

## **Growing up Alone: the new normal of isolation in adolescence**

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In the hope of imagining new paradigms for ministry with youth, this paper looks back to medieval Europe to learn how youth moved from childhood to adulthood. Observations are made on geographic stability, religious belonging, and vocational preparation. Consideration of these conditions offers new insight on the contemporary reality of isolation experienced by teens.

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## **Growing up Alone: the new normal of isolation in adolescence**

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The author takes Chap Clark's findings (*Hurt*, 2005) of isolation and abandonment seriously and asks if this reality was always so. The author looks back to medieval Europe, investigating how youth moved from childhood to adulthood in that environment. Observations are made on geographic and social stability, religious belonging, and vocational preparation. The author's reflection on these conditions offers new insight on the contemporary reality of isolation experienced by teens; and suggests changes in adult labor as a major factor in contemporary isolation. The author hopes by investigating the past we might imagine new paradigms for ministry fit for today.

### **Introduction**

The questions that motivated this paper started in response to the findings Chap Clark reports on in his 2005 book *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Clark was motivated by what he perceived as dramatic changes in teen behavior observed over the many years of his ministry with youth. Looking to get underneath the surface behaviors to learn the sentiments and motivations of youth, Clark conducted an empirical study that afforded him the rich opportunity to learn from the youth themselves about their own lives. Clark's major finding reported in that book is that by and large teens feel abandoned by the adults in their lives and feel responsible for their own "growing up." He describes today's adolescents as "indescribably lonely," but exhibiting an "air of callousness" as a defensive response in the face of what they perceive is an uncaring adult world.<sup>1</sup> He found this especially true for teens whose lives were scheduled to include all the advantages of good schooling and extracurricular events. For those youth, the fact that they were farmed out to paid professionals, rather than to parents and other adults, who cared, only increased their sense of abandonment. Clark's research among adolescents is both fascinating and disturbing. He has unmasked the tremendous, but largely hidden anxiety and

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<sup>1</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt: Inside the world of today's teenagers*, (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 69, 67.

isolation felt by today's teenagers, and those findings are invaluable for anyone concerned for adolescents today.

However, I found his major attribution of the source of that abandonment less helpful. In *Hurt* Clark charges that, over the past few decades, adults with having turned their attention away from the needs of youth – even when leading youth programming – towards more self-serving ends.<sup>2</sup> This assertion is reliant on the teen's impression of adult intention, as well as his reading of the wider social setting in which youth are living – postmodern, 21<sup>st</sup> century North America. He writes, “The contributing factors are varied and complex, but the foundational reason behind the separation between the adult world and the world of adolescents is that society has abdicated its responsibility to nurture the young into adulthood.”<sup>3</sup> While adult self-involvement may be the case in some instances, this attribution seems less credible. Since Clark's study investigated the sentiments of teens, his findings on their sense of abandonment are invaluable; teens' perception of their own felt reality is unquestionably valid. However, their ability to attribute that perception to another's intention (that of parents and other adults) is less accurate. Clark does not make the same study of the adult's behavior and understanding as he has done the teens'. I recognize that would clearly have been beyond the scope of his study.

It is important to understand the sources of abandonment if we are to address it in the lives of teens. Yet, Clark's reading of the larger social world is limited by how he frames and understands the contemporary experience of adolescence. Clark's interpretation is limited by the perspective that “there is nearly universal support for the idea that adolescence as we know it

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<sup>2</sup> This is largely the argument of chapters two and three of *Hurt*.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, *Hurt*, p. 59.

was a cultural invention of Western society that was first noticed around 1900.”<sup>4</sup> Thus his investigation is framed by the following assertion about the newness of adolescence:

The concept of adolescence as a social construct, or definition of unique life stage, has been recognized for just over a century. Prior to this, the transition from childhood to adulthood was seen less as a process and more as an event, marked in many cultures by significant ritual and celebration. It is as though the mere act of naming the stage caused a change in the way we thought about and acted toward our young.<sup>5</sup>

He goes on to note the immediate proliferation of public high schools, mandatory secondary education laws, and various programs “which provided opportunities for teens...[They served] to nurture emerging adolescents by providing systems, structures, and activities to help them grow into adulthood by means of the smoothest, most productive transition possible.”<sup>6</sup> Clark seems to see the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as some kind of golden age for adolescents when youth “enjoyed a newly affirmed status in the dominant culture.”<sup>7</sup> This lasted until the 1970’s, after which the programs designed for youth’s care and development began to serve the interests of the adults who ran them; adults became more focused on their own lives that they failed to look out for the interests of youth.<sup>8</sup>

In another place, Clark, leaning on the work of developmental psychologist John Santrock, identifies adolescence as “the period of life between childhood and adulthood.”<sup>9</sup> Clark then names the task of adolescence as “a psychosocial, independent search for a unique identity or separateness, with the end goals of being a certain knowledge of who one is in relation to others, a willingness to take responsibility for who one is becoming, and a realized commitment to live with others in community.”<sup>10</sup> In many ways, this is a fine definition, and

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<sup>4</sup> Clark, *Hurt* p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, *Hurt* p. 44-45.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, *Hurt*, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, *Hurt*, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Clark, *Hurt* p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> John Santrock, *Adolescence*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), p. 28-29, as quoted in Clark, *Hurt*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, *Hurt* p. 28.

helpful in its brevity and clarity. The error is in his presumption that this transition is a recent historic phenomenon, rather than one that has been part of the human community for ages.

Clark is not alone in his presumptions about the newness of adolescence.<sup>11</sup> Medieval historian Barbara Hanawalt argues that “in the case of adolescence [social scientists] have been willing to dismiss the existence of the phenomenon until sociology came up with names for it.”<sup>12</sup> A full discussion of the definition of adolescence is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>13</sup> For the time being I simply assert that youth have been maturing into adulthood from the beginning of human history and that the transition may have been brief or quite lengthy, but the task that Clark names above can be found to have been part of the maturation process for much of recorded history. What we might ask, rather, is how has the social reality surrounding how youth come to adulthood changed over time, and how has that change impacted their maturation? Considered from such an angle, there may be much to learn for our own work today by investigating how the maturation process was experienced in other times.

The perception of teens, which Clark terms “abandonment,” I assert is a symptom of isolation. Isolation is a serious and destructive reality, not just for teens but felt widely across contemporary life in North America. Clark’s findings lead me to ask the following questions, whence came the isolation now experienced by youth? Was it always the case? In order to answer these questions I investigated the passage from childhood to mature adulthood centuries

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<sup>11</sup> Clark himself looks to Jeffrey Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2000), Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffé (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), G. Stanely Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1904). Kenda Creasy Dean also makes the claim that “adolescence is an invention of the Industrial Revolution,” after which she refers to the ensuing “age-stratification” that eventually “created” the “American ‘teenager.’” Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 8. In chapter eleven Hanawalt offers an extensive description of the final marks of the passage from adolescence to adulthood, accomplished in one’s twenties, when one could finally be recognized as “sad and wise.”

<sup>13</sup>The definition of adolescence as such is challenged by Robert Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen* (Sanger CA: Quill Driver Books, 2007).

back, rather than decades. For my presumption is that the current symptoms of isolation are brought on by long standing causes, rather than more immediate ones.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps we have become so accustomed to the factors contributing to isolation that we do not see them, or that we do not recognize their impact on our daily living.

### **Part I: Coming to Adulthood in Medieval Europe**

While the United States is currently a widely diverse society, its most dominant cultural roots are planted in Europe. Therefore understanding pre-Industrial European history offers a window on the foundation out of which our current culture has come. This section of the paper offers a review of youth growing into adulthood in medieval Europe.<sup>15</sup> There are advantages to investigating the medieval period. We see the functioning of European society prior to the Reformation, prior to the industrial revolution, and prior to the shifts and movements we attribute to Modernism, for all of these will have dramatic impact on life in Europe. Yet the advantage of looking to medieval Europe, rather than further back, is the relative proliferation of documentation on everyday life, such as court documents, church records, guild records, and census data. Even though the region is divided and subdivided among frequently battling interests, the documentation illustrates great similarities in daily life across the region. While that information is generally limited to town life and not rural, it allows for some reflection on or extrapolation about rural living. It is beyond my capacity to analyze primary source material from the mid to late middle ages, a period from roughly the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, therefore I

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Clark attributes it to recent changes in adult attitudes towards teens. Robert Epstein attributes it what he calls the infantilization of teens throughout the twentieth century. Robert Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence*. John Taylor Gatto blames mandatory schooling practices of the twentieth century. John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> The age range under consideration is from approximately 14 to 28 years old. Depending on circumstance, youth as young as 7 may start on the path to adulthood, but more often 14 was the common age. On the upper end, they may take on full adult privileges as early as 21, but as late as 28. These particulars are discussed and cited below.

am dependent upon the work of eminent scholars of that period, including Barbara Hanawalt, Norman Pounds, and David Herlihy.

I consider three areas, each markers of life in the middle ages, and each influential on youth growing to adulthood: geographic stability; religious belonging; and vocational preparation. From these brief overviews, I draw three major characteristics of growing to adulthood in medieval Europe. They are: limited opportunities on a variety of fronts; parental concern for children's future and family stability; and the significant time spent by youth in the company of mature adults.

### *A. Geographic stability*

A first step in understanding geographic stability is to understand population density. Throughout the middle ages, Europe is lightly populated and largely agrarian. By the tenth century, the structures of the fallen Roman Empire were eventually replaced by a new kind of social reality of agricultural regions dotted with towns.<sup>16</sup> Towns and cities develop in order to support trade and skilled crafts, but their size was limited by the need for the surrounding region to support the town's population with food and other raw materials. By contemporary standards, many of the major urban settings would be thought insignificant. Accurate census data from the period is hard to come by, and there is disagreement among scholars about exact numbers, but there are few cities that seemed to reach 100,000 inhabitants; there were only a dozen cities in northern Europe with populations ranging from 25 to 50,000.<sup>17</sup> The vast majority of towns were

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<sup>16</sup> While the invading agents were different across the whole of Europe, the ensuing reality of kings holding control over small and large regions, further subdivided by lords and other vassals, was replicated throughout much of Europe. Population was densest along a corridor from southern England and Flanders to northern Italy. Norman Pounds, *The Medieval City*, p. 8, 75-77. The thesis that towns were further enhanced to serve the needs of long distance merchants is put forward by Fritz Rörig in *The Medieval Town* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1969), pp. 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> One source suggests Milan and Venice in the 14<sup>th</sup> century reached a height of 100,000, Paris at 80,000 and London 40,000. John Mundy and Peter Riesenbun, *The Medieval Town*, 30-31. Norman Pounds names no cities

only composed of a few thousand people, closely connected to the rural landscape immediately surrounding them. The primary purpose of the towns was to supply basic markets and crafts to support the region. The larger towns – Florence, Venice, Paris, and Bruges – were augmented by the lively long-distance trade they supported.

Besides density, travel between communities is also a consideration. Most people traveled by foot, and goods were transported by cart along dirt roads, or by river in small boats. The distance between most towns was small, maybe as little as twelve miles, but such that it required a whole day to go to and return from the town market for basic services. Larger towns were more widely dispersed, since their services (courts, cathedrals, law, and more select markets) would not be needed by most people on a frequent basis; the population of these larger towns was generally drawn from within a 50 mile radius.<sup>18</sup> All of that to say, the vast majority of the population in the Medieval world (85-90%) was directly connected to rural, agricultural communities, and for most of their lives only travelled short distances from their villages.<sup>19</sup>

When we look at larger urban settings, of which there may have been as many as 20 in all of Europe,<sup>20</sup> they were bound by walls and were further subdivided into closely huddled neighborhoods. Thus urban populations were densely contained. For example, the city of London in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries held a population between 40 and 60,000 people within little more than a square mile.<sup>21</sup> According to Fritz Rörig, European town properties were generally owned by the upper class, long distance traders who were often the ones to build up towns; these

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over 50,000 in northern Europe. Norman Pounds, *The Medieval City*, p. 79. In Germany the largest of towns may have been the 15 or so with populations between 10 and 30,000. Fritz Rörig, *The Medieval Town*, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Pounds describes the economic relations of towns to their surrounding regions and their density and size, *The Medieval City*, pp. 70-75

<sup>19</sup> Pounds argues that establishing an accurate percentage is nearly impossible, given the dearth of accurate census data. *The Medieval City*, p. 80. Mundy and Riesenburger, *The Medieval Town*, p. 31. Central to this consideration is the limited freedom of many rural people to move from the land to which they were bonded to work.

<sup>20</sup> Pounds, *The Medieval City*, p. 76.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Hanawalt looks to various sources for her population estimates, the discussion of which can be found in endnotes supporting her claims. Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, pp. 23-24.

houses were then subdivided into workshops and rooms rented to artisans and smaller scale traders.<sup>22</sup> So one building would contain a few establishments for living and work. Most often the workshop was connected to the living quarters, so work life and private life intermingled. Within the households were crowded a diversity of persons, including blood relatives, servants, and apprentices. Likewise neighborhoods were closely packed, with the range of social status mixing within small confines. London historian Hanawalt claims that “alderman lived side by side with craftsman and prostitutes” so that “from an early age, children mixed with a varied population.”<sup>23</sup> That is to say within the town, where there was greater diversity than the village, there was still a relatively stable community of people with whom neighbors interacted. Hanawalt further claims that there developed strong bounds among neighbors whereby they protected one another’s well being against outsiders.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, because of lower birth rates and higher mortality than rural living, towns were unable to replace their own population and depended upon new people continually brought in to replenish the population.<sup>25</sup> These new members were drawn primarily from the surrounding region as servants or apprentices, of which more will be said below. Since towns had a continued connection to the rural communities that surrounded them, and towns themselves were closely contained communities, I suggest that the geographic stability that is found in medieval Europe reflects a social stability. For the most part, people lived among familiar friends and

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<sup>22</sup> Rörig, *The Medieval Town*, p. 20. On the design of the medieval town home, see Pounds, *The Medieval City*, p. 41-46.

<sup>23</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 31, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>25</sup> The high mortality rate is connected with the proliferation of illness spreading in the close confines of the town. This is particularly true following the Great Plague that swept across Europe during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Cities and towns were most affected, as the plague was carried by rats and fleas living in close quarters with humans. It started in the southern Europe and moving northward slowly. According to Norman Pounds, each outbreak “decimated the urban population and afresh and offered renewed opportunities in the shape of empty home and opportunities for employment for more immigrants from the countryside.” Pounds, *The Medieval City*, p. 58. Interestingly, death of children by accidental causes is lower in the town neighborhoods than it was reported in the rural areas. Hanawalt attributes this to the fact that young children generally played in the street under the watchful eyes of adults working nearby. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 64.

neighbors for much of their lives. Even if there was movement from the village or countryside to the town, that town still had strong connections to the countryside and was itself a small tightly bound community. That community was a range of ages and occupations, mixing on a daily basis, and for the most part working where they also lived.

### ***B. Religious belonging***

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the west the Roman Church remained as an institution that crossed the multiple political boundaries subdividing Europe. As such the Church's influence increased as Church leadership offered the avenues by which alliances were formed across princely boundaries. The presence and influence of the Church contributed to establishing peaceful alliances among princes, which then contributed to economic growth. These alliances could be assisted by local priests and bishops stationed in various dioceses or by religious orders with monastic houses in different regions. Religious orders proliferated over the course of the Middle Ages, starting with communities created in established towns (such as the Clunys in Toulouse France in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries), followed by those which chose undeveloped tracts of land to build their establishments (Cistercians and Carthusians across France in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries). Each in their own way contributed to the development of the towns and the countryside by developing agriculture, leasing land, and employing people. According to Mundy and Riesenber, the Church not only influenced the economic development, but also the moral sensibilities of that development by reminding the people "of the services they owed the community."<sup>26</sup>

Across Europe cathedral churches were established by bishops in the larger towns, but smaller churches and chapels were also established in the villages by lords and within larger towns by wealthy families or groups of families in service to their households. According to

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<sup>26</sup> Mundy and Riesenber, *The Medieval Town*, p. 28.

Pounds, “parishes varied greatly in area, but there was a certain consistency in the size of their populations. They had to be large enough to support a priest and maintain a church, but at the same time small enough for the priest to attend to the parishioners’ spiritual needs and for the parishioners to go to their parish church on those occasions the Church had ordained.”<sup>27</sup> Recall that such travel was largely by foot, so the parish church was likely within a few miles of one’s home.

The Church was a consistent component of community life, whether in the town or countryside. While its influence can be seen in peaceful alliances across borders, it can also be seen in the changing mores of social life in medieval Europe. As examples David Herlihy points to changing practices in both polygamy and infanticide, both of which were widely practiced in ancient Rome and among the barbarian peoples of Europe, but were contrary to the Church’s teaching.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, practices of popular piety offer examples of the religious sensibility of the people enduring in spite of the Church’s leadership teaching otherwise. Such would be the case in the developed devotion to the Holy Family. Whereas the Church was teaching the superior value of celibacy and warning against undue affection for children, popular devotions grew around the “Virgin Mary as interceding mother; of Jesus as the adorable child; and of St. Joseph as patron and provider.” According to Herlihy, “the assumption here is that these public devotions correspond in some manner to the private attitudes and values of the participants.”<sup>29</sup> What is to be noted is that even in instances of difference between Church leadership and the membership, it is not a question of *whether* to believe, but a question of *how* to express that belief.

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<sup>27</sup> Pounds, *The Medieval City*, p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991* (Berghahn Books: Providence, 1995), p. 142 on marriage, pp. 225-226 on infanticide.

<sup>29</sup> Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe*, p. 148-151

A similar inference can be made about religious belonging. The city of London prior to the great fire of 1666 boasted 120 churches even though it had a population of 50,000. Winchester, a community of 5,000 had 70 churches. Hanawalt attributes the great number of parishes within the city of London as evidence for “a preference for neighborhood worship, a place to be baptized, married and buried among close friends.”<sup>30</sup> Norman Pounds argues that most of these urban churches had a short life, as the families that founded them passed on or were unable to support them in time; eventually these urban communities “concentrated on a small number of large and pretentious churches.”<sup>31</sup> Regardless, what I would like to emphasize is that religious belonging and practice were clearly central to life in medieval Europe. The vast number of churches and chapels suggests that it was not a question of *whether* people went to church with regularity, but a question of *which* church they regularly attended.

### *C. Vocational preparation*<sup>32</sup>

The final consideration focuses on young peoples’ movement into the labor force. The vast majority of young people would follow in their parent’s footsteps – the only avenue available to them – and enter agricultural labor and husbandry in season and basic craft work out of season. In rural settings very young children were frequently left in the care of older children while both parents were busy with the intensive work of planting or harvesting in the fields surrounding their home or village. However, as soon as a child was physically able they were given tasks that assisted their parents’ labor. As their physical ability grew, so did their responsibilities. In that way, they learned how to work from parents and other surrounding

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<sup>30</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Pounds, *The Medieval City*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>32</sup> This section is heavily reliant on Barbara Hanawalt’s scholarship on London. However, patterns of service and apprenticeship were similar throughout much of Europe. The discussion does not include those preparing for religious life or the nobility; rather the focus is on the experience of the greater number of youth outside those vocations.

adults, and they contributed to the household. Such work did not require the ability to read or write, and so education for those purposes was generally unavailable to most young people.

However, life in larger towns was somewhat different for young people entering the labor force. Those who grew up in town usually moved into service (all forms of contracted labor) or apprenticeships in a skilled trade. However, the town needed more laborers than their own youth provided so when possible, young people from rural villages moved to town to advance their family's prospects in service or apprenticeship.<sup>33</sup> The choice of occupation was not up to the young person and their interests, but depended on the family's connections, for parents were primarily responsible for setting up connections and contracts for their sons and daughters.<sup>34</sup> According to Hanawalt, parents would try to make connections with employers or masters slightly above their own standing as a means of ensuring a good future for their son or daughter.

In either service or apprenticeship the young person usually took up residence within their employer's or master's household for the contracted period, receiving room, board, and maybe some income. It is for that reason that employers and masters wanted to choose young people who were known to them, or at least had trustworthy references. The reputation of the recommending adult, whether parent or sponsor, was on the line in these negotiations. In the case of apprentices the risk was even greater because of the significant investment being made in the young person. Then "bonds of surety were posted...to ensure the terms were kept" by both parties.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 131.

<sup>34</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 132.

<sup>35</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 133.

The terms of a contract for service were dependent upon the situation, whereas the terms of apprenticeships were determined in large part by the guilds governing the skilled work.<sup>36</sup> In the case of service, youth from fourteen years onward would enter into service in a household in order to learn social skills, make connections in town, earn some income, and generally improve marriageability. For most, this was not lifelong work, but taken on for a few years. Service was not necessarily limited to the lower classes, but would have been open to all levels of society except the very top. Entering service was a common practice for young people, undertaken for a few years prior to marriage and setting up their own households.<sup>37</sup> Families pursued service contracts within households they knew. Parents were on the lookout for the son or daughter's safety, but also for their appropriate advancement. Employers were looking for trustworthy and reliable youth who would be entering the intimacy of their home. While a servant would not be considered a peer of the family, it was expected that a young person would learn the social manners of a better household and meet people beyond their own family's connections.

The more formal agreement of apprenticeship involved contracts of greater specificity and endurance. Apprenticeships were the means of entry into all manner of skilled labor, from tanner, fishmonger, weaver, and butcher, to the more exclusive trades of accountant, secretary, goldsmith and cloth merchant. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, skilled labor was protected by member guilds, which regulated the market of and preparation for the trade within a community.<sup>38</sup> More select skilled labors generally took longer to master, were needed less regularly among common

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<sup>36</sup> The role of guilds in medieval society is complex and beyond the scope of this discussion. It is enough to say at this point that guilds were both beneficial and problematic for trades people, and they were a fact of urban life. Rörig, *The Medieval Town*.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Hanawalt estimates that three times as many young people entered service in London as entered apprenticeships. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 174. For girls of middling families it was a way of increasing a dowry, thus improving marriageability. Paul Newman, *Growing up in the Middle Ages* (McFarland: Jefferson, NC, 2007), p. 198.

<sup>38</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 134.

people, and were practiced only in larger towns. On the other hand many skilled crafts were widely needed and available, even in small towns; but their status was accordingly lower.

By entering an apprenticeship a young person had the potential of becoming a master, with all the benefits mastery allowed.<sup>39</sup> However, the process was lengthy. One would enter between 14 or 18 years old and be committed to stay a standard seven years in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, to ten years in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> Obviously the lengthy contract benefited the master who had skilled labor for longer and apprentices sometimes left their masters before the contract expired.<sup>41</sup> Masters were obligated to provide “room, board, and clothing and to teach the craft and not menial service.”<sup>42</sup> For the apprentices’ part, they were expected to know how to read and write, “be honest and to have learned their manners by the time they entered into the contract,” which meant they were to receive that basic education during childhood.<sup>43</sup> They were also restricted in their public behavior so as to reflect well on the master and the guild. Their contracts included prohibitions against such things as drinking, gambling, and visiting theaters, but also marrying and living on their own.<sup>44</sup> As mentioned above, the workshop was usually connected to the master’s living quarters. Also in larger towns the various guilds were restricted to certain neighborhoods. Therefore interaction among all parties was continuous. Central to the young person’s education was their entrance into the society of the guild, which meant that masters were to instruct apprentices on guild secrets and appropriate behavior. Even if some

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<sup>39</sup> Not only did that include being able to charge for their labors at the rate of a master and own their own shop, but also to become a citizen of the town and engage their own apprentices in time.

<sup>40</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> Hanawalt reports that only 41% of apprentices in London completed their contracts. This would be done for multiple reasons. If the apprentice was wealthy enough, the master might be compensated for the duration of the contract. For an apprentice who planned to return to a smaller town to practice, guild membership may not have been needed, and so they left prior to gaining full status. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 138.

<sup>42</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 135.

<sup>43</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 144.

<sup>44</sup> Only legal apprentices did not live with their masters, but in lodgings with their own servants. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 135.

young people are not finished with their apprenticeship until they are 28 years old, by then they are well situated – and likely eager – to start their own shop and household.

According to Hanawalt, few London masters took in more than one apprentice over their career. More prosperous households and shops could absorb more, and some of those masters could take on two, or even three in overlapping stages of maturity.<sup>45</sup> Within that environment young apprentices were “locked into a close, quasi-familial relationship with their masters.” Hanawalt goes on to argue: “It is easy to imagine that part of the intensity of the master-apprentice relationship grew out of the master’s need to mold this sole disciple into an image of himself.”<sup>46</sup>

Regardless of whether a young person took the path of agricultural labor, service, or apprenticeship, for the most part they learned their work while in the workplace. They started with simple tasks, observed more complicated, and in time, took on the more complicated. The whole time he or she would be learning to take on the social life of the setting, which for some would be higher than that of their original family. Only those whose work required the ability to read and write would have taken advantage of a formal education earlier in their lives to serve that purpose.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Three themes from medieval Europe***

Three themes come to my attention from this analysis. The first is that a young person growing up would have very limited options – by today’s North American standards – on a variety of fronts. They would have met a limited number and diversity of people; most they

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<sup>45</sup> The guilds themselves limited the number of apprentices. This was a means of restricting the market for the skilled trade. Depending on the nature of the trade, the master may employ several servants to aid in the labor of the trade, but skilled work (and training) would be reserved for the master and apprentice. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 137.

<sup>46</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 137.

<sup>47</sup> Such an education would have been done in small schools, most of which were sponsored by religious communities or churches, or by individual tutors, usually clergy who had such learning themselves. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, pp. 82-85. Newman, *Growing up in the Middle Ages*, pp. 118-124.

would know for much of their lives. They would have had very limited educational opportunity; there was little need for most people to read and write, and so there was little training available. There were limited options for religious belonging or practice. There was limited social diversity in terms of ethnicity or religion; while there was some in the larger cities even that was limited.<sup>48</sup> Finally, there were limited options for labor and employment. This depended on what was available and what families could negotiate; it had little to do with a young person's interests.

The second observation is that parents were interested in their children's security. Granted the child's security fed into their own, especially in an age with few social services. Regardless, the effort parents expended on their children's behalf for good service positions and for apprenticeships is indicative of the care they had for their children. Plenty of court records speak of parents fighting masters for the rights promised their children, suggesting that parent's concern did not end with their children leaving their home.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, young people spent the majority of their time in the company of adults, whether parents, neighbors, masters, or employers and other servants. While they would have been in regular contact with other young people – those older and younger – there is no evidence of them spending any considerable time primarily in the company of their age peers. They entered adulthood under the tutelage of mature adults, of whom parents, sponsors, and masters were deeply invested in their success.

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<sup>48</sup> I have not mentioned the presence of Jews through parts of Europe and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. By and large the European population was Christian. Even where Jews were present they were frequently limited by law and/or custom in where they could settle. Pounds, *The Medieval City*, pp. 147-149.

<sup>49</sup> Both Barbara Hanawalt and David Herlihy challenge the assertions of Phillipe Aries, who in his influential 1960 book *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien regime*, asserted that childhood and the needs of youth were not recognized by medieval families. Both authors argue that Aries' assertions are based on presumptions on the necessary improvement of modern society rather than on any appropriate analysis of the historical record. Herlihy, p. 216-217. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, p. 7.

Given these three themes of medieval youth – limited options, parental concern, and adult company – it may have been easier for the young person to figure out what was expected of them as adults, how they were to live, and with whom. Such are the “end goals” of adolescence, named by Clark: “a certain knowledge of who one is in relation to others, a willingness to take responsibility for who one is becoming, and a realized commitment to live with others in community.”<sup>50</sup> However, they would still have taken several years to mature into those realities, struggling with their own growing abilities and with the shifting expectations of those around them. We are left to ask, What makes today so much different from then? And what makes these goals so much more difficult for today’s adolescents?

## **Part II: Observations about contemporary North America**

There are many factors that contribute to the changes from medieval Europe to 21<sup>st</sup> century North America. In the space remaining I can only gloss over a few important points, paralleling the three themes named above. However, each is worthy of deep investigation for another time. In regard to options, rather than a life marked by limitations, contemporary youth swim amid an overwhelming sea of opportunity. In a world where the long daily commute is common and vacation travel a given, a teen encounters more people and places in the space of a year than a medieval person would have experienced in a lifetime. Similarly, it is common for families to move, and for extended families to be spread over great distances, inviting ever-widening networks of relationships. Whether in person or through various media, teens encounter a tremendous range of people and cultures, embodying belief systems and value worlds different from their own. From preschool to university families weigh the value of different educational options. Embedded within those educational decisions are aspirations for ever widening employment opportunities.

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<sup>50</sup> Clark, *Hurt* p. 28.

In regard to parental concern I suggest that parental behavior on behalf of their children's lives frequently appears self-serving. Securing a good future for your children insures a level of security for yourself; this was true in the medieval world and remains true today. However, different times and cultural mores play a large part in what parents think will promote that security. Thus parental behavior – and adult behavior at large – cannot be judged without significant regard to the larger social world and its pressures on adults.

Finally, as concerns adult companionship, I want to make what I think is an important observation that goes to the heart of the issue on isolation. Clearly youth do not spend the majority of their time in the ongoing company of adults. Rather, from preschool through university, they spend the greater part of their waking hours in the company of their age peers. Yet, I suggest, this is not immediately attributable to a plan by adults to abandon youth. Rather it results in a major shift in how and where adults spend their day.

### ***The New Normal of Isolation***

From the dawn of human history through the late medieval period, adults' work was located in or near their home.<sup>51</sup> As described above, the fields surrounded the home or village and the shop was usually adjacent to the living quarters. Youth were always around adults because adults were seldom far from their home. Since the industrial revolution in the mid-eighteenth century, with the first significant advances in labor technology, work was increasingly removed from the places people lived to mills and factories where industry of scale was possible.<sup>52</sup> Advances in technology improved travel and also made it necessary, causing people

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<sup>51</sup> Mundy and Reisenberg write, "it may be argued that there was no basic technological change since the introduction of settled agriculture, domesticated animals, metal work, and town life in the late Neolithic age until yesterday's industrial revolution. Both antiquity and the middle ages are alike in being times when already known techniques were transplanted to new areas." *The Medieval Town*, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> This starts in the mid-eighteenth century in England and northern Europe, expanding from there to other regions, including the northern British colonies of North America.

to relocate from smaller towns and cities to larger, sometimes newer, cities where large scale industry was possible and employment available. While initiated with the advent of the industrial revolution in Europe, these changes have taken centuries to be widely felt across Europe and elsewhere in the world. In regions still deeply tied to small scale agriculture, these changes have come more slowly. However, by the end of the twentieth century most North Americans have become deeply accustomed to the reality of employment outside the home, and the practice of relocating for jobs.

These labor changes happened for adults, such that the majority of their day was spent away from their homes, therefore out of the sight and company of children.<sup>53</sup> But even children's labor changed; they were welcome in some factory settings where their small bodies worked well with the machines and their compliant natures fit well with employers.<sup>54</sup> In the United States child labor was not universally restricted until the early twentieth century, and then it was in large part due to the Depression and lack of employment opportunities for adults that finally determined the issue. Companioning restrictions on child labor were the development of mandatory schooling laws across the country.<sup>55</sup> We can interpret mandatory schooling as a response to two realities: the need to keep youth safely occupied while parents were away from the home; and the need to prepare youth for the demands of eventual employment as adults.

Throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth century education took on the same economy of

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<sup>53</sup> There is need for a discussion on women's employment outside the home since the dawn of the industrial revolution to challenge the charge that it is only a late 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>54</sup> It might be suggested that adult overseers of laboring children would have had the children's welfare at heart, such overseers were in turn responsible to other managers and owners and so not final arbiters of the fate of children under their employ. This in no way reflects the close working and living situation of earlier servants or apprentices.

<sup>55</sup> While restrictions on labor were first proposed much earlier, the passage of the United States law restricting work by children less than 16 years of age were not enacted until 1938. Mandatory schooling for youth up to age 16 became the law across the United States in 1918. Laws on the state level involving both schooling and labor for youth progressed at different rates across the country. Massachusetts was an early proponent of both laws. Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence*, pp. 32-39.

scale that informed other industries, resulting in specialized subject areas, taught in large, age-peer groupings. The frameworks that defined schools (scale, separation, and specialization) came to inform models used in Christian churches ministry to youth.<sup>56</sup>

Embedded in Clark's reading of the reality of abandonment among teens is the recognition that the experience of adolescence as a communal reality, distinct and separate from the wider culture. In fact he asserts "Their world is different."<sup>57</sup> I suggest that such *separation* during adolescence is what is new in the twentieth century. The consequences of that separation – its longstanding effect of abandonment, companioned by the presumption of its normalcy – are what confront us today.<sup>58</sup>

I do not propose that we turn back the clock and return to a time of bad plumbing and frightening health care. However, I do believe that if we look to the environments and practices by which young people came to adulthood in the past, it will help us imagine new paradigms by which we will help youth do so today. It was the separation of youth from the ubiquitous and ongoing company of multiple significant adults that has necessitated the need for programming and services designed for youth. It is unlikely that new programs for youth will adequately answer the problems of isolation, which is now deeply engrained in our social world. Rather we might ask how our Christian churches may recognize how the patterns of isolation function in our world, and ask anew, how best do we bring adolescents to adulthood? In the past they were

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<sup>56</sup> The claim that public school models influenced religious education in churches is made by John H. Westerhoff III. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), pp. 3-5. Concern for scalability and replication is reflected in the various youth ministry initiatives in the United States found in the book by Mark Senter III. *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Clark, *Hurt*, p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> Again, there is a larger discussion here, not least of which is the influence of a market economy on children and youth, now largely targeted as a distinct and valuable commercial market. See Juliet B. Schor, *Born to Buy* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

ushered into adulthood, by and large, in the presence of adults who had an investment in their future, not their age peers. What might we imagine for them today?

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Adolescence is a highly formative time for future health. While many of the challenges that emerge at this age are rooted in experiences in the womb or in young childhood, effects of the neurobiological changes in the very early years can emerge in adolescence. This will influence behaviours that can lead to heart disease and other chronic conditions that also tend to be established at this crucial time of life, including levels of physical activity, nutrition, tobacco smoking, and alcohol use. -"Growing up" period between childhood and maturity from approximately ages 10-20. -Major tasks of adolescence: -Adjust to changing body size and shape. -Come to terms with sexuality. -Adjust to new ways of thinking. -Strive for emotional maturity and economic independence of adulthood. Explain puberty in historical context. -Age at puberty has declined dramatically over last few hundred years. -E.g. Norway - 1840: mean age of menarche 17; today: 13 (Santrock, 1998). -Causes: increased standard of living, particularly nutrition, health, heredity and body mass. Explain puberty.