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CONTACT:

Emily Stack Davis

517-803-3745

PR@hillsdale.edu

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Hillsdale College Ph.D. Candidate Ben R. Crenshaw Presents Doctoral Research
Crenshaw presented research from his dissertation, ‘The Political Theology of Rev. Jonathan Mayhew.’

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College doctoral candidate Ben R. Crenshaw gave a research presentation on his dissertation, titled “The Political Theology of Rev. Jonathan Mayhew,” on Nov. 3. Mayhew was a Congregationalist minister in Boston whose defense of resistance to tyranny helped shift American political sentiment in favor of revolution. Crenshaw gave his presentation after successfully defending his dissertation before a faculty panel.

Professor of Politics Thomas West served as Crenshaw’s dissertation chair and provided introductory remarks.

“What was the event or the events that that initiated the founding out of which later American greatness developed? Ben speaks to that question by analyzing the political thought of a leading New England minister, Jonathan Mayhew,” West said. “Ben’s dissertation provides considerable support to those who deny that America’s founding must be seen as a radical whig, anti-theological, Enlightenment project in which John Locke plays the role of hero or villain, depending on your political preference.”

Crenshaw said that British, Puritan, and Protestant traditions all influenced Mayhew’s thought, leading him to the belief that government is a cooperative effort between God and man — both a divine ordinance and a rational endeavor.

“Mayhew believed that civil or political power came from God, but instead of being granted directly to a king, a prince, or a civil magistrate by God himself, God’s power was granted to the people in general for men to steward and use wisely for their own social well-being,” Crenshaw said. “Civil power comes from God to the people, who then select the best magistrates to lead them.”

According to Crenshaw, this was the basis of Mayhew’s argument for resistance to tyranny, as it was the office, not the rulers, that God ordained, and the office was only for the purpose of doing good.

“The office has a purpose and function not determined by men but by God, even though men must take the initiative to fulfill its functions and ends. Only when men confuse the office of the civil magistrate with particular rulers do they mistakenly think that civil rulers carry a divine blessing and must be obeyed and praised without exception,” Crenshaw said. “Only when civil rulers who have been elected by the people actually rule as God has designed by the ordinance of their office do they then become ministers or servants of God.”

Crenshaw is a visiting assistant professor at the University of Mississippi’s Declaration of Independence Center for the Study of American Freedom and a contributing editor at American Reformer. He received his Bachelor of Arts in History from Taylor University in 2011, his Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from Denver Seminary in 2017, his Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics and Ethics from Denver Seminary in 2018, and his Master of Arts in Politics from Hillsdale College’s Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship in 2021. Having successfully completed his dissertation, he will earn a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics and receive his diploma at Hillsdale College’s Commencement Ceremony in May 2026.

For a headshot of Crenshaw, click [here](#). For Crenshaw’s student profile, click [here](#). For photos of Hillsdale College, click [here](#). For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About Hillsdale College Graduate School of Statesmanship

The Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship was founded in 2010 “to educate students in the language of American constitutionalism and to place its graduates in positions of public service in politics, in journalism, in the Academy, and elsewhere.” Its courses of study, which culminate in either a Master of Arts or a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics, are centered around the core texts from the Western and American traditions of political thought — what Thomas Jefferson called the “elementary books of public right.” All admitted students receive a full-tuition scholarship and admitted Ph.D. students receive an additional living stipend. For more information, visit gradschool.hillsdale.edu.

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than 7.2 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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