

A COMPARISON OF FAITH COMMITMENT IN CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN  
SCHOOL GRADUATES TO THE GENERAL POPULATION DURING YOUNG  
ADULTHOOD

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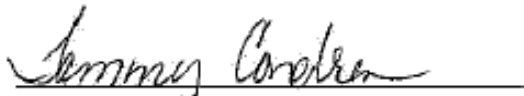
A COMPARISON OF FAITH COMMITMENT IN CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL GRADUATES TO THE GENERAL POPULATION DURING YOUNG ADULTHOOD

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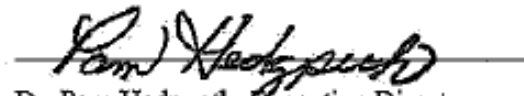
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ADULTHOOD

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Graduate Education Department  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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By

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2022

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## ABSTRACT

Many studies since the turn of the century have documented the decline in the number of Christians in the United States, particularly among young adults in their 20s (American Culture and Faith Institute [ACFI], 2017; Lipka, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021). While some would contend a departure from the faith is a natural result of family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) and those who have wandered will eventually reengage with the church, others have warned many Americans raised in church may not be returning to practice Christianity (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barna Group, 2006; Gallup, 2002; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Smith & Snell, 2009). An expressed purpose of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) is to seek to establish an environment which increases the likelihood students will remain committed to the Christian faith (ACCS, 2018b). The purpose of this quantitative, causal comparative study was to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) by comparing young adult graduates of ACCS schools and those in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) in terms of religious faith commitment as determined by responses to an online survey using questions adapted from Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Participants included graduates of ACCS member schools who were between the ages of 18 and 24 when family lifecycle would predict a decline in religiosity. The primary guiding question for the study was: What is the difference in the level of faith commitment between young adult ACCS graduates and the sample young adult population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019)? The researcher conducted a one-way chi-square analysis to determine if such a difference existed in the ACCS sample and the sample from the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock. The two

major findings from this study were: 1) Graduates in the sample from ACCS schools do not appear to follow the trend of recent research nor experience the drop in religious faith commitment to the degree predicted by family lifecycle theory. 2) No relationship was found between the faith commitment of ACCS graduates and the number of years they attended an ACCS member school. Findings from the study can benefit classical Christian educators in promoting the relationship between graduating from a classical Christian school and resilient faith commitment and can assist parents in determining benefits which might be gained from classical Christian education for their children.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Any group or species which do not reproduce will eventually result in the population dwindling or perhaps becoming extinct. As cultural winds continue to shift into the twenty-first century, many studies have documented the decline in the number of Christians in the United States, particularly among young adults in their 20s (American Culture and Faith Institute [ACFI], 2017; Lipka, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021). While some would point to a typical pattern of religiosity which seems to repeat itself in the faith experience of each generation (Mueller & Cooper, 1986; Roozen, 1980; O'Connor, Hoge, & Alexander, 2002; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995), others have warned there are indications many Americans raised in church may not be continuing to practice Christianity (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barna Group, 2006; Gallup, 2002; Smith & Snell, 2009).

Christians have been mandated biblically, in passages such as Deuteronomy 6:2-9 (English Standard Version), to instruct their children in matters of faith in the morning, evening, and during the day. Therefore, it is important for Christian parents and educators to determine what effect the large portion of time invested in school has on the faith practices of their offspring. While some research has been done to document the effectiveness of various types of Christian education (Vaughan & Morgan, 2015; Collins & Clanton, 2018; Brower Latz, 2018; Filipas, 2019; Hull, 2003; Miller & Beazley, 2018; Pennings et al., 2014; Williams, 2019), very little research exists on the effectiveness of classical Christian education on the Christian faith commitment of adults later in life (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020; Horan, 2017). No research exists examining the faith

commitment of classical Christian school graduates in the years immediately following graduation when many students attend college.

This quantitative study surveyed 18- to 24-year-old graduates of classical Christian schools, specifically graduates of member schools of the Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS) to determine their level of Christian faith commitment. The survey was adapted by permission from a recent study by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) which found that just one in ten 18- to 29-year-olds who claimed to be current or former Christians fell into a category of what they labeled *Resilient Disciples*. Member schools of the ACCS were contacted and asked to send the link to the survey to individuals who graduated from their school within the previous 5 years. Once an adequate sample of ACCS graduates had responded, results were compared to the Kinnaman and Matlock study. Survey results were also examined for correlation with other factors research has determined to influence religiosity such as parental faith commitment, discipleship, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and relationships with others of faith (Black, 2008; Gane, 2014; Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020; Myers, 1996).

If attending a classical Christian school has a positive effect on post-high school Christian faith commitment (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020), such knowledge will enable families to make a better-informed decision about their children's education. It would also provide Christian school leaders who are considering a change to a classical pedagogy with valuable information. Furthermore, such research would be valuable for families considering the type of education they desire for their children.

Chapter One included a problem statement from the researcher, a purpose statement, as well as the research questions. It also included a theoretical framework

outlining the challenge of measuring depth of spiritual commitment. In addition, the researcher defined key terms, listed assumptions, limitations, delimitations, design controls and included a summary.

### **Problem Statement**

The number of people who identify as Christian in the United States has declined drastically in the twenty-first century. The ACFI, a branch of the Barna Research Group established factors to measure Christian faith commitment (ACFI, 2017). American Culture and Faith Institute (2017) found the number of Christians in the United States plunged from a mean of nearly 40% from 1991-2005 to only 31% in 2017. The longitudinal study from ACFI (2017) established a series of questions on theological beliefs regarding sin and salvation for participants to be labeled as born-again Christians rather than mere self-identification. Furthermore, Lipka (2015) with the Pew Research Center, reported the number of Americans who self-identify as having no religious affiliation increased from around 16% in 2007 to about 23% in 2014. Additionally, of special note is the high concentration of what Lipka of the Pew Research Center (2015) labeled as “nones” among younger adults (2015, para. 2). Among Millennials born between 1981 and 1996, the percentage who claimed no religious affiliation increased to 35% (Lipka, 2015). More recently, Pew Research Center (2021) found the percentage of U.S. adults claiming to be Christian had fallen by 14% when compared to the number of Christians a decade ago. Furthermore, the number of Americans claiming no religious affiliation (sometimes identified as *nones*) had increased by 11% compared to 2009. In a different Pew Research study (2020), researchers found 53% of all U.S. adults say

Christianity's influence on the culture in America is decreasing, and 60% of these respondents cited the reason as a growth in the number of *nones* (para. 14).

The increasing number of young people who once attended church and have now walked away has been well documented (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barna Group, 2006; Gallup, 2002; Smith & Snell, 2009) and highly publicized in the landmark book *Sticky Faith* by Clark and Powell (2011). In the most recent decade, Lipka (2015) reported almost one-fifth of Americans claim a religious upbringing but now identify as a "none" (para. 2) Given that an extensive longitudinal study by Myers (1996) and recent findings by ACFI (2017), founded by George Barna, indicated parents as the most influential factor determining the religiosity of offspring, it should be deeply concerning the ACFI concluded very few adults are equipped, concerned, or interested in guiding their children to a personal relationship with Jesus.

The trend of the Church losing its offspring is not likely to change, Barna Group (2006) concluded. If neither families nor churches prove to be influential in the lives of children, the chances of exposure to the gospel are small. However, Black (2008) reported three domains of Christian influence in addition to parents that impact church commitment. These include discipleship, mentoring, and relationships with other committed believers. Gane (2014) found a combination of a student's home, church, and school working together impacted the student's faith commitment significantly. The Gane study noted when students form multiple relationships with trusted adult mentors in a cross-section of environments including the home, church, and school, there was a correlation with an adolescent's intention of continuing in the faith into his or her adult years. Only 11% of students who reported no effective environmental influence from

home, church, or school also demonstrated a high level of Christian commitment (Gane, 2014). By contrast Gane (2014), found almost 5 times as many (54%) students with a strong Christian commitment to have an effective home, church, and school.

Deuteronomy 6:2-9 and Ephesians 6:4 (English Standard Version) both instruct parents on the importance of raising children to follow the Lord, with the Old Testament reference clearly indicating believers should instruct their offspring during every waking hour. Public school programs, as a result of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), must have a strictly secular purpose and must not excessively entangle with religion. Such restrictions severely limit the ability of Christian teachers in public school programs to instruct in the Christian faith, and make the mentoring relationship increasingly difficult or, in some districts, even prohibited (Alexander & Alexander, 2019). The Cardus Educational Survey noted parochial schools and private evangelical schools have offered religious instruction in addition to secular subjects to varying degrees (Pennings et al., 2014). However, a longitudinal study by Uecker (2009) demonstrated a positive correlation between religious schooling and religiosity.

Nevertheless, parents sometimes choose a public school based on academic offerings or even available extra-curricular activities rather than a religious reason. Consequently, the diminishing influence of Christianity in the public school may be leading to a departure from the faith after high school graduation. According to Wilson (2001), excluding God from education does not lead to an atheistic worldview, but rather a belief God may safely be ignored. The documented departure from faith during the period of emerging adulthood seems to be a recent historical development (Arnett &

Jensen, 2002; Barna Group, 2006; Gallup, 2002; Smith & Snell, 2009; Lipka, 2015; ACFI, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2021).

Similarly, Pennings et al. (2014), authors of the Cardus study, referenced the relatively recent phenomenon of education not including a religious element. Bible lessons and Christian prayer were part of the curriculum of many public schools into the latter half of the twentieth century (Pennings et al., 2014). Gradually, Christian instruction disappeared from public schools as a result of several court cases (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962; *Abington v. Schempp*, 1963; *Chamberlain v. Dade County Board of Public Instruction*, 1963; *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971). By contrast, member schools of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) have a stated purpose of educating to shape the students' virtues to align with the will of God (ACCS, 2018e). According to the ACCS website, most graduates of ACCS schools have demonstrated a high level of college readiness, but the stated objective is to prepare students to worship and glorify God (2018e). Although it can be shown that the diminished influence of Christianity in American public schools correlates with the diminished numbers of emerging adults practicing their faith, no research demonstrating a causal link between either has been conducted. In addition, until a recent report by Goodwin and Sikkink, (2020) no published research demonstrating the effect of classical Christian education on the adult Christian faith commitment of graduates from such schools was available. The Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) report was a comparative study of alumni from various high school backgrounds, including member schools of the ACCS. The study demonstrated a difference in the Christian commitment of graduates between the ages of 24-42 (Goodwin

& Sikkink, 2020). However, no research exists demonstrating a difference in the Christian commitment of college aged ACCS graduates.

Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) conducted similar research as Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) with a focus on 18- to 29-year-old individuals reporting to be raised as Christians. Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) found only 10% of the individuals surveyed, responded with answers which met the established criteria describing resilient disciples. Many respondents provided no evidence of Christianity playing a significant role in their lives and some even reported no longer identifying as Christians.

Research indicates a strong influence of parents, school, and church on the practice of one's faith after high school graduation. Additionally, studies demonstrate a downward trend in the number of young adults continuing to identify as Christian. This study was conducted to determine the relationship between students graduating from an ACCS member classical Christian school and the persistence of faith practices among graduates of ACCS schools. Specifically, the researcher wanted to determine if a significantly higher percentage of college students graduating from ACCS schools would meet the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) criteria of resilient disciples.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal comparative study was to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) by comparing young adult graduates of ACCS schools and those in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) in terms of religious faith commitment as determined by responses to an online survey using questions adapted from Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Roozen (1980) found teens and young adults in their early 20s tend towards disengagement with religion. Additionally,

Dernlan (2013) documented little research exists, which demonstrates how faith develops in adolescents and if spiritual formation can develop apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, Dernlan (2013) agreed with Pazmino (2010) further research was needed on how to effectively develop an environment which increases the likelihood students will hear the Spirit. An expressed purpose of classical Christian schools is to seek to establish such an environment (ACCS, 2018b).

The number of classical Christian schools in the United States has increased to over three hundred members in the ACCS in just under 25 years, serving nearly fifty thousand students (ACCS, 2018d). The stated goal of ACCS schools is Christian formation rather than academics, instilling virtue rather than college and career preparation, and training students to rightly order their affections rather than aiming to increase college entrance exam scores (ACCS, 2018e). If classical Christian schools are actually achieving their stated goals, graduates from such schools should demonstrate a higher level of church involvement and personal faith commitment. While a recent report demonstrating a higher level of personal faith commitment in ACCS graduates later in life (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020) is available, one could possibly attribute such results to a natural cycle of religiosity. No research demonstrating higher levels of Christian faith commitment of ACCS graduates than their peers during college years is available. Furthermore, no research applying the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) criteria specifically to ACCS graduates has been conducted.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of attending a classical Christian school on the level of Christian commitment (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019) of college students. The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the difference in the level of faith commitment between young adult ACCS graduates and the sample young adult population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019)?
2. What is the relationship between levels of faith commitment in young adult ACCS graduates and the number of years attending an ACCS school?

The researcher contacted member schools of the ACCS to identify college students who were graduates of ACCS schools. Participants were then surveyed on a series of questions established by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) to determine if a significantly higher percentage of the graduates met the criteria as resilient disciples. The researcher then compared the survey results of ACCS graduates aged 18-24 with the responses of those in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) sample of 18- to 29-year-olds.

## **Statement of Hypotheses**

The researcher made the following null hypotheses:

1. There will be no statistically significant difference in faith commitment of young adults graduating from an ACCS member classical Christian school and the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).
2. There will be no statistically significant relationship between the number of years attending an ACCS member classical Christian school and the level of faith commitment of young adult graduates.

## **Theoretical Framework**

A study of Christian commitment presents a problem for individuals seeking to measure its depth. However, Jesus said we could inspect the fruit of an individual and determine if one's faith is genuine (Matthew 7:15-20, English Standard Version), but research on the subject requires a framework to view faith commitment and measurement of faith practice. According to O'Connor et al. (2002), three generally accepted theories of factors influencing faith practice and commitment are family lifecycle, social learning, and cultural broadening. A relatively recent theory influencing the way researchers view high school graduates through their 20s is the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Espinoza, Poest, & Mitchell, 2016; Bird, 2016). Literature was reviewed using a combination of all four frames.

The theory of family lifecycle describes an individual's religious involvement basically as the result of the stages of life and is cyclical, predictable, and influenced by various needs throughout one's life (Roozen, 1980; Mueller & Cooper, 1986; Stolzenberg et al., 1995; O'Connor et al., 2002). Roozen (1980) found children at a young age tend to be involved in church with their parents, then trend toward disengagement in their teen years and early 20s, and finally tend toward reengagement in the late 20s and when building a family.

Social learning theory also contends religious practices change throughout life but argues influencers such as parents, role models, and peers have the greatest impact on religious practices (Bandura, 1977; Hunsberger, 1983; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993). O'Connor et al., (2002) argued social learning varies from one denomination to another and is influenced by the modeling practices of the group. The social learning theory

suggests parental influence is the greatest determiner of faith practice in young children, while peers become more influential during the teen and college years, followed by adult friendships influencing one's religious practices and beliefs in later years (Hunsberger, 1983; Hoge et al., 1993; O'Connor et al., 2002).

A third theory is known as cultural broadening, or localism. The cultural broadening theory frames religious involvement within the context of one's local environment (Cornwall, 1989; O'Connor et al., 2002). According to cultural broadening theory, local environment has the greatest impact on an individual's religious practice (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978; Roof, 1978; Hoge et al., 1993). Therefore, family has the greatest influence on young children, but as one matures, broadening occurs through high school, college, geographic location, marriage, and other interactions which may influence the individual to be less dogmatic in regard to faith practices (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978; Roof, 1978; Hoge et al., 1993).

Emerging adulthood, the most recent theory, describes the time period of the late teens through early twenties (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood was not suggested during the twentieth century, because unlike previous generations, individuals in the late teens through early 20s often postpone marriage to pursue more education and intentionally engage in a time of life exploration (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) described individuals in the late teens through early 20s as having the characteristics of uncertainty, a focus on self, exploring one's identity, being unstable, and yet full of possibilities for life transformation. Additional researchers have stated the time of emerging adulthood can be marked by the contrasting characteristics of either floundering or flourishing, actualization or destruction (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Espinoza, Poest, &

Mitchell, 2016; Bird, 2016). Although Espinoza, Poest, and Mitchell (2016) noted skepticism among some researchers about the existence of the emerging adulthood stage of life, they found consensus among researchers regarding the characteristics of this age group, outlined by Arnett (2000) and later clarified by Arnett and Jensen (2002). Espinoza, Poest, and Mitchell (2016) concluded researchers agreed characteristics describing emerging adulthood accurately depicted young adults in the particular age group. Consequently, this study used the phrase *emerging adults* to refer both to a theoretical perspective and a time period of life.

The combination of the previously described theories provides a framework through which the impact of a child's education on post-high school faith commitment may be viewed. family lifecycle frequently involves parents delegating their authority to a local school for a large portion of the child's developmental years (Roozen, 1980), while social learning theory emphasizes the importance of one's peers, role models, and other authority figures. The cultural broadening theory contends the local environment has the greatest influence on religious practice (Cornwall, 1989). Consequently, the environment of the school—including teachers, coaches, and peers—is an important factor in the lives of children. According to Gane (2014), outside of the home and the church, minors find the majority of their friends, role models, and authority figures at school. Gane documented the importance of school, home, and church working together in the development of one's faith throughout the teen years and into emerging adulthood. Researchers have pointed to a host of influences on the spiritual lives of young adults. Therefore, this study was viewed through four theoretical frames which include family lifecycle, social learning, cultural broadening (localism), and emerging adulthood.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Young Adulthood.** For purposes of this study young adults were considered to be those between the ages of 18 and 24.

**Christian Faith Commitment.** For purposes of this study, the following categories defined by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019), were used to classify the level of Christian faith commitment of participants: *Resilient Disciples*, *Habitual Churchgoers*, *Nomads* and *Prodigals* (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

**Resilient Disciples.** Required indicators categorizing individuals as a *Resilient Disciple* included church attendance of at least once monthly, involvement in church activities beyond worship services, demonstration of a solid trust in biblical authority, indication of a personal commitment to Jesus and a belief he was crucified and raised from the dead, and indication of a desire to impact the culture as a result of their faith commitment (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

**Habitual Churchgoer.** The *Habitual Churchgoer* attends regular worship but does not indicate any other involvement with the church beyond attendance (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

**Nomad.** *Nomads* selected “Christian” as their religion but did not indicate church attendance in the six months prior to taking the survey. (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

**Prodigal.** *Prodigals* described themselves as having been raised a Christian, indicated involvement in a Christian denomination prior to the age of 18, but no longer referred to themselves as Christian (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

**Classical Christian School.** While no set formula exists for a classical Christian school according to the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS, 2018e),

the term generally refers to a school with a stated purpose of using classical Greco-Roman methods developed during the Middle Ages, combined with a Christian worldview.

### **Limitations**

The research for this study including ACCS graduates made every effort to protect the integrity of the process to ensure successful implementation. However, like every research study, the study did have limitations including factors beyond the researcher's control which may have affected the results. The limitations included:

1. The sample was limited to those graduates of ACCS schools who chose to respond to the online survey.
2. There has been no specific research conducted with ACCS graduates between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four.
3. The Barna research group was unable to provide detailed psychometrics for the survey conducted by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).
4. Self-reported data is difficult to verify and may have been affected by desirability bias among ACCS graduates.
5. Relationships in the data can be inferred but causality cannot be determined.
6. During the time elapsed between the Kinnaman and Matlock Study (2019) and the current research project, participants endured a global pandemic. The researcher had no control on the effect the pandemic may have had on the ability of participants to attend school or church in person.

7. The number of ACCS member schools is likely to have increased since the data was reported as of 2018. However, all schools with ACCS membership at the time of the survey were contacted to participate.

### **Delimitations**

1. For reasons of practicality, the study was limited by design to the ACCS member schools in the United States who have had graduating students.
2. The study was delimited to young adult ACCS graduates to compare their level of faith commitment with those in a previously researched population.
3. A survey similar to that developed by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) was used for comparative purposes.
4. Literature was reviewed and results interpreted through the theoretical frames of family lifecycle (Roizen, 1980), social learning (Bandura, 1977), cultural broadening (Cornwall, 1989), and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).
5. Participants were excluded if they indicated they had not graduated from an ACCS school, were not in the desired age demographic, or failed to answer those questions on the survey.
6. A difference in level of faith commitment resulted in a statistically significant difference in the quantitative measures of the percentage of participants in the four categories of emerging adults identified by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).

### **Assumptions**

It was assumed by the researcher:

1. Data would be applicable to other ACCS schools, but not to private schools in general.
2. Interpretation of the questions was consistent by all participants.
3. By virtue of attending a classical Christian school, participants demonstrated some level of Christian faith practice while in high school.
4. There were enough participants in the sample to detect a statistically significant relationship.
5. Depth of religious commitment was normally distributed in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock.

### **Design Controls**

This quantitative study utilized the survey results of 18- to 24-year-old graduates of classical Christian schools within the ACCS organization. Although recent research by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) indicated greater faith commitment in older adults who graduated from ACCS schools, family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) might account for some of the statistical difference. The researcher intentionally limited the sample population to emerging adults (Arnett, 200) aged 18-24 who graduated from ACCS schools. The researcher then established a contact within each school who took responsibility for inviting recent graduates from his/her school to participate in the online survey. The survey for the sample ACCS population was adapted by permission from a Barna survey designed by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Although the Barna Research Group did not conduct detailed psychometrics for the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study, the organization has a strong reputation for accurate and valid research, and many of the questions used in their research were similar to ones used and tested previously.

Therefore, the questions were found to have been interpreted consistently by previous respondents. Participants failing to respond were contacted by the school liaison through email or by phone. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality, and the assumption was made each participant was honest in his or her responses and interpreted the survey as intended. However, since participants were contacted through school liaisons, the researcher cannot rule out some social desirability bias in the sample population. Each participant was screened with preliminary questions to ensure a faith commitment was present while in high school. However, the existence of a relationship between faith commitment post high school in the sample population and graduating from an ACCS school could be inferred but not necessarily identified as causal.

The number of ACCS member schools increases yearly with most startups initiating elementary grades and adding subsequent grades yearly (ACCS, 2018d). Therefore, research was limited by design to member schools with grades nine through twelve having already graduated students. Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) found only 10% of the emerging adults who responded to their survey could be labeled *Resilient Disciples*. This researcher limited the sample population to ACCS graduates to determine if there was a difference in the level of faith commitment when compared to the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) population by replicating with permission the questions and scoring procedures used by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) to categorize participants. A statistically significant difference was indicated by the researcher only if quantitative measures of the percentage of participants in the four categories of emerging adults identified by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) indicated such.

The data collected and interpreted for this study yielded results to be interpreted for ACCS schools but should not be considered generalizable to all private Christian schools, due to the distinctly defined pedagogy of classical Christian Schools (ACCS, 2018f). The researcher assumed all ACCS graduates completing the survey interpreted the questions consistently and by virtue of attending an ACCS school, demonstrated some level of faith commitment in high school. The researcher sought to ensure enough participants by using a statistical power analysis to ensure the ability to detect statistically significant differences from the population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Furthermore, it was assumed the results were normally distributed in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).

### **Summary**

This research will fill the gap in the literature where young adult ACCS graduates have not been studied in relation to family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980). There has been recent research comparing various measures on public, private and religious schools (Pennings et al., 2014) and specifically on the level of faith commitment in ACCS graduates between the ages of 24 and 42 (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Furthermore, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) researched the level of faith commitment in a general population of 18- to 28-year-olds. Although the Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) research indicated a difference in the level of faith commitment of ACCS graduates, some of that difference might be attributed to family lifecycle theory, which would indicate a drop off in religious commitment for individuals in their late teens and early 20s. Since receiving the Great Commission, the New Testament Church has been charged with advancing the gospel (Matthew 28:16-20, English Standard Version). Scripture states believers should

first start in their homes and then move beyond to the rest of the world (Deuteronomy 6; Ephesians 6; Matthew 28, English Standard Version). According to Wilson (2003) and Littlejohn and Evans (2006), the primary purpose of ACCS member schools from the beginning in the early 1990s has been to join with parents in passing Christianity to successive generations. Wilson (2003) and Littlejohn and Evans (2006) each stated schools in the ACCS should integrate a confession of faith in such a way students demonstrate transformation into Christ-like character.

The purpose of this quantitative, causal comparative study was to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) by comparing young adult graduates of ACCS schools and those in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) in terms of religious faith commitment as determined by responses to an online survey using questions adapted from Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Christian faith commitment, as described by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019), should be demonstrated by continued church involvement, trust in the authority of the Bible, personal commitment to Jesus, as well as personal faith practice in emerging adulthood. This quantitative study could help ACCS schools determine if their goals and curriculum are serving the indicated purpose and potentially guide Christian schools towards considering a change to a classical Christian curriculum.

Chapter Two is a review of related literature, beginning with a broad overview of education in America, narrowing to some of the more popular types of schools presently in existence, and finally discussing the purpose and philosophy of classical Christian schools. Chapter Three includes the study's research design and methodology, and

Chapter Four is an analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter Five provides the conclusions and recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

Scripture explicitly states parents should train their children according to biblical doctrine (Deuteronomy 6:2-9; Ephesians 6:4, English Standard Version), and, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul commends the young pastor for his strong faith which was passed to him by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). Furthermore, Baucham (2007) and Dreher (2017) both noted if Christianity is to survive, educating children biblically is the key. The biblical scripture passages significantly pre-date the theories of social learning or cultural broadening (localism), but both of the theories support the value of what Scripture has commanded. Furthermore, the social learning and cultural broadening theories underscore what G.K. Chesterton (1924, as cited in Clipper et al., 1990) argued nearly 100 years ago—education was not a subject, but rather the transfer of society’s soul from one generation to another. In addition, Dewey (1934) felt the primary purpose of education was social training. More recently, Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein, and Harris (2015) found a longitudinal trend of the transmission of similar religious practices across generations, in spite of an overall progression of successive generations toward secularization. Williams (2019) also posited education plays an important role in transmitting a worldview to the next generation in a way which affects how individuals live.

In light of the transmission of practices and worldview, one might ask which practices or worldviews will be passed. Furthermore, if education is primarily social, as Dewey (1934) suggested, and Chesterton (1924, as cited in Clipper et al., 1990) is

correct, regarding the passing of society's soul, one might wonder about the type of soul passed to generations in the future. Additionally, it is worth considering whether transfer of religiosity is a result of social learning (Bandura, 1977), is dependent more on cultural broadening (Hoge et al., 1993), or is just a natural cyclical trend common to all generations. The literature review in this chapter functioned as a funnel, beginning with a broad look at education historically—from colonial times to the present—and then examined the philosophies of education in public, charter, parochial, evangelical, and classical Christian schools. Secondly, in this chapter the researcher discussed religiosity in the United States and the conditions which increase the likelihood of faith transfer in the lives of children. Furthermore, the researcher explored the question of whether faith transfer can be explained by one particular theoretical framework or is a result of a combination of frames. Finally, literature pertaining to the purpose and goals of Christian schools and classical Christian schools in particular were reviewed to understand the philosophical differences.

### **Faith in Education**

**Colonial education.** The first appearance of anything resembling public education in the United States is generally agreed upon as taking place in New England as a result of what is now known as the Old Deluder Satan Acts in the 1600s (Lauderdale, 2001; Marshall, 2006; Hazlett, 2011; Mabary, 2017). The Old Deluder Satan Acts required settlements with fifty or fewer homes to assign an individual to provide community education in Bible-based reading and required towns with at least 100 homes to establish a grammar school (Watz, 2011; Ryan, 2012; Mabary, 2017). Lauderdale (2001), Marshall (2006), Hazlett (2011), and Mabary (2017) agreed the purpose of the

Old Deluder Satan Acts was to teach youth to read to understand the Bible so they might attain salvation and live out the precepts of Christianity. Lauderdale (2001) and Hazlett (2011) both contended the two-fold purpose of the Old Deluder Satan Acts was to help students develop into better Christians and more virtuous citizens.

**Early America.** Christian virtue and citizenship were important themes throughout the eighteenth century. Christian morality was predominantly taught in schools throughout the 1700s (Lauderdale, 2001; Marshall, 2006). In the next century, the most popular texts were the four McGuffey Readers—as well as a primer and a speller (published between 1836-1857)—and the New England Primer published in 1875. According to Hazlett (2011), the McGuffey books were written by a Presbyterian minister and professor by the name of William Holmes McGuffey, who sold over one hundred million copies of the books during the nineteenth century. Both the New England Primer and the McGuffey publications were replete with Bible lessons, prayers, basic facts taught with religious themes, and discussions of biblical principles and philosophy (Hazlett, 2011; Marshall, 2006).

**Common school period to the late 20th century.** While Protestantism dominated education from the Colonial Era through the mid-1800s, the latter part of the nineteenth century was the beginning of some huge changes which some would even call an educational revolution (Lauderdale, 2001; Mabary, 2017; Marshall, 2006). Lauderdale (2001) described the change as a shift from religious education to one which was becoming secular in nature. The beginning of the movement was pushed along by the ideas of Horace Mann, who argued the Bible and Christian values should be taught in schools, but without any input or comment from the teacher (Lauderdale, 2001; Marshall,

2006). According to both Lauderdale (2001) and Marshall (2006), Mann's ideas contributed to the establishment of what was known as Common Schools, which would eventually be common to all with a goal of democratic education. Lauderdale (2001) argued, removing sectarianism and comment from the teaching of Scripture, resulted in the effect of gutting the instruction of any moral substance and removed religious context from the teaching of religious values.

However, looking back at the removal of moral substance and religious context from education, Williams (2019) suggested a predominantly Judeo-Christian underpinning to American culture temporarily obscured the secular effects of a neutrality toward religion in schools. He added no such thing as a purely secular education existed and attempting such an undertaking set the course of American education on a path which subtly promotes atheism and naturalism (Williams, 2019). Williams (2019) contended a neutrality toward religion sent an unintended message to students implying the religion (if any) one embraced was irrelevant.

Nevertheless, the 20th century became known as a progressive era in education, with educators led by John Dewey promoting a more secularized version of education (Mabary, 2017). Having a more secularized focus on education represented not only a new development in the United States, but also an entirely different take on education for Christians in general. Pennings et al. (2014) referenced the relatively recent phenomenon of education excluding a religious element. Bible lessons and Christian prayer were represented in the curriculum of many public schools into the latter half of the twentieth century (Pennings et al., 2014), but Christian instruction increasingly disappeared from public schools as a result of several court cases (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962; *Abington v.*

*Schempp*, 1963; *Chamberlain v. Dade County Board of Public Instruction*, 1963; *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971). The cases effectively removed any mandatory prayer, Bible reading, or Scripture lessons from public schools. In *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), the Supreme Court determined a greater standard than just secular purpose was needed when assessing school programs to ensure the separation of rights by the government and to avoid the excessive intermingling of religion with the government (Alexander & Alexander, 2019). Consequently, the Supreme Court (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) established a three-pronged test mandating any public school program must have a strictly secular purpose, cannot cause excessive entanglement of the school with religion, and could not have the effect of either promoting or inhibiting religion. Williams (2019) argued, however, virtue cannot be ignored while attempting to deliver a secular education without the implication religion is irrelevant. In other words, Williams (2019) conjectured the first and third premises of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) contradicted each other since an attempt to deliver a secular education results in religion being inhibited. Essentially, if religiosity in one's life is impacted by role models, peers, and the local environment as suggested by social learning theory and cultural broadening theory, avoiding religious instruction must necessarily inhibit religion (Williams, 2019).

### **Purpose of Education in Public and Christian Schools**

**Strictly secular.** The Supreme Court decision in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) basically solidified the transition of public schools in America from their original form during the Colonial Period of promoting the Christian faith to a court-mandated, strictly secular, system of curriculum delivery. Because of the three-pronged test resulting from *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), courts have generally kept a separation of church and state

mentality and have concluded teaching the existence of a Supreme Creator is unconstitutional (Fuller, 1994). According to Littlejohn and Evans (2006), public education has become, by necessity, secular in nature and relegated religion to the margins of students' lives, retarding scientific discovery and impeding the progress of a social agenda. Brower Latz (2018) synthesized several 21<sup>st</sup>-century researchers describing secular education as not only devoid of any god, but also having a primary focus of consumerism, individualism, and a view of religiosity as mindless indoctrination. As a result, Brower Latz (2018) found a steady decrease in the influence of religion in the United Kingdom exists and concluded research in the United States points to an increasing skepticism towards religiosity. Pandya (2017) noted in research involving 108 schools in twelve countries, including the U.S. educators with more experience were more likely to incorporate spirituality with values education, a trend which may lead to schools becoming more secular as experienced educators retire from the profession.

**Religious and secular.** Secularization of the curriculum may not be limited to public schools. Littlejohn and Evans (2006) found many religious schools have adopted a dualistic curriculum of both the biblical and the secular. Pennings, Seel, Van Pelt, Sikkink, and Wiens (2011) found a tension between Christian education and strong academic programming in many Protestant and parochial schools, forcing parents to choose between high intellectual academic rigor and discipleship of their children's faith. Littlejohn and Evans (2006) argued Christian schools must integrate faith lessons throughout all academic and social endeavors to avoid the same secularization mandated by the courts for public schools.

**Christian formation.** To avoid secularization within their Christian institutions, many religious schools in the United States have taken an approach to their academic programs which defines education very deliberately as Christian formation (ACCS, 2018f). Recently, Dreher (2017), along with Chesterton (1924, as cited in Clipper et al., 1990) nearly a century earlier, argued education was not a collection of subjects, but rather a transmission of the soul of a society from one generation to the next. De Kock (2015) concurred by viewing Christian education through the framework of social learning theory, citing research demonstrating the social process upon which the transmission of Christian faith depends is external and transferred by intentional religious tradition. Dreher (2017) contended traditional Christian education, refined from the Greeks and the Romans, was designed to pass a Christian Western culture to each successive generation. He argued separating education from spiritual formation created a false dichotomy (Dreher, 2017). Again, De Kock (2015) agreed, citing the importance of cooperation between parents and schools to form religious identities and focus on an intentional transmission of Christian culture by leaning on social learning theory. De Kock (2015) found such intentional socialization strategies countered the trend of secularization in the culture at large. Littlejohn and Evans (2006) and Wilson (2003) concluded Christian education, at its core, should result in students becoming more Christ-like, being thoroughly prepared to impact the culture, maturing in their faith, and having the ability to winsomely persuade others to pursue a better life.

However, Smith and Denton (2009), in the book *Soul Searching*, a culmination of their landmark National Study on Youth and Religion, issued a startling warning. Too often, Smith and Denton (2009) noted, adults have relegated the Christian formation

aspect in the lives of children to the outskirts of their time and social structure. Furthermore, Smith and Denton (2009) contended Christian communities must confront the reality that faith formation must play a larger role, taking into consideration children spend 35 to 40 hours per week in school for roughly 13 years. A general consensus appears in the research regarding Christian schools having the greatest impact by leveraging social learning and cultural broadening (localism) through equating Christian education with Christian formation (De Kock, 2015; Lawson, 2017; Stan, 2017; Brower Latz, 2018; Williams, 2019).

### **Philosophy of Education in Public and Christian Schools**

**College and career preparation.** Literature has demonstrated a difference in both the philosophies and purpose of various types of schools in the United States. A series of court cases throughout the 20th century (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962; *Abington v. Schemp*, 1963; *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) has resulted in an interpretation of the Constitution which has removed school-sponsored prayer, mandatory Bible reading, and any activity that might excessively entangle the school with religion from public schools in the United States. Alexander and Alexander (2019) noted, in recent years, the courts have permitted some tax funds to go to religious schools while, consecutively, pushing public schools to become secularized. Whitehead (1994) found many educators believed they could not even mention anything religious in the classroom or on campus or their actions would be considered unconstitutional. Hursh (2011) contended American public schools should not depart from the vision of Horace Mann's Common School movement, which emphasized a philosophy excluding religious doctrine from the school curriculum. Fife (2016) agreed, pointing out the necessity for public schools to avoid any type of

religious education and advocated against any philosophy of returning biblical instruction to the public school classroom. Thus, researchers like Stone and Lewis (2012), as well as Fletcher, Warren, and Hernandez-Gantes (2018), have argued public school curricula should be focused on core academics and career readiness within a framework structured toward knowledge, employment skills, and technical skills.

Social Learning Theory identifies the secularization of the school environment is bound to have an effect on students since the relationships, conversations, adult influences, lessons, and religious beliefs influence the way students live (De Kock, 2015; Williams, 2019). Cultural broadening theory supports the same finding and points to one's local environment as the strongest influence on religiosity (Cornwall, 1989; O'Connor, et al., 2002). De Kock (2015) found religious learning is no longer under the control of the church or a church school, but young people often take a selective approach from various sources such as school and social media. Thus, environment, when considered through social learning or cultural broadening, does have an impact on religiosity (Cornwall, 1989; O'Connor et al., 2002; De Kock, 2015).

**Christian formation.** While students may be learning about faith from a variety of sources, nothing matches the school environment for sheer volume of time in shaping one's worldview. Hull (2003) argued, without the proper lens, an individual has a distorted perception of the world. He contended some Christian schools may not be truly executing Christian education, but rather creating a school environment where Christians are merely carrying out a secular education (Hull, 2003). If Hull's (2003) contention is the case, then the social learning and cultural broadening in students' lives would demonstrate little variation from a secular public school. Additionally, Hull (2003)

identified the real test of Christian education was a transformed life which resulted in the graduate living in such a way Christian values outlined in Scripture were evident. He concluded, the attributes of a Christian school should be evident in all academic areas, including planning, evaluations, goals, structure of the school day, and classroom instruction. Miller and Beazley (2018) as well as Brower Latz (2018) concurred, stating Christian school content should permeate all aspects of one's life, including orthodox theology, creative and critical thinking, Christian discipleship, development of worldview, an understanding of secular culture, and a development of mercy toward others. Additionally, Brower Latz (2018) also contended Christian schools must be in touch with the history of the church while teaching students how to live and flourish in today's current society. Cox and Peck (2018) argued the vision of Christian education should be discipleship which in turn prepares students for the transcendent Christian values of life.

Understanding the importance of environment on religiosity, Christian education in general—and classical Christian education in particular—advocates for an educational philosophy starting with a commitment to the Christian faith. Christian formation is the end of lifelong learning when a graduate reflects Christ-like character and affections are correctly ordered. (Dernlan, 2013; Littlejohn & Evans, 2006; Wilson, 2003). Classical Christian educators, believing virtues can be assimilated, establish a goal of producing a morally virtuous person desiring not only to live a godly life, but also influencing the common good of society (Vaughan & Morgan, 2015; Collins & Clanton, 2018; Brower Latz, 2018; Miller & Beazley, 2018; Filipas, 2019; Williams, 2019).

The ACCS was established to assist classical Christian educators and promote the idea of education as Christian formation (ACCS, 2018b). According to the ACCS (2018b) website, the objective of member schools is to shape students' virtues to align with God's will rather than merely to prepare students for college. Miller and Beazley (2018) concurred, indicating classical Christian schools should be developing students who live a morally upright life. Furthermore, ACCS (2018b) schools subscribed to the belief all knowledge, thought, and skill are only understood through the lens of God's Word and His nature.

The stated purpose of classical Christian education, according to the ACCS (2018f), goes beyond academic content. The ACCS (2018f) aimed to impress upon graduates the desire to love the right things in the right order. Additionally, the intent of ACCS schools (ACCS 2018f) is to impress upon graduates the willingness and ability to think critically and view the world through a biblical lens. Recent research published by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) indicated graduates from ACCS schools in the age group of 24-42-year-olds were more likely to live a lifestyle reflecting a biblical worldview. The study showed such graduates to view God in control of all things, including adversity (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). The study revealed the age group of 24-42 were more likely to have a stronger Christian commitment as measured by higher levels of church attendance, personal and group Bible study, and frequency of Christian practices (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Furthermore, graduates of ACCS schools represented views Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) labeled as more traditional and conservative. The views of graduates included a greater likelihood of knowing an individual who identifies as living an alternative lifestyle but being less likely to approve of such lifestyles, believing

science and faith to be compatible, and more likely to be married, stay married, and never have cohabitated while not married (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). The study did not address Christian commitment among ACCS graduates specifically in the age group of 18-23 or individuals still in college, but it did indicate attending an ACCS school demonstrated a strong correlation with living out Christian teachings later in life.

### **Factors Influencing Religiosity in the United States**

In separate dissertations, Dernlan (2013) and Gautier (2018) posited the philosophy and purpose of a school were not relevant if knowledge did not translate into belief. Gautier (2018) identified it was important not only to analyze if Christian schools were supporting the beliefs of students while students were in attendance, but also if the support yielded in a persistence of the students' faith after leaving the school. Before examining literature specific to education, it is important to understand researchers have pointed to a host of influences on the spiritual lives of young adults, generally viewed through four theoretical frames which include family lifecycle, social learning, cultural broadening (localism), and emerging adulthood.

**The religiosity cycle.** Some researchers over the years have found individuals who were once engaged in church at a young age and later became disengaged were just following a natural cyclical pattern in the religiosity of many Americans (Roozen, 1980; Gallup, 2002). family lifecycle theory contends children raised in religious homes demonstrate a cyclical life pattern of engagement, followed by a period of disengagement in one's late teens and 20s, and then becoming re-engaged after marriage or later in life (Roozen, 1980; Mueller & Cooper 1986; Stolzenberg et al., 1995; O'Connor et al., 2002; Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein, & Harris, 2015). Roozen (1980) found the disengagement

and reengagement varied by gender, education, and different age groups. However, reentry rates remained quite stable across decades, even during the cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s (Roozen 1980). This led researchers like Roozen (1980) to conclude disengagement from religion and reengagement later has been a natural part of the life cycle of many individuals in the church.

In contrast, Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein, and Harris (2015), in a 35-year generational study, found successive generations seem to be gradually trending (although not making huge shifts) toward a secular view of the world. The trend includes a recent rapid increase in the number of Americans professing no religious affiliation (Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein & Harris, 2015). The study was comprised of a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis which revealed a consistent decline in religiosity over the thirty-five-year span of the study, thus, indicating a decrease in the influence of faith practice (Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein, & Harris, 2015). In other words, the reengagement aspect of family lifecycle theory appears to be dissipating.

Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) found just one in ten 18-29-year-olds, claiming to be current or former Christians, fell into a category labeled as *Resilient Disciples*. The criteria for a *Resilient Disciple* label was not complicated as the researchers (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2018) labeled a respondent a *Resilient Disciple* if the participant indicated church attendance at least once monthly. In addition, an individual must also demonstrate interaction with their local church beyond worship service attendance, indicate a trust in Biblical authority, and affirm a personal commitment to Jesus (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2018). Further criteria included a belief Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised to life and

a desire to have an impact on the culture around them that emanates from their faith (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2018).

**Other domains of religious influence.** Although some researchers including Roozen (1980), Mueller and Cooper (1986) Stolzenberg et al., (1995), O'Connor et al., (2002), and Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein, and Harris (2015) viewed a decline in faith practice after high school as a natural, cyclical religious trend of every generation, other research indicates the downward trend may be more linear. Lipka (2015) pointed to more concerning trends that, unlike past generations, some people may not return to the faith. However, before addressing some of the more recent trends in religiosity, it is important to understand factors which influence young adults in a positive fashion. If the Church is to successfully perpetuate itself, research has identified the most effective means of faith transfer is through Christian parents in Christian homes influencing their children to practice that same faith (Myers, 1996; Black, 2008; Gane, 2014). Both social learning theory and cultural broadening theory support the conclusion of parents serving as the most effective means of faith transfer (Ghoshal & Mehrotra, 2017; Mueller & Cooper, 1986; O'Connor, et al., 2002; Roozen, 1980; Stolzenberg, et al., 1995). Additionally, Dortch (2014) agreed, citing children of parents committed to church are more likely to be remain highly involved themselves. Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein, and Harris (2015) also found similarities in religiosity spanning multiple generations. Dudley (1999) described three parental factors the most likely indicators of retaining youth in the church. The factors included parents who had a high level of church commitment, were intentional about the transfer of their faith, and developed strong relationships with their children (Dudley, 1999).

Parental influence, however, does not automatically guarantee offspring will follow in the faith. Black (2008), Gane (2014), and Myers (1996) found certain conditions in the home increase the likelihood children will follow the same faith practices of their parents. Certain conditions included the following: both birth parents live in the home, higher levels of marital happiness, parents' agreement on religious beliefs, higher levels of religious practice, and a parenting style demonstrating affection and allows some independence are all factors which increase the odds children will follow the religious beliefs of their parents (Black, 2008; Gane, 2014; Goodman & Dyer, 2020; Myers, 1996; Stearns & McKinney, 2019). Ghoshal and Mehrotra (2017) also found a positive correlation between the spiritual health of the mother and more effective coping skills in their children. Additionally, Kliewer, Washington-Nortey, Yendork, Sosnowski, Wright, and McGuire (2020) found young low-income, urban, African Americans were more likely to retain high levels of religiosity if their mothers had a strong religious commitment and their offspring had a perception of being accepted by their mothers. By contrast, Stearns and McKinney (2018) found antisocial problems for mothers weakened the relationship of religiosity between mothers and daughters. Interestingly, Stearns and McKinney (2020) found in a follow-up study conflict between mothers and sons as well as fathers and sons were surprisingly and positively correlated with a stronger connection between religiosity of parents and sons. Furthermore, Augustyn, Hall, Wang, and Hill (2017) subjects who reported higher levels of attachment to God also demonstrated desired spiritual outcomes such as forgiveness, meaning, and an awareness of God.

Supported by both social learning and cultural broadening theory, Black (2008) and Gane (2014) both found other factors—in addition to one’s parents—which influence faith transfer. Other factors influencing faith transfer which can be aided by both church and school (Gane, 2014) include discipleship and spiritual depth, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and relationships with others of faith (Black, 2008). Gane (2014) found when a teen had a highly involved adult mentor in his or her life, strong correlations to the same teen having high self-esteem, greater faith maturity, greater loyalty to one’s denomination, a better understanding of grace, and greater Christian commitment was present. Research has also demonstrated a high negative correlation between a teen having a strong mentor and using alcohol, being sexually active, and harming oneself (Gane, 2014). Additionally, the same study by Gane (2014) identified a significant increase in faith maturity of teens was associated with an increased number of effective environments in a teen’s life. Specifically, 54% of students in spiritually effective homes, churches, and schools rated high in Christian commitment as opposed to only 11% of students only attending a Christian school (Gane, 2014). Additionally, Gane (2014) found if students perceived a school to have a high degree of impact on their Christianity, there was stronger Christian commitment and greater levels of intergenerational influence and mentorship from the school. Dudley (1999) also identified a series of factors including the pledge of a teen to maintain their Christian commitment after high school were predictors of greater retention of youth in church following graduation. Furthermore, Dudley (1999) also found teenagers attending a Christian academy had a greater likelihood of continuing their church involvement into adulthood as well.

Positive peer influence is one of the additional benefits of attending a Christian school. De Kock (2015) referred to tribal socialization, which indicates the importance of peer influence in groups organized around shared experiences, events, and friendships which naturally form in the Christian school setting. De Kock (2015) found tribal socialization can offset trends towards secularization and pluralism in society at large. Additionally, students who have developed an active prayer life and also agree with the doctrines of their church demonstrated greater longevity in their involvement with the church (De Kock, 2015). In line with localism and social learning theory, Smith and Snell (2009) found “the greater the supply of religiously grounded relationships, activities, programs, opportunities, and challenges available to teenagers, other things being equal, the more likely teenagers will be religiously invested” (p. 261).

**Faith development.** Many attempts have been made by churches to increase religious investment by teens, but recent faith trends seem to indicate a decrease in faith commitment beyond the teen years among individuals who were raised as Christians (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Lipka, 2015; Powell & Clark, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005; ACFI, 2017). Furthermore, Gautier (2018) found a lower faith persistence in recent male graduates than female graduates with males responding more negatively to questions about God’s love and the importance of the Bible.

Christian faith commitment can reflect a wide range of religious activities. Religious activities can range from one who attends church only on Christmas and Easter, to one who attends church multiple times weekly, and additionally, one who engages in other worship activities including prayer, Bible reading, mission trips, and community involvement (O’Connor, Hoge, & Alexander, 2002). O’Connor et al. (2002) developed a

Church Involvement Scale comprised of four indicators, including the number of times one attended church in the last year, the number of monthly hours one spent on church meetings, volunteer work, Bible study, and worship, the number of times one contributed financially to the church in the last year. O'Connor et al. (2002) also developed a personal religious involvement scale using indicators consisting of six self-reported items. Items included the number of times attending a Bible study, attending a prayer meeting, reading one's Bible, listening to or watching Christian programming, engaging in personal devotional time, and reading a book with religious content other than the Bible. More recently, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) categorized the Christian faith commitment of 18 to 29-year-olds indicating they had grown up Christian by organizing their responses into four levels of Christian faith commitment.

So how is one's faith developed and just how does one define faith? Moulin-Stozek (2020) referred to spiritual development blending scientific development models with more ambiguous and holistic principles. Researchers have developed different definitions of faith development, but most identify humans as spiritual beings, desiring to find answers to existential questions (Day, 2017; Grasmane & Pipere, 2020). Grasmane and Pipere (2020) concluded spirituality can be defined from both secular and religious points of view. Fowler (1981) argued by stating faith does not have to be in a religious context, but rather is the motivating factor for one's loves and loyalties based on the object of one's ultimate concern. In his landmark book, *Stages of Faith* (1981), Fowler (1981) went on to define stages of development which he contended paralleled the stages of human development described by Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg. Fowler (1981) labeled the stages chronologically by age. However, Fowler and Dell (2006) also

contended, due to the complex interrelationship of biological, emotional, psychological, racial, gender, and other factors in one's life, progression through each of the stages described were not guaranteed or automatic. In other words, biological and spiritual maturation could happen independently with one moving ahead of the other (Fowler & Dell, 2006).

Fowler (1981) described the progression of faith in his book *Stages of Faith*. During infancy, Fowler (1981) posited, a child (0 – 1½ years) has primal or undifferentiated faith. During infancy, not described by Fowler (1981) as a stage, faith is basically limited to trust in the primary caregiver as the seeds of other defining emotions like courage, love, and hope are developing. During early childhood (ages 2-6), most children interpret their own experiences as normalcy and frequently lack inductive or deductive reasoning skills. Fowler (1981) referred to this stage (Stage 1) as Intuitive-Projective Faith. In Intuitive-Projective Faith, children draw heavily from stories and imitation in constructing their faith (Fowler, 1981).

In conjunction with childhood (ages 7-12), Fowler (1981) noted most children begin to develop reasoning skills, learn to differentiate between fantasy and reality, and give meaning to one's experiences through narration or story. Children begin to develop a conscience and a sense of fairness and justice. He labeled this second stage Mythic-Literal (Fowler, 1981).

Fowler's (1981) third stage, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, corresponds roughly with adolescence (ages 13-21). Fowler (1981) notes the increase in the number of one's spheres of influence and the need to make sense of the greater complexity of one's life is present in this stage. The Synthetic-Conventional stage was reflected in the findings of

both Black (2008) and Gane (2014) who documented the impact various influences outside one's own family have on Christian faith commitment. Fowler (1981) emphasized the precarious nature of this faith stage as teens sometimes permanently internalize the expectations of others, which impedes their own personal judgment later in life, or by contrast, find such expectations impossible or blemished by personal betrayals which results in compromised spiritual intimacy with God or a complete abandonment of belief in an ultimate being. Fowler (1981) also noted Synthetic-Conventional Faith can be marked by conflict with one's sources of authority as the circles of influence widen and multiply.

Fowler's (1981) fourth stage, roughly corresponding with the age range of those aged 21 to 35, is Individuative-Reflective Faith. Interesting to note, Fowler (1981) found some individuals did not complete the transition to Individuative-Reflective Faith until their mid-thirties or forties, creating a pre-cursor to Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (2000). During the fourth stage of faith, Fowler (1981) suggested an individual begins to accept responsibility for one's own commitments and attitudes. Once again, tension and conflict may potentially develop as an individual becomes self-aware of one's own worldview which may not be as closely tied to the other significant people around them. Fowler (1981) drew attention to potential danger in the fourth stage of faith. As an individual begins to pull away from the influencers of youth, developing a greater confidence in their own ideas, the individual can develop a spiritual narcissism. (Fowler, 1981) Consequently, at the other extreme, disappointment with one's own choices which conflict with faith upbringing can lead to disillusionment as well. The stage of faith appears to be where many individuals who were raised in Christian homes choose to

abandon the beliefs which were influential to the individual at an earlier age (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Lipka, 2015; Powell & Clark, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005; ACFI, 2017).

Although Fowler (1981) provided clear descriptions of the first four stages of faith he identified, he admitted to frustration with his inability to adequately provide a description of the fifth stage of faith which he labeled Conjunctive Faith. Roughly corresponding with the age range of 35 to 60 years of age, Conjunctive Faith most closely resembles what Fowler (1981) referred to as dialogical knowing. In other words, an individual knows and recognizes things before attempting to assign things to one's system of belief (Fowler, 1981). Conjunctive Faith identifies the transcendent truth which is the belief God is more multifaceted than one's system of belief can categorize, which places the individual beyond the system constructed during the fourth stage (Fowler, 1981). Fowler (1981) identified the strength in the fifth stage is the ability for one to see the powerful meanings in one's faith while comprehending one's limited ability to fully understand the complete meaning at the same time. Consequently, Fowler (1981) warned the realization of such paradoxes could lead an individual to complacency or cynical withdrawal.

Fowler's (1981) work demonstrated individuals face changes in their belief system throughout their life based on the faith stages as well as the life experiences of the individual. He identified both strengths and dangers to an individual's faith at each stage, with the final stage as a culmination of mature faith he labeled as Universalizing Faith. Although Fowler (1981) posed Universalizing Faith corresponded with an individual's chronological age (60 and beyond), Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) also contend an

individual's faith can mature sooner and thus categorized such individuals as *Resilient Disciples*. A resilient disciple or an individual in the sixth stage develops beliefs and exhibits behaviors demonstrating a willingness to impact the culture. Fowler (1981) wrote individuals in the sixth stage are willing to sacrifice oneself for the purpose of transforming current reality into a transcendent actuality. Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) identified a descriptor called Cultural Influence, which examines one's willingness to engage with the culture or attempt to influence one's community. Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) found some individuals much younger than 60, particularly ACCS graduates, had developed a high level of faith maturity.

### **Recent Christian Faith Trends**

Fowler's (1981) stages of faith emphasized both strengths and dangers exist throughout each stage of development. The extreme in each stage of faith often resulting from people or circumstances outside of oneself (Fowler, 1981). The positive domains of influence strengthen individuals in the Christian community, but many individuals have succumbed to the dangers Fowler (1981) described. Research indicates a downward trend in the number of Americans claiming to practice Christianity, especially among teenagers and individuals slightly beyond their teens, whom Arnett (2000) called emerging adults (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Lipka, 2015; Powell & Clark, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005; ACFI, 2017). The ACFI (2017) reported the average percentage of adults who met the survey criteria qualifying as Christians was close to 40% from 1991 to 2005 and climbed to an average of nearly 44% from 2006 to 2010. Surprisingly, however, the same report indicated the percentage of individuals qualifying as Christians had fallen to just 31% in 2017 (ACFI, 2017). Lipka (2015) also reported from the Pew Research Center a

rapidly growing number of individuals the research called nones (Lipka, 2015, para.2), emphasizing the fact they claimed no religious affiliation. The Lipka (2015) report showed an increase in the religiously unaffiliated from 16% in 2007 to about 23% in 2014. A follow up study from Pew Research (2019b) reported 26% of American adults identified as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular, which was an increase by 10% from ten years prior. Bengtson, Putney, Silverstein, and Harris (2015) indicated the data showed a linear decrease in strength of faith and belief in general over a thirty-five-year period, demonstrating a lessening of religious influence in modern culture. In just eight years from when Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011) reported 59% of young adults between the ages of 18-29 indicated having a Christian background but were no longer practicing their faith, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) found the number increased to 64%.

Not only has Pew Research (2019b) shown a decline in the number of Christians in general, but also demonstrated a downward trend among teenagers and adults in their 20s. The ACFI report (2017) indicated children and teenagers have recently shown a lower likelihood of converting to Christianity, and a mere 23% of young adults (under 30) even met the criteria the organization established as Christian in 2017. Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011) reported close to 60% of young people stating they had a foundation of Christianity no longer attended church on a regular basis. According to the same report by Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011), who completed eight national studies consisting of over five thousand interviews, nearly the same percentage (57%) reported to be less active as young adults than at age 15 and close to one third referred to stages when they considered rejecting the faith of their parents. In a follow-up study, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) found only 10% of individuals who grew up Christian currently in their

20s would now meet the criteria of Resilient *Disciples*. To qualify as a *Resilient Disciple*, respondents had to indicate worship attendance of at least once monthly, church engagement beyond just worship attendance, belief in biblical authority, affirm a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and a belief in his crucifixion and resurrection defeating both sin and death, and articulate faith-driven desire to transform the culture (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

While some might attribute the low number of *Resilient Disciples* to family lifecycle theory, other researchers have implied the trend might be attributed to an additional phase of development theorized by Arnett (2000). Arnett (2000) proposed a theory known as emerging adulthood to describe the development of individuals in their late teens and 20s. He theorized this phase of development as a recent phenomenon resulting from the modern trend of young adults delaying marriage in lieu of pursuing more education and taking time to explore life's possibilities (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) characterized emerging adulthood as a time of exploration, self-focus, and a general feeling of instability, yet optimism for various possibilities. Espinoza, Mitchell, and Poest (2016) noted some scholars debate the existence of a new stage of life called emerging adulthood, but still find consensus that many members of the age group feel ignored by churches and are skeptical of them.

Daniel (2016) suggested perhaps emerging adults had not left Christianity as much as they had left the church. He found many students may have stopped attending church, but were still active in Christian campus ministries. Although the number of students in Daniel's (2016) research demonstrating low church involvement with high involvement in campus ministry was significant, it was not as high as the researcher

expected, coming in at only 15%. Furthermore, the study by Daniel (2016) included only students attending Southern Baptist Convention campus organizations and measured only attendance, not a level of personal faith commitment. Bird (2016) found emerging adults in his study of students attending Christian colleges vacillated between floundering and flourishing. Bird's (2016) study did demonstrate a connection between religiosity (determined by a series of faith questions) and students' outlook during emerging adulthood. Additionally, Bird (2016) found religious students to be more likely to focus on the possibilities of emerging adulthood rather than the instability of emerging adulthood. Furthermore, Bird's (2016) research indicated students with a greater faith commitment were less likely to report feelings of lostness or uncertainty.

One particular trend among emerging adults referenced quite frequently throughout the literature was documented in the National Study of Youth and Religion and summarized in the book *Soul Searching* (Smith & Denton, 2005). The study was a mixed design of quantitative and qualitative research of nearly three hundred subjects (Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Denton (2005) posited most teenagers were not rejecting the faith of their parents, but rather practicing a pseudo-Christianity learned from adult role models. The researchers labeled the collection of practices as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 162). Through the interview process, Smith and Denton (2005) identified several characteristics exhibited by teens demonstrating a belief system with similarities to, but very much unlike, Christianity. Characteristics of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism include a belief in a God wanting people to be nice in a way which fits with most religions. Respondents emulating characteristics of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism believed the most important goal in life is to be happy

and view God as a being to turn to in a crisis but not a God personally involved in their life (Smith & Denton, 2005). Furthermore, the final aspect respondents believed was good people qualify for heaven after death (Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Denton (2005) noted the predominant belief system among American teens was not a religion of repentance, but rather of feeling good and being happy. In short, Smith and Denton reported very few teenagers were able to articulate the historically important tenants of the Christian faith or address conventionally orthodox theological ideals of the Church.

### **Classical Christian Schools**

In contrast to Smith and Denton's (2005) findings that students were not rejecting the faith of their parents, Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011) reported teenagers and young adults leaving the Christian faith. Kinnaman and Hawkins agreed with Smith and Denton (2005) pinpointing the main issue is a Christian formation problem and claiming the Church has not sufficiently laid a proper foundation and left individuals unanchored in a culture which is changing swiftly. In subsequent research, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) proposed having nearly unlimited access to the digital world has decreased the influence of parents, school, and local social environments such as communities and church. Kinnaman and Matlock indicated a former concern of Social Desirability Bias (meaning results were sometimes skewed due to respondents' belief of being viewed as a Christian helped them culturally) which sometimes influenced religiosity research in the past had become almost nonexistent. Since social learning theory identifies influencers as having the greatest impact on the religious development of teens and young adults, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) argued such influencers have become more complex, are increasing at an accelerated pace, and resulting in a diminished influence of parents and families.

Helping parents prepare a foundation for their children is the purpose of classical Christian education—preparing students to have a depth of understanding of their belief system and be able to winsomely articulate their beliefs to others (Vaughan & Morgan, 2015; ACCS, 2018f; Miller & Beazley, 2018). The design of each classical Christian school has been to assist parents to obey the instruction of Ephesians 6:2 (English Standard Version)—to bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (ACCS, 2018f). Miller and Beazley (2018) identified classical Christian schools as having age-appropriate formation while maintaining high academic standards and boundaries for behavior.

**Purpose.** The word in the Greek from which discipline and instruction in Ephesians 6:2 (English Standard Version) was translated is *paideia*. *Paideia* refers to a transformation in the life of the individual when one's life and virtues are trained to align with God's will (ACCS, 2018a; Wilson, 2003). The methods are referred to collectively as the *Trivium* and are composed of three basic stages of child development known as the *grammar*, *dialectic*, and *rhetoric* phases (Dernlan, 2013; ACCS, 2018e; Wilson, 2003). Wilson (2003) succinctly identified classical Christian education as combining the Trivium pedagogy with a specific purpose of transferring the Western traditions to the next generation. Littlejohn and Evans (2006) explained the purpose of classical Christian education was not only to go beyond acquiring knowledge, but also to have an impact on society. Littlejohn and Evans (2006) referred to a two-fold purpose of classical Christian education which includes leading students to achieve wisdom and eloquence to discern the wisest course is and also to articulate the wisest course effectively to others.

Subsequently, many researchers, including Pennings et al. (2014) as well as Collins and Clanton (2018), describe classical Christian education as education for the common good.

**Structure.** Wisdom and eloquence seem like worthy goals, but schools may find achieving and measuring such attributes challenging. Classical education has been practiced for centuries, and for close to 1,500 years, has been joined to Christian thought since the Christian scholar Boethius divided the known liberal arts into two categories called the Trivium and Quadrivium (Dernlan, 2013; Perrin, 2004; Veith & Kern, 2001). The Trivium, has roots in the education of the Greeks and Romans and consists of three stages—grammar, logic or dialectic, and rhetoric—as the tools that prepare an individual for a lifetime of learning (Dernlan, 2013; Joseph, 2002; Perrin, 2004; Sayers, 1979; Wilson, 2003).

With a foundation on Trivium and the three stages of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric, classical Christian education has been divided into three levels of instruction, generally corresponding with developmental stages of students as well (ACCS, 2018f). The grammar phase (roughly grades K-6) is designed to take advantage of young children's enjoyment of rhymes, songs, and repetitive activity and prepare a foundation of learning in all subjects, particularly in writing, reading, and mathematics (ACCS, 2018f). Due to both social learning and cultural broadening theories, Filipas (2019) noted childhood, specifically kindergarten, as the best time for the formation of religious life. The dialectic or logic phase uses the inquisitive or questioning nature of students in grades seven and eight to teach formal logic, discernment of truth, and recognition of fallacies (ACCS, 2018f). In the final phase, known as the rhetoric phase, high school students' desire to communicate becomes the means by which students learn to

persuasively articulate the information they have memorized in the grammar phase and analyzed in the logic phase (Bauer & Wise, 2009; Dernlan, 2013; Littlejohn & Evans, 2006; Perrin, 2004; Sayers, 1979; Wilson, 2003). Miller and Beazley (2018) described the genius of the Trivium as an emphasis on content rather than on specialized skill development, resulting in a training of the virtues. They found classical Christian schools more focused on Christian faith taking root in the lives of students rather than focused on preparation for employment.

**Growth.** Although the purpose of ACCS schools has focused more on faith development than academic achievement, the structure of those ACCS schools using the tools of the Trivium has resulted in some surprising academic statistics. According to recent ACCS (2018b) research, students from member schools have significantly outperformed public schools, independent schools, and other religious schools on standardized tests such as the ACT and the SAT. Documented academic achievement, along with the rigor of a classical education infused with foundational Christian truths, may help to explain the growth of the classical Christian education movement and the ACCS in particular (ACCS, 2018f). Incorporated in 1994 with just ten member schools, the ACCS grew out of the popularity of Douglas Wilson's book *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* (1991) and the founding of Logos School in Moscow, Idaho, by Wilson and others (ACCS, 2018c). The ACCS was formed as a result of many inquiries from people all over the United States and some foreign countries wanting to start their own classical Christian school (ACCS, 2018c). Today, the ACCS has over 300 member schools serving close to 50,000 students (ACCS, 2018d). The growth of classical Christian schools in the United States has resulted from an increasing number of

Christian parents trusting the schools to deliver on their stated beliefs regarding graduates being primarily committed Christians who believe and model Christian virtues, and love learning throughout their lives (ACCS, 2018a). As John Milton, writing in 1673, stated,

The end then of learning is to repair the ruines [sic] of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection. (pp. 3-4)

### **Christian Faith Commitment in Young Adulthood to Adulthood**

The increase in the number of ACCS schools since its inception in 1994 (ACCS, 2018d) as well as the academic performance of ACCS member schools' students has been documented (ACCS, 2018b), but until recently no research demonstrating the impact of such schools on the Christian faith commitment of alumni has been conducted. Horan (2017) indicated a significant amount of data on the beliefs of emerging adults, but an absence on published research indicating an impact of Christian schools on Christian formation. By contrast, the structure of classical Christian schools as outlined by ACCS (2018e) seems to include the domains of religious influence described by Dudley (1999), Smith and Snell (2005), Black (2008), Gane, (2014) and De Kock (2015). Furthermore, Komives, Mackie, Shalka, and Smith (2020) found greater levels of spirituality in general relate to higher levels of leadership capacity in college. However, the question remains as to whether classical Christian education has impacted the lives of its graduates into young adulthood referred to by Fowler (1981) and Arnette (2015).

Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) conducted the only research specifically on ACCS graduates. The Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) sample population of ACCS graduates appeared to indicate an impact of classical Christian education on religious commitment in adults over the age of twenty-four. Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) examined research by the University of Notre Dame for Cardus (Pennings et al, 2014) and developed a similar study which examined graduates of ACCS schools. The Cardus study (Pennings et al, 2014) documented the responses of five groups of alumni: public school graduates, private non-religious (preparatory) school graduates, Catholic school graduates, protestant Christian (evangelical) school alumni, and adults who were religiously homeschooled. The head of research of the sociology department at Notre Dame, Dr. David Sikkink, agreed to conduct the same research on ACCS alumni with the president of the ACCS, David Goodwin. The results of which were published jointly by Sikkink and Goodwin (2020). The published report of the research divided the outcomes into seven groups of radically different results from the five groups in the 2014 study (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). The life outcomes identified by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) were labeled Academic Preparation, Outlook on Life, Christian Commitment, Christian Life, Conservative and Traditional, Independent Thought, and Influence. The differences identified from the study were distinct, even when techniques were used to eliminate family and other influences as well as isolate the impact of one's particular school type (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

Of the total of six educational groups studied in both the Cardus study (Pennings et al, 2014) and the replicated study on ACCS graduates (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020), ACCS and private preparatory alumni demonstrated the greatest level of college and

career preparedness. The indicators cited included 55% of ACCS graduates earned mostly A's in college compared with the next highest group, homeschoolers, of which 45% reported earning mostly A's (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Close to 90% of ACCS graduates earned a B.A. or higher compared to about 75% of Catholic, preparatory, and evangelical school graduates, and only 45% of homeschool alumni earning a B.A. or higher degree. Additionally, ACCS students scored significantly higher on standardized tests and college entrance exams (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Overall, on components including preparedness for jobs, reading books, degrees earned, and college GPA, ACCS graduates scored 32% higher than the mean score for the group (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Furthermore, no other group identified scored more than 10% above the mean, with public school students scoring 10% below the mean of the individuals surveyed (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

Beyond academics, the Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) study yielded some interesting results on factors indicating the respondents Life Outlook. Indicators included thankfulness, one's vocation as a calling from God, all things (including suffering) being a part of God's plan, trust in others, being self-sufficient, and motivated by goal setting (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS), homeschool, and evangelical school graduates had the highest marks in the Life Outlook category with 75% of ACCS alumni giving responses above the median on Life Outlook down to about 54% of evangelical school graduates responding above the median on Life Outlook. Catholic school alumni, along with preparatory and public school graduates, each had fewer than 50% of their responses at the median, meaning less than half had a Life Outlook score as high as the median (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Two notable

results included a measure of gratitude and meaningfulness of life (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Gratitude raw scores ranged from 1 to 7 with 7 representing the greatest amount of gratitude (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Association of Classical and Christian School graduates averaged a score of 6.8 on the scale which was significantly higher than all other categories. Furthermore, only 14% of ACCS alumni agreed with a statement asking if life lacked clear goals or meaning (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

The third profile which emerged from the Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) study was Christian Commitment. The courts (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962; *Abington v. Schempp*, 1963; *Chamberlain v. Dade County Board of Public Instruction*, 1963; *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) have limited the ability of public schools to influence Christian Commitment, so one might expect religious schools to have the greatest impact on Christian Commitment. However, ACCS graduates scored disproportionately higher on the Christian commitment profile, with almost 90% of the graduates reporting above the median on combined factors of regular church attendance, consistent Bible reading, church volunteerism, and obligation to religious practices (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Graduates of ACCS schools were also found more likely to attend church more than three times per month (90% compared to 66% of other religious school graduates) (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). In addition, the same classical Christian school graduates were more likely to seek a distinctly Christian vocation and indicate a frequency of Bible reading an average of six times weekly whereas, Catholic school graduates reported Bible reading less than three times per week and around 4.5 times per week for graduates of homeschools and other evangelical Christian schools (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

Cultural broadening theory (Cornwall, 1989) might predict a return to one's religious roots in the age group studied but cannot account for the disparity among groups.

Similar to the findings on Christian Commitment, Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) classified another group of responses in a category called Christian Life. The Christian Life category contained responses the researchers believed pointed to religious commitments which translated into actual life choices based on the commitments (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Responses from ACCS graduates indicated a greater likelihood to pray as a family, have conversations in the home about God, engage in family Bible-reading, marry rather than cohabitate, and a lesser likelihood to have divorced (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

In addition to a difference in academic achievement (Prepared for College and Career), Life Outlook, Christian Commitment, and Christian Life, Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) identified a significant difference in responses called a Conservative and Traditional outlook. Eighty-four percent of ACCS graduates reported a believing the Bible being historically and scientifically reliable whereas only 73% of other religious school graduates and just 50% of public school alumni reported the same belief (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Another noteworthy aspect was ACCS graduates were more likely to indicate knowing someone identifying as LGBTQ, but less likely to affirm the LGBTQ lifestyle (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

A sixth profile developed by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) was comprised of responses the researchers grouped under the heading Independent Thinkers. Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) implemented a combination of different questions to determine if respondents thought for themselves or based ideas on what others espoused. The report

indicated ACCS graduates were as likely as other groups to trust scientific research, and more likely to indicate compatibility between science and religion (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). When coupled with a greater likelihood of believing the Bible as scientifically accurate, the researchers reported a phenomenon of ACCS graduates accepting the truth of scientific research while not accepting everything scientists say as absolutely true (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Furthermore, the study found ACCS alumni more willing to listen to other religious viewpoints and were more likely to challenge other views publicly when compared with other graduates. Additionally, the same classical Christian graduates did not believe their faith was strictly a private belief which should not be discussed publicly (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Furthermore, close to 88% of ACCS graduates reported reading more than ten books per year whereas just under 70% of other religious school graduates and about 30% of public-school alumni made the same report.

Finally, the *Good Soil* Report (Goodwin and Sikkink, 2020) categorized a group of responses as Cultural Influence. The Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) sought to construct a metric to determine how likely a respondent was to engage with the culture and how likely one was to have influence on a community. The measurement consisted of many factors including volunteerism, knowing politicians and community leaders, involvement in non-church organizations, and a belief one can have influence on their communities and the culture at large (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). The metric also included the likelihood of giving money to organizations, feeling an obligation to act, and reading non-religious books (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Furthermore, the measurement also encompassed one's view of a job as a calling from God, willingness to accept a low-paying job, and belief it is okay to offend someone when engaged in a public discourse

(Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) referred to the measurement as “the strongest profile for ACCS graduates” (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020, p. 26) with over 40% responding above the median response for the group. In addition, only one other group of graduates, private preparatory schools scored above the median. with just under 5% of graduates responding above the median for the group in this combined metric (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

The Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) report indicated a huge difference in responses among the seven identified categories between ACCS alumni and other groups previously studied. Again, however, respondents were in an age group of 24 to 42-year-olds, so some level of difference might be attributed to family lifecycle (Roozen, 1980) or cultural broadening (Cornwall, 1989). Furthermore, the question still remains as to the effect of classical Christian education on students in young adulthood (Fowler, 1981) or during the years Arnett (2002) identified as emerging adults, as the research did not include any responses from graduates still in college.

### **Categorizing Christian Faith Commitment**

In their book, *Faith for Exiles*, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) examined the responses of more than 1500 18-29-year-olds who indicating they were raised as Christians. Kinnaman and Matlock (2020) sought to establish a benchmark for the level of Christian commitment among respondents in the target group. Using an extensive survey of nearly 50 questions, Kinnaman and Matlock sorted the respondents into four main groups, determined by their current level of religiosity. This researcher replicated many of the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) research questions with permission.

Consequently, the groups identified and labeled by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) are of particular relevance to this study.

The first group Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) labeled as *Prodigals* or *Ex-Christians*. Individuals in the group no longer identified as a Christian despite being raised in an orthodox Christian denomination. Surprisingly, 22% of individuals surveyed responded in such a way which met the qualification for the description.

A second group identified by Kinnaman and Matlock (2020) were called *Nomads*. The individuals in the group were currently not attending church despite growing up in a mainline church denomination. *Nomads* still referred to themselves as Christian but had not attended church in the last month and most had not had any involvement with a church for at least six months. Individuals identifying as *Nomads* represented 30% of individuals surveyed.

Another group of the respondents from the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) research indicated a higher level of church involvement but were not intentionally engaged in their faith. Kinnaman and Matlock (2020) found them lacking in core beliefs or lifestyle practices generally present in deeply religious followers of the Christian faith. The researchers labeled respondents as *Habitual Churchgoers*, as individuals indicated church attendance of at least once during the previous month but also indicated low levels of intimacy with God. Furthermore, only 29% of *Habitual Churchgoers* reported a greater ability to live out their faith in the workplace as a result of experiences at church.

The final group identified by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) were labeled as *Resilient Disciples*. Respondents indicated attending at least monthly and engaging with the church congregation beyond just worship services. In addition, *Resilient Disciples*

also demonstrated a high level of belief in the authority of the Bible and affirmed a personal commitment in Jesus with a strong belief in his historical crucifixion and resurrection. Furthermore, respondents also indicated a desire to impact the broader culture as a result of their Christian beliefs. Only 10% of respondents answered the research survey in such a way which represented the classification *Resilient Disciple*.

### **Summary**

Jesus, addressing Peter, stated, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18, English Standard Version). However, recent research demonstrating a decline in the number of Christians (ACFI, 2017; Pew Research, 2019b, 2020, 2021) has raised the alarm over the decline of the Church in the United States. Several researchers, including Arnett and Jensen (2002), the Barna Group (2006), Gallup (2002), Smith and Snell (2009), and Powell and Clark (2011), have documented dwindling numbers of Christians and increasing numbers of young people claiming to have no faith commitment or disengaging with church. If one believes Jesus’ words, no cause to believe the Church will fail should be present, but many are concerned about the transfer of faith to successive generations (Smith & Snell, 2009; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Powell & Clark 2011). Smith and Denton (2005) documented the quality of faith which is spreading may not be true Christianity but instead *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*. Smith and Denton (2005) described *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* as a general belief in the existence of God and His desire for people to be good, He mainly wants people to be happy and feel good, and good people will make it to heaven. *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* is also characterized by believing God does not care to be closely involved in an

individual's life (Smith & Denton, 2005). Other researchers, including Powell and Clark (2005), Lipka (2015), and ACFI (2017), have reported decreasing numbers of Americans in general—teens and young adults in particular—identifying as Christians. Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011), as well as ACFI (2017), claimed the decrease in numbers of Christians is directly related to a lack of Christian formation or true understanding of the faith in the lives of children. Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) found a mere 10% of respondents in the 18-29 age group qualify as *Resilient Disciples* who not only attend church regularly but live a life daily which is impacted by their faith.

Advocates of classical Christian education, including Veith and Kern (2001), Wilson (2003), Perrin (2004), Littlejohn and Evans (2006), Dornlan (2013), Pennings et al (2014), and Collins and Clanton (2018), have stated the blending of Christian thought, with a delivery system that has been tried and proven for centuries, can stem the tide for Christians and their offspring. Such pedagogy can increase the likelihood of developing *Resilient Disciples* described by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). The ACCS (2018) along with Veith and Kern (2001), Wilson (2003), Perrin (2004), Littlejohn and Evans (2006), Dornlan (2013) have claimed schools using the classical Christian model better prepare young Christians to understand what they believe and why. Developing and understanding of beliefs can result in lives which are transformed, rather than lives just trying to be good (Smith & Denton, 2005). Results from ACCS school surveys (2018b) have shown higher academic achievement, currently no research documenting a greater Christian faith commitment of graduates from ACCS member schools exists.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used for this quantitative study and restates the research questions. It also contains a description of the participants and

methodology for obtaining the sample. Chapter Four includes an analysis of the data as well as tables and charts reflecting the significance of the findings. Chapter Five summarizes the problem and outlines the implications of the findings of this study. In addition, it contains recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Members of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) have stated the historically successful classical model blended with a Christian worldview results in graduates who are more committed to the Christian faith (ACCS, 2018f). No research documenting young adults ages 18-24 who are graduates of classical Christian schools are more committed to their churches and their faith than the general population of young adults is available. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if any effect from attending a classical Christian school on the Christian faith commitment of young adults who graduated from such schools exists. The researcher utilized a comparative study approach to determine any differences in the Christian faith commitment of college students who attended an ACCS school compared to young adults categorized in a 2019 Kinnaman and Matlock study detailed in their book, *Faith for Exiles* (2019).

Chapter Three is comprised of the methods and procedures used by the researcher. The first section details the research questions used to guide the study, as well as the null hypotheses for each of the research questions. Following the questions are a description of the participants, selection sampling, research setting, the design of the research, and the survey instrument developed. Additionally, the next section explains the research procedures and the analysis of the data.

## Research Questions

The researcher examined the following questions:

1. What is the difference in the level of faith commitment between young adult ACCS graduates and the sample young adult population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019)?
2. What is the relationship between levels of faith commitment in young adult ACCS graduates and the number of years attending an ACCS school?

## Null Hypotheses

The researcher used the following null hypotheses to guide the study:

1. There will be no statistically significant difference in faith commitment of young adults graduating from an ACCS member classical Christian school and the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).
2. There will be no statistically significant relationship between the number of years attending an ACCS member classical Christian school and the level of faith commitment of young adult graduates.

## Participants

**Selection and sampling.** The participants in this study were young adults, ages 18-24, from across the United States, who had graduated from an ACCS member school. Over 400 member schools with approximately 50,000 students are comprised within the ACCS (2018d). As part of the participant selection process, the researcher asked a filtering question to determine if the participant was truly a graduate of an ACCS institution. The researcher also obtained the approval of the Research Review Board of

Southwest Baptist University to ensure the safety of the participants and to conduct the study proficiently.

The researcher attempted to collect responses from a large sample of graduates from ACCS schools throughout the United States to compare participant responses to the responses obtained by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) in their research for their book *Faith for Exiles*. For Research Question 1, the researcher conducted a one-way chi-square analysis, using the results of the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) survey to calculate expected values. Using the G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2007) statistical analysis software, the researcher determined a sample of 122 ACCS graduates were needed to detect a small to medium effect size (Cohen's  $d=0.3$ ) with 80% confidence of rejecting null hypothesis 1 at the alpha level of 0.05 with three degrees of freedom. In order to increase the confidence level to 95%, G\*power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2007) indicated a sample size of 191 participants was needed with the other parameters remaining the same. In considering the second research question to determine if any relationship between the number of years attending an ACCS school and level of faith commitment could be detected, the researcher developed a scale level score from a subset of 16 of the survey questions. A higher scale score indicated a stronger faith commitment. The researcher then used statistical software to calculate the Pearson correlation coefficient for the faith commitment scale score and number of years attending an ACCS school. Again, using G\*Power software, to detect a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.3$ ) with 80% power with an alpha level of 0.05, a sample size of at least 141 was required (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2007). Consequently, an adequate

sample size for the chi-square analysis also proved to be an adequate sample size for the Pearson coefficient.

Attempting to survey alumni from a large group of schools in various states can be difficult. However, to collect responses from a sample size in the desired range, the researcher obtained the cooperation of the president of the ACCS who provided an email list and phone numbers of all school leaders in member schools of the ACCS. Before contacting school leaders for each member institution, the researcher attended the ACCS national conference in June of 2021, and obtained permission from ACCS leadership to address the breakout session for heads of school to introduce the study, familiarize school leaders with the researcher, and increase the likelihood of participation.

The researcher ensured protection of the rights of participants in a number of ways. Member schools had legitimate legal access to the contact information of the graduates. By using member schools to access the subjects, all participants remained unknown to the researcher and the researcher could see no identifiable data. The data was collected, and statistics generated on the entire sample and individual data was anonymous to the primary researcher. No individual data was shared with anyone outside the study. Participants in the online survey were given a statement of informed consent and agreed to participate knowing they could leave the survey at any time or skip a question if desired.

**Participant description.** The link to the survey went to an unknown number of people. However, 249 started the survey. There were three participants who were eliminated because they indicated they had not graduated from an ACCS school, 30 were eliminated because they were not in the desired age range, and 40 were deleted because

they did not complete enough of the survey to obtain a usable data set, bringing the total to 176 participants in the final data sample. The researcher did not ask participants to indicate their gender, but the sex of the participant was irrelevant to the research questions and increased the anonymity of members of the sample.

Demographically, the breakdown was as follows: 157 or 89.2% of the participants indicated their ethnicity as White, five (2.8%) chose Black or African American, 10 (5.7%) were Hispanic or Latino, 15 (8.5%) indicated an ethnicity of Asian or Asian American, only one participant indicated American Indian or Alaskan Native, five (2.8%) were Middle Eastern or North African, one chose Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, while none indicated an ethnicity of “Other,” and two declined to answer. The percentage exceeded 100% because participants could choose more than one ethnicity. Of the total number of participants, 83 (47.2%) attended an ACCS school 10 or more years, 55 (31.3%) attended an ACCS school between 5 and 9 years, and 32 (18.2%) attended an ACCS school for less than 5 years. Six participants did not answer the question. The median number of years the students attended was 9 and the mode was 13 (7.3% of participants) representing K-12 years. One hundred twenty participants were full-time college students, 10 were part-time students, three were attending a formal gap year program, 39 were not attending college, and four chose not to answer. Furthermore, of the participants indicating they were students, 69 (39.2%) indicated attending a 4-year private Christian college or university, six (3.4%) indicated attending a private secular institution, 47 (26.7%) indicated attending a public university, and 21 (11.9%) were community college, or technical school students. Additionally, 45 of the students lived with their parents, 62 lived in a dormitory, and 63 owned or rented a private residence.

## Research Setting

The research setting was an online survey of various graduates of ACCS high schools within the US ranging in age from 18- to 24-years-old. The participants comprised a purposive sample of appropriate size. The demographic and setting were chosen based on existing research demonstrating large numbers of young people calling themselves Christian or growing up in the church were abandoning church attendance or leaving the faith altogether (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Lipka, 2015; Powell & Clark, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005; ACFI, 2017). Additionally, research conducted by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) focused on a general population of 18-29-year-olds and categorized the participants based on Christian faith commitment. Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) confirmed the trend suggested by previous research, finding only 10% of those surveyed qualified as *Resilient Disciples*. By contrast, a study published by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) found a higher faith commitment among ACCS graduates beyond the college years in a 23-44-year-old demographic. The researcher, however, chose to survey 18- to 24-year-old graduates because no research existed which examined the Christian faith commitment of ACCS graduates in the demographic of interest. Furthermore, family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) would suggest a trend of emerging adults in the 18-24-year-old range experiencing a drop in the level of their faith commitment. This research was conducted to test whether graduates of ACCS demonstrated the expected decrease in level of faith commitment.

The researcher used a sample survey to remain consistent with the existing research and to have more direct comparison to the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) survey data. A sample survey was appropriate because the population of ACCS graduates was

too large for a census survey and not readily accessible to the researcher (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The sample survey used was cross-sectional in nature, as the researcher desired to examine existing relationships (if any) in the current population of 18- to 24-four-year-olds rather than a longitudinal trend (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Cresswell, 2014).

Furthermore, the researcher chose to use an online survey to expedite distribution, decrease inconvenience for participants, and to increase the likelihood of participation. The survey was designed using QuestionPro in order to ease the process of creating data bases. These data bases were then used to generate valuable statistics, charts, and graphs to answer the research questions.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal comparative study was to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) by comparing young adult graduates of ACCS schools and those in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) in terms of religious faith commitment as determined by responses to an online survey using questions adapted from Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). The method used by the researcher was a quantitative study using an online sample survey. The study was causal comparative in that responses of recent ACCS graduates were compared with those in the population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) to determine if significant differences existed. This method was appropriate for a correlational comparison between graduating from an ACCS school and one's level of faith commitment (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Other quantitative studies (Pennings, et al, 2014; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020) addressed similar populations. Therefore, a quantitative

study to address the gap in the research on faith commitment of emerging adults was the best fit to answer the research questions.

The design of the research included two screener questions to ensure the participants had graduated from an ACCS member school and were in the desired age demographic. Other demographic questions facilitated the grouping and examining of other factors which might have influenced the data such as participant gender and number of years attending an ACCS school. The researcher used comparative chi-square analysis to best determine if differences existed in the sample population and the population studied and categorized by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).

To determine if a statistically significant relationship exists between level of faith commitment of young emerging adults and graduating from an ACCS school, the researcher designed a survey which utilized several questions developed by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) and replicated the questions with permission. The survey instrument allowed for efficiency of completion and quicker turnaround time. The instrument also facilitated effective comparison of data with the data collected by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Additionally, the researcher also used the coding guidelines specified by Kinnaman and Matlock to categorize participants on level of faith commitment and compare the results of this study on ACCS graduates with the results which were obtained from the earlier research on a general population of emerging adults.

### **Instrumentation**

During the spring and summer of 2021, the researcher developed an online survey which contained a large number of questions originally created by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) for purposes of comparing their data with an ACCS sample. These

questions were replicated with permission from Kinnaman and Matlock's organization, the Barna Research Group. The current survey consisted of 52 questions, most designed as Likert scale questions, with a few simple demographic questions or items which allowed a simple response of "yes" or "no." The Barna Group granted permission to replicate selected questions from their *Faith for Exiles* survey (Kinnaman and Matlock, 2019) and shared the data coding used to categorize participants based on answers to the questions as well. The researcher utilized the same coding to categorize ACCS graduates who completed the online questionnaire in the same manner as participants in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study were categorized. Daniel Copeland, director of research services for the Barna Group (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019), granted permission to use selected questions, including the specific items used to categorize the respondents, and use the data coding instructions from Kinnaman and Matlock study (2019). See Appendix A for a copy of the permission email from Daniel Copeland, Appendix B for the coding criteria, and Appendix C for a comparison of question numbers.

The types of questions used by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) were similar to previous surveys conducted by the Barna Group with known psychometric measures. However, the Barna Group did not conduct detailed psychometrics on the survey conducted for Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Nevertheless, the research was conducted by well-qualified researchers from a reputable organization. Furthermore, the types of questions used on this survey have been used in multiple instruments with known psychometric data assessing faith commitment. Specifically, the researcher used questions and coding from Kinnaman and Matlock to group responses in categories. Those survey questions reflected similar traits of questions from other reputable

organizations measured for validity and reliability. For example, Question 14 about current religious affiliation was nearly the same as questions asked by the Pew Research organization (Pew, 2019b) and the Gallup organization as reported in the Baylor University Religion study (Dougherty et al., 2011). Furthermore, Questions 9 and 13 measuring frequency of religious activities for the participant during teen years and then currently was worded similarly to questions on the College Student Belief and Values survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (Astin et al., 2003), Pew Research (Pew, 2019b), and the Baylor University Religion Study (Dougherty et al., 2011). Such similar content provides a level of construct validity. Furthermore, the straightforward nature of the survey questions would allow researchers to infer face validity. At the surface, the items appear to address the topic the current study attempted to measure.

The current research survey consisted of opening questions for filtering purposes to determine if the participant was an ACCS graduate in the age range of 18-24. The opening section also had two demographic questions to determine the gender and ethnicity of the participant. The second section of the survey consisted of questions designed to compare the current faith commitment of each participant with the faith component of when they were in their early teens. To determine level of church attendance, participants replied to a series of questions with a simple “yes” or “no” and to determine denominational affiliation, participants selected from a comprehensive list of choices. The survey contained headings of “teen faith” and “current faith” to provide clarity for the participant and to categorize the current state of each participant’s faith. Five questions, taken from Kinnaman and Matlock, focused on the participant’s teen faith

commitment. All questions were straight-forward with responses chosen from a list such as, ‘When you were growing up, how often did you attend a worship service at a church, parish, or faith community?’ Research subjects selected answers from a list of seven choices ranging from *once a week or more* to *never*. The teen faith section also included a denominational affiliation question with choices each participant could select from a list of 25 different denominations or could select *one not listed, no particular denomination, didn’t attend, or decline to answer* as alternative answer selections.

Following the teen faith questions, participants responded to five additional questions about their current faith commitment. The questions were replications of the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) questions that were very similar to teen faith questions, in regard to frequency of worship service attendance and current denominational affiliation. Three questions were multifaceted and required multiple responses. One question specifically delved into the construct of personal faith involvement. The question consisted of twelve different statements which asked participants to indicate their level of agreement from *agree strongly* to *disagree strongly* with no neutral response offered. Items included, “There is someone in my life who encourages me to grow spiritually,” and “I engage with my church in more ways than just attending service.” Another multi-layered question addressed the construct of personal faith commitment. The question asked participants to respond to a list of seven items with no neutral choice given. Responses in this section ranged from *completely true of me* to *not at all true of me*. Examples of items included, “I want to find a way to follow Jesus that connects with the world I live in,” as well as “Christian community is important, but I want to do more than get together once a week for worship.” The section which assessed current faith condition

of each participant concluded with a straight-forward, open-ended numerical question, “How many hours in the last week did you spend focusing on your spirituality, including going to church, reading the Bible, praying, listening to or reading Christian content, or talking about faith?” The data was scored using the same scoring methods used by Kinnaman and Matlock (see Appendices B and C).

The researcher acknowledged other factors or constructs such as a strong Christian commitment of the mother, father or both parents in their childhood home, may have had an influence on Christian faith commitment. Therefore, a few Likert scale questions in the final demographics sections allowed for comparing the results of those who indicated such factors with those who did not. The scale used on these questions allowed the participant to choose a level of commitment of one’s parents from 1 (*not committed*) to 6 (*strongly committed*) with no neutral response offered.

The survey concluded with nine final questions about demographics. The final questions were designed to determine the number of years the participant attended a classical Christian school, current employment status, whether the individual was a fulltime or part-time college student, and the type of college the student attended. Although the study focused on the effect of graduating from a classical Christian school, other demographics questions helped to determine if any differences discovered were related to other factors as well including years attending, denominational affiliation, or Christian faith commitment of parents.

## **Procedures**

Prior to conducting this research, the researcher obtained permission from the Southwest Baptist University Research Review Board. All participants were treated

according to the ethical guidelines of 45 CFR 46, the federal guidelines for protection of research subjects. Participation was voluntary, although participants received a code to email the researcher for a chance to win a \$10 Chick-Fil-A gift card. The identity of those sending the code was kept separate from the data so participants could not be identified.

The survey instrument was developed using several questions from the research of Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). The researcher obtained permission to use the questions as well as data scoring information from the head of research for the Barna Research Group, the organization publishing the research of Kinnaman and Matlock (Appendix A). In order to conduct this research, the researcher also obtained the cooperation of the ACCS through email and phone conversations. (See Appendix D for approval email from ACCS Director of Member Services, Tom Spencer.) During a joint session of ACCS school administrators at the national conference held in Frisco, Texas in June of 2021, the researcher addressed school leaders in attendance, informing them of the impending research. Furthermore, the ACCS provided a contact list of all school leaders in the nearly 300 member schools in the organization.

Using the provided list, the researcher developed an introductory letter sent to each head of school, to encourage participation of their alumni. For contents of this letter (see Appendix E). The letter requested the head of school to serve as or appoint a liaison whose duty was to solicit responses from graduates of his/her school still in the age category of 18-24-years of age. The researcher requested each school leader to respond with the contact information of their school liaison (in some cases, the school leader served as liaison). As an incentive, each school leader or their appointed liaison who

returned the participation form had their name entered in a drawing to win a \$250 Bass Pro Gift Card.

Once the school leader appointed a liaison for his/her school, each liaison was asked to email a survey link to every individual who had graduated from the school in the previous five years. The link took the participant to the survey (See Appendix F for a printable copy) which had been composed in Qualtrics. Each liaison was also asked to solicit responses by posting the link on their social media pages to reach graduates who might not keep up with email. The survey included a brief consent statement for each subject to read and then click, agreeing to participate. The researcher used the information obtained from each school to follow up with each liaison to verify the survey link had been sent and to request the liaison send reminders to alumni who had not responded.

Participants received communication from school liaisons requesting their participation in this research. Each participant provided informed consent to participate by clicking a button agreeing to do so. Additionally, participants responded to a screener questions to ensure each individual fit the desired demographic. Participants answered a total of 56 questions regarding experiences, religious beliefs and practices, and Christian faith commitment both currently and as a teen before the age of 18. Participants also answered nine demographic items and were given contact information for further information about the study. Finally, the participants were thanked for their participation.

After one month, the researcher sent out a reminder email to liaisons to encourage additional responses. In some cases, the researcher made phone calls to schools from which no response had been received. Once responses were collected, the data was

compiled and analyzed. The researcher compared responses from the sample of ACCS graduates to responses of the sample from Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).

### **Data Analysis**

This quantitative study was designed to determine the effect attending a classical Christian school has on the Christian faith commitment of 18-24-year-olds compared to participants in the sample studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). The online survey (Appendix G) contained answer choices using a Likert scale as outlined in the book *Faith for Exiles* (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019). In considering the first research question, the researcher used the same coding criteria (see Appendix B) used by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) to disaggregate participants into the four categories which included *Prodigals*, *Nomads*, *Habitual Churchgoers*, and *Resilient Disciples* as described by the two researchers. *Prodigals* represented individuals no longer identifying as Christians. Following the coding criteria established by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019), participants were sorted as *Prodigals* by their responses to two questions. If the participant indicated on question 5 (see Appendix G) attendance at a Catholic or evangelical church or considering themselves Christian while growing up and also selected any current religious faith other than Christian on question 6, they were sorted into the *Prodigal* category. *Nomads* indicated an identification as Christian on question 6, but little or no church involvement on Question 13. Participants earned the label of *Habitual Churchgoer* if he/she indicated at least monthly church attendance on Question 13. Further criteria to be labeled *Habitual Churchgoers* required participants to indicate no core beliefs or behaviors reflecting a deep engagement with one's faith and on Questions 13 or 18 and no behaviors that would earn one of the other three labels. Finally, using the

Kinnaman and Matlock scoring criteria, *Resilient Disciples* must have given a specified response on multiple items. First, they must have indicated Christian faith on question 6, a minimum of monthly church attendance on Question 13, and a series of beliefs from Question 18. Question 18 was a 4-point Likert scale question developed by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) with responses ranging from *agree strongly* to *disagree strongly*. Resilient Disciples must have indicated they strongly agree (scale score = 1) with the Bible as the inspired word of God (18c), their own personal commitment to Jesus Christ (18d), and a belief that Jesus was crucified, and raised from the dead (18e). Additionally, participants must have indicated strong agreement on question 16L referencing engagement with their church beyond worship attendance. Finally, to be sorted into the *Resilient Disciple* category, a participant must have chosen 1 or 2 on at least one Likert-scale question regarding one's current faith commitment (question 17). The scale went from 1 meaning completely true of the participant to 4 meaning not at all true of the participant (Questions 17a or 17b or 17g).

For testing Hypothesis 2, the researcher developed a scale level score from a subset of the survey questions which reflected attitudes and behaviors associated with greater faith commitment. A higher scale score corresponded with a deeper faith commitment. Items were reversed scored when appropriate. The faith commitment scale score subset was comprised of 16 items used in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study. Representative behaviors included frequency of worship attendance chosen from a six-option item ranging from "once a week or more" to "never" (Appendix G, Question 13). The subset also included an open-ended response to total number of hours spent on spirituality (Appendix G, Question 14), and 4-point Likert-scale questions indicating

level of agreement with orthodox Christian beliefs from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” Orthodox belief questions included salvation by grace, belief in Satan as a real being, the Bible being the inspired word of God, a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, a belief in his death and resurrection to atone for sin, that Jesus was sinless, inerrancy of scripture, agreement their faith was important to them, and agreement with the responsibility to tell others (Appendix G, Question 18). The scale also included 4 additional 4-point Likert-scale items ranging from *completely true of me* to *not at all true of me* to indicate whether participants’ practices matched their beliefs. These items included questions about a practical desire to follow Jesus, belief that God is at work in the world, Christian community being more than weekly worship, and a desire to help the church align its priorities with the teachings of Jesus (Appendix G, Questions 17a, e, f, and g). The individual responses from each question were added to obtain the faith level scale score. Since each Likert response resulted in a score from 1 to 4 with 4 corresponding with the highest level of Christian commitment, and the number of weekly hours of spiritual activity question was open-ended, the scale ranged from 16 to unknown. After testing the 16 items for reliability and obtaining a Cronbach Alpha score of just 0.503, the researcher observed a large standard deviation with Question 14 (total hours focusing on spirituality) and a much higher Cronbach Alpha if Question 14 were deleted. Consequently, the researcher eliminated Question 14 from the scale score, increasing the reliability of the scale score to a Cronbach Alpha of 0.892. The scale score then ranged from 15 to 60. The researcher used results from Survey Question 19 (Appendix G) reflecting the number of years attending a classical Christian school and the scale score from these 15 items to calculate a Pearson correlation coefficient to

determine if and what way length of attendance and Christian faith commitment were related. Using a Pearson correlation was appropriate as the researcher wanted to analyze the existence of a relationship between to interval or ratio variables. The researcher conducted a two-tailed test with an Alpha level of .05, and a small to medium effect size with Cohen's  $d = 0.3$  or higher. In analyzing the data, the researcher examined the  $p$ -values in determining whether to reject the null hypothesis, the correlation coefficients to determine the strength of the relationship (if any) which existed, as well as the means and standard deviations of each variable.

The data was cleaned by excluding the surveys of those who did not answer the first two questions of the online survey (see Appendix G), indicating whether they graduated from an ACCS school and whether they were in the desired age group. In addition, those who answered "no" to the ACCS question or indicated an age outside the appropriate demographic were also eliminated to ensure results were limited the desired sample population. If participants were in the desired demographic, but chose not to answer other questions, partial data could be used if all required questions pertaining to proper scoring were completed. For example, participants must have answered Questions 5, 6, 13, 16, 17, and 18 (see Appendix G) in order to use their data for hypothesis 1. Participants in the desired demographic who answered Questions 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18 could be used to consider Hypothesis 2. Finally, the researcher computed appropriate scale scores and sorted the data into the particular categories identified by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).

Demographics data reported included the return rate as a percentage of those who started the survey. It did not include the percentage of male and female participants.

Following the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) survey, other demographic data collected included ethnicity, denominational affiliation (if any), years attending an ACCS school, current employment status, type of undergraduate institution (if any) attending, and current living status. Four questions of secondary demographic interest were also asked, including the type of college or university attending (if any), the participants' assessment of the level of faith commitment in the home they grew up in as well as an assessment of the level of faith commitment of both the mother and the father.

The researcher used the statistical software, SPSS, for data analysis to determine whether or not to reject the null hypotheses. Chi-square analysis was appropriate when considering Hypothesis 1 as it provided a test for goodness of fit in the categories established by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019), with those established category percentages serving as the known values. A one-way chi-square analysis was used to determine if significant differences existed between the number of ACCS graduates in each of the four categories of faith commitment compared to the expected values in those same categories from the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) research. The researcher used percentages from each category of the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study to calculate the expected values for chi-square goodness of fit test with a Cohen's *d* between .3 and .6 and an Alpha level of .05. The researcher reported the chi-square statistic and *p*-value in order to determine if a difference existed between the level of faith commitment of ACCS graduates and the expected values of the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study.

## **Summary**

Chapter Three outlined the design, methodology, research setting, and participants for the study. The chapter included a review of the research questions and null

hypotheses, a description of the instrumentation and procedures used for the research, and the methods used to analyze the data and categorize the participants using procedures developed by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Furthermore, the researcher detailed the participant selection process and the research setting. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the data collected and Chapter Five includes a summary of the findings, significance, the implications for Christian educators, and recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal comparative study was to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) by comparing young adult graduates of ACCS schools and those in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) in terms of religious faith commitment as determined by responses to an online survey using questions adapted from Kinnaman and Matlock . Prior to this study, no research documenting if young adult graduates of classical Christian schools are more committed to their churches and their faith than the general population of young adults was available. A purposive voluntary sample of recent graduates from ACCS member schools was obtained by inviting leaders from each member school to send the survey link to their graduates. Through QuestionPro, participants responded to survey questions from the Kinnaman and Matlock study as well as some additional questions of interest to the researcher. Results were exported from QuestionPro to an Excel file, which was subsequently imported to and analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Chapter Four contains an analysis of data, demographics, and the findings from the research to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between 18- to 24-year-old graduates of ACCS schools and the population of emerging adults studied by Kinnaman and Matlock.

#### **Research Questions**

The data collected were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the difference in the level of faith commitment between young adult ACCS graduates and the sample young adult population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019)?
2. What is the relationship between levels of faith commitment in young adult ACCS graduates and the number of years attending an ACCS school?

To answer the first question, the researcher used one-way chi-square analysis to determine if significant differences existed between the number of ACCS graduates in each of the four categories of faith commitment compared to the expected values in those same categories from the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) research. To answer Question 2, the researcher developed a faith commitment scale score from a subset of the survey questions, which reflected attitudes and behaviors associated with greater faith commitment. A higher scale score corresponded with a deeper faith commitment.

### **Null Hypotheses**

The researcher made the following null hypotheses:

1. There will be no statistically significant difference in faith commitment of young adults graduating from an ACCS member classical Christian school and the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019).
2. There will be no statistically significant relationship between the number of years attending an ACCS member classical Christian school and the level of faith commitment of young adult graduates.

### **Data Analysis**

The online survey was administered through QuestionPro over a period of 6 weeks from mid-January through February of 2022. To collect responses from a sample

size in the desired range, the researcher obtained the cooperation of the president of the ACCS who provided an email list and phone numbers of all school leaders in member schools of the ACCS. There were 429 school leaders on the list provided. Using the provided list, the researcher developed an introductory letter sent to each head of school to encourage participation of their alumni between the ages of 18 and 24. After three weeks, a reminder email was sent to these same leaders to encourage the participation of their graduates. Twenty-seven of the 429 leaders responded their schools had not been in existence long enough to participate and four emails were no longer valid. Thirteen school leaders sent responses they had sent surveys to their graduates, but participants indicated attendance at 21 different ACCS member schools. The average amount of time taken to complete the survey was just under 14 minutes.

Once the survey was closed, the data collected were uploaded to SPSS software for final cleaning and then analyzed. To determine if a statistically significant difference existed in the categories of religious commitment from the researcher's sample and the population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019), the researcher used the same scoring criteria developed by Kinnaman and Matlock to categorize the participants. Subsequently, a one-way chi-square analysis with 3 degrees of freedom was conducted to test Hypothesis 1 and a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to test Hypothesis 2. If a *p*-value of less than 0.05 was obtained, the null hypothesis was rejected.

### **Participants**

Survey participants included 249 participants, of which 159 completed the entire survey. However, 176 participants answered enough questions to allow partial data to be used. Data from participants who declined to answer some questions were still used if the

responses included all necessary responses for one or both research questions. After cleaning the data obtained using a QuestionPro survey, the researcher uploaded the data to SPSS software for analysis.

The researcher did not ask participants to indicate their gender, as gender was not relevant to the research questions. Furthermore, not asking the question increased the anonymity of the participants. Participants were predominantly White, (89.2%) followed by Asian (8.5%), Hispanic (5.7%), and African Americans and Middle Eastern/North Africans each comprised 2.8% of the sample. Participants were instructed to select all ethnic categories that applied, so total percentage exceeded 100%. Two participants declined to answer. To be included in the data, participants must have indicated graduation from an ACCS member school and an age between 18 and 24 years of age. If an individual indicated they had not graduated from an ACCS school or were not in the desired age range, the survey took them immediately to the “thank you” message. The median age of participants was 20. The vast majority of those who indicated a current denominational affiliation were Protestant, with only 1.7% indicating attendance at a Catholic church. Baptists comprised 21% of the participants and 23.3% were Presbyterian. Other responses were scattered among 12 other denominations including Other. These statistics are indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Ethnicity and Denomination Demographics*

	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnicity	White	157	89.2%
	Asian	15	8.5%
	Hispanic	10	5.7%
	Black or African American	5	2.8%
	Middle Eastern/North African	5	2.8%
	Other	2	1.1%
	Denomination	Baptist	37
	Presbyterian	41	23.3%
	Nondenom./Ind.	35	19.9%
	Catholic	3	1.7%
	Various Other Denominations	95	34.1%

The number of years spent at an ACCS school ranged from 2 to 14 with a mode of 13 and a median of 9.0. Participants included 120 full-time college students, 10 were part-time students, three were attending a formal gap year program, 39 were not attending college, and four chose not to answer. Furthermore, of the participants indicating they were students, 69 (39.2%) indicated attending a 4-year private Christian college or university, six (3.4%) indicated attending a private secular institution, 47 (26.7%) indicated attending a public university, and 21 (11.9%) were community college or technical school students. Additionally, 45 of the students lived with their parents, 62

lived in a dormitory, and 63 owned or rented a private residence. The details of these statistics are indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*Student and Living Status*

	Status	Frequency	Percentage
Student status	Full-time Student	120	69.8%
	Part-Time Student	10	5.8%
	Formal Gap Year Program	3	1.7%
	Not a Student	39	22.7%
Living status	With Parents or Other Family	45	26%
	Dormitory/College Housing	62	35.8%
	Rent/Own Residence	63	36.4%
	Other	3	1.7%

**Data Management**

The number of individuals who started the survey was 249. There were three participants who were eliminated because they indicated they had not graduated from an ACCS school, 30 were eliminated because they were not in the desired age range, and 40 were deleted because they did not complete enough of the survey to obtain usable data. In order for a participant's data to be usable, they must have answered the questions about their current faith commitment. Furthermore, since the current study was focused on persistence of faith commitment, participants must have indicated being raised as

Christian to be included in the data set for Question 1. The faith commitment scale score subset was comprised of 16 items used in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study. Representative behaviors included frequency of worship attendance chosen from a six-option item ranging from *once a week or more* to *never* (Appendix G, Question 13). The subset also included an open-ended response to total number of hours spent on spirituality (Appendix G, Question 14), and 4-point Likert-scale questions indicating level of agreement with orthodox Christian beliefs from *agree strongly* to *disagree strongly*. Orthodox belief questions included salvation by grace, belief in Satan as a real being, the Bible being the inspired word of God, a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, a belief in his death and resurrection to atone for sin, that Jesus was sinless, inerrancy of scripture, agreement their faith was important to them, and agreement with the responsibility to tell others (Appendix G, Questions 18). The scale also included four additional 4-point Likert-scale items ranging from *completely true of me* to *not at all true of me* to indicate whether participants' practices matched their beliefs. These items included questions about a practical desire to follow Jesus, belief that God is at work in the world, Christian community being more than weekly worship, and a desire to help the church align its priorities with the teachings of Jesus (Appendix G, Questions 17a, e, f, and g). The individual responses from each question were added to obtain the faith commitment scale score.

Since each Likert response resulted in a score from 1 to 4 with 4 corresponding with the highest level of Christian commitment, and the number of weekly hours of spiritual activity question was open-ended, the scale ranged from 16 to unknown. Those who did not respond to faith commitment scale questions were eliminated when testing

Hypothesis 2. Some partial data were usable as long as the participant answered all questions necessary for coding current faith commitment level. Answers outside the expected range were changed to a nonresponse. These included one participant who indicated attending an ACCS school for 69 years and another who indicated 1,000,000 hours per week focusing on spiritual activities. After cleaning, usable data were obtained from 176 participants in the final sample. If a participant answered all current faith questions but failed to respond to the number of years attending a classical Christian school, the data could be used to test Hypothesis 1, but not Hypothesis 2.

### **Research Question 1 and Null Hypothesis**

After cleaning the data, the researcher used the same coding criteria (see Appendix B) used by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) to categorize participants into the four categories, which included *Prodigals*, *Nomads*, *Habitual Churchgoers*, and *Resilient Disciples* as described by the two researchers. Kinnaman and Matlock gave the label *Prodigal* to individuals who were raised Christian, but no longer identified as such. Those who still considered themselves Christian but had not attended church in the past month were called *Nomads*. *Habitual Churchgoers* were those who identified as Christian and attended church at least once in the past month, but did not indicate core beliefs normally found in a highly engaged Christian. Kinnaman and Matlock gave the label *Resilient Disciple* to those who attended church regularly, were actively engaged in activities in their church besides worship, and expressed belief in foundational principles consistent with orthodox Christianity.

In order to address the hypothesis that there will be no statistically significant difference in faith commitment of young adults graduating from an ACCS member

classical Christian school and the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019), a chi-square analysis was performed on the data using the same coding criteria (see Appendix B) developed by Kinnaman and Matlock to categorize participants in the current research. To determine if the results differed significantly from the Kinnaman and Matlock study, the researcher used the Kinnaman and Matlock percentages to calculate the expected values and computed a one-way chi-square analysis with 3 degrees of freedom using the observed values from the research sample. There were 175 usable participant scores. The percent of participants in each category was different than the percentage of participants in each category of the sample surveyed by Kinnaman and Matlock. The number of *Prodigals* in the current survey was 11 with an expected value of 38.5 (6.3% v. 22%). The number of *Nomads* in the current study was also less with 16 compared to an expected value of 52.5 (9.1% v. 30%). The observed number of *Habitual Churchgoers* was 82 in the current study with an expected value of 66.5 (46.9% vs. 38%). The observed number of *Resilient Disciples* in the current sample was also significantly higher than expected with 66 *Resilient Disciples* observed compared to an expected value of 17.5 (37.7% v. 10%). Using SPSS the researcher conducted a one-way chi-square analysis. A statistically significant difference was found between the observed and expected values,  $\chi^2(3) = 183.046, p < 0.0001$ , with a large effect size of  $\phi = 1.02$ . As a result of having a statistically significant difference, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis: there will be no statistically significant difference in faith commitment of young adults graduating from an ACCS member classical Christian school and the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock. It appears fewer participants in the ACCS sample left the Christian faith and more continued the practice of their faith than

those in the Kinnaman and Matlock study. Table 3 lists the differences in expected and observed frequencies and percentages, while Figure 1 demonstrates the difference in observed and expected frequencies graphically.

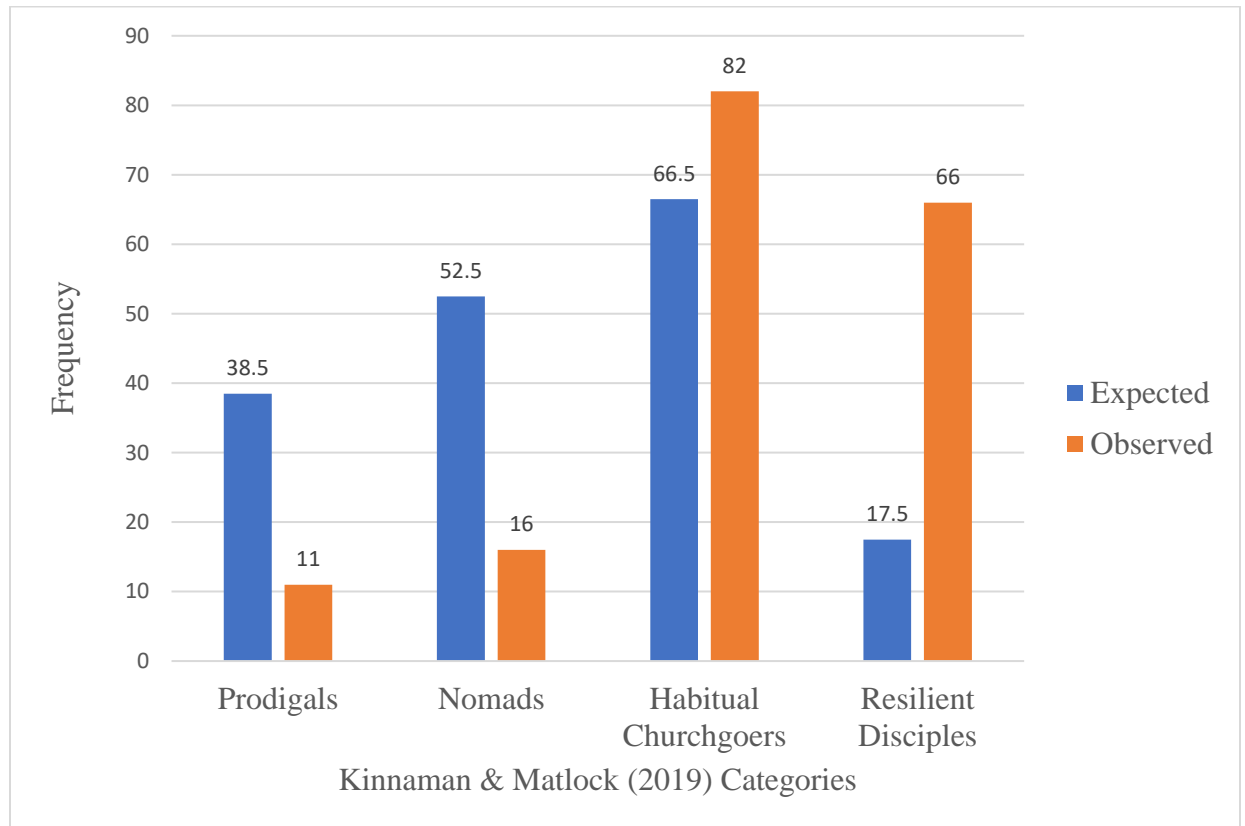
Table 3

*Expected and Observed Frequencies and Percentages*

	Expected Frequency	Observed Frequency	Expected Percentage	Observed Percentage
<i>Prodigals</i>	38.5	11	22%	6.3%
<i>Nomads</i>	52.5	16	30%	9.1%
<i>Habitual Churchgoers</i>	66.5	82	38%	46.9%
<i>Resilient Disciples</i>	17.5	66	10%	37.7%

Figure 1

*Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) Categories Compared to Observed Values*



### **Research Question 2 and Null Hypothesis**

The second null hypothesis was this: there will be no statistically significant relationship between the number of years attending an ACCS member classical Christian school and the level of faith commitment of young adult graduates. In order to test Hypothesis 2, a Pearson correlation coefficient analyzed the relationship between the faith commitment scale score (as described earlier) and number of years attending an ACCS school.

To develop the faith commitment scale score, the researcher selected 16 items used in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study. The individual responses from each question were added to obtain the faith commitment scale score. A higher scale score corresponded with a deeper faith commitment. Items were reverse scored when appropriate. Since one item was open-ended and each Likert response resulted in a score from 1 to 4 with 4 corresponding with the highest level of Christian commitment, the scale ranged from 16 to unknown.

The researcher then used reliability analysis on the faith commitment scale score, which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of only 0.503, which is considered poor internal consistency. An inter-item correlation matrix revealed the removal of the only open-ended question (weekly hours of spiritual activities) would increase the Cronbach's Alpha to 0.894, rated as good internal reliability. Removal of all other items except one would decrease the Cronbach Alpha score. Removal of the excepted item only increased the Cronbach Alpha from .503 to .507, which was still poor. Furthermore, the researcher observed a large standard deviation in the item compared to that of the other items. Table 4 contains a list of each faith commitment scale score item as well as the mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach Alpha score if the item were deleted.

Table 4

*Faith Commitment Scale Score Reliability Data*

Scale Score Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Worship Frequency	5.14	1.54	.443
Weekly Hours of Spiritual Activity	8.34	11.15	.894
Heaven can be Earned	3.75	.62	.492
Satan is not Real	3.64	.77	.484
The Bible is Inspired	3.81	.63	.482
Committed to Jesus	3.77	.73	.478
Literal Resurrection	3.83	.64	.480
My Faith is Important	3.68	.73	.473
Responsibility to Share My Faith	3.40	.95	.465
Biblical Accuracy	3.61	.83	.475
Jesus Sinned	3.64	.91	.491
God Will Ultimately Set Things Right	3.57	.78	.483
Desire to Follow Jesus Impactfully	3.35	.86	.479
God is at Work Outside the Church	2.27	.96	.507
Christian Community is Important	3.05	.99	.474
Priorities of Church Should Match Priorities of Jesus	3.16	.95	.475

Since all other items used to comprise the faith scale level score were 4-point Likert-scale items, the weekly hours of spiritual activity item was removed to increase reliability.

Therefore, the faith commitment scale score ranged from 15 to 60.

After obtaining a more reliable faith commitment scale score, the researcher computed a Pearson correlation coefficient to assess the linear relationship between faith commitment scale score for ACCS graduates in the sample and number of years attending an ACCS school. A Pearson correlation was appropriate as all variables met the required assumptions. Assumptions included both variables were interval, each data set contained a related pair for the variables of interest, the observations were independent, the scores were normally distributed, the relationship was linear, and the scores had similar variability. There was no correlation between the two variables,  $r(159) = .09$ ,  $p = .234$ . As a result of having no statistically significant relationship, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. It appears the faith commitment scale score of recent ACCS graduates is unrelated to number of years spent attending an ACCS school.

### **Additional Analysis**

Although no research question addressed the relationship of post high school education (or lack thereof), it is worth noting when analyzing the data, the researcher discovered a relatively high frequency of graduates indicating attendance at a 4-year Christian college or university. To determine if a significant difference existed, the researcher sought to conduct a one-way ANOVA comparing the mean faith commitment scale scores of those who indicated attending different types of post high school institutions. The variables of interest met most of the assumptions for a one-way ANOVA including an interval dependent variable, and scores came from a purposive sample, but if

results are interpreted cautiously without extending to the population, this is acceptable. Furthermore, the observations were independent of one another, and with a sample size > 30, the ANOVA analysis was robust with respect to violations of normality. However, the data violated the Levene test for homogeneity of variance ( $p = .001$ ), perhaps because of a high standard deviation (11.02) in the mean faith commitment scale scores of those who indicated they were currently attending a public university. Hoping to find a way to analyze the data, the researcher conducted a Welch's ANOVA for equality of means. The data also failed this second test ( $p = .068$ ). The mean faith commitment scale score of those who attended a private Christian college was 55.95, while the mean score of those who attended a public university was 51.4. The data set reflected a difference, but the researcher was unable to verify any significant difference in the data.

Additionally, a large quantity of related literature identified multiple parental factors as influencing religiosity (Ghoshal & Mehrotra, 2017; Mueller & Cooper, 1986; O'Connor, et al., 2002; Roozen, 1980; Stolzenberg, et al., 1995). Specifically, the faith commitment of the parents (Dortch, 2014; Dudley, 1999) and the mother in particular (Ghoshal & Mehrotra, 2017; Kliewer et al., 2020) seems to have an effect on the religiosity of the offspring. The researcher asked participants in the current study to rank the faith commitment of the home they grew up in on a sliding scale from 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest. Then participants were asked to rank the faith commitment of their father and mother individually using the same scale. The perceptions of the faith commitment of their home and their parents were exceptionally high. The mean faith commitment score of the home for the sample was 5.37. The mean faith commitment score of fathers as ranked by the participants was 5.30 and 5.54 for their mothers.

Table 5

*Perceived Family Faith Commitment*

	Home	Father	Mother
Mean Faith Commitment Score (Scale 1 to 6)	5.37	5.30	5.54

**Summary**

Chapter Four included the data analysis and findings of the study. The researcher used the results of 176 emerging adult ACCS graduates in the United States. For Research Question 1, chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in the categories of participants in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study and the sample population of ACCS graduates from the current study. Consequently, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. It appears fewer participants in the ACCS sample left the Christian faith and more continued the practice of their faith than those in the Kinnaman and Matlock study. For Research Question 2, the researcher utilized a Pearson correlation coefficient to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between the faith commitment scale score of ACCS graduates and the number of years the graduates attended an ACCS school. No statistically significant relationship was found, thus the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. It appears the faith commitment scale score of recent ACCS graduates is unrelated to number of years spent attending an ACCS school.

Chapter Five includes an overview of the research, conclusions, professional implications, and recommendations for further research. The overview includes a discussion of each question and possible applications of the results for classical Christian

schools. Additionally, rival explanations of the results are considered. Chapter Five also includes recommendations for future study, questions arising from the results, and their implications for ACCS member schools.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine if a difference existed in the faith commitment of emerging adult graduates from ACCS schools and that of young adults in the general population as reported in previous studies. A gap in the current literature existed regarding the faith commitment of ACCS graduates in the age range of 18 to 24 years, typically associated with college students. A sample of 176 ACCS graduates in the desired age range completed a survey developed predominantly from questions taken from a previous study of young adults by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) of the Barna Research Group. Family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980; Mueller & Cooper, 1986; Stolzenberg et al., 1995; O'Connor et al., 2002) predicted students would experience a disengagement with their faith in their teen years and early 20s. Furthermore, Kinnaman and Matlock found that of the 18- to 28-year-olds raised as Christians they surveyed, only 10% were committed enough to be labeled *Resilient Disciples*, the label they gave to the participants who demonstrated the greatest Christian commitment. Additionally, only 38%, although not as committed as *Resilient Disciples*, were attending church at least once per month (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019). Perhaps even more alarming, 30% of those in the Kinnaman and Matlock study considered themselves Christian but were no longer attending church, and 22% no longer considered themselves Christian despite identifying as Christian while growing up. Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) found higher levels of faith commitment among ACCS graduates between the ages of 23 and 44, but the researcher sought to determine if ACCS graduates experience the disengagement predicted by family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) during their late teens and early 20s

and if the current sample of ACCS graduates would differ categorically from those in the Kinnaman and Matlock study.

The purpose of this quantitative, causal comparative study was to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) by comparing young adult graduates of ACCS schools and those in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). The current study compared responses to an online survey using several questions adapted from the Kinnaman and Matlock study. Chapter Five includes a summary of the findings and discussion of the research. Additionally, the researcher presents a discussion around each research question and implications of the findings for classical Christian schools and their leaders. Furthermore, Chapter Five includes suggestions for further research based on questions resulting from the study as well as conclusions of the study.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the difference in the level of faith commitment between young adult ACCS graduates and the sample young adult population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019)?
2. What is the relationship between levels of faith commitment in young adult ACCS graduates and the number of years attending an ACCS school?

The researcher conducted quantitative analysis on each of the research questions to determine whether to reject the null hypotheses. After using the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) criteria for data coding, participants in the sample were categorized into the four categories developed by Kinnaman and Matlock. With four categories from the sample to compare to the Kinnaman and Matlock data, a chi-square analysis was used to determine

if a significant difference was detected between the two research samples. The researcher also used a subset of Kinnaman and Matlock questions to develop a faith commitment scale score and a Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the faith commitment scale score and the number of years attending an ACCS school. Statistical analysis resulted in a rejection of the first null hypothesis and failure to reject the second null hypothesis.

### **Research Question 1 Discussion**

For Research Question 1, a statistically significant difference between the research sample and the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) sample was found, so the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. The results of a chi-square analysis between the four categories of the two samples indicated a significant difference,  $\chi^2(3) = 183.046, p < 0.0001$ , with a large effect size of  $\phi = 1.02$ . The difference was very noticeable when comparing the expected frequencies of both groups as well as the percentage of participants falling into each category. The two categories of strongest faith commitment, *Resilient Disciples* and *Habitual Churchgoers*, had higher observed values than expected. In the Kinnaman and Matlock research 48% of the participants fell into the highest two categories of faith commitment, while 84.6% of the current ACCS sample population fell into those same categories. Conversely, while Kinnaman and Matlock found 30% of their sample population calling themselves Christian, but no longer attending church (*Nomads*), just 9.1% of the current ACCS research sample fell into that category. Finally, 22% of those who responded to the Kinnaman and Matlock survey no longer identified as Christian (*Prodigals*), while only 6.3% of the ACCS sample met the criteria for *Prodigals*.

Research Question 1 specifically addressed the faith commitment of 18- to 24-year-olds raised as Christians. Previously reviewed literature indicated a large percentage of emerging adults leaving the faith (ACFI, 2017; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Lipka, 2015; Pew Research, 2019b; Powell & Clark, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005;). Furthermore, family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) would suggest an expected decrease in religious commitment and practice among young adults in the sample population. However, by indicating a rejection of Null Hypothesis 1, this research indicates a difference for graduates of ACCS schools. Graduates in the sample from ACCS schools do not appear to follow the trend of recent research nor experience the drop in religious faith commitment to the degree predicted by family lifecycle theory.

Other previous literature details many factors that influence the religiosity of young adults. A consistent theme in the literature is parental influence. Parents who are Christian (Myers, 1996; Black, 2008, Gane, 2014) have a high level of Christian commitment (Dortch, 2014), are intentional about the transfer of their faith, and have strong relationships with their children (Dudley 1999), are more likely to have children who are committed to Christianity as well. Other parental factors include: both birth parents live in the home, higher levels of marital happiness, parents' agreement on religious beliefs, higher levels of religious practice, and a parenting style that demonstrates affection and allows some independence are all factors that increase the odds children will follow the religious beliefs of their parents (Black, 2008; Gane, 2014; Goodman & Dyer, 2020; Myers, 1996; Stearns & McKinney, 2019). These factors seem to fit the prediction of social learning theory indicating influencers such as parents, role models, and peers have the greatest impact on religious practices (Bandura, 1977;

Hunsberger, 1983; Hoge et al., 1993). Participants in the current study indicated high perceptions of their parents' faith commitment. On a scale of 1 to 6 with 6 being the highest, the mean perceived faith commitment of the childhood home was 5.37, with a mean perceived faith commitment of fathers at 5.30 and 5.54 for mothers. The results were on the very high end, negatively skewed, and leptokurtic. The standard deviation for all three statistics was less than 1. family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) suggests an influence of parents on childhood faith commitment but would also predict a drop in commitment in the late teens and early 20s. The faith commitment in the homes of ACCS graduates (or the perception thereof) may have had an impact on the faith commitment of participants in the study, but the data from this study did not reflect the predicted drop.

Related literature also revealed other factors contributing to a higher faith commitment. Black (2008) found discipleship and spiritual depth, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and relationships with others of faith as factors that influence teen religious commitment. Gane (2014) found when a teen had a highly involved adult mentor in his or her life, greater Christian commitment was also present. Such findings are supported by cultural broadening (Localism) theory, which posits local environment has the greatest impact on an individual's religious practice (Hoge et al., 1993; Hoge & Petrillo, 1978; Roof, 1978;).

In addition to the influence of parents and other adults, De Kock (2015) found peer influence can offset trends towards secularization and pluralism in society at large. Additionally, De Kock found students who have developed an active prayer life and also agree with the doctrines of their church demonstrated greater longevity in their involvement with the church. In summary, Smith and Snell (2009) in their landmark

book, *Souls in Transition*, synthesized these ideas, indicating the greater number of family, adult, peer, and individual factors present in the lives of young adults, the greater likelihood they will be religiously invested. It might be said that a collection of such factors referenced by Smith and Snell would encompass all three theories of family lifecycle (Roozen, 1980), social learning (Bandura, 1977), and cultural broadening (Cornwall, 1989).

Considering the number of factors that influence the religiosity of young adults, one might say there is a “recipe” of ingredients that increase the likelihood of Christian faith transfer. This current study indicated a statistically significant difference in the faith commitment of ACCS graduates from that of a general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). Some of the influences, such as factors present in the home, cannot be controlled by schools. Perhaps the difference detected by this study can be attributed to ACCS schools not only supplying some of the ingredients for stronger faith commitment, but additionally providing the “mixing bowl” where the ingredients identified in the literature might be combined. If classical Christian schools are intentional about Christian formation (Dreher, 2017) and in selecting families that desire to have cooperation in Christian instruction (De Kock, 2015), the school becomes a container for parental influence, adult mentors, and peer influence, as well as individual Christian formative practices. The result is an environment replete with the factors Smith and Snell (2009) identified as contributing to a greater probability of emerging adults being religiously committed.

## Research Question 2 Discussion

For Research Question 2, a Pearson correlation test demonstrated no significant relationship between the number of years attending an ACCS school and the faith commitment scale score, so the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Using a subset of 15 items from the research survey, the researcher developed a faith commitment scale score. The researcher then calculated a Pearson correlation coefficient to determine if and in what way length of attendance at an ACCS school and Christian faith commitment were related. The researcher conducted a two-tailed test with Alpha level of .05. There was no correlation detected between the two variables,  $r(159) = .09, p = .234$ . Therefore, the Pearson correlation coefficient detected no statistically significant correlation between the number of years attending an ACCS school and the faith commitment scale.

Research Question 1 indicated a significant difference in the faith commitment of ACCS graduates when compared to the population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019), but there was no statistical evidence in this study to indicate a relationship between that higher faith commitment and the number of years spent at the ACCS school. As discussed in Research Question 1, related literature points to multiple factors that are associated with greater faith commitment including, marital status of biological parents, faith commitment of parents, adult mentors outside the family, and peers committed to the Christian faith, as well as discipleship and intergenerational influences (Black, 2008; De Kock, 2015; Gane, 2014; Goodman & Dyer, 2020; Myers, 1996; Stearns & McKinney, 2019). It could be that ACCS graduates sought out those factors before

joining an ACCS school, or finding those factors present may have encouraged them and their families to join a classical Christian school community.

Another reason for failing to reject the null hypothesis might simply be a lack of variance in the number of years of ACCS school attendance in the sample group as well as a high mean faith commitment scale score in the sample. The median number of years of attendance was 9.0 with the mode being 13. The second most frequent response was 12 years of attendance and nearly half the participants (48.8%) indicated attending an ACCS school for 10 years or more. Furthermore, participants who indicated attending an ACCS school 6 years or more (meaning they likely graduated after attending in Grades 7-12) comprised 65.9% of the sample. The faith commitment scale score could range from 15 to 60, yet the sample mean score for the group was 53.8. With little variance in both the independent and dependent variables, it is unlikely correlation could be detected.

Additionally, this research did not identify the type of education a graduate received prior to coming to an ACCS school if they did not attend for the full 13 years of kindergarten through graduation. The students may have attended a public school, another Christian school, a different classical school, or even been homeschooled. It could not be determined if longevity of classical Christian education and faith commitment were correlated.

This study failed to reject the second null hypothesis, there will be no statistically significant relationship between the number of years attending an ACCS member classical Christian school and the level of faith commitment of young adult graduates. However, the current research cannot account for other factors besides longevity that may be present and/or related to graduating from an ACCS school. The ACCS graduates in

this study indicated a significantly different level of faith commitment than those in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study but no correlation was indicated between the level of their faith commitment and the number of years attending an ACCS school.

Participants in this study did not seem to follow the trend predicted by family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) of falling away from the faith of their parents in their late teens and early 20s despite the number of years attending an ACCS member school.

Although the research questions dealt specifically with the Christian faith commitment of recent ACCS graduates and the relationship between that commitment and number of years attending an ACCS school, it is worth noting another interesting piece of data that emerged in the study. The researcher discovered when analyzing the data, a relatively high frequency of graduates had indicated attendance at a 4-year Christian college or university. Of those who answered the question 48.3% reported being currently enrolled at a private 4-year Christian college or university. While the research questions being investigated did not include an exploration of institutional influence on faith commitment, it must be considered as a possible explanation for higher faith commitment in the sample. To determine if a difference was detected, the researcher sought to conduct a one-way ANOVA comparing the mean faith commitment scale scores of those who indicated attending different types of post high school institutions. However, due to the fact the data set failed to meet the general assumptions for conducting a one-way ANOVA, the researcher was unable to verify any significant difference in the data. Consequently, another explanation for a difference in the ACCS sample in this study and the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) sample might have something to do with a large percentage of the sample attending a private Christian college.

However, the potential difference could not be tested with the current sample. Conversely, choosing to attend a private Christian institution might be another indicator of a greater Christian commitment found among ACCS graduates, but no relationship could be determined using the current sample. To further explore the relationship (if any) between post high school choice and Christian faith commitment, a new sample from this population would need to be studied.

### **Implications**

This study attempted to address a gap in the literature as to the effectiveness of ACCS classical Christian schools fulfilling their stated objectives. The ACCS has a stated objective of producing graduates who are well-grounded in their Christian faith, exhibit wisdom and virtue, and live lives that reflect Christian presuppositions (ACCS, 2018A). Previous research by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) indicated ACCS graduates between the ages of 23 and 44 demonstrated qualities reflecting a high level of Christian commitment. However, family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) would predict those raised as Christian would likely return to the faith of their childhood after a period of diminished faith practice in one's late teens or early 20s. No research existed on ACCS graduates during the stage of the predicted period of a drop in faith commitment. Research by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) would indicate only 10% of emerging adults raised as Christian would demonstrate a deep enough commitment to be considered *Resilient Disciples* during the time period usually associated with college attendance. Furthermore, the Kinnaman and Matlock research suggested only 38% of those raised as Christian even indicated attending church once per month. In other words, less than half of the young adults in the Kinnaman and Matlock study, raised as Christian, were in the

top two categories of faith commitment identified by the researchers. Over half (52%) were no longer attending church and 22% no longer identified themselves as “Christian.”

For this study, the researcher attempted to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) to see if graduates of ACCS schools during the crucial 18- to 24-year-old age range demonstrated a greater faith commitment than those in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) study. The researcher also sought to determine if there was a relationship between the level of faith commitment of 18- to 24-year-old ACCS graduates and the number of years they attended an ACCS school. The results of the study indicated there was a significant difference in the responses of ACCS graduates compared to those found by Kinnaman and Matlock. A substantially higher percentage (37.5%) of ACCS graduates in this study qualified as *Resilient Disciples*, responding to the survey questions in ways that reflected a robust faith commitment. Additionally, 46.6% indicated regular church attendance even though they did not qualify as resilient disciples. Consequently, 84.1% of ACCS graduates surveyed were in the top two categories of faith commitment, compared with only 48% of those in the Kinnaman and Matlock study.

The large percentage of young ACCS graduates demonstrating a continued faith commitment, even during the college years, is good news for the ACCS, member school leaders, teachers, and families. At the organizational level, the results of the current study complement the research of Goodwin and Sikkink (2020), which reflected a greater faith commitment of ACCS graduates in their mid-20s to early 40s. There was no existing research on recent ACCS graduates. However, now the ACCS can point to data that indicate recent graduates of member schools, most of whom are still in college, have a greater Christian faith commitment than the general population reported in previous

studies. This study adds credibility to the pedagogy set forth by the ACCS to promote Christian formation and can also aid in the recruitment of new member schools.

School leaders in the ACCS now have evidence that the classical Christian methodology yields fruit, even during a period in students' lives that family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) would predict a drop in religious faith commitment. Heads of ACCS schools can use this information for recruitment of new families and retention of current families. School leaders can also use this data to assess whether their schools include those elements that increase the likelihood of continued faith commitment, including Christian peers, positive adult mentors, and strong biblical instruction, in addition to Christian course content and pedagogy. Furthermore, this study may aid leaders of Christian schools who may be considering a change to a classical pedagogy.

Finally, parents who desire a strong Christian foundation for their children and view this study may be aided in selection of schools for their children. If families live near ACCS schools, the data may persuade them to explore the option of enrolling their children at a member school. Additionally, parents could assess whether the collection of factors identified in the related literature and summarized by Smith and Snell (2009) are present in their children's schools. If they do not find such factors in their schools, they would do well to place their children in situations where they may find the combination of influences including peers, mentors, and intentional discipleship (Black, 2008; Gane, 2014; Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020; Myers, 1996).

With this information, parents of classical Christian students, ACCS school leaders, and the ACCS organization as a whole may now more confidently affirm the stated end of their child's education as developing Christian virtue. The researcher

committed to report his findings to ACCS leadership and leaders of participating schools. This study will be sent to ACCS President David Goodwin and all school leaders who indicated they had recruited their graduates to participate. The results could be published in ACCS literature, and the researcher plans to explore the possibility of presenting the findings at a future ACCS national conference.

Distribution of this study as indicated above can serve to enhance the growing movement of classical Christian education. The primary goal of Christian formation over academics as stated by the ACCS (2018a) seems to have been demonstrated by the sample population in this study. Although these results run contrary to family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980), the study would seem to reflect cultural broadening theory which states local environment has the greatest impact on an individual's religious practice (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978; Roof, 1978; Hoge et al., 1993). As stated earlier, the environment of ACCS schools would seem to include many of the factors identified in the related literature as having a positive impact on Christian faith commitment (Black, 2008; De Kock, 2015; Dudley, 1999; Gane, 2014; Smith & Snell, 2009; Stearns & McKinney, 2019). Leaders of ACCS schools may use this study as a reflection on the Biblical mandate in Deuteronomy 6 (English Standard Version) to instruct our children in matters of faith morning, evening, and throughout the day. During the day, children spend many hours in school during childhood and adolescence, and the results of this study indicated there is a significant difference in the faith commitment of those who spend their school time in an ACCS school.

Although ACCS schools enjoy a larger percentage of participants in this research in the top two categories, it should naturally be a concern that 6.3% of the sample no

longer identified themselves as Christian. In spite of the fact this is much lower than the 22% in the Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) population, the appropriate response of Christian educators should be concern for the one lost sheep described by Jesus in Matthew Chapter 18 (English Standard Version). If Jesus demonstrated concern for the one lost sheep out of 100, ACCS school leaders should consider what might be done for the 6.3% of the sample classified as *Prodigals*.

Furthermore, it is worth noting this study sample was limited to those graduates of ACCS schools who chose to respond to the online survey. The possibility exists ACCS graduates who have a lower level of faith commitment may have declined to respond to a survey measuring their spirituality, especially when the invitation came from one's alma mater. For example, a student who has strayed from the faith and received an invitation from a faculty or staff member of one's former Christian school may have simply declined to fill out the survey. Additionally, social desirability bias sometimes affects self-reported data. Again, the participants received the invitation from an employee of their high school, so there is no way to tell if a participant may have self-reported a higher level of commitment in order to appear more spiritual. However, the differences found in this research were significant in spite of these limitations. It must also be noted responses were collected from January to February 2022, near the end of a global pandemic. Therefore, factors used in measuring religiosity (such as church attendance or other religious gatherings) may have been negatively affected. A participant who had a desire to attend worship and engage in other community worship practices may have been prevented from doing so by federal, state, or local pandemic guidelines.

In summary, the results of this research indicated a difference in the faith commitment levels of college-aged ACCS graduates. The level of faith commitment in the sample was not significantly correlated with the number of years of ACCS attendance. This study addressed the gap in the literature specifically for ACCS graduates in the 18- to 24-year-old range. The data did not isolate ACCS school attendance as the sole factor influencing religiosity, but they do indicate factors increasing the likelihood of continued Christian commitment seem to be present in the environment of ACCS schools.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The following recommendations for further research will add to the body of knowledge of Christian faith commitment, specifically as it pertains to classical Christian schools in the ACCS.

1. Related literature identified several factors influencing religiosity that seem to be present in most ACCS schools. Further study isolating individual factors, specifically those influenced by teachers and school leaders, would add to the body of professional knowledge for classical Christian schools. Such research would help classical Christian schools improve practice and pedagogy.
2. There was not a great deal of diversity in the sample of graduates who chose to respond to the survey. Further study exploring the level of diversity among ACCS schools would be beneficial. If a greater degree of diversity exists within the ACCS, a study of a more diverse sample would be helpful.
3. This study revealed a high percentage of ACCS graduates attending 4-year Christian colleges and universities (48%). However, statistical data for the sample

could not be calculated without violating assumptions testing for one-way ANOVA. Future studies examining the correlation between graduating from an ACCS school and undergraduate school selection would prove beneficial.

Additionally, research examining the relationship between faith commitment of ACCS graduates and type of college attending would be enlightening.

4. A replication of the study could be done to determine if gender of the participants had any effect on level of religious commitment.
5. A qualitative study of those ACCS graduates in the *Resilient Disciple* category might yield valuable information into the factors, practices, pedagogy, and environment that contributed to their continued faith commitment in college.
6. Furthermore, a qualitative study of ACCS graduates in the *Prodigal* category to determine what factors led to their decision to leave the Christian faith would prove to be both enlightening and beneficial.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal comparative study was to test the family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980) by comparing young adult graduates of ACCS schools and those in the general population studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) in terms of religious faith commitment as determined by responses to an online survey using questions adapted from Kinnaman and Matlock. Based on family lifecycle theory (Roozen, 1980), most young adults raised as Christian experience a decline in religiosity during their late teens and early 20s followed by a return to the faith of their childhood in their late 20s as they begin to raise families of their own. However, more recent studies have indicated a more linear downward trend (Harris, 2015; Lipka, 2015), pointing to a

break in the cycle with fewer emerging adults following the pattern of resurgence in their religiosity (ACFI, 2017; Pew Research, 2019b, 2020, 2021).

Recent research by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) pointed to a stronger faith commitment in older ACCS graduates, but no research existed on the faith commitment of ACCS graduates in the 18- to 24-year-old age range. This study sought to address that gap by examining the faith commitment of recent ACCS graduates and comparing their responses to a sample population of young adults studied by Kinnaman and Matlock (2019). This study revealed a significant difference in the faith commitment levels of ACCS graduates and those in previous research. The study did not find a significant relationship in the level of faith commitment in the population and number of years attending an ACCS school.

The findings of this study are significant for ACCS schools, leaders, and parents since the stated goal of member schools is Christian formation (ACCS, 2018a). Clark and Jain (2021) state,

Without the students internalizing a fundamental respect for God, their teachers, parents, and elders, the entire process of education likewise fails...Before learning can begin there must be an education in love. It begins in the home and church but must be supported, nourished, and not undermined, in the school. For this and a multitude of reasons therefore, a Christian classical education must be grounded in piety. (p. 23)

The sample in this study demonstrated a continued respect for God and an internalization of the Christian values they learned from influential people in their lives. Literature indicated a collection of factors influencing faith commitment, and data from ACCS

graduates demonstrated a greater faith commitment. Christian parents who desire for their children to continue in the faith would do well to consider if the school their children are attending has sought to establish an environment that includes those factors. Additionally, Christian school leaders should seek to establish a culture that intentionally includes those attributes and is most likely to instill Christian virtue in their students.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Permission to Use Barna Research Questions

**From:** Daniel Copeland <[dcopeland@barna.org](mailto:dcopeland@barna.org)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 30, 2020 6:38 PM  
**To:** Brad Dolloff  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Barna Research Inquiry

Brad,

Good evening! I hope this finds you healthy and well. My name is Daniel Copeland, Barna Group's Director of Research Services. The wonderful Rhesa Storms sent me your inquiry and asked that I reach out.

I am happy to help and willing to share the exact questions from Faith For Exiles. Are you only interested in the question set that defines resilient disciples? Or are there other questions that interest you? Please let me know so I can distribute the correct information to you. I am beyond happy for you to use this so long that Barna Group and Faith For Exiles is properly cited.

For my own understanding, I would love to hear about your doctoral work! What exactly are you writing on? I have a masters in sociology and sincerely miss academic writing.

Additionally, for your further interest, I have attached here a complimentary digital version of Barna's *The Connected Generation*, which investigates Resilient Discipleship around the globe.

Thanks so much!

**Daniel Copeland**  
Director of Research Services



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Appendix B

**Categorizing Coding Criteria Corresponding to  
Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) Labeling and Scoring**

<b><u>Category</u></b>	<b><u>Scoring Criteria</u></b>
<i>Prodigals</i> than 1	Q5a=1 or Q5b=1 or Q5c=1 and Q6=any response other
<i>Nomads</i>	Q6=1 and Q13=4, 5, or 6
<i>Resilient Disciples</i> Q18e=1 and	Q6=1 and Q13=1, 2 or 3 and 18c=1 and Q18d=1 and Q16l=1 and (Q17a=1-2 or Q17b=1-2 or Q17g=1-2)
<i>Habitual Churchgoers</i> criteria	Q13=1, 2, or 3 and Q6=1 and failed to meet other category

Appendix C

**Comparison of Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) Survey Item Numbers  
With Item Numbers of Current Research Project**

<b><u>Item Number(s)</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) Number</u></b>
1-2	Filter Questions	NA
3-4	Demographics	3-4
5-6	Commitment Comparison	5-6
7-10	Teen Faith	7-10
11-12	Teen Faith	20-21
13-15	Current Faith	13-15
16	Current Faith	22
17	Current Faith	40
18	Current Faith	42
19	Demographics	NA
20	Demographics	22
21-27	Demographics	NA

## Appendix D

### Permission to Use ACCS Email List and to Speak to Heads of School at the Conference

Brad,

I will work to assist you with these requests.

Tom

Tom Spencer

Director of Accreditation, ACCS

Director of Member Services, ACCS

(208) 882-6101 x102

[tspencer@accsedu.org](mailto:tspencer@accsedu.org)

PO Box 9741, Moscow, ID 83843

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"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

On Mar 25, 2021, at 3:20 PM, Brad Dolloff <[bdolloff@cofo.edu](mailto:bdolloff@cofo.edu)> wrote:

Good afternoon, Tom!

My name is Brad Dolloff. We have met a time or two at previous conferences, but it has been a few years since School of the Ozarks has been able to attend. Thankfully, Lord willing, we will be bringing our faculty to the conference in June and have already pre-registered.

I am writing to you with a request that I believe my friend, Bruce Williams, has already mentioned to you. I am doing a doctoral dissertation on the effect of attending an ACCS school on post high school Christian faith commitment. I'm hoping my research will complement the *Good Soil Report* already published by ACCS. My survey will focus on young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, using survey questions developed by the Barna Group and published in the book *Faith for Exiles* (2019) which found only 10% of 18-28-year-olds in their sample qualified as "resilient disciples." I will be looking to see if a significantly greater number of ACCS graduates meet the qualifications of a "resilient disciple." A couple years ago, when I started my doctoral program, I was able to speak with David Goodwin about my research and he felt it would be worthwhile and that the ACCS would be willing to provide me with assistance.

My request is twofold:

- Would I be able to have 2-3 minutes at some point during the administrators pre-conference (maybe even at lunch) to briefly explain my project to heads of school and request their help in completing my research?

- I will also at some point be requesting an email list of ACCS school leaders so I might send them the information with a link to a survey for their graduates. I will be asking each head of school to appoint a school liaison (perhaps themselves) to solicit their graduates from the previous 5 years to complete the survey.

Thank you so much for your consideration, Tom! I am thankful for all the resources provided to member schools by the ACCS.

Blessings in Christ,

Brad

*Brad D'oloff*

**Dean of the Lab School**

School of the Ozarks

A Laboratory School of

College of the Ozarks

P.O. Box 17

Point Lookout, MO 65726

[bdolloff@cofo.edu](mailto:bdolloff@cofo.edu)

(417) 690-2325

## Appendix E

### Letter to ACCS Heads of School

Dear Head of School,

I am writing to request your help in securing participants for a doctoral dissertation study I am conducting as a graduate student at Southwest Baptist University. **The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if the objective of classical Christian education as stated by the ACCS translates into greater faith commitment of recent graduates of member schools.** The *Good Soil* report (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020) provided some excellent findings among ACCS alumni between the ages of 23 and 44. This research seeks to examine the faith commitment of alumni between the ages of 18 and 24, many of whom are attending college or university.

To conduct this research, I am asking you to appoint a school liaison who will contact all graduates of your school in the designated age range, inviting them to participate in a confidential online survey. You may appoint yourself. The survey consists of 27 questions (some with multiple parts) but should take no longer than 15-20 minutes to complete. The survey contains several questions used by the Barna Research Group for the book *Faith for Exiles* (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2020) and will seek to compare the number of ACCS recent graduates who meet the criteria to be labeled Resilient Disciples to those found in the Kinnaman and Matlock study. **In order to ensure validity of the research, please make the survey available to all of your recent graduates between the ages of 18 and 24.** Please complete the attached participation form and return it to the researcher at the email provided. Participating schools will receive a copy of the research results and will have their liaison entered into a drawing to win a \$250 Bass Pro/Cabela's gift card.

Here is a suggested format for the letter to potential participants:

*Dear Alumnae/Alumnus:*

*I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a valuable research project. A researcher from Southwest Baptist University is studying the faith commitment of young adult graduates of ACCS member schools. If you would be willing to participate, please follow the link below to take an online survey that should take only 15-20 minutes to complete. The survey will be completely confidential, and the privacy of participants will be protected. This research will be very valuable to ACCS schools as we seek to offer the best education possible. As an extra incentive, those who participate will be given a code to email the researcher at the end of the survey for a chance to win one of multiple \$10 Chick-fil-A gift cards.*

*Please click the link below to begin the survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.*

<https://accs-graduate-survey.questionpro.com>

*Sincerely,*

*(Name of school liaison)*

A sample copy of the survey is attached to this email. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by phone or email through the contact information listed below, and I will be happy to discuss the research with you. Please reply to this email to confirm or decline your school's participation in this research. Thank you in advance for your help in completing this doctoral study.

Sincerely,

Brad Dolloff

Doctoral Candidate

Southwest Baptist University

And Head of ACCS member school

School of the Ozarks

[bdolloff@cofo.edu](mailto:bdolloff@cofo.edu)

**ACCS School Participation Form**

**Number of graduates from your school 2017-2021 (inclusive)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of graduates contacted to participate** \_\_\_\_\_

**If these items are not equal, please briefly explain why:**

## Appendix F

### ACCS Research

#### Participant Survey

##### **Informed Consent**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in a survey about your faith commitment. Your participation will help the researcher understand more about current faith trends among college-aged young adults. Your answers will be anonymous and any answers you provide will be kept completely confidential. Demographics questions will simply be used for categorization of all participants and will not be used to personally identify you. Completion of the survey will take 20 minutes or less. Upon completion of the survey, you will receive a code you may email to the researcher to be entered to win one of 30 Chick-fil-A gift cards.

By completing the survey, you are giving consent to participate in the study, knowing your rights will be protected. If a question causes you to feel uncomfortable you may skip it or may exit the survey without consequence.

This research is being conducted by Brad Dolloff, a candidate for a doctoral degree from Southwest Baptist University, and has been reviewed by the Research Review Board at SBU. If you have any questions about the survey or your data, you may email the researcher at: [bdolloff@cofo.edu](mailto:bdolloff@cofo.edu) or contact the Research Review Board at Southwest Baptist University by emailing Suzie Morrow, Chair, Research Review Board at [RRB@SBUiv.edu](mailto:RRB@SBUiv.edu) or calling (800) 526-5859 or (417) 893-1738.

In order to ensure the greatest accuracy of the research, please answer each of the following questions as honestly as possible.

**Introductory Questions** First we will ask you to respond to some brief questions about yourself.

**Q1. Are you a graduate from an Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) member high school?**

Yes (Please give the name of the school: \_\_\_\_\_) No (If “no” exit to thank you page.)

**Q2. What is your age in years?** (If <18 or >=25, exit to thank you page.)

**Q3. Which of the following ethnicities do you consider yourself to be? (Select all that apply)**

1. White or Caucasian
2. Black or African American
3. Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish
4. Asian or Asian American
5. American Indian or Alaska Native
6. Middle Eastern or North African
7. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
8. Or of another ethnic group (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4. Please indicate whether you are:**

Male

Female

**Christian Commitment Comparison Questions** Knowing that each one's faith journey is unique and that one's faith changes or goes through "seasons," we'd like you to respond honestly to some questions comparing your faith now to when you were still in high school.

**Q5. When you were growing up, before you turned 18, did you ever:**

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| a. attend a Catholic church                  | Yes | No |
| b. attend an evangelical or Christian church | Yes | No |
| c. consider yourself to be a Christian       | Yes | No |
| d. attend a religious church or camp         | Yes | No |

**Q6. Right now, what religious faith do you consider yourself to be? Choose the answer that best describes you now.**

1. Christian (Including Catholic)
2. Jewish
3. Muslim
4. Buddhist
5. Hindu
6. Other faith [SPECIFY] \_\_\_\_\_
7. Atheist
8. Agnostic
9. Not affiliated with any religious group

**Teen Faith** Now we would like to ask you some questions specifically about your teen faith.

**Q7. Everyone goes through his or her own unique faith journey. Thinking about your own life, compared to when you were age 15, would you say you are:**

1. I am more spiritual today than when I was 15.
2. I am less spiritual today than when I was 15.
3. I am the same.

**Q8. Compared to when you were 15, are you:**

1. I am more active in church today than when I was 15.
2. I am less active in church today.
3. I am just as active as before.

**Q9. When you were growing up, how often did you attend a worship service at a church, parish, or faith community?**

1. Once a week or more
2. A few times a month
3. Once a month
4. Every few months
5. A few times a year
6. Less often
7. Never

**Q10. When you were growing up, what is the denomination or affiliation of the church you attended most often, if any?**

1. AME/African Methodist Episcopal
2. Assembly of God
3. Baptist (any type)
4. Catholic
5. Christian
6. Church of Christ
7. Church of God
8. Episcopal
9. Evangelical (Free, Covenant)
10. Jehovah's Witness
11. Lutheran (any type)

12. Methodist
13. Mormon/Latter Day Saints
14. Nazarene
15. Non-denominational/independent
16. Orthodox
17. Pentecostal/Foursquare
18. Presbyterian (any type)
19. Protestant
20. Reformed
21. Seventh Day Adventist
22. Wesleyan
23. Unitarian
24. Christian Science
25. Scientology
26. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
27. No particular denomination
28. Don't attend
29. Decline to answer.

**Q11. When you were growing up, did you have any adults besides your parents who were close personal friends of yours?**

1. Yes
2. No

**Q12. Were any of those adults who were close personal friends from your church, parish, or school?**

1. Yes
2. No

**Current Faith** Now that you have answered some questions about your faith as a teen, please answer some questions about your faith currently.

**Q13 Thinking about your life right now, how often do you attend a worship service at a church?**

1. once a week or more
2. a few times a month
3. once a month
4. at least once in the past 6 months
5. more than 6 months ago
6. never

**Q14. How many hours in the last week did you spend focusing on your spirituality, including going to church, reading the Bible, praying, listening to or reading Christian content, or talking about faith? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Q15. Currently, what is the denomination or affiliation of the church you attend most often, if any?**

1. AME/African Methodist Episcopal
2. Assembly of God
3. Baptist (any type)
4. Catholic
5. Christian
6. Church of Christ
7. Church of God
8. Episcopal
9. Evangelical (Free, Covenant)
10. Jehovah's Witness
11. Lutheran (any type)
12. Methodist
13. Mormon/Latter Day Saints
14. Nazarene
15. Non-denominational/independent
16. Orthodox
17. Pentecostal/Foursquare
18. Presbyterian (any type)
19. Reformed
20. Seventh Day Adventist
21. Wesleyan
22. Unitarian
23. Christian Science
24. Scientology
25. Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_
26. Don't attend
27. Decline to answer.

**Q16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?** [1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly]

- a. I have at least one close friend I trust with my secrets.
- b. My friends help me to be a better person.
- c. I have friends and family who are honest with me about my weaknesses.
- d. I have someone in my life, other than a family member, who I can go to for advice on personal issues.
- e. There is someone in my life who encourages me to grow spiritually.
- f. I admire the faith of my parents.

- g. I feel emotionally close to someone at my church.
- h. I wish I had more close friendships.
- i. I am very content when I am by myself.
- j. I am connected to a community of Christians.
- k. The church is a place where I feel I belong.
- l. I engage with my church in more ways than just attending service.

**Q17. People experience many different attitudes and emotions in their faith or spiritual journey. Which of the following describes you right now:**

[1. Completely true of me 2. Mostly true of me 3. Only somewhat true of me 4. Not at all true of me.]

- a. I want to find a way to follow Jesus that connects with the world I live in.

1(completely true of me)    2    3    4 (not at all true of me)

- b. I want to be a Christian without separating myself from the world around me.

1(completely true of me)    2    3    4 (not at all true of me)

- c. I am a Christian, but the institutional church is a difficult place for me to live out my faith.

1(completely true of me)    2    3    4 (not at all true of me)

- d. I feel stuck between the comfortable faith of my parents and the life I believe God wants from me.

1(completely true of me)    2    3    4 (not at all true of me)

- e. God is more at work outside the church than inside, and I want to be part of that.

1(completely true of me)    2    3    4 (not at all true of me)

- f. Christian community is important, but I want to do more than get together once a week for worship.

1(completely true of me)    2    3    4 (not at all true of me)

- g. I want to help the church change its priorities to be what Jesus intended it to be.

1(completely true of me)    2    3    4 (not at all true of me)

**Q18. Here is a list of statements about religious beliefs that people have. There are no right or wrong answers. Please indicate if you, personally, agree or disagree with each statement.** [1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly]

a. If a person is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

b. The devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

c. The Bible is the inspired word of God and contains truth about the world.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

d. I have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in my life today.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

e. I believe that Jesus Christ was crucified and raised from the dead to conquer sin and death.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

f. My religious faith is very important in my life today.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

g. I, personally, have a responsibility to tell other people about my religious beliefs.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

h. When He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins, like other people.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

i. The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

j. God's ultimate plan for the world is to set things right and to renew all things.

1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Disagree somewhat 4. Disagree strongly

**Demographics** Finally, please respond to some general questions about yourself and your family.

**Q19. How many years did you attend a classical Christian school? \_\_\_\_**

**Q20. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? (Choose all that apply.)**

1. Work full-time outside the home
2. Work part-time outside the home
3. Work from home full-time
4. Work from home part-time
5. Do not currently work for pay
6. Student

**Q21. Student Status:** Are you currently a:

Full-time Student          Part-time Student          Formal Gap Year Program          Not a Student

**Q22. If you are a student, which indicates the type of institution you are attending?**

Private 4-yr. Christian College/University          Private Secular 4-yr. College/University  
Public College/University          Community College/Vocational/Technical School

**Q23. Living Status**

Parents or Other Family    Dormitory/College Housing    Rent/Own Residence  
Other

**Q24. Indicate the level of Christian commitment in the home you grew up in. (established item) N.A. (not present or not committed)**

1 (Not Committed)          2          3          4          5          6 (Strongly Committed)

**Q25. Are both of your natural parents still married and living together?**

1. Yes
2. No

**Q26. Indicate the level of Christian commitment of the mother/mother figure in your home.**

1 (Not Committed)          2          3          4          5          6 (Strongly Committed)

**Q27. Indicate the level of Christian commitment of the father/father figure in your home.**

1(Not Committed)      2      3      4      5      6 (Strongly Committed)

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your honest responses will help the researcher better understand the current faith commitment of college students. Again, all your responses and information will be kept completely confidential. If you would like to be entered into a drawing to win a \$10 Chick-fil-A gift card (30 winners), please email the code on the screen to [bdolloff@cofo.edu](mailto:bdolloff@cofo.edu). Winners will be notified and asked to provide a mailing address for the card.