it came to be used to refer to the human nature of Jesus, in parallel with the term “Son of God,” which referred to his divine nature,” so that he was recognized as “the revelation of the mystery of the nature of humanity, and that, in the formula of the Second Vatican Council, “only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light (*Jesus through the Centuries*, New York: Harper and Row, 1985; paperback, 1987; 71). Muggeridge says, “The writers of the gospels, very creditably, evince no inclination to apologize for Jesus’s humanity; nor, for that matter, to accentuate unduly his divinity. The Son of Man loses his temper, as sons of men do... (p. 114).

The most complete discussion in the NT of the idea that Jesus appeared as the ideal human being is found in the book of Hebrews. Chapter 2 begins with a reflection on Psalm 8:4-6, which describes God’s human creation in these words:

What is man, that thou rememberest him,/ Or the son of man, that  
thou hast regard to him?/ Thou didst make him for a short while lower  
than the angels;/ Thou didst crown him with glory and honor;/ Thou  
didst put all things in subjection beneath his feet. (NEB)

The language reflects Genesis 1:26-28 where God commissioned his human creatures, the bearers of his image, to have dominion over all the earth and to subdue it. But the writer observes, in a note of disappointment, that the ideal was never realized: “For in subjecting all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject. But in fact we do not yet see all things in subjection to him.” In short, we have failed to become what we were intended to be. All of human history is a record of the failures. Every advance in culture and technology is accompanied by the possibility of destruction by the same means.

Then the writer states the solution to our failure: “ In Jesus, however, we do see one who for a short while was made lower than the angels, crowned now with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that, by God’s gracious will, in tasting death he should stand for us all.” Jesus, as human being, became in every way what we were intended to be. He takes our place, showing what God had in mind when he said, “Let us make *adam, anthropos*, human kind.” So then, as surely as Mohammed or Gautama Buddha, or any human figure of heroic proportions, the portrait of Jesus presented in the four Gospels offers for us a model of a man in the best sense. Pelikan summarizes: “Jesus was, then, not only the image of divinity, but the image of humanity as it had originally been intended to be and as through him it could now become; he was in the sense the ‘ideal man’ (p. 74).”

One of this year’s speakers polled the students at his school to discover what traits of manhood were important to them. A few years ago the students at Memphis University School composed a list of characteristics that were the ideals of an MUS student. The “Community Creed” is posted around the school as a reminder to the entire school community. It consists of seven qualities, which are prefaced by this one sentence: “As students of Memphis University School, we share a common duty to preserve our tradition of general excellence by upholding the principles that define and unify our community:...” I would like to use these as an outline for looking at the life of Jesus as an example of manhood.

## **1. Truth and Honor**

The Community Creed says: “An MUS student tells the truth, does his own work, honors his commitments, and respects the property of others and the school.” Jesus taught and modeled a lifestyle that displayed the kind of commitment to truth and honor that would lead people to accept the simple word of his followers. He said, “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” The opposite pattern uses words to confuse, to obfuscate, to create loop holes and unintended “outs” that give unfair advantage over the unsuspecting. So taking a oath is necessary in our legal proceedings because the world has still not learned the lesson. This way of dealing with people was so threatening to the status quo that Jesus was rejected by the power brokers of his day.

Near the end of the first book in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, after the diminutive Frodo has become the designated ring bearer, the fellowship of the ring has formed, and the trek is underway, Tolkein observes a truth about human nature, including our heroes. It is something like this: "If Frodo had known ahead of time what difficulties, occasions of grief, and challenges lay ahead of him on this journey, he would never have set out in the first place." According to the description in the Gospels, Jesus did know, in full-blown color and digital surround-sound, exactly what lay ahead, including the manner of his death, and still he would not be dissuaded. Luke's Gospel says of Jesus as he set out on his ministry, "He set his face steadfastly toward Jerusalem." He knew he would die there, and still he went. As John's Gospel records Jesus's thoughts during the last week of his earthly life: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Obviously I am including the concept of courage under the heading of truth and honor. It is the ability to remain with a cause, a calling, regardless of personal risk. Every boy must learn, as every man must practice, the courage to stick with the task, to maintain what is right, to work for the good of those who depend on him, without regard for the personal fallout. Jesus's ministry and death show what such dedication looks like.

The commitment of Jesus to stick with his calling no matter the outcome is powerfully demonstrated in the Gospels' presentation of the temptation of Jesus by Satan, just at the outset of his ministry. The three temptations contain a distillation of the pitfalls that are commonly experienced by men, young and old alike. The first comes in light of his forty days of fasting. Matthew says suggestively, "He was hungry" (4:2), an obvious condition after forty days of fasting for one who is truly human. Against that background the tempter, who always strikes at the most vulnerable point, invites him to make the stones become bread. After all, he had the power of creation in his little finger, if he was truly the Son of God. How hard could it be? And such an easy answer to the problem at hand. But Jesus declined to be sidetracked from his task, saying, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The quick fix, the easy way out, the short cut in order to avoid the difficult choices is never the way of truth and honor, of the courage that must be shown to the young men who are in our care.

The second temptation took place in "the holy city" of Jerusalem at the highest point of the temple. The challenge was for Jesus to create a spectacle, attracting attention to himself by means of an unusual, superhuman display of power. Again, Jesus declined, rejecting the spectacular display as a substitute for substance and patient instruction in word and deed. Religious locations, activities, or people do not shield us from the desire to accomplish our goals in the fastest means possible, often without sufficient regard for the effect on others, the "collateral damage" that comes with avoiding difficulty.

In the third scene all the kingdoms of the world were displayed to Jesus by the devil. He offered to give them to him, a generous shortcut when compared to a three-year span associating with dim-witted disciples, hostile religious leaders, audiences of people interested only in an easy meal or a spectacular healing or exorcism, and ending in excruciating death by crucifixion. He had only to bow down and worship the devil himself. This temptation must have been the

strongest of all, because it promised the very thing Jesus had come to accomplish. What is a temptation, after all, but something that is wrong that feels so right! “God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son...” So, what if Jesus could hand the world to God, having won it back from the devil without all the mess involved in the way the Father had laid it out? Doesn’t the end justify the means? Jesus’s answer was “No.” He said simply that God alone is the proper object of our worship, and that was the end of the matter. Knowing your priorities and sticking with principles cuts down on the clutter of deciding moment-by-moment in the complications of life.

Philip Yancey, an editor for *Christianity Today* magazine, observes that John Milton in *Paradise Regained*, made the temptation scene the hinge event in Jesus’s ministry, undoing the defeat of humanity by Satan in the beginning. “*Can you be like God?* the serpent had asked in Eden; *Can you be truly human?* asked the tempter in the desert (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995; 70).

## 2. Scholarship

“An MUS student actively seeks knowledge and understanding, and he encourages that pursuit among his classmates.”

Scholarship is not a common category for discussions about Jesus. He wrote no books, founded no schools, and held no degrees from noteworthy institutions. During his years of active ministry his audience often responded with surprise that his words were filled with authority even though he was untrained (John 7:15). Even in his hometown of Nazareth they liked his teachings, but they knew him, not as a teacher, but as the carpenter, brother of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, as well as sisters (Mark 6:3). As the result of his lack of credentials, “they took offense at him.” The official leaders and religious teachers constantly challenged him as teacher by either concocting tests of his insight or his authority to teach at all.

Jesus demonstrated scholarship both as a student and as a teacher. As a boy growing up in Roman Judea he began his study at home, and soon would have transferred to the local school for boys at the synagogue. He would have learned to read Hebrew, studying the content of the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms. Luke’s Gospel provides the only glimpse of his childhood in describing the scene at the temple when Jesus was twelve years old. When Joseph and Mary found the temporarily missing Jesus, he was “in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:46-47).

He sounds to my teacher’s ears like an ideal student! He was “listening” first, as in paying attention instead of staring blankly at nothing, or creating a disturbance with another student, or playing sudoku on his cell phone! And asking questions that are relevant to the topic at hand is one of the great affirmations of a teacher’s experience. I am assuming that he listened well and asked relevant questions since “everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

A second “learning” experience for Jesus, covering his entire earthly life, is specifically named in the epistle to the Hebrews, which is associated with second-generation Christians. The author states, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered...” (5:8). The learning-through-suffering experience is, as Hebrews explains it, part of his solidarity with our own humanity. “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (4:15). That Jesus gained some insight of living by learning, just as we do, gradually, bit-by-bit over time, through slow experience, including suffering, suggests that he accumulated this understanding as any student would do. By this means “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (5:9),” a truly significant accomplishment. The author points out that he was not exempted from this all-too human fact of learning even though he was a “son” in a unique way.

In our time, Jesus has become recognized as a teacher across human ages and cultures, even by those who deny to him any special divine role. In his own day he impressed audiences in the synagogues where he delivered expositions of Scripture, his area of particular expertise. “Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mark 1:21-22). The usual rabbinic teaching approach consisted of quoting ancient authorities, other rabbis, sages whose reputations exceeded that of the speaker. Even though this scene in Mark is the introduction to the account of a miracle, it begins by drawing attention to Jesus’s teaching. It ends with a similar note: “The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching—and with authority!’” (v. 27).

The “authority” in the teaching of Jesus is reflected in Matthew’s presentation of the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago... But I say to you...” (5:21, etc.), contrasting traditional teaching with his own emphasis. This “sermon,” which is built around a theme of fulfilling the Law and the Prophets by gaining a surpassing righteousness over that displayed by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, elicits much the same reaction as Mark’s scene in the synagogue: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (7:28-29).

The originality of Jesus in handling the traditional sources of knowledge could lead his hearers to new insight or to hostility toward the teacher. A positive interchange took place when Jesus was invited to participate in the current theological debate over which of the ten commandments was the most important, Jesus declined to take a position. The challenge was given because one of the traditional teachers (a Pharisee) heard Jesus responding well in a debate with representatives from the priestly party of the Sadducees. Instead of engaging in a pointless discussion, Jesus offered another commandment, also from Moses, as the most important: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Then he added, as a bonus, “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:28-31). Even the Pharisee was amazed: “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right...” The “scholarship” of Jesus showed his ability to analyze and refine the learning of his contemporaries.

His teaching was corrective toward the Sadducees' teaching about the impossibility of resurrection. "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ...Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!'" (Mark 12:24-27). The "scholarship" of Jesus was based on a shared body of knowledge which he knew well, better than his opposition.

He could give new insights based on older, familiar material. Twice he referred his opponents to a familiar proverb from Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Once he told them, "Go and learn what this means" (Matt. 9:13), suggesting that they had never learned the real meaning in something they thought was familiar. The other time he told them, "If you had known what these words mean...you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matt. 12:7). Their failure to properly study and apply their own sources led them to unjustified conclusions. Proper reasoning based on good sources is an essential component of good scholarship.

In another instance of drawing proper conclusions, Jesus pointed to their use of Scripture as a spiritual guide. "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40). In each of these situations he indicated where their reasoning was mistaken, and the changes they should make to arrive at the best conclusion. So, I would say that while "scholarship" may be an unusual category in which to consider the role of Jesus, he certainly fits, both as learner and as teacher.

### **3. Service**

"An MUS student contributes his time and abilities to the welfare of his school and of the greater community."

It is common place in modern society to speak of the "servant-leader" as one who sets the desired tone in an organization, providing leadership mixed with encouragement and support so that all members are able to give their best effort. However, such an ideal has not always characterized the Western leader, where power and control have often been in the ascendancy. "The Chairman of the Board" evokes an image of authority and dictatorial influence. Philip Yancey (p. 81) quotes Helmut Thielicke's observations about Hitler's influence over the German church: "The worship of success is generally *the* form of idol worship which the devil cultivates most assiduously. We could observe in the first years of 1933 the almost suggestive compulsion that emanates from great successes and how, under the influence of these successes, men, even Christians, stopped asking in whose name and at what price...."

In Jesus's day much the same model was the ideal. But he would have none of it, and insisted that his followers should learn a different approach. He interjected the contrary approach into a scene in which the disciples argued about greatness: "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be

served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45). On another occasion he added, “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27).

A beer commercial used to include the tag line, “You only go around in life once—grab for all the gusto you can.” For too many in our time you have to grab for all you can in order to get it before someone else gets there first, and it is all about competition. If you don’t take care of yourself, nobody else will. There is often no place for selfless service toward those who are dependant and vulnerable, who cannot take care of themselves. The virtue of service toward others seems out of step with the modern rush for personal actualization and self-fulfillment. Many follow the motto, “The one who dies with the most toys, wins.”

Jesus enacted his lesson of leadership-through-service in his entire life of public ministry, but one “acted parable” embodies this mindset. I’m speaking, of course, of the time that he washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:1-11). Someone has pictured the scene as the disciples entered the upper room one by one, each spying the basin a water and towel in the corner of the room. Knowing that the role of washing the feet of arriving guests was reserved for the household slave, each of them declined, deciding that it was the responsibility of someone else, presumably someone lower than they on the status ladder. Imagine, then, their embarrassment when Jesus himself removed his outer robe, picked up the basin and towel, and began to wash their feet, each in turn, around the table: Peter, whose enthusiasm often overshadowed his understanding; Matthew, who had left a lucrative career as tax collector to follow Jesus; Thomas, who was willing to go to Bethany with Jesus and die with him, but who would not wash feet; John, who with his brother James would call down fire from heaven on a village in retaliation for rejection of their message of the kingdom of heaven, but who was above foot-washing for James or anyone else; Andrew, who was constantly bringing others to Jesus, but would not wash the feet of his brother, Simon Peter; Judas Iscariot, the keeper of the money bag, always looking for the advantage, but who would not stoop to wash feet to get ahead. Jesus washed the feet of every one; in their humiliated silence they watched the lesson twelve times—stoop, wash, dry, move to the next one, stoop, wash, dry, move.

When he was finished washing their feet, Jesus explained the significance of the event (vv. 12-17). He took note of how they addressed him: “Teacher” (rabbi) and “Lord” (master, even God in OT), and he approved those titles, “for that is what I am.” Yet he had washed their feet, without relinquishing any of his dignity or authority. “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” Scott Peck has summarized the importance of this demonstration from Jesus: “Until that moment the whole point of things had been for someone to get on top, and once he had gotten on top to stay on top or else to attempt to get farther up. But here this man already on top—who was rabbi, teacher, master—suddenly got down on the bottom and began to wash the feet of his followers. In that one act Jesus symbolically overturned the whole social order. Hardly comprehending what was happening, even his own disciples were almost horrified by his behavior” (*The Different Drum*, New York: Touchstone/ Simon & Schuster, 1988, p. 293).



The lasting effects of this lesson reveal themselves in comments from later writers in the NT. Peter's instructions to elders in the church include, "Be shepherds of God's flock...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Paul instructed Christians to adopt toward each other the attitude of Christ, who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). He showed that he followed his own advice throughout his missionary enterprise, working to support himself rather than taking money from the new churches (Acts 18:3; 1 Thes. 2:9; 2 Cor. 11:7-9). The spirit of selfless service is surely a legacy of the example set by the humanity of Jesus.

#### **4. Respect**

"An MUS student is courteous and kind and appreciates everyone in his community."

It is a constant challenge for us to be affirming and accepting of others who come within our sphere of activity. In a school setting the "successful" students often function separately from those who struggle with the demands of school life. Athletes are divided from scholars, "A" students receive special recognition, while actors, writers, artists, musicians and other stand-out students have their own areas in which they receive praise and appreciation. What is it that might lead the athlete to respect the actor or the actor to appreciate the accomplishments of the scholar?

Jesus had friends among all levels of society, ate at the same table with various levels spiritual and cultural attainment, and praised and criticized by his choices of companions. Whereas Aristotle taught that the well-bred citizen should desire the friendship of one who was superior and avoid one who was less worthy, Jesus knew no such exclusions. He spent so much time with the "common" people, teaching them and eating with them, that he was criticized as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'" (Luke 7:34). When he chose as one of his disciples a tax collector and then attended a banquet at his house, Jesus was criticized for his associations. That occasion gave rise to his explanation for his mission: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13).

He affirmed children in a way that was unusual in his culture, where the young were to be, quite literally, "seen but not heard." To quiet his disciples' arguing about who was the greatest (does this argument remind anyone about school?), "He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me'" (Mark 9:36-37). Later on, "he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:16).

Nowhere is Jesus's treatment of others more remarkable than in his friendships with women. In a day when women were not to be seen in public unaccompanied by a male relative, when they had no rights to property and could not give testimony in court, Jesus treated them as human beings, bearers of God's divine image and in need of his message like everyone else. He treated with dignity the "sinful woman" who invaded the dinner party at the house of Simon the Pharisee, and then proceeded to embarrass herself with a public display of abandon toward Jesus (Luke 7:36-50). He rescued the "woman caught in the act of adultery," saving her life and her

personhood by remarking, “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:3-11). No wonder the religious authorities considered him a troublemaker!

Contrary to contemporary practice, Jesus taught women about spiritual matters and included them in his mission. When he visited the house of Martha and her sister Mary, Martha busied herself with meal preparation while Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said” (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus praised Mary for choosing “what is better” over the traditional female role. His conversation with Martha, sister of his dead friend Lazarus, whom he would shortly raise from the dead, prompted a strong confession of belief in Jesus from her that is the equal of any man’s affirmation: “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world” (John 11:27). His first post-resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene, who had mistaken him for the gardener. He commissioned her to take the news to the (male) apostles, who at first dismissed the news. Could it have been because they were emotional, gullible women? Luke says, “They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (24:11).

The outstanding example of his acceptance of women is his conversation with a Samaritan woman in the hill country near the village of Sychar, where the patriarch Jacob had dug a well that still supplied the people with water (John 4). She came alone to the well in the middle of the day, rather than at daybreak with the other women from the town. Jesus, having sent the disciples to buy food, was resting alone beside the well and asked the woman for a drink. She reacted with surprise that a Jewish man would speak at all to a Samaritan woman, since, in addition to the usual social barriers, Samaritans and Jews did not associate together at all. When Jesus offered her living water that would eliminate the daily drudgery of drawing water, she leapt at the prospect, revealing, as Jesus knew, the depth of her misery. “Call your husband and come back,” Jesus instructed her, thus getting to the bottom of her personal struggle. “I have no husband,” the woman replied. When Jesus reminded her that she had had five husbands and was now living with a man to whom she was not married, the depth of her misery was laid bare. When she did return to the town, she told them about Jesus, and then brought all of the people to see Jesus in response to his acceptance of her. His disciples were amazed when they returned and found him talking with a woman, but Jesus explained that it was all in keeping with his mission.

Perhaps the secret is not so deep after all. He accepted the unacceptable without regard to the way he himself would be perceived by those in power, because he knew their need so well. The response of Jesus is summarized by Matthew: “He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). No wonder those who were marginalized were drawn to him. He touched lepers, healed beggars, taught women, and honored children. C.S. Lewis has commented, “Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are in that danger” (*The Problem of Pain*, 1962, p. 98). His example of inclusive respect teaches us all to treat others with compassion.

## 5. Humility

“An MUS student may be confident but never arrogant or boastful.”

Humility was not prized in the ancient world nor recommended as a trait for leaders or other “great men.” The very concept in the Greek language referred to something that was base or mean. John R.W. Stott says this concept “was much despised in the ancient world. The Greeks never used their word for humility (*tapeinotes*) in a context of approval, still less of admiration. Instead they meant by it an abject, servile, subservient attitude,” as a slave (*God’s New Society*, IVP, 1979, p. 148). Now it is not only recommended for all, but usually makes the list of essential characteristics in a good leader. How did this quality undergo such a complete revolution in esteem?

The early Christians remembered Jesus as one who “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death...” (Phil. 2:7-8). Finding such a quality in the one they followed, the early Christians tried to emulate his attitude of humility. We call it, “Others first,” or some similar motto. Jesus described himself as “gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29), and stated that “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). Michael Griffiths has observed that the NT uses words related to humility in a positive way thirty four times, while the prevailing culture had the opposite view (*The Example of Jesus*, IVP, 1985, p. 97).

He showed unusual acceptance of children, who were ignored in his day, but chosen by Jesus as an object lesson in humility. “He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said, ‘I tell you’re the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:2-4). This teaching was in response to the question about the quest for greatest, and Jesus indicated that self-promotion was not the way.

The goal was to promote an attitude that was the opposite of arrogance and pride that ascribes false superiority to one’s self. As Griffiths remarks, “...It is not a Uriah Heep-like protestation of insignificance, but a kind of warm objectivity about the value of others, a sober judgment that does not esteem itself more highly than it ought (Rom. 12:3). It recognizes that there must always be something of value in the other person’s viewpoint” (p. 98). This attitude is the real basis for tolerance of others, which has been defined as “the suspicion that the other person might be right.”

The practical importance of such an outlook is demonstrated by Philip Yancey’s experience with the editors of *Pravda* in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their circulation had dropped from 11 million to 700,000. They recognized that many of the ideals of communism were also promoted by Christianity:

equality, sharing, justice, and a racial harmony. Yet they had to admit the Marxist pursuit of that vision had produced the worst nightmares the world has ever seen. Why?

“We don’t know how to motivate people to show compassion,” said

the editor-in-chief. “We tried raising money for the children of Chernobyl, but the average Russian citizen would rather spend his money on drink. How do you reform and motivate people? How do you get them to be good?” (p. 75).

Part of the answer lies in providing an example in concrete, human terms that shows both the attitudes and the actions of a person “being good.” “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example.... When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats” (1 Pet. 2:21, 23). Then add the specific instruction that shows what such actions would look like. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up.... Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:29, 32).

Such humility as displayed by Jesus, allowing him to give to others without any sense of intimidation, requires a solid foundation in self-identity, a confident knowledge of self-worth, and a certainty of purpose. A statement of these truths about Jesus is supplied by John’s Gospel. Just prior to the narrative about Jesus washing the disciples’ feet, this information appears: “Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father.... Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing...” (13:1, 3-4) Jesus knew who he was, he was certain of his identity and his purpose, and he knew where he had come from and where he was going. Thus he was not diminished in value or self-worth by performing the task of a lowly servant to his followers. My college choir director used to remind us to be on our best behavior when we were on tour by saying, “Remember who you are.” Such knowledge encourages the right decisions and the best behavior without a sense of self-sacrifice.

Humility in this sense is not the servile, spineless attitude of the ancient Greeks. Rather, it is the control of one who has tremendous power, but chooses to restrain that power in order to act for the good of others. At one time my mother-in-law owned two dogs. One was a full-grown female St. Bernard weighing in at 130 pounds. The other was a mix, a wild-haired, fluffy white midget who weighed less than ten pounds soaking wet. My mother-in-law named her “Pronto Pup.” I have often watched the little dog “playing” with the St. Bernard, leaping up to nip her ears, worrying the big dog with little “yips” and snarls that seemed to be pure pleasure to the white ball of fur. The response from the St. Bernard was to sit quietly, staring of into space, occasionally dodging, but never striking back, never retaliating or trying to injure Pronto Pup. I thought how easy it would be for a dog who weighed 130 to snap the little dog in two without much effort, but she didn’t. It is the kind of self-control, humility, taught and exemplified by Jesus

## **6. Involvement**

“An MUS student develops leadership, cooperation, communication, self-discipline, and friendships in activities outside the classroom.”

The concept of the incarnation of Jesus is all about leaving the shelter of “home” and applying principles in the real world of the daily grind. But because Jesus’s life often seems so different

from ours, it can be a challenge to see ourselves in the experience of Jesus. I appreciate Philip Yancey's story about keeping a salt water aquarium as an illustration of incarnation. He recounts the daily effort to maintain a healthy environment for his fish, and then reflects that they didn't appreciate his efforts or affirm his relationship.

“Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dove for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me one ‘emotion’ only: fear.... To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction. To change their perceptions, I began to see, would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and ‘speak’ to them in a language they could understand” (pp. 38-39).

Jesus became involved, he left the classroom, he forsook heaven and assumed human form in order to show us the way to God. It is easy to conceive of God as the Muslims proclaim, “God is great.” How much more difficult it is to state that God became a baby—helpless, dependant, and needing everything to be done for him!

He became involved in the human story—his genealogy is recorded by both Matthew and Luke. His ancestors included the big names—Adam, Abraham, David, Josiah—but they also include some surprises, especially the women: Tamar (who pretended to be a prostitute and had a son by her father-in-law Judah), Rahab (a non-Israelite from Jericho, a prostitute or inn-keeper who was saved by her faith when that city fell to Israel), Ruth (a Moabite, thus non-Jew, whose loyalty to her mother-in-law Naomi makes for a great short story), “Uriah’s wife,” Bathsheba (whose liaison with King David became grist for Hollywood and made her name synonymous with scandal and the fall of a great man), and Mary (whose betrothed was convinced he must “put her away” for unfaithfulness when he learned that she was pregnant by someone other than himself).

His relationship with his siblings must have been much like our own, both positive and negative. He was obedient to his parents in Nazareth, and under their care he “grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people” (Luke 2:51-52). He learned a trade, becoming a carpenter just as his father was. His care for his mother continued all the way to his death, when he assigned to one of the disciples responsibility for her care (John 19:26-27). Perhaps his siblings were too close to recognize his unique nature, since his brothers did not believe his claims (John 7:5), and at one point during his public ministry they even “went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21).

His ministry began with a severe period of temptation, and that kind of testing dogged him throughout his earthly life. The author of Hebrews affirms, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (4:15). He often found it necessary to cry out to the Father when he was in distress: “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death...” (5:7). He became tired, hungry, angry, and discouraged just as we all do. He wept openly from grief for those he loved and he prayed privately, both as a spiritual discipline and in specific preparation for important transitions in his ministry (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1).

Jesus is remembered for addressing large crowds with his message about the kingdom of heaven—on a hillside (Matt. 5:1), beside a lake (Mark 4:1; Luke 5:1), in a private house (Mark 2:2), and across the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1-2). But he was also available for one-on-one contacts with a wide range of people—Nicodemus, a member of the ruling council, in a meeting at night (John 3); a Samaritan woman whose multiple marriages had ostracized her from her village (John 4); Zacchaeus, a tax collector who created a spectacle by climbing a tree (Luke 19); a Roman centurion whose depth of faith amazed Jesus (Luke 7:2-10); a widow in the village of Nain whose only son had died (Luke 7); a Greek woman from Syrian Phoenicia who showed persistent faith (Mark 7:24-30); and many more. He attended wedding feasts, dinner parties, banquets, and family meals in private homes. As Philip Yancey observes, “He let himself get distracted by any ‘nobody’ he came across, whether a hemorrhaging woman who shyly touched his robe or a blind beggar who made a nuisance of himself.... Jesus was ‘the man for others,’ in Bonhoeffer’s fine phrase” (p. 89).

In a word, Jesus was involved in the lives of people on this earth. And as a result of contact with him, their lives were changed for the better. In the paraphrase of Frederick Buechner, Jesus summarized his impact to John’s disciples:

You go tell John what you’ve seen around here. Tell him there are people who have sold their seeing-eye dogs and taken up bird-watching. Tell him there are people who’ve traded in their aluminum walkers for hiking boots. Tell him the down-and-out have turned into the up-and-coming and a lot of dead-beats are living it up for the first time in their lives (*Peculiar Treasures*, 1979, p. 70).

## 7. Accountability

“An MUS student takes responsibility for his actions and accepts their consequences.”

In a way similar to the topic of scholarship, accountability is not a common subject heading for studying the life of Jesus. None of the books on my shelf considered the question of Jesus’ accountability. Philip Yancey doesn’t raise the issue in his fine study, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Nor does Malcolm Muggeridge in *Jesus, the Man Who Lives*. So, what is there when we begin looking for a model of taking responsibility from the life of Jesus?

First there is the insistence on using well what you have been given, a theme that recurs in the teachings of Jesus. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) the difference between the two servants who were praised and the one servant who was rejected was the use they made of their master’s money which he left in their charge. The master praised the servants who had invested that with which they had been entrusted with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things” (vv. 21, 23). With emphasis on the lack of the same accountability he condemned one servant who did not put the money to use, but buried it: “You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with

interest” (vv. 26-27). When you have been given something by a superior, you have a responsibility to the giver in how you use that gift.

Jesus indicated that expectations would be commensurate with abilities and opportunities when he said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48b). Since our schools provide outstanding opportunities in all areas of a boy’s education, this lesson should be stressed constantly. These young men will be future leaders in business and government, and we must impress on them the urgent need to use well what they are being given in this environment. The news of recent investment scandals around the world give urgent reminders of the need for this lesson in our own time.

Nowhere was that need demonstrated more spectacularly than in the fiasco the eventually brought down Barings Bank in London in 1995. A 28-year-old trader in Barings’ Singapore branch lost almost 1 billion dollars on the stock market and closed a bank that had been in existence for 233 years. He had no supervision, and was not accountable until it was too late. As one writer said, it was like a school boy grading his own test, only with higher stakes.

One of the questions presented by modern culture concerns the tension between form and substance, or that between intentions and outcomes. I’ve always been a bit suspicious of the salesperson who says too often, “Trust me,” when I don’t know them well at all. Jesus taught that only by a person’s behavior can you tell what kind of individual that person is. “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33). The application to human beings is, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that people will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (vv. 35-37).

The consistency between words and actions is highlighted in another parable:

What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, “Son, go and work today in the vineyard.” “I will not,” he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, “I will, sir,” but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted? (Matt. 21:28-31a).

Is it not true that what we want from our students is not just the polite, correct response to any request or direction, but also the follow-through with the desired behavior?

In a note that is particularly relevant to those attending this conference, Jesus insisted on the same link between words and behavior on the part of teachers as well.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matt. 23:2-4).

Followers of Jesus continued to teach the link between words and deeds in the leaders of the faith community. Paul (older, in the role of teacher) to Timothy (younger, in the role of student): “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but *set an example* for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Peter to fellow elders in the church: “Be shepherds of God’s flock...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but *being examples* to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Paul, again, said that bishops in the church “must be above reproach,” that deacons “are to be men worthy of respect,” and deaconesses “are to be women worthy of respect” (1 Tim. 3:2, 8, 11). While these instructions are for the church, the case can be made very easily that the parallel situation exists in the school community. Teachers and administrators must embody the proper ideals and code of conduct, following the same standards that we expect from our students. In this way our behavior becomes a model that reinforces the ideal of individual accountability.

We might reasonably expect to find that which was most important to Jesus on his mind as he faced the last moments of his earthly life. Human beings have for a long time remembered the last words of important figures, trying to discern the deep wisdom expressed in those last thoughts. John’s Gospel records a long prayer from Jesus immediately before he was arrested and led to his trial and death. Among other things, he gave an accounting of his actions to the Father:

I have revealed to you those whom you gave me out of the world.  
They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word... I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them...  
While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by the name that you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled (17:6-12).

It would be easy to become distracted by many questions raised by this statement. For the present discussion, note that Jesus is attesting to the present condition of that which has been given to him as he comes to the end of his life, and his own actions regarding them. His disciples are all accounted for and he has taken all appropriate actions to protect them.

In what ways did he provide for them and protect them? Sorting through the information available in the Gospels reveals some details about some of the disciples. Jesus began to call them as he met them in their workplaces. Two pairs of brothers were from the fishing industry on the Sea of Galilee, one came from the tax collector’s booth, and at least one of them was a member of the revolutionary group of Zealots who wanted a war with Rome. Simon Peter will serve as a case in point.

Peter was always dominant among the disciples, quick to commit and quick to speak out, often before determining the cost of such a commitment. He was the first to confess Jesus’s identity as the Christ, the Son of God, for which he was praised by Jesus (Matt. 16:18). It was Jesus who gave him the name “Peter,” or Rock (Rocky?), suggesting a resilience and dependability that was merely hidden potential at the time. Sensitive to his own failings, he was quick to confess his unworthiness in the presence of the power of Jesus. After one specific miraculous sign, Luke reports, “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners” (5:8-10). It was this



vocal fisherman who seized a sword at the scene of Jesus's arrest and slashed at one of the enemy, slicing off his ear (John 18:10). Up to that time, it seems, his courage was never in doubt.

But Simon could also harbor dangerous visions of grandeur and invulnerability:

“You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written:

‘I will strike the shepherd,  
And the sheep will be scattered.’

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Mark 14:27-31).

As subsequent events played out, Peter failed spectacularly under the pressure of the arrest and trial of Jesus. If the scene weren't so serious, you could almost imagine Jesus smiling to himself at Peter's optimistic self-evaluation. He had unrealistic confidence in his ability to cope with events, and only with Jesus's support would he be able to persist in the proper direction. Jesus encouraged him with a vision of the future, and with a role to fill after his fall. “Simon, Simon,” says Jesus, “Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32).

On another occasion Jesus confronted Simon, accusing him of doing the work of Satan himself! Just after his strong confession of faith in Jesus as Christ, Simon, now nicknamed Peter by Jesus, couldn't tolerate Jesus's assertion that “he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Matt. 16:21). Peter assumed the role of confidential advisor, almost as a peer to his master, when he “took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’” (v. 22). Jesus apparently heard echoes of the temptations in the wilderness when the devil offered an alternative path to gaining the world. The response to Peter was, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (v. 23).

Peter needed more protection than he was aware of, and the “accounting” by Jesus included bringing this disciple through the struggles and failures to the point that he could strengthen his brothers. The same model can be extended to the other disciples. He had acted toward them in the manner that was best for them. Jesus served to keep them safe by his behavior toward them.

A high school student reported this personal encounter with the need for external monitoring until he developed a sense of accountability. As a 14-year-old, when school was dismissed early for a teachers' meeting, he didn't inform his parents. Instead, he invited his girlfriend to his house. In his own words, “we weren't planning to study.” As they were about to enter the door to the house a neighbor called from her window, “You're home awfully early, Jerome.” He responded that they were going to go over their algebra homework. “Does your mother know, and do you want me to call her?”

Asked the helpful neighbor. At that point he gave up, saying he would call his mother while the girl sat on the front steps. Listen to his conclusion:

Mrs. Nolan saved our careers that day. If Kathy had gotten pregnant, she might not have become the doctor she is today. And my father had warned me that if I made a baby, the mutual fund he set up for me to go to college or start a business would have gone to the child. I'm glad Mrs. Nolan was at her window, looking out for me (from *Leadership Journal*).

Jesus demonstrated that actions have consequences, and that outcomes depend on previous actions and attitudes. When he went to the house of Simon the Pharisee for dinner, he was anointed with expensive perfume by a "sinful woman" who had wet his feet with her tears and then dried them with

her hair. The host evaluated the scene negatively, thinking that any righteous person would refuse such attention from a person such as she was. Jesus's response was to tell another parable:

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii, and the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:36-47).

Only when we are accountable for what decisions we have made and for what we have done can we begin to learn from our mistakes.

When I have confronted a student for plagiarism or other forms of dishonesty, I have first insisted that they confront their guilty actions, but then I urge them to learn from this bad decision. Learn to prepare better, to resist the lazy shortcut, and to be a better person. Advice and counsel may be helpful in teaching our boys to become responsible men, but being able to point to someone who lives the principles in everyday life helps even more. Jesus of Nazareth as portrayed in the Gospels provides such a model. We should, at the very least, include his life and teachings in any attempt to show our students model behavior.