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FACTORS RELATING TO DIMINISHED CONFIDENCE IN CORE
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES AMONG STUDENTS IN
PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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To Alissa Michelle Adkins, my wife, and my love, who has dedicated her life
to building a strong biblical foundation into the lives of our four children.

You are the epitome of a godly wife and mother.

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PREFACE

I would like to begin by thanking Dr. Timothy Paul Jones for allowing me the honor of studying under his tutelage. As I considered where I wanted to complete my doctoral studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary rose to the top because of the published works by Dr. Timothy Paul Jones. I had read, studied, and used many of his published works on the topic of family ministry as the foundation from which I sculpted my philosophy of family ministry. When I discovered that he would not only be one of my professors, but also my supervisor in the Ed.D. program I was both ecstatic and yet a bit fearful about the possibility of facing the Vader pen (Future Padawan's of Dr. Jones, be aware that when the Darth Vader pen appears Yoda's question to young Anakin will ring all too true . . . Afraid, are you? . . . But know that the midichlorians from past Ed.D. Jedi will be with you!). In all seriousness, Dr. Jones was a wonderful mentor through this research process. Thank you, Dr. Jones.

I would also like to thank my senior pastor, Rob Willey, for giving me the opportunity to pursue my dream of completing a doctoral degree. His love for learning and equipping the staff of Harvest Bible Chapel Davenport continually encourages me. Rob, thank you for allowing me to take the needed time (sometimes crowding my church work) to finish this degree.

A big thanks to my good friend, Dr. Ryan Yoder, who helped me through this process as my statistician. Ryan, I could not have done this without you.

To my cohort, our time together at Southern conducting action research groups, participating in late-night study sessions, drinking copious amount of coffee, and eliciting invaluable communication with each other provided me with memories and friendships to last a lifetime. I could not have completed this without your continued

encouragement. Thank you.

Lastly, I want to thank my wife and our four children for allowing me to continue in my studies. There were many nights and even weeks when I was unable to be present and did not see them. Alissa, thank you! Thank you for sacrificing during this time. Landon, Reagan, Griffin, and Rowen, I felt like quitting almost weekly but the four of you spurred me on. Know that you can conquer difficult things with diligence, determination, and by God's wonderful grace. I love each of you so very much!

Finally, I owe all to Jesus Christ who saved me from death and ruin because of my sins. He is my Lord and Savior whom I will follow all the days of my life. All glory, honor, and praise belong to Him.

Grady Adkins

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

A scan of the evangelical landscape among colleges and universities seems to indicate that many students who identify as Christians experience a personal diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines. Research suggests that this diminishment increases upon graduation from high school and continues into the college years.¹ Some of the major research groups and studies that have been conducted on this topic include the Fuller Youth Institute, LifeWay Research, the Barna Group, the Gallup Poll, and the University of Notre Dame's National Study of Youth and Religion. Researchers have published ground-breaking and ongoing works based on this research and report anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of young adults are spiritually declining and disengaging from the church.² Although their findings differ from one another, the overarching theme

¹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 23; Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 17; Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 2; Kenda C. Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

² The major publications on which this research focused include Christian Smith and Melinda Linquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005); Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford, 2009); Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University, 2011); Dean, *Almost Christian*; Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (New York: Oxford, 2011); Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*; Barna Group, "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," *Barna Update*, September 16, 2006, accessed June 16, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years/>; Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*; LifeWay, "LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church," LifeWay Christian Resources, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

is the same: many college students experience a diminished confidence in the foundational Christian doctrines that they once believed.

In her book *Almost Christian*, Kenda Creasy Dean states that young people, generally speaking, lack concern regarding faith issues, and therefore may turn from their Christian belief shortly after high school.³ Other studies suggest more of the same.⁴ Research indicates that many college students in America who identify as Christian withdraw from institutional religion and either opt out of faith altogether or construct a more blended faith that diverges from the historical and religious traditions.⁵ These traditions often incorporate an eclectic mixture of spiritual practices from diverse faith groups. Many teenagers live out their religion through their parents, which Christian Smith refers to as “parental religion.”⁶ The problem is that the majority of teenagers tend to absorb traditional substantive content and religious traditions through osmosis.⁷ In many cases, the doctrines of Trinity, holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification, church, Eucharist, heaven, and hell are supplanted by language of happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward.⁸ In other words, there could be a connection between a diminishment in confidence of core Christian doctrines among college students and an insufficient understanding of God, faith, and Scripture.

³ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 3. In *Almost Christian*, Dean investigates the changes among American teenagers and young adults who were once positive about Christianity but underwent a change in which their attitude toward Christianity became apathetic, or even non-existent. The research in her book is based on the National Study of Youth and Religion, <http://youthandreligion.nd.edu> founded by the preceding book by Christian Smith, *Soul Searching*.

⁴ Barna Group, “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf”; LifeWay, “LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church.”

⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 5. In *Soul Searching*, Smith and Denton reveal the complexity of teenage religious life. According to the authors, American teenagers value religion, but they de-prioritize and have difficulty understanding how religion shapes their lives.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Young adults face new tensions as they transition out of high school and into college, especially those who leave home. This tension continues through their college years as students experience new ideals that conflict with religious beliefs.⁹ However, the friction that college students face can actually help refine their biblical worldview and faith.¹⁰ Even more, there is a correlation for college students between strong parental support and confidence in religious beliefs.¹¹ The implication is that parents and churches can help build a lasting faith into the lives of teenagers so that when students face tension in college they are more likely to stand firm on their religious foundation.¹² Knowing that students experience religious tension during their college years, this study sought to identify the core Christian doctrines in which college students attending private school express a diminished confidence.¹³

Introduction to the Research Problem

Institutions of higher education have changed dramatically over the past fifty years, and for many students, the moment they enter a college campus their Christian convictions and discipline are assaulted.¹⁴ From past observations, there have been students like Justin, a young adult who grew up in a Christian home and attended church multiple

⁹ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 17. The conflict with religious beliefs is also supported by Fuller Youth Institute's College Transition Project that was a longitudinal study of 384 youth group seniors through their first three years of college. This study was not causal in nature, but rather was intended to provide correlation between variables.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23. Powell reports that the vast majority of students involved in the College Transition Project reported that college was a time for growth where they defined their faith.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Josh Swindall, a fellow doctoral student in my cohort, conducted research on this same topic but focused on students attending public colleges and universities. We used the same research tool to conduct our research. The title of his dissertation was *Factors Relating to a Diminished Confidence in Core Christian Doctrines among Students Attending Public Colleges and Universities: A Mixed Methods Study*.

¹⁴ J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 17.

times weekly.¹⁵ He professed that he knew Christ as his personal savior and even graduated from a private Christian high school. Justin could not wait to begin a new chapter in his life at college. He was accepted to a well-known Christian university and quickly became involved in many activities. Over time he chose a lifestyle that was inconsistent with the ideals of Christianity and rather, found himself living a secret homosexual lifestyle. Justin now found himself living in conflict with the core Christian doctrines he once believed to be true.

Another example from past observations is Jeremy, who similarly grew up in a Christian home, had Christian friends, and attended a private Christian school. He knew how to respond verbally and physically act in a Christian way; however, he only understood the doctrines of faith with a head knowledge and lived his life with a moralistic view of religion. He played the game of acting like a Christian better than most. He grew up under the umbrella of his parents' and church's faith. As he transitioned into private college he began to make his own decisions. Jeremy's new-found freedoms began to impact him and as his environment changed, he began to succumb to the peer pressure and secularism that were inconsistent with the doctrines of Christian faith. Because Jeremy's religion was based on morality, his confidence in core Christian doctrines changed as the environment around him changed. In reality, Jeremy had never accepted the core doctrines of faith as his own. As Jeremy's environment changed, so did his faith.

Justin's and Jeremy's stories are not too uncommon among college students. The religious lives of college students can be shaped by a host of factors to include personal characteristics, family contexts, peers, and social factors to name a few.¹⁶ The bottom line is that the religious lives of students in college do not exist in a vacuum but are instead tied to other areas of their lives.

¹⁵ Justin is an example for illustrative purposes. He is a character used as an example and was not a part of a case study.

¹⁶ Pearce and Denton, *A Faith of their Own*, 82.

According to LifeWay Research, 53 percent of all young adult churchgoers agree with the beliefs of their church. Or, as Thom Rainer points out, “Only half of our young adults agree with the church’s teachings.”¹⁷ This means that the converse is also true, and that roughly half of young adult churchgoers do not agree with the beliefs of their church. This is a staggering statistic that shines a systemic light into the heart of Christian emerging adults.

An underlying struggle for many private college students is the tension between faith and the ideals of secular society. There is ongoing confusion and debate surrounding the topic of secularity, but perhaps Charles Taylor’s modes of secularity provide clarity in this area. Taylor refers to secularity as the absence of religion.¹⁸ Specifically, Taylor says religion is a private matter. As such, the common institutions and practices of politics and state governance are no longer connected to religion in the United States. The implication is that, within secular society, a person can engage in politics without ever engaging with God.¹⁹ Taylor espouses that there are three types, or modes, of secularity. The first is secularity in a physical and public space. The second mode of secularity is a type of belief or practice that is or is not in regression. The third mode of secularity is a belief or commitment whose conditions in this age are being examined.²⁰ College students relate most closely to Taylor’s third mode of secularism. Taylor argues that the third mode of secularity relates to experience and is defined by belief. The third mode of secularity is found in a new context in which all searching and

¹⁷ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 30.

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 1. George Jacob Holyoake was the first person to coin the term *secularism* in 1851. Even though Holyoake was an atheist, he taught that secularism was not about being against religion. He rather said that secularism was guiding beliefs and principled ideals connected to the here and now, people, nature, life, and existence. Secularism was based on the ideals of the Golden Rule’s basic logic of empathetic reciprocity. Phil Zuckerman, *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 13.

¹⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

questioning about the moral and spiritual must proceed.²¹ With this in mind, it is conceivable that college students who have difficulty grasping an understanding of faith can become susceptible to succumb to the secular ideals taught across college campuses in the United States, resulting in a diminished confidence of core Christian doctrines for the student.

Christians possess convictions on which they stand and a moral framework on which their beliefs are built.²² Yet, amid a rapidly changing culture, research suggests that the American church is not sufficiently preparing students to withstand the ideals of secular thought.²³ This is observed in the church dropout problem. Teenagers make up some of the most religiously active Americans; however, American twentysomethings are the least religiously active age group. There is a 43 percent drop-off between the teen and early adult/college years in terms of church engagement.²⁴ The Barna Group conducted a nationwide sampling of young adults with a Christian background regarding the church dropout rate and found a declination of spirituality during a person's early twenties. Their results are as follows:

1. Fifty-nine percent dropped out of attending church after going regularly.
2. Fifty-seven percent were less active as compared to when they were 15 years old.
3. Thirty-eight percent describe a period when they seriously doubted their faith.

²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20.

²² A difference between a Christian and a secular thinker is the foundation on which they stand. Zacharias says, "The Christian faith brings with it convictions by which to stand and build a moral framework. The secular thinker, with his implicitly amoral assumptions, imagines that knowledge without a moral base has enough sustaining power." Ravi Zacharias and Vince Vitale, *Jesus among Secular Gods: The Countercultural Claims of Christ* (New York: FaithWords, 2017), 11.

²³ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

²⁴ Kinnaman reports that this 43 percent drop-off represents about eight million twentysomethings who were once active churchgoers but will no longer be engaged in church by their thirtieth birthday. *Ibid.*, 22.

4. Thirty-two percent describe a period when they felt like rejecting their parents' faith.²⁵

Emerging adults are the least likely to say they are personally committed to Jesus Christ. Kinnaman says that even though this age group possesses favorable views of Jesus, they harbor significant doubts about the central tenants of Christianity.²⁶ In fact, these young adults are more likely than any other age group to believe that Jesus sinned, doubt the miracles of Jesus, and to express skepticism regarding his resurrection.²⁷

Significance of the Research

Support for the Church

Kenda Dean notes,

American teenagers may engage in substantial amounts of youth ministry and Christian education, but they do not seem to be spending much time in communities where a language of faith is spoken, or where historically orthodox Christian doctrines and practices are talked about or taught.²⁸

Dean's statement is significant because it shows that, during their formative years, teenagers are thoroughly engaged in Christian activities; however, as students enter early adult years a decrease in Christian activities are often replaced by social activities. Kara Powell reports that 50 percent of full-time college students abuse alcohol, prescription drugs, and/or illegal drugs.²⁹ This statistic is not as harsh for the church as multiple studies indicate that students who consider themselves religious are much less likely to participate in those activities.³⁰ This is good news for churches, but much remains to be done.

²⁵ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 28.

²⁹ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 17. Powell is the Executive Director of the Fuller Youth Institute and faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary. The data for this research was taken from The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "Wasting the Best and Brightest: Substance Abuse at America's Colleges and Universities."

³⁰ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 18.

Support for Parents

In *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith states that much research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is found in their parents.³¹ What parents do, or conversely, what they do not do regarding their personal faith, will ultimately influence their children. If a parent models a life of morality rather than Christianity, the chances are greater that their children's faith and confidence in core Christian doctrines will diminish once they leave home.³² However, if parents are intentional with their children regarding matters of faith then those students have a greater chance of maintaining their confidence in core Christian doctrines.

As stated, it would be beneficial for the church and families to partner together in an effort to help Christian youth become more serious about their faith. Smith and Denton offer the following suggestions: "Involve parents, teach rigorously, articulate effectively, embrace individualism and challenge conventionality, distinguish pluralism, and perform religious practices."³³

The Goal

This research attempted to determine areas where college students in private schools find themselves least equipped to defend core Christian doctrines so that churches and parents can work together to build a greater confidence in students during their formative years. The end goal of this research was to produce and provide data that could be used to support spiritual formation during the formative years of a person's life, and to equip churches and families in their discipleship and apologetic efforts.

The hope of providing practical and applicational ideas for churches,

³¹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56.

³² *Ibid.*, 57.

³³ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 267-68.

specifically family ministries was a main impetus for this research. Dr. Timothy Paul Jones defines family ministry as, “The process of intentionally and persistently coordinating a ministry’s proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”³⁴ This definition places responsibility for discipleship in the correct place, with the parents. The problem is that over the past couple of generations churches have assumed the responsibility of discipleship with their age-organized programs resulting in many parents not understanding or engaging in their children’s Christian formation.³⁵ With this in mind, the goal of this research is to buttress family ministries and parents with information that could lead to a more comprehensive understanding regarding Christian formation, specifically religious issues that students attending private colleges and universities might face.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine areas where students attending private colleges or universities find themselves least equipped to defend core Christian doctrines of the faith in order to define areas that churches and parents can better partner in equipping young adults with apologetic and foundational truths.

Delimitations

The research was delimited to college seniors and/or recent college graduates who attended a private college or university. Seniors are defined as students attending and enrolled in their final year of undergraduate college. Recent college graduates are defined as young adults who completed their undergraduate study at a private college or university within the past two years. These areas of delimitation were identified in the

³⁴ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents To Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

initial survey questions delivered in the quantitative research.

This mixed-methods study explored four faith trajectories: (1) stability in belief, (2) diminishment of belief, (3) increase in belief, and (4) stability in unbelief.

Unbelief is not an assessment of a person's soteriological status, but rather an assertion based on the person's self-reported Christian orthodoxy according to the instrument used. In the initial quantitative survey, the participant's faith trajectory was determined based on their survey responses. The survey results were then compiled, reviewed, and analyzed. Once the qualitative data was gathered, a purposive sampling of no fewer than six participants whose beliefs diminished during college were interviewed about key influences on their diminished belief system for illustrative purposes.

Research Questions

Primary Research Questions

Three questions served as the exploration into the factors attributing to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among college student attending private schools.

1. Among students in private colleges and universities, what factors significantly relate to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines?
2. Among students in private colleges and universities, what core Christian doctrines are most difficult to defend and to maintain while in college?
3. Among students in private colleges and universities, what personal doctrinal beliefs are most likely to change during college?

Origination and Reliability of the Research Tool

The Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy (SCO) Scale was used as the research tool for this study. The SCO was derived from the Christian Orthodoxy (CO) Scale created by Fullerton and Hunsberger in 1982. The CO is a unidimensional measure of the degree to which someone accepts the beliefs central to Christianity. Hill and Hood comment that, "These are bedrock statements that define the faith and are expressed in

the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.”³⁶ The scale is designed to assess the degree of acceptance that a person believes regarding the foundational statements of Christianity.

The CO Scale is comprised of twenty-four statements of the Christian faith. Half of the items are negatively worded so that disagreement with the item is scored in the orthodox belief direction. The CO uses a seven-point Likert scale ranging from -3, meaning strongly disagree, to +3, meaning strongly agree, with 0 as a neutral point. A constant of 4 is added to each raw score, and these numbers are then summed to yield the total CO score. CO scores can range from a low of 24 to a high of 168.³⁷

The CO Scale exhibits strong statistical reliability. Mean inter-item correlation coefficients range from .57 to .70. Internal consistency reliability coefficients for the same samples are all .98, except for one that is .97. Factor analysis showed that one factor runs through the set of items and all the items load on this factor. These findings suggest that the CO Scale items “hang together” well to form a unidimensional measure of orthodox belief.³⁸

In 1989, Hunsberger created the SCO Scale. The shorter version is composed of only six items, yet its statistical properties are comparable to the properties of the larger CO Scale. The two scales correlate highly with each other.³⁹ Hunsberger explains the correlation and reliability of the SCO:

This short version of the scale retains psychometric properties very close to the original. As expected, the mean inter-item correlation of the six items for all participants (669 successfully completed at least four of the six items, the minimum criterion for inclusion) was .72, and Cronbach's alpha was .94. All items correlated at more than .76 with the total scale score, and a PA2 factor analysis (SPSSX, 1983) revealed a single large factor with an eigenvalue of 4.61 accounting for 76.9% of the variance, with all items loading higher than .78 on this factor. This next largest factor

³⁶ Peter C. Hill and Ralph W. Hood, Jr., *Measures of Religiosity* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), 15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁸ Hill and Hood, *Measures of Religiosity*, 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

had an eigenvalue of just .39, so there was no justification for rotation. These properties were also evident for various subgroups. For example, Cronbach's alpha was .93 for 395 females (M = 33.4), .94 for 262 males (M = 30.2), .93 for 333 respondents from Protestant backgrounds (M = 33.1), and .93 for 191 participants from Catholic backgrounds (M = 34.5).⁴⁰

Research Tool Survey Statements

The research tool consisted of six statements that addressed core Christian doctrines. Some of the statements were written in a positive manner and some in a negative manner in order to present the statements in a balanced manner. The six statements are as follows:

1. Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
2. The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in the history of man.
3. The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
4. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of man's sins.
5. Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions.
6. Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried but on the third day He arose from the dead.⁴¹

Terminology

Core Christian Doctrines. *Core Christian Doctrines* are the core doctrines of the evangelical Christian faith. Over the past centuries, various Christian groups have differed in some aspects of their belief; however, certain beliefs are common to all groups who call themselves Christian. Four of the five foundational statements included in this study derive from the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.⁴² Although inspiration of the Bible was not included in the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed, this study includes inspiration of the Bible as a core Christian doctrine as Hunsberger included it in the SCO

⁴⁰ Bruce Hunsberger, "A Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 3 (1989): 362.

⁴¹ Hunsberger, "A Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale," 360-65.

⁴² Hill and Hood, *Measures of Religiosity*, 16.

Scale.⁴³ For the purposes of this study, core Christian doctrines include (1) the existence of God, (2) Jesus as divine, (3) Jesus' mission to save humankind, (4) Jesus' death and resurrection, and (5) the inspiration of the Bible.

Discipleship. *Discipleship* is the sanctifying process that takes place through regular and intentional practices that focus on knowledge of Scripture, reverence for God, and obedience to Christ. Discipleship is therefore not a program or ministry, but rather a commitment to a lifestyle.⁴⁴

Emerging Adult. An *emerging adult* is a person between the ages of 18 and 29.⁴⁵ For the purposes of this study, an *emerging adult* is defined as a person between the ages of 18 and 23. Someone who is 24-29 years old has considerable differences than those who are 18-23, such as a first job, house, spouse, etc. Factors influencing a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines may be considerably different during the second half of an emerging adult's life and will therefore not be included in the research of this thesis. Precedent literature may include research among emerging adults who are college-aged (18-23), but the research and data gathered by this study was limited to college seniors and emerging adults who have graduated from an undergraduate degree within the last two years. It is important to include emerging adults in this study to include those who have recently graduated from college.

Family Ministry. *Family Ministry* is defined as, "The process of intentionally and persistently coordinating a ministry's proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children's lives."⁴⁶ This definition emphasizes the process of equipping parents as the

⁴³ Hunsberger, "A Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale," 363.

⁴⁴ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2001), 19.

⁴⁵ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 6.

⁴⁶ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 33.

primary disciple-makers of their children. It also emphasizes the function of churches as the equippers.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). *MTD is a tacit religious outlook that is distinctly different from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or any of the world's major religions. MTD helps people be nice, feel good, and leaves God in the background.*⁴⁷ The creed of MTD can be codified by the following statements.

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.⁴⁸

Procedural Overview

This design involved collecting quantitative data, analyzing the data, and utilizing the results to inform the follow-up qualitative data collection for illustrative purposes. Initially, current college seniors or recent college graduates from private colleges or universities indicated on a survey the orthodox Christian beliefs held when they graduated from high school and beliefs they currently hold. The final survey question was open-ended and asked which doctrinal beliefs they found most challenging to defend and maintain while in college. Next, a purposive sampling of six participants whose confidence in core Christian doctrines diminished during college were interviewed about key influences relating to their diminished confidence. Finally, the researcher discussed resources their family used that were provided by their church during the interviewee's formative years.⁴⁹ This discussion was intended to provide insight into the partnership

⁴⁷ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 162-63.

⁴⁹ Formative years include birth through high school.

between parents and the family ministries of their church.

Research Assumptions

In planning the research design, the research assumed a few risks. These risks were not such that caused the creation of a new research design. The assumptions are as follows:

1. The research assumes the responses to the quantitative research of the survey accurately represents respondents' belief experiences.
2. The research assumes the responses to the qualitative interview accurately represents respondents' belief experiences.
3. The research assumes that the respondents accurately recall their belief in core Christian doctrines upon graduation from high school. This is not a longitudinal study and the research assumes that the risk of inaccurately recalling one's belief when graduating high school is minimal.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Is there a correlation between a student's diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines and private college? To answer that question, a survey and synthesis was conducted regarding literature on this subject. While researching the topic of this thesis, two primary categories emerged that needed to be addressed regarding the faith of private college students: the current state of religiosity among college students and the existing religious foundations among college students. Both categories bring to light the potential and contributing influences that can relate to diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among private college students. To demonstrate the need for research, an exploration of literature for the two categories was conducted.

The following literature review begins by exploring a brief history of higher education, which will help the reader understand the progression of higher education in America. After examining a brief history of higher education, this literature review explores the current religious state of college students, especially in matters concerning their stability in the Christian faith. Several questions are asked to determine if there is a correlation between a student's diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines and private college, which has resulted in three sub-categories falling under each major category. The sub-categories include an exploration of the (1) current statistics concerning the decrease in Christian commitment among college students in private schools; (2) influences of private American universities on college students; and (3) impact of the American church on college students in private schools. These sub-categories provide a deeper understanding of the correlation between a student's

diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines and private college.

Similar to the current state of religiosity among college students, two influences on college students in private schools fall under the second primary category: an exploration of a college student’s religious foundation and an exploration of an emerging adult’s personal faith rather than their parents’ faith.

A Brief History of American Higher Education

Frederick Rudolph writes, “On the eve of the American Revolution, England’s colonies in the New World were supporting, in one fashion or another, nine colleges, nine home-grown variations on a theme known in the mother country as Oxford and Cambridge.”¹ Institutions of higher learning began to emerge early in the life of America even before America earned its independence. Nine colleges were born prior to 1770, as displayed in table 1.²

Table 1. The original colonial colleges

Name of Original Institution	Name of Present Institution	Year Founded	Primary Religious Influence
New College	Harvard University	1636	Puritan
College of William & Mary	College of William & Mary	1693	Church of England
Collegiate School	Yale University	1701	Puritan
College of New Jersey	Princeton University	1746	Nonsectarian
King’s College	Columbia University	1754	Church of England
College of Philadelphia	University of Pennsylvania	1755	Church of England
College of Rhode Island	Brown University	1764	Baptist
Queen’s College	Rutgers University	1766	Dutch Reformed
Dartmouth College	Dartmouth College	1769	Puritan

Of these colleges, Harvard was the first to emerge in 1636, in part because

¹ Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 3.

² Information in table 1 taken from John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 1-6. Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 3.

education was important to the people colonizing in New England. In early American literature one reads, “After God had carried us safe to New England . . . one of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance *Learning*, and perpetuate it to Posterity.”³ The leaders of the new country considered education to be of high importance. As such, they sought to develop an institution of higher learning similar to that of Cambridge or Oxford.⁴ The original intent of the American university was to educate ministers so that they could lead communities with Puritan theology and Puritan aspiration like the graduates of Cambridge. The author of *New Englands First Fruits* writes, “Dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust . . . it pleased God to stir up the heart of one Mr. Harvard to give one half of his Estate.”⁵ And so Harvard University, originally named New College, was founded in 1636.

Harvard was birthed because of a desire to implement two major ideals laid forth in English Puritanism: a learned clergy and a lettered people.⁶ These two ideals profoundly affected social development, which the Massachusetts settlers did not wish to leave to whim or carelessness.⁷ As such, the founders of Harvard felt a sense of obligation to uphold these principles of learning and educate a ruling class.⁸ The first president of Harvard, Henry Dunster, stated,

You shall take care to advance in all learning, divine and humane, each and every student who is or will be entrusted to your tutelage, according to their several

³ *New Englands First Fruits* (London: Printed by R. O. and G. D. for Henry Overton, 1643), 23.

⁴ Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 4.

⁵ *New Englands First Fruits*, 23.

⁶ Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

abilities; and especially to take care that their conduct and manners be honorable and without blame.⁹

The original intent of Harvard was to serve a broad purpose in educating members of society, but there was a special emphasis on the clergy. Rudolph agrees that the religious commonwealth required an educated clergy, but he also commented that “it needed leaders that were disciplined in knowledge and learning, it needed followers disciplined by leaders, it needed order.”¹⁰ The formation of Harvard was essential if they wished to carry out these purposes.

For centuries, the most educated people in Protestant countries were the clergy. This was partly because education was primarily a function of the church. In fact, most of the educators were also members of the clergy and there was not much differentiation between a professor and minister.¹¹ Leading up to the Civil War, most colleges in America were founded by churches with the support of state and community taxes.¹² George Marsden reports that higher education was originally thought of as a religious enterprise and a public service. Because of this it was natural for the state and churches to work hand in hand.¹³ During this time there was little distinction between Protestant colleges and public institutions, which was even true following the American Revolution when many schools had disestablishmentarian intentions.¹⁴ Institutions of higher education, even though they were not religious by nature, had to assure their constituents that they would

⁹ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, part 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 19.

¹⁰ Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 7.

¹¹ George M. Marsden, “The Soul of the American University: A Historical Overview,” in *The Secularization of the Academy*, ed. George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. Disestablishmentarianism as it pertains to the United States is also known as separation of church and state.

care for the religious welfare of their students. One of the ways they accomplished this was through chapel services and required church attendance.¹⁵ The president of the University of Michigan, James B. Angell, reported in 1890 that twenty-two of twenty-four state schools conducted chapel services. Only four of those schools required church attendance on Sunday.¹⁶

In *A History of American Higher Education*, John Thelin of the University of Kentucky, reports of the great growth of American colleges. He says in 1800 there were twenty-five degree-granting colleges. This number increased to fifty-two by 1820. Yet, by the year 1860, the American University grew to an astonishing total of 241 institutions of higher education.¹⁷ These years of growth brought with it many changes to the American university. Schools truly moved toward diversity by founding a variety of institutions. Some were universities, academies, seminaries, scientific schools, normal schools, and institutes.¹⁸ Internal changes took place within these educational institutions as well. Curricula was extended beyond the liberal arts to include medicine, law, engineering, military science, commerce, theology, and agriculture.¹⁹

Some would argue that the growth was due to a more diversified educational experience for the student rather than limiting the curricula to the likes of the colonial

¹⁵ Marsden, "The Soul of the American University," 11.

¹⁶ James B. Angell, "Religious Life in Our State Universities," *Andover Review* 13 (April 1890): 365-72. Angell only reported on those schools that were state schools. For further understanding of the relations between church and state during the colonial and revolutionary eras, see Evert B. Green, *Religion and State: The Making and Testing of an American Tradition* (New York: New York University Press, 1941); Anson P. Stokes and Leo Pfeffer, *Church and State in the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

¹⁷ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 41-42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

colleges.²⁰ Earle D. Ross, department of history at Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, writes,

Consequently without radical alteration in control, curriculum, and objectives, these bulwarks of traditional orthodoxy were entirely inadequate and inappropriate as agencies to propagate and propagandize the democratic transformations of society that the devotees of the Enlightenment were deliberately and sedulously striving for in the era of the Revolution. For in their day these progressive educationists dared openly and confidently to essay the building of a new social order through the public school system.²¹

In the late 1600s and early 1700s institutions of higher education were mostly birthed from the church. This quickly changed as Protestants began to place less importance on the education of Christian orthodoxy.²² Marsden comments, “Vestiges of the old informal religious establishment persisted throughout the era following the Second World War, though typically in increasingly vague and peripheral ways.”²³ He continues by saying that by the 1960s most of what was substantial in religion evaporated without a trace and seldom with so much as a protest.²⁴

In the early years, influential leaders such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Benjamin Rush were advocates of adopting a national university for America.²⁵ In 1817, while Madison was president, a bill was introduced to create America’s national university, but was defeated by the House of Representatives.²⁶ An important exception to the absence of a national university was the funding of two

²⁰ Earle D. Ross, “Religious Influences in the Development of State Colleges and Universities,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, December 1, 1950, accessed July 24, 2017, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/imh/article/view/8006/9725>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Marsden, “The Soul of the American University,” 11.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 41-42.

²⁶ Ibid., 42.

military service academies. Congress approved and opened the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland.²⁷ A national university in America would never become realized except for the military. Rather, the regional or state schools soon came to fruition in the United States.

Ross comments on the transition to state schools:

As Jefferson, the master mind and the guiding spirit of the educational reformers, realized, the true opportunity was in creating new state systems in accord with regional interests. The first step was to liberalize and modernize the existing colleges by alteration of their charters. Efforts to functionalize and socialize the old centers of sectarian orthodoxy were eagerly undertaken, but academic inertia and natural conservatism of much of the constituency delayed and tempered the innovations. As it proved, the defenders of the old ways were given legal relief by the Dartmouth College decision which brought comfort to those who loved the small colleges, not so much for their moral or cultural inspiration as for the defense which they gave to the established order.²⁸

Church establishments gave colleges official sanction and possessed the monopoly of higher education in the beginning.²⁹ Over time this monopoly faded as disestablishmentarianism set in. Jefferson was one of the foremost leaders in the disestablishment between higher education and religion. His own University of Virginia is a prime example of this. Earle Ross reports on Jefferson's university:

To safeguard the liberal innovations in instruction and administration and to insure the fullest public control, all theological department and clerical professors were excluded. Such a policy by no means reflected an insensibility to religion as a social determinant or a lack of appreciation of theology, as such, as a field of study and research. On the contrary, Jefferson had a rare understanding of the religious influence in social progress and, in spite of his unorthodox trinitarian views, a truer and more realistic conception of the Christian ethic than did his intolerant assailants. As a student and observer of the European universities he was familiar with the place of the faculty of theology and his original plan included such a chair. Apparently he was persuaded by Thomas Cooper of the impossibility, in practice, of separating basic religious principles from an intolerant divisive sectarianism. Without risking

²⁷ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 42.

²⁸ Ross, "Religious Influences in the Development of State Colleges and Universities."

²⁹ *Ibid.*

such a devitalizing influence, he was still confident that essential religious values might be taught by the professor of ethics.³⁰

The idea of separating church and state could be justified on the grounds that voluntary religion was on the rise and was a better way for religion to grow rather than coercing the study of religion upon the free people of America.³¹ Marsden comments that during the period when formal disestablishment was progressing at its fastest rate, it was also a time when voluntary religion was most robust.³² Even though voluntary religion was vigorous during this time, it became peripheral to the main business of higher education. The popular thought among Christians was that disestablishment could be seen as a plausible trade-off since religious programs were flourishing. Then, by 1950, most religious activity in the university had moved from the institution to the voluntary periphery.³³ Science was now the guideline for intellect at the university. Theology could still operate at the university, but it was now placed in a separate sphere.³⁴ Soon a division of labor was born between universities and theological seminaries. In the seminary, professional religious training remained available for their students. Religious training was also found in private universities under the direction of their divinity schools, which ultimately lessened the threat of the disestablishment of Christianity in higher education that was taking place.³⁵

In modern day, conservative Christians may feel as if the lack of a religious climate in higher education is due to the secular revolution. After researching the history

³⁰ Ross, "Religious Influences in the Development of State Colleges and Universities."

³¹ Marsden, "The Soul of the American University," 28.

³² *Ibid.*, 29. YMCAs and YWCAs were utilized in a way much like the modern day Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. Organizations such as the Student Volunteer Movement, the Chicago Evangelism Society under the direction of D. L. Moody, and American foreign missionary efforts reached a peak during this time as well.

³³ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

of higher education, one will find that even though colleges began as education for clergy and spawned out of churches, the conservative Christian population stood by as religion was reduced in universities across America.³⁶ They stood by because religion remained in the periphery of universities which sufficed their requirements. Likewise, the more liberal Protestantism opposed traditional Christian exclusivism and they worked to remove it from the school house. Marsden comments, “methodological secularization provided a non-controversial rationale for such a move, reinforced by beliefs concerning the universal dictates of science. Concerns about pluralism and justice supplied a moral rationale.”³⁷ In essence, one could argue that Christians have as much responsibility in the removal of religion from the university because they were satisfied with religion remaining in the periphery.

In more modern times, religion in the university has shifted from the humanities with a moral purpose to being considered one of the social sciences. As such, religion departments are hiring fewer professors with clerical training and trading it for professors with scientific credentials.³⁸ The words that George Marsden wrote in 1992, are eerily true today:

My impression is that considerable numbers of instructors in religious studies programs were once traditionally religious themselves but have since lost faith. Like most teachers, they hope that their students will come to think as they do, so a goal in their teaching becomes, in effect, to undermine the traditional religious faith of their students. In this pursuit they are aided by methodological secularization, which demands a detachment from all beliefs except belief in the validity of the scientific method itself. So a history-of-religions approach that suggests that the only valid way to view religions is as social constructs intentionally or unintentionally undermines belief in any particular religion as having divine origins. Of course, such a negative impact of religious studies on religious faith is mitigated by the fact that many persons in religious studies have entered the field as an extension of their religious

³⁶ Marsden, “The Soul of the American University,” 34.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 35.

calling, and their more positive perspectives are apparent despite pressures not to reveal any explicit religious commitment.³⁹

The modern university has evolved since the early colonial colleges that were originally founded as religious institutions for the church and by the church. The question must then be asked what impact this evolution of turning religious institutions into institutions where religion is found in the periphery had on the Christian college student. In an attempt to answer this question, a good starting point is to understand the current state of college students attending private institutions.

The Current Religious State of College Students

America has a diverse moral culture that celebrates many ideals and philosophies. It is a culture that celebrates personal effort, individual achievement, and patriotism. Many people within this culture believe in God and a spiritual afterlife. Loyalty to family, friends, and coworkers are among its core values. The American culture assumes moral freedoms and distrusts the bureaucracies of large business and government.⁴⁰ In general terms, Americans believe that happiness and fulfillment are found through personal relationships and individual consumption.⁴¹ Although the above statements may seem altruistic, the aforementioned philosophy could potentially lead to a humanistic lifestyle. Statistics show that emerging adults are leaving the church, even during their

³⁹ Marsden, "The Soul of the American University," 36.

⁴⁰ Tim Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 3. Clydesdale, professor of sociology at the College of New Jersey, followed fifty young people and their day-to-day lives to reveal that teens settle into a lifestyle where they manage substance use, sexual activity, education, and finances. He also found that during this period teens embrace their identity as being tied to mainstream culture for acceptance purposes. As they do this, they stow away their religious, racial, and political ideas in which they entered this period.

⁴¹ Ibid.

college years.⁴² A potential parallel to spiritual disengagement among emerging adults may be the increase in secularism and its ideology.⁴³ America is undergoing a period of secularization whereby religious faith, religious involvement, religious identification, and religious institutions weaken, fade, or become less significant in society.⁴⁴ Zuckerman reports that in the 1950s fewer than 5 percent of Americans were nonreligious.⁴⁵ According to the latest national surveys that number has increased to 30 percent, which is an increase of over 200 percent over the last twenty-five years.⁴⁶ Today, more than a third of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 claim to be non-religious.⁴⁷ This points to a potential connection between the decline of confidence in core Christian doctrines among private college students and the influx of non-religious ideals influencing education. As Zuckerman points out, “There are currently more people in this country who were raised in secular homes—without any religion—than there are African Americans.”⁴⁸ *Time* magazine even cited the dramatic increase of Americans claiming “none” as their religion

⁴² David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 23; Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 17; Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 2; Kenda C. Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

⁴³ Zuckerman states that the common traits/values of secularism include encouraging pragmatic, reasonable problem solving to fortifying oneself against groupthink and a herd mentality, deepening one’s attachment to the people and things of this world to speaking a soulful appreciation for the majesty of nature, encouraging scientific inquiry to manifesting humane empathy, and fostering a mature morality to engendering a serene acceptance of mortality. Phil Zuckerman, *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4. Zuckerman uses the term nonreligious and secular interchangeably.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

as a significant trend changing American society.⁴⁹ Interestingly, this statistic is highest among emerging adults. The following figure reflects this data.⁵⁰

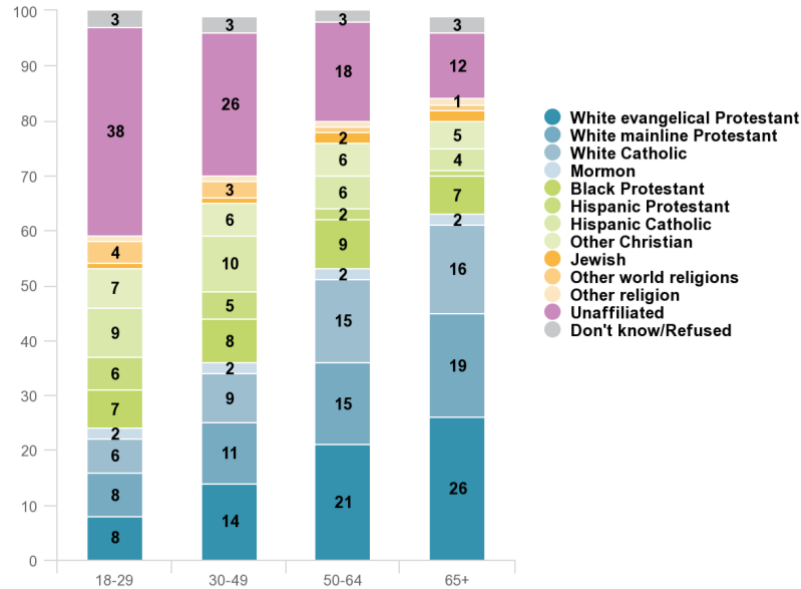


Figure 1. Generational shift in religious identity

Secularism influences American ideology, worldviews, and religious beliefs, and this influence can greatly impact Christian emerging adults as their peers make up the greatest nonreligious group in America today.⁵¹ Secularism continues to push God and the church out as they define happiness by relationships and consumption.⁵² Current trends seem to show that emerging adults in American society are embracing humanism and

⁴⁹ Denver Nicks, “The U.S. Is Becoming Less Religious, Statistics Show,” *Time*, November 3, 2015, accessed July 24, 2017, <http://time.com/4098544/u-s-becoming-less-religious-survey/>.

⁵⁰ Figure 1 is taken from Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, *America’s Changing Religious Identity: Findings from the 2016 American Values Atlas* (Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, 2017), 11.

⁵¹ Zuckerman, *Living the Secular Life*, 5.

⁵² Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, 3.

secularism more and more while pushing away any moralistic philosophy founded in God and Christianity.⁵³

Statistics Concerning the Spiritual Disengagement among Private College Students

Statistics provide data that display many students who identify themselves as Christian experience a diminished confidence in God and Christianity during their college years. Multiple research groups have conducted research in this area. The Fuller Youth Institute estimates that 40 to 50 percent of emerging adults ages 18-23 will remain strong in their faith.⁵⁴ This statistic should not be ignored because it also means that 50 to 60 percent of emerging adults will walk away from their faith. This research is supported by three other research organizations. First, the Barna Group conducted research in 2006, with statistical results showing that 61 percent of young adults, identified as college-aged students in their early twenties, that had been churching during their teen years, became spiritually disengaged.⁵⁵ Similarly, in 2006, *The Gallup Poll* produced research showing that 40 percent of 18 to 29-year-olds who attended church when they were 16 or 17 were no longer attending church.⁵⁶ In August of 2007, LifeWay Research produced statistical findings from their research that revealed more than 65 percent of young adults who

⁵³ Jones and Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity*, 11.

⁵⁴ Kara Powell, and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 15. Fuller Youth Institute bases this estimate on the research from three other sources. These researchers include Barna Group, LifeWay Research, and the research provided by Christian Smith in *Souls in Transition*. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford, 2009).

⁵⁵ Barna Group, "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," *Barna Update*, September 16, 2006, accessed June 16, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years/>.

⁵⁶ George H. Gallup, Jr., "The Religiosity Cycle," *The Gallup Poll*, October 19, 2006; Frank Newport, "A Look at Religious Switching in America Today," *The Gallup Poll*, October 19, 2006. These results were based on phone interviews sampling 1002 adults ages 18 and older.

attended a protestant church for at least a year during high school stopped attending church regularly between the ages of 18 and 22.⁵⁷

Christian Smith, a renowned sociologist whose work has focused on religion and young adult culture, produced concluding data with similar results and has written extensively on this topic.⁵⁸ In 2009, Smith concluded that the weekly religious attendance of Protestant young adults decreased by 30 percent as compared to high school teenage years.⁵⁹ He reports that fewer than 1 out of 10 emerging adults, ages 18-23, are attending a weekly organized religious group or meeting other than a worship service.⁶⁰ Belief in a personal God among emerging adults decreased by 4 percent since they were teenagers.⁶¹ This statistic correlates with his data that reports that 12 percent of emerging adults feel very or extremely distant from God.⁶²

Statistics that show a declination are verified each time research is conducted. In a 2011 survey, research showed that 59 percent of young adults, ages 18-29 with a Christian background, reported that they stopped attending church even though they had

⁵⁷ LifeWay, "LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church," LifeWay Christian Resources, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

⁵⁸ Important works that include Smith's research with the National Study of Youth and Religion include Christian Smith and Melinda Linnquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005); Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*; Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University, 2011); Dean, *Almost Christian*; Christian Smith, *The Secular Revolution: Power Interests and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003).

⁵⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 112. Smith and Snell (Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame) conducted important research on what is happening in the lives of American adolescents ages 18 to 23. Smith and Snell conducted interviews and recorded sociological data which shows that parents and religious congregations are the two main entities that socialize religious faith in emerging adults. Smith conducted this research through the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 121.

previously been a regular attender.⁶³ Fifty-seven percent said that they are less active than when they were 15.⁶⁴ Thirty-eight percent said they went through a period where they significantly doubted their faith.⁶⁵ Finally, 32 percent said they experienced a time when they felt like rejecting their parents' faith.⁶⁶ This connects with Smith's research that two-thirds of emerging adults view themselves as similar to their mother's and father's religion.⁶⁷

These statistics bring to light a personal spiritual and religious problem among many young adults, specifically college-aged young adults. Moral and spiritual foundations are typically set by the age of 13.⁶⁸ For most, the teen and young adult years become periods of experimentation and of testing limits.⁶⁹ Putting the two of these ideas together means that once a person reaches their late twenties, for the most part, their spiritual

⁶³ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23. Kinnaman is president of the Barna Group. The research to support this study was not conducted by Kinnaman himself, but rather the Barna Group. The statistics presented include all Christian groups, both Protestant and Catholics. The statistics increase if Catholics are removed and only Protestants are reflected. Among Protestants, the statistics are 61 percent, 58 percent, 41 percent, 35 percent respectively. Every category increased when only Protestant Christians were considered. All participants were ages 18-29 and considered themselves to be Christian. Rainer and Rainer report that 70 percent of young churchgoing American adults drop out of church between the ages of 18 and 22. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 3. Gallup Poll reported that 40 percent of 18-29 year olds who attended church when they were 16-17 no longer attend church. Gallup, "The Religiosity Cycle"; Newport, "A Look at Religious Switching." In 2007, LifeWay Research reported that more than 65 percent of young adults who attended a Protestant church for at least a year in high school will stop attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18-22. LifeWay, "LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 19 to 22 Year Old Drop Out of Church." In 2009, Smith's data from the NSYR indicated that there is a 30 percent drop in weekly religious service attendance across Protestant denominations. Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 112.

⁶⁴ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 128.

⁶⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 31.

⁶⁹ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 16-17.

trajectory is confirmed.⁷⁰ This is not to say it is impossible for someone beyond the age of 30 to change their spiritual trajectory, but it does mean it will be increasingly more difficult for that change to take place.⁷¹ These statistics provide great insight into the importance of discipleship among children and youth during their formative years.

Influences of the American University on their Students

J. Budziszewski, professor of government and philosophy at the University of Texas, points out that many evangelical adolescent students feel as though their faith is under attack at universities across the United States.⁷² He reports that Christian students hear comments from peers and professors such as, “Faith is just a crutch. The Bible is just mythology. Morality is different everywhere. Everyone must find their own faith. Jesus was just a man who died.”⁷³ These encounters challenge the doctrinal truths of Scripture and the faith of Christian college students. The pressures and stressors that college students face today seem to be increasing as students’ lives are not only lived out in the context of their community, but also in front of the voyeuristic eyes of social media.⁷⁴ For many students, adolescent life in the public eye is a constant litmus test of popularity with an added pressure to reach an almost unattainable status.⁷⁵ A dark side to adolescent life

⁷⁰ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 31.

⁷¹ Research from Kinnaman shows that 71 percent of people who changed their spiritual views did so before the age of 30. This means that roughly 30 percent of people may change their spiritual trajectory after the age of 30. *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷² J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 17. Budziszewski provides example after example of the transitions and changes that college students go through. His book offers practical advice for the Christian on how to combat giving into the negative transition and stand firm in the faith.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 224. Smith points out that teenagers find the instantaneous feedback and the myriad of information that social media, and other technology driven communications, can provide seems very satisfying, and perhaps addictive to the American teen.

⁷⁵ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 224.

constantly defies Christian beliefs, often resulting in negative peer pressure, drugs, alcohol, crime, pornography, sex, pregnancy, abortion, slanderous talk, gender identity issues, hatred, and anger.⁷⁶ All too often evangelical college students face increasing pressures to conform to a secularized culture, even while their own faith is still developing.⁷⁷ The tension between faith and secular conformity can become a battle for students which seems to compound on American university campuses.

Marsden writes, “Contemporary university culture is hollow at its core. Not only does it lack a spiritual center, but it is also without any real alternative. . . . ‘Wisdom’ is hardly a term one thinks of in connection with studies, nor with our system of higher education generally.”⁷⁸ On American university campuses, some students struggle with the tension between evangelical faith and secularism. Much of the educational system not only plays into this tension, but also promulgates attacks on biblical values, principles, and teachings, claiming that religion does not promote intelligence.⁷⁹ Marsden comments, “It is not unusual for otherwise judicial scholars to dismiss the idea of the relevance of religious perspectives to respectable scholarship as absurd.”⁸⁰ Ravi Zacharias comments that he has been met with anger at multiple Ivy League schools in the United States because students and faculty believed he was unqualified due to his Christian

⁷⁶ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 3.

⁷⁷ Smith discusses the regular practice of religious faith: “But doing so requires that religion be a very high priority—or at least a consistent habit—that trumps the demands of the rest of life, a commitment around which the competing needs of school, work, and play are adjusted, rather than vice versa.” Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 78.

⁷⁸ George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Marsden also comments that another academic proclaimed that “asserting the matters of religion are by definition not amenable to logic.” *Ibid.*

worldview.⁸¹ Christian college students often feel this same tension and observe it during a period of great transition in their life.

College years are defining years for students. They have the opportunity to define personal identity apart from their parents. They have freedom to make choices, experiment, and create stability during an unstable time in their life. For most students, this is when they will experience the most transition in their life.⁸² It is during this time that young adults leave home, then return temporarily during school breaks all while planning to leave again. Students leave for college and the next few years are riddled with transition. It seems that transition is one of the only constants in their life during this time.⁸³

Students encounter a new environment when they transition into private college. Some may find themselves at a private university that is very Christian and upholds biblical values. Others may attend a private school that has no affiliation with religion, or a school that is affiliated with religion by name only. They may have rules originally put in place to help students stand *in loco parentis*. Or they may attend a party school where students organize progressive drinking nights.⁸⁴ Through all these changes, many students encounter culture shock, which can lead to homesickness or depression. Some students explore extremes during this time and give into the weirdness or wildness in which they find themselves.⁸⁵ Often they will plunge headfirst into the ideologies of

⁸¹ Ravi Zacharias and Vince Vitale, *Jesus among Secular Gods: The Countercultural Claims of Christ* (New York: FaithWords, 2017), 1-2.

⁸² Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 34.

⁸³ Ibid. I have experienced much of this firsthand. My first three semesters of college I attended three different private schools with four different majors. This was a difficult time as I bounced from one idea to the next. I started my private college career in downtown Chicago and after one semester transferred to a rural school in West Virginia. After one semester in West Virginia I transferred to yet another school in Lynchburg, Virginia. During this time I changed my undergraduate degree five times, which extended my undergraduate education by a year. Transition and change were a constant as I was trying to define my identity.

⁸⁴ Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, 26.

⁸⁵ Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, 27.

the people surrounding them.

Many evangelical private college students suddenly find themselves surrounded by people who do not follow Christ and have different beliefs or worldviews from their own.⁸⁶ Kinnaman surveyed young adults who do not consider themselves Christian and determined the top reasons why non-Christians have a negative perception of Christians. His findings are as follows: 91 percent of non-Christians perceive Christians to be anti-homosexual, 87 percent say Christians are judgmental, and 85 percent say Christians are hypocritical. Small negative perceptions include Christians as being old-fashioned, too involved in politics, out of touch with reality, insensitive, boring, not accepting of other faiths, and confusing.⁸⁷ Much of the unchurched world possess this perception resulting in a negative view of church, faith, and God. To transform this cynical viewpoint, the church must concern themselves with solutions for this problem.

The Foundational Impact of the American Church on Private College Students

The statistical data from research shows that college students are becoming less concerned about their faith. Dean says, “American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith—but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school. One more thing: we’re

⁸⁶ Budziszewski says that colleges and universities are magnets for extreme beliefs, ideologies, and cults. He reports of campus feminist movements and homosexual sponsored protests, to name a few. Ibid.

⁸⁷ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 27. Kinnaman, president of The Barna Group, and Gabe Lyons, founder of the Fermi Project and co-founder of Catalyst, conducted research among 16 to 29 year-old emerging adults. This study researched the perception that non-Christians have of Christians. The finding showed that Christians are best known for what they are against, rather than what they are for—the gospel of Christ.

responsible.”⁸⁸ The ones responsible to whom Dean refers are evangelical Christian churches. Kinnaman expresses a similar concern. He says that the problem of emerging adults turning from God is a faith-development problem, also known as a disciple-making problem. He proposes that the church is not adequately stepping up to the challenge and preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully.⁸⁹ At the present time, this seems to be the general impact of the American church on emerging adults. Of course there are exceptions and this is not a broad statement about every church across the United States; however, the statistics do show that emerging adults are leaving the church in great numbers.⁹⁰

Statistics showing that college students who are walking away from the church do not specifically answer the question of why they are walking away; however, Smith and Denton’s thoughts on Moralistic Therapeutic Deism provides insight into the problem. According to Smith and Denton, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is now the

⁸⁸ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 3. Kenda Dean, Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote *Almost Christian*, which follows on the heels of *Soul Searching* and *Souls in Transition*, two books by Christian Smith. In *Almost Christian*, Dean takes these findings and interprets them for youth ministry and the church by taking a practical theological approach—an analysis that listens to sociology and educational theory but is profoundly guided by theological conviction. While a majority of American teenagers described themselves as Christian, in reality they espouse a version of Christianity the researchers termed “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” This kind of self-centered faith Dean simply terms “almost Christian.” Almost Christians go through the motions of religion without committing to a relationship of loving God. This reference is not an indictment of certain of Christian beliefs, but rather a form of cultural Christianity that has the semblance and language of authentic faith but lacks its heart and soul. Advocating ways to develop consequential faith in American teenagers is the main thrust of the book.

⁸⁹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23; Powell, Mulder and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 17; Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 2; Dean, *Almost Christian*, 3.

dominant religion among contemporary teenagers in the United States.⁹¹ This religion has unknowingly been created by teenagers because of maturing in a society where religion consists of a myriad of stories and statements about religious faith and practice. As a result, teenagers tend to piece together key ideas on relevant issues and create a *de facto* dominant religion. After interviewing these students, Smith and Denton codified a creed for Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, as defined in the terminology section of this thesis.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism adopts a moralistic approach to life which means that the most important values, or even doctrines, consist of being nice, kind, pleasant, and respectful.⁹² Simply stated, moral attributes trump biblical doctrine. The doctrine of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism concerns itself with being a good person and defining “good” within the context of culture and society at that particular moment. From an evangelical viewpoint, the cautionary concern is that society defines what is good and right rather than God. Smith comments,

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one’s affairs—especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved.⁹³

The God of this faith is kept at a safe distance, which can embolden a diminished

⁹¹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162. Christian Smith, William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame and Principal Investigator of the National Study of Youth and Religion, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Clemson University, investigate and wrote this detailed book regarding the current status of American teenagers. This study is based on the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers and their findings that involvement in religious activities results in a more positive adolescent life. Some of the key questions that Smith and Denton address include, What is going on in the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers? What do they actually believe? What religious practices do they engage in? Do they expect to remain loyal to the faith of their parents? Or are they abandoning traditional religious institutions in search of a new, more “authentic” spirituality? The findings to these questions show that faith is a positive guide. Smith argues that faith provides teenagers with guidance and resources for knowing how to live well. Smith and Denton conducted 267 in-depth interviews consisting of both face-to-face and phone conversations. Their sampling included a wide variety of race, sex, socioeconomic status, and region of the country in which they reside. The research was conducted by the National Study of Youth and Religion of which Smith was the Principal Investigator.

⁹² Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-63.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 164.

confidence in core Christian doctrines among emerging adults because, in reality, core Christian doctrines of a Judeo-Christian faith become nonexistent.

There is a potential connection tied to the church. Rainer suggests that the church is losing influence in American culture because local churches are not relating to their local community nor the younger generation.⁹⁴ This leads to a greater, symptomatic issue that the church is no longer necessary for many people. Sadly enough, the statistics support that statement. Membership in many churches is much higher than the number of people attending, which means at some point people stopped attending.⁹⁵ Rainer points out just how pervasive this problem is in the United States. In 2007, he reported that 52 percent of the American population claims to be Protestant, which translates to 157 million people.⁹⁶ A different statistic reports that only 28 percent of the American population attends a Protestant church, which translates to 85 million people.⁹⁷ Somewhere along the way people are leaving the church. Rainer breaks this down ever farther by identifying the age and percentages in which emerging adults are leaving the church. He reports that at age 16 a young person starts to lose interest in church, as seen in table 2.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 8.

⁹⁵ This is a general statement, meaning that some churches membership verses attendance are balanced; however, for the most part, American churches are suffering a great decrease in numbers.

⁹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook: Religions,” accessed July 29, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2122.html>. Those numbers were recorded in 2007—52 percent has decreased to 46.5 percent.

⁹⁷ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 9.

⁹⁸ Information in table 2 taken from LifeWay, “LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church.” The article by LifeWay reflects the figures in the chart. I first found this chart in Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 15.

Table 2. Gain/loss for age categories in the church

Age	Percentage gain/loss
Between ages 15 & 16	+1%
Between ages 16 & 17	-15%
Between ages 17 & 18	-24%
Between ages 18 & 19	-29%
Between ages 19 & 20	-5%

The age range with the highest number of people walking away from the church is between the ages of 18 and 19, which means that the greatest number falls within a student's freshman year of college. This is partly because first year college students encounter a transitional period outside of the context of their home or under the umbrella of their parents. What they experienced in high school and the environment in which they experienced it changed. In college they experience more people, more groups, more activities, more learning, more freedom, and make more mistakes.⁹⁹ Over a short period, college students experience new freedoms that they never knew and find themselves in new situations that they have never experienced. The abruptness of this transition can lead to a change in routines and even a declination of faith. One professor became concerned of many of his students' poor grades and questioned why this happened. He received responses such as, "When I got to the university I went wild." Or another student said, "For my first three years I just partied."¹⁰⁰ Many college students trade their old habits, traditions, and even religion for experiencing new and exciting things. Churches have an opportunity to help students by assisting their spiritual development during their formative years.

Foundations and a Personal Faith

The adolescent years of a person's life are full of turbulence. Maybe that is

⁹⁹ Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

partly why the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth” (12:1).¹⁰¹ Imperative to this verse is the first word *remember*. *Remember* connotes that a person must have first learned something in which they must recall. Specifically, the writer of Ecclesiastes says to remember the Creator, or Lord. The author seemed to know that youth will endure a time of turbulence and transition during the years of discovering their identity and must therefore remember the foundation on which their faith was built.

Parents, Church, and a Religious Foundation

Students experience new freedoms throughout their private college years, which is just one of the reasons it is important for students to receive a strong foundation of faith. Pearce and Denton’s research reports that college students who had previous positive religious influences from family and church help students remain true to their foundation. They remark, “The more parents attend religious services and value religion’s role in everyday life, the more likely their child will remain religiously involved and engaged.”¹⁰² The new-found freedom that college students encounter can become a time of faith refinement for those who grew up in an environment with parental or church support.¹⁰³ Students who grew up in an environment where faith was integrated into daily life and with parental or church support are less likely to walk away from the church or decrease their confidence in core Christian doctrines.

Powell asked seniors graduating from high school about the greatest spiritual

¹⁰¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

¹⁰² Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America’s Adolescents* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 181. Using the NSYR telephone survey, coupled with 120 in-depth interviews, Pearce and Denton chart the spiritual trajectory of American adolescents over a period of three years. They find that religion is an important force in the lives of many who fit into this category; however, their involvement with religion changes over time just as teenagers themselves change.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

influencers in their lives. The list included friends inside youth group, friends outside of youth group, youth leaders at church, parents, and adults in their church congregation. The group that seniors nominated as the greatest spiritual influencers were their parents.¹⁰⁴ Smith's research validates Powell's data. Smith writes, "Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence shaping a person's religious life is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents."¹⁰⁵ Parents have a great opportunity to influence their children for Christ and help build a strong religious foundation from which they can understand and create a well-defined personal faith. The freedom that college students encounter in private institutions force them to truly make their faith their own. It can be a time when college students define their personal faith, remembering what their parents taught and exemplified.

Personal Faith among College Students

Budziszewski quotes a college student regarding their college experience:

My first two years at college were probably some of the most stressful of my life, and I thought high school was stressful! But I also know that I have done the most growing emotionally, physically (dorm food = fattening), mentally, and most important spiritually, through trials, the missing people, and the loneliness.¹⁰⁶

College students attending private institutions face a myriad of changes, including changes to their home, interests, hobbies, intellect, disciplines, mannerisms, and friends. Even though college students seem to be surrounded by people in their dorm rooms, classes, dining facilities, campus, apartments, etc., many times they experience an aloneness.¹⁰⁷ This is because they have not yet planted roots in this new world of

¹⁰⁴ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56.

¹⁰⁶ Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, 22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

transitions and transient people. One of the positive aspects for college students during this aloneness is that they have the opportunity to define their personal faith. Churches have a great opportunity to help students define their faith and should be intentional in this. Even though churches have little time with these students, they can increase that time if they partner with parents and move discipleship outside of the walls of the church and inside the walls of homes.

A Foundation of Family Ministry

A goal of this research is to confirm which doctrines that students, who attend private university, experience the greatest diminishment so that churches and families can intentionally address these areas as they disciple their children during their formative years. Ultimately, the responsibility of discipling children belongs to parents. The church should equip parents in in the discipleship of their kids. Simply stated, the local church must impact and equip parents for discipleship of their children.¹⁰⁸ This model of family-equipping discipleship is founded Biblically according to the discipleship model found in Deuteronomy 6:4-7. According to Timothy Paul Jones, family ministry is defined as, “The process of intentionally and persistently coordinating a ministry’s proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”¹⁰⁹

Biblical and Practical Basis for Family Discipleship

It is good for parents and families to embrace the responsibility of discipling their children because it is biblical and practical. First, family discipleship has a biblical basis. There is so much that goes on in a child’s life at home that church leaders are

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Paul Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 143.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 33.

unaware of, and that is by God's design. The Biblical basis for family discipleship is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-7. The essence of this verse is that parents, not church leaders, should teach their kids every day.¹¹⁰ The Bible is clear that parents are to raise their child in the instruction of the Lord. God expects parents to talk about Him in everyday life with their children. This is not only biblical, but also practical.

Practically speaking, parents have more time with their children as compared to the amount of time children spend at church. This is one of the principles that Reggie Joiner, the founder and CEO of the reThink Group and Orange, placed in his ministry strategy. He uses an analogy of time and the impact that it has on the church and family.

On average, there are 936 weeks from the time a child is born until he graduates high school.¹¹¹ This number is important to parents because it represents the amount of time a child has at home until they move out on their own. It is also important for the church to understand the impact of this number.

For the church, this number can be broken down even farther by weekends according to the stages of a child's schooling. There are 260 weekends in a child's life from the time they are born until the time they start kindergarten. There are 312 weekends that a child attends grade school, defined as kindergarten through fifth grade. There are 156 weekends that a child attends junior high, defined as sixth through eighth grade. Finally, there are 208 weekends that a child attends high school, defined as ninth through twelfth grade. All of these numbers are important because practically speaking, these numbers correspond with the amount of time a church ministry has to disciple a child.

Yet this number can be broken down even more. If a child attends a church

¹¹⁰ Jerry Pipes, and Victor Lee, *Family to Family: Leaving a Lasting Legacy* (Lawrenceville: Jerry Pipes, 2000), 9.

¹¹¹ Reggie Joiner, and Kristen Ivy, *Playing for Keeps: What You Do this Week Matters* (Cumming, GA: Orange, 2013), 32

service every weekend and all-year, then they will have walked through the doors fifty-two times. Roughly each service lasts approximately one hour, which means that in a best case scenario a child receives fifty-two hours of instruction and discipleship per year. Practically speaking, it is not feasible for the church to be the primary means of discipleship in a child's life. A parent will spend fifty-two hours with their child in one weekend alone. A parent has more opportunity to train and disciple their child than the church could ever imagine. In regards to the practical basis for family discipleship, it is the parents who is best suited to train their children in the instruction of the Lord, because no one has more potential to influence a child than the parent.¹¹²

The Church's Role in Family Ministry

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”¹¹³ Regarding the discipleship of children, this verse can be interpreted as saying the church should equip parents for the work of the ministry. This is one of the key roles that a church plays in the life of a parent. Barna says, “The role of the church is to equip and reinforce rather than lead [in children's discipleship].”¹¹⁴ One way of thinking about it is that the church should become a parent's best partner.

When churches understand their role of equipping families for discipleship, there is greater potential for discipleship to take place throughout the week rather than being restricted to weekends or midweek only. It is important for the church must to find ways to engage parents so that spiritual growth is a part of everyday life and practice,

¹¹² Marcia J. Bunge, “Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Children, Parents, and ‘Best Practices’ for Faith Formation: Resources for Child, Youth, and Family Ministry Today,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47, no. 4. (Winter 2008): 350.

¹¹³ Eph. 4:11-12.

¹¹⁴ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2003), 98.

after all, it is parents who provide the best spiritual nurturement for their child, not a church program.¹¹⁵ It is the desire for a family-equipping church ministry that spiritual growth will take place within the context of the home. With this in mind, a goal of this research is to provide information to churches and parents that will help them in the discipleship of their children during their foundational years.

Profile of the Current Research

Statistics show that anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of young adults walk away from the church.¹¹⁶ This systemic problem has been an issue in the church for many years; however, the good news is that many evangelical college students continue to stand strong in their faith and influence the world around them for Christ, which provides hope for future generations.¹¹⁷

Smith and Denton offer a great challenge for the church in the United States.

They write,

Religious congregations and other religious organizations are uniquely positioned in the array of social institutions operating in the United States to embrace youth, to connect with adolescents, to strengthen ties between adults and teenagers. But it will not happen automatically. It will require intentionality and investment.¹¹⁸

Churches have the opportunity to embrace their role of equipping parents to be the spiritual leaders for their children. Ephesians 4:11-12 says that Christian leaders are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. In the context of family ministry, this means churches should strive to equip parents in becoming the spiritual leader of their children. A strong partnership between churches and families can help change the current spiritual decline

¹¹⁵ Scottie May, Katie Stemp, and Grant Burns, "Children's Place in the New Forms of Church: An Exploratory Survey of their Ministry with Children and Families," *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 283

¹¹⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23; Powell, Mulder and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 17; Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 18.

¹¹⁸ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 265.

among emerging adults who are college students.

The intent of this study is to identify any diminishment of core Christian doctrines among students attending private university or college. The following chapter analyzes this relationship through quantitative assessments of the student's self-assessed level of confidence in core Christian doctrines.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Three research questions were used to investigate any correlation between confidence and a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among students in private universities.

Research Questions

The three questions were as follows:

- Among students in private colleges and universities, what factors significantly relate to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines?
- Among students in private colleges and universities, what core Christian doctrines are most difficult to defend and to maintain while in college?
- Among students in private colleges and universities, what personal doctrinal beliefs are most likely to change during college?

The first research question was addressed under the heading of precedent literature. The second and third questions were addressed in the remainder of the research.

Design Overview

Data was gathered using a quantitative research design in order to collect data from current college seniors or recent graduates attending private institutions. This was followed by an interview of no fewer than six college seniors or recent graduates for illustrative purposes. This study provided data concerning the faith trajectory and confidence in core Christian doctrines among students attending or who attended private college or university.

The quantitative research measured the religious beliefs of private college seniors and/or recent college graduates attending or who attended private schools. The

research tool that was used was obtained from a validated survey based on the Christian Orthodoxy (CO) Scale.¹ Students who chose to participate in the sampling completed two sections of the survey, each consisting of six questions. Students first answered according to their religious belief when entering private college as a freshman. Second, students answered according to their current religious belief. Answering the faith questions from this viewpoint created data that assessed the core doctrines in which students experience a diminished confidence as well as the correlation between the diminishment and private college.

The CO Scale is a twenty-four-question research tool that measures a person's belief in core Christian doctrines of the faith. The survey consisted of six questions regarding Christian orthodoxy.² In this study, these six questions were asked twice, once from the student's past perspective and once from the student's current perspective. This created a total of twelve Christian orthodoxy questions for the student. In addition to the Christian orthodoxy questions, six qualifying/demographic questions were asked. These questions included the following:

1. Do you identify yourself as an evangelical Christian?
2. What is your current collegiate academic level?
3. What type of college/university do you attend?
4. What geographical region of the United States is your college/university located?
5. What describes your collegiate enrollment as a student?
6. How many times in the past 30 days have you attended any church service?

One final open-ended question was asked in order to provide students with an opportunity to express any diminishment of confidence they have experienced in other areas not

¹ Peter C. Hill and Ralph W. Hood, Jr., *Measures of Religiosity* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), 17-19.

² J. T. Fullerton and Bruce Hunsberger, "A Unidimensional Measure of Christian Orthodoxy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21 (1982): 317-26.

mentioned in the survey. Students were also asked if they would like to participate in an optional, follow-up interview. Each student answered a total of nineteen questions, which included the six qualifying/demographic questions, the six Christian orthodoxy questions from two perspectives, and finally the open-ended question. This concluded the qualitative research process.

The qualitative research process was followed by interviews for illustrative purposes. I interviewed six private college seniors or recent graduates who wished to provide additional feedback for the study. Not every student who expressed interest in continuing in the study was selected to participate in the follow-up interview. Those students whom I selected were contacted in order to schedule an interview via a phone call.

The survey was advertised on social media, specifically on Facebook. Facebook advertisements were purchased and once the student completed the survey they were entered to win one of three \$100 Amazon gift cards. These gift cards were advertised on Facebook to attract participation from private college students. The survey took approximately ten minutes to complete.

Population

The population for the study includes students attending a private college or university in the United States who are enrolled in their senior year of college or who graduated from college within the past year. The respondents self-reported as being either a college senior or recent college graduate at a private institution.

Sample

The sample was drawn through purposive sampling from private colleges or universities and with individuals who identified themselves as evangelical as defined in this research. Samples were promoted through the use of social media which resulted in a sample that included data from 387 evangelical Christian students attending private

college or university. This number was based on the needed sample size to achieve an error level of 5 percent and was derived from Cochran's infinite population formula which he explains according to the estimation of the standard error from a sample.

Cochran explains,

The formulas for the standard errors of the estimated population mean and total are used primarily for three purposes: (1) to compare the precision obtained by simple random sampling with that given by other methods of sampling, (2) to estimate the size of the sample needed in a survey that is being planned, and (3) to estimate the precision actually attained in a survey that has been completed.³

The sample size was set to ensure precision based on considerations of power tests for observing effects of a size that would accurately represent Christian students attending private universities. The sample set was sufficiently large enough to reject the null hypothesis of no effect with sufficient power to accept the alternative. The sample size was also to provide reliable estimates of Christian beliefs that might be found in varying demographic and regional subgroups.⁴

Confidence intervals help the researcher determine population size. A confidence interval is simply a finite interval of score values on the dependent variable. This is constructed by adding a specific amount to the computed statistic (upper limit) and subtracting a specific amount from the statistic (lower limit).⁵

This research was considered infinite in population size because the total population size of Christian students who attend a private university or college exceeds 130,000. According to the calculation program at Check Market, any population size that is greater than 130,000 when using a margin of error of 5 percent and a confidence level

³ William G. Cochran, *Sampling Techniques*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977), 25-26.

⁴ Huck W. Schuyler, *Reading Statistics and Research*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2000), 215.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

of 95 percent, requires a sample size of 384.⁶

Delimitations

The sample was delimited to include only individuals from private colleges or universities who are either seniors or graduated within the past year at the time of the survey. All individuals had to identify themselves as attending private college and as an evangelical Christian as defined by this thesis.

Limitations of Generalizations

The data from the samples may not necessarily generalize to all evangelical Christian college students attending private schools in the United States. Data also may not generalize to individuals who are college-aged (18-23) but do not attend private college. The research may not necessarily generalize to all private colleges or universities. The concluding data may be helpful to evangelical Christian institutions such as churches and parachurch organizations, but it may not generalize to every evangelical Christian institution.

There were 387 responders who made up the sample of this research. All sub-samples in this research consisted of a population size less than 384 responders which cannot extrapolate out or be generalized to every private Christian college. Therefore, any statistics within the sample are only generalizable within the sample.

Instrumentation

The Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy (SCO) Scale was utilized⁷ based off of the Christian Orthodoxy (CO) Scale, which was designed by J. T. Fullerton and

⁶ This calculation tool is found at CheckMarket, "Sample Size Calculator," accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.checkmarket.com/sample-size-calculator/>.

⁷ Fullerton and Hunsberger, "A Unidimensional Measure of Christian Orthodoxy," 317-26.

Bruce Hunsberger in 1982. The CO Scale was validated by Raymond F. Paloutzian.⁸ The original CO scale proved to have great strengths in its psychometric properties; however, the major drawback was its length.⁹ The SCO Scale is a condensed version of the CO Scale with just six questions, and retains most of the psychometric strengths associated with the original scale.¹⁰ The six questions concerning Christian Orthodoxy are divided equally into positive and negative statements.

The SCO Scale seeks to utilize bedrock statements of common Christian Orthodoxy to measure one's belief.¹¹ The SCO Scale identifies beliefs that fall into the following categories: the existence of God, Jesus as divine, Jesus' mission to save humankind, Jesus' death and resurrection, and the inspiration of the Bible. The various items that make up the scale represent one or more of these elements. A tenant of the scale is that the beliefs are knit together to define Christian orthodoxy.¹² The six-item SCO Scale correlated at a 0.98 with the twenty-four-item CO Scale (see table 3).¹³

⁸ Hill and Hood, *Measures of Religiosity*, 15-18.

⁹ Bruce Hunsberger, "A Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28 (1989): 360.

¹⁰ Ibid. The development of this scale was based on a sample of 691 students who were enrolled in psychology at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario in the fall of 1987.

¹¹ The bedrock statements define the Christian faith and are expressed in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

¹² Hill and Hood, *Measures of Religiosity*, 15-16.

¹³ Hunsberger, "A Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale," 362. Table 3 is taken from *ibid.*, 363.

Table 3. Comparison of correlations of CO and SCO scales

COMPARISON OF CORRELATIONS OF CO AND SCO SCALES
WITH OTHER VARIABLES (1987 AND 1988 DATA)

	1987		1988a	1988b	
	CO	SCO	SCO	CO	SCO
Right Wing Authoritarianism (30-item scale, Altemeyer, 1982)	0.49	0.46	N/A	0.54	0.52
Doubt about Religious Teachings (5-point item)	-0.53	-0.52	-0.55	-0.52	-0.51
Interest in Religion (9-point item)	0.63	0.60	0.69	0.51	0.47
Emphasis on Religion in Family Background (5-point item)	0.48	0.46	0.43	0.51	0.47
Agreement with Parental Religious Teachings (5-point item)	0.74	0.72	0.57	0.67	0.65
Current Frequency of Church Attendance (5-point item)	0.61	0.58	0.61	0.56	0.53
Religious Socialization (12-item scale)	0.48	0.53	0.73	0.57	0.53

Note: Sample size ranged from 590 to 656 in the 1987 analyses, from 69 to 73 in the 1988a analyses, and from 249 to 275 in the 1988b analyses, depending on the number of participants who gave complete information for the two measures involved in each correlation. All correlations are significant at the .001 level.

A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from -3 (strongly disagree) to +3 (strongly agree) is utilized to answer each question. An understanding of the scoring is as follows:

No response is scored as "0" on the (-3 to +3) response scale for each item. It is suggested that a participant's data be discarded if he/she does not answer four or more items. Data can easily be prepared for analysis by resettling responses such that -3 = 1; -2 = 2; -1 = 3; 0 (or no response) = 4; +1 = 5; +2 = 6; and +3 = 7. The keying of all negatively worded items is reversed so that for all items a low score indicates an unorthodox belief and a high score indicates an orthodox belief.¹⁴

The follow-up interviews consisted of no fewer than six college seniors or recent college graduates from private institutions. The interviews were conducted by phone with the purpose of to gain insight into the factors impacting the respondent's faith trajectory while attending private college.

¹⁴ Hunsberger, "A Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale," 362.

Procedures

This mixed methods study was conducted by surveying students who self-reported that they were in their senior year of college or a recent college graduate from private colleges and universities. The instrument used to survey these college students was administered through an online survey that I prepared.¹⁵ Facebook advertisements were utilized to attract private college students to the survey.

A purposive sample of the respondents who completed the online survey was selected to participate in a follow-up interview via telephone for illustrative purposes. Students were asked questions regarding their diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines as indicated by their answers on the quantitative survey.

Statistical data gathered from the online survey was analyzed according to two major categories: (1) demographic information and (2) faith-based questions. The demographic statistics helped identify differences among the population according to current academic level, geographical location of the college, collegiate enrollment status, and church attendance.

Each faith-based question was asked twice. The first question was based upon the student's belief of Christian doctrines when they entered college as a freshman. The second question was based upon the student's current belief in Christian doctrines. Half of the questions were stated in a positive manner (7, 8, 13, 14, 17, 18) and half were stated in a negative manner (9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16). Acknowledging the positive verses negative statements are important to note so that the statistical findings are analyzed properly and accurately. The faith-based questions fit into the following categories of Christian orthodoxy:

1. The existence of God – questions 11, 12, 15, 16
2. Jesus as divine – questions 7, 8

¹⁵ All of the research instruments used in this thesis were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in this thesis research.

3. Jesus' mission to save humankind – questions 17, 18
4. Jesus' death and resurrection – questions 13, 14
5. The inspiration of the Bible – questions 9, 10

These faith-based questions were posed as to potentially buttress family ministries in churches and provide parents with information that could lead to a more comprehensive understanding regarding Christian formation, specifically religious issues that students who plan to attend private colleges and universities might face.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine areas where students attending private colleges or universities find themselves least equipped to defend core Christian doctrines of the faith in order to define areas that churches and parents can better partner in equipping young adults with apologetic and foundational truths. This chapter describes how data from the research was compiled, analyzed, and summarized. The analysis of findings is presented in four sections to include (1) an overview of the characteristics of the demographic sample, (2) an analysis of the survey, (3) an overview of the qualitative interview for illustrative purposes, and (4) an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design.

Compilation Protocol

The survey was administered using social media, primarily Facebook, to those who met the research criteria of being a college senior or recent graduate from a private university or college. Students who met that criteria then proceeded with the survey that consisted of (1) an explanation of the survey, (2) six demographic questions that would also be used to identify possible factors relating to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines, (3) six faith-based survey questions asked once in the context of entering college as a freshman and once in the context as a senior, (4) one open-ended question, and (5) a request for contact information to be used for potential follow-up questions. The survey was created using Google Forms and as each participant completed the survey Google Forms collected their data. The survey was set up so that all questions

had to be answered, except for the open-ended question, in order to complete the survey. There was no time limit placed on the survey and on average the respondent completed the survey in five to ten minutes. Once 384 respondents completed their survey and submitted it through Google Forms, I closed the survey so that it would no longer accept survey submissions in order to prepare for data compilation.

Inclusion Criteria

The final research population totaled 387 completed surveys. Every survey submitted met predetermined protocols. The survey was set up so that if a person did not meet the survey protocols and requirements their survey could not be submitted. The following protocols determined if data from a subject's survey could be submitted by the subject and included in the research data: (1) Subjects must have identified themselves as either a college senior or having graduated from private college within the past two years. (2) The subject must have completed questions 1 through 18, which included demographic and faith-based questions. Subjects did not have to complete question 19, which was the open-ended question, or the questions regarding contact information. Respondents who did not answer a question from questions 1 through 18 could not submit their survey and were not counted as one of the 387 surveys collected.

The statistics in this chapter are drawn from the 387 completed surveys collected. A statistician entered all data into a computer program known as SAS.¹

Quantitative Characteristics and Relationships within the Research Sample

I will begin with a general description of the demographic characteristics found in the research sample. Second, I will use these demographic characteristics to define the

¹ SAS stands for Statistical Analysis System. The statistician, Ryan Yoder, used Microsoft Windows version 9.4, copyright 2013. Yoder received his Ph.D. from Ohio University.

factors that relate to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among the research sample.

From the 387 responses 225, or 58.14 percent, identified as an evangelical Christian. There were 125, or 32.3 percent, that did not identify as an evangelical Christian. There were 37, or 9.56 percent, that said that they identified as an evangelical Christian when they entered private college but no longer identify themselves in that manner (see figure 2).

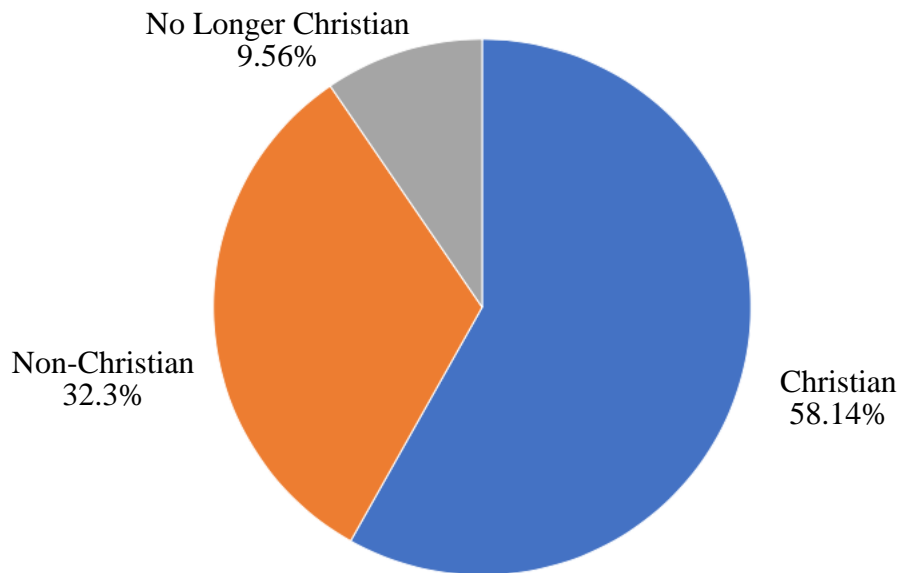


Figure 2. Distribution of personal faith identification.

From the 387 responses 252, or 65.12 percent, identified their college as a private Christian institution. There were 135, or 34.88 percent, that identified their college as a private non-Christian institution (see figure 3).

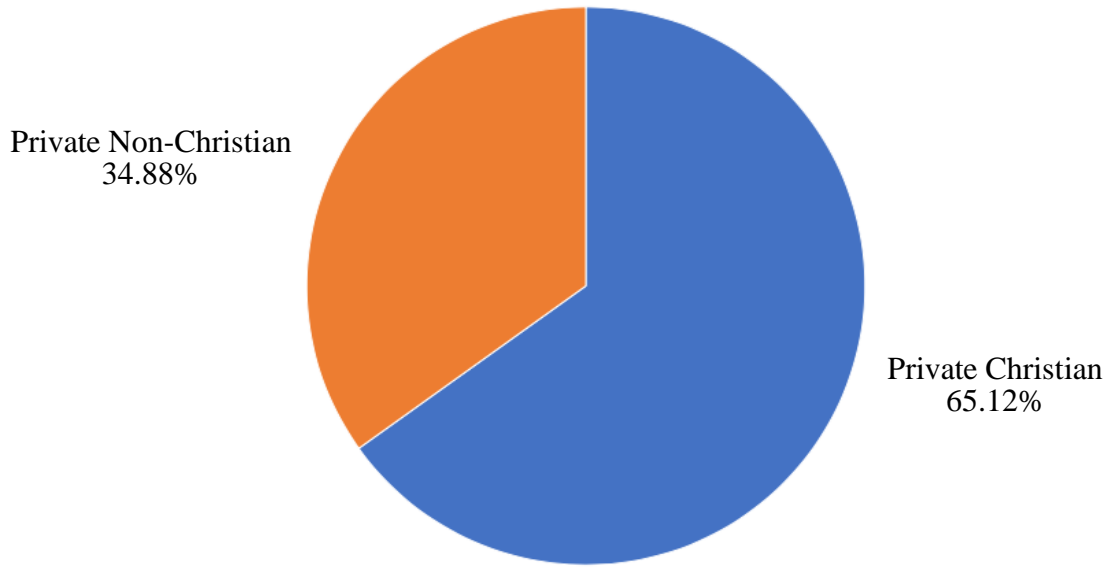


Figure 3. Distribution of collegiate identification.

From the 387 responses 202, or 52.2 percent, identified themselves as a college senior. There were 185, or 47.8 percent, that identified themselves as recent college graduates within the past two years (see figure 4).

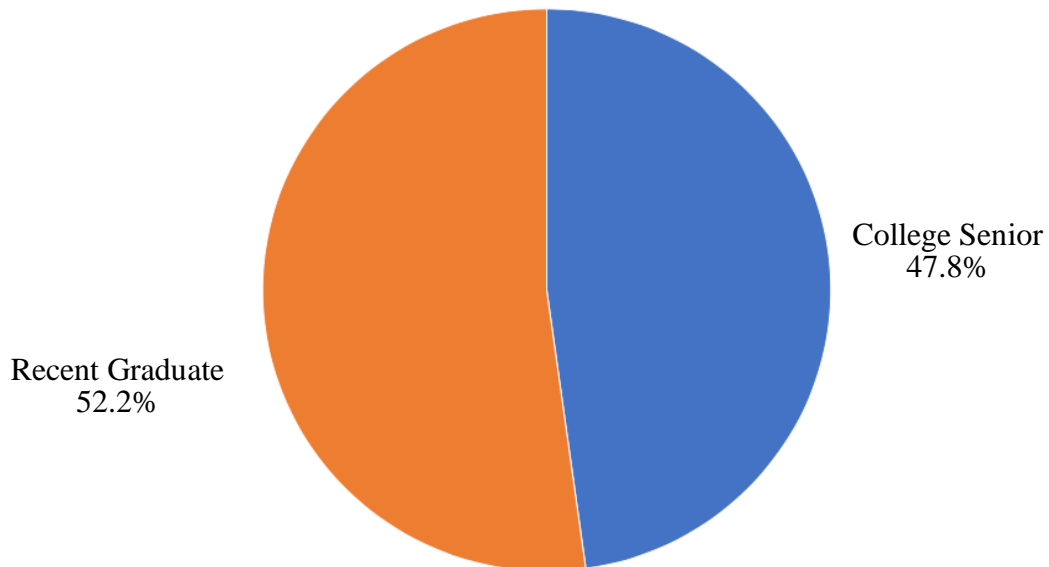


Figure 4. Distribution of academic level.

From the 387 responses 204, or 52.71 percent, identified that their collegiate institution was located in the Mid-West.² There were 22, or 5.68 percent, that identified that their collegiate institution was located in the North; 87, or 22.48 percent, identified that their collegiate institution was located in the South; 55, or 14.21 percent, identified that their collegiate institution was located in the East; and 19, or 4.91 percent, identified that their collegiate institution was located in the West (see figure 5).

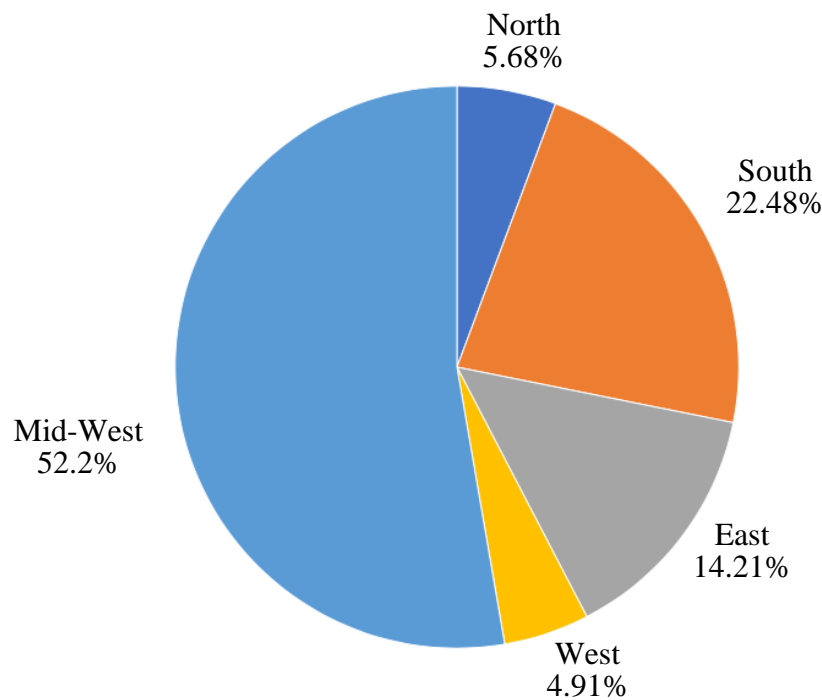


Figure 5. Distribution of geographic region.

From the 387 responses 361, or 93.28 percent, stated that they were full-time students taking courses on campus; 14, or 3.62 percent, stated that they were full-time students taking courses online; 10, or 2.58 percent stated that they were part-time

² I believe the majority of the responses came from the Mid-West because I am from the Mid-West. My acquaintances were more apt to participate in this study and asked their acquaintances to do the same. This, of course, is speculation. Nonetheless, in the regression model it was determined that geography was not of significance.

students taking courses on campus; and 2, or 0.52 percent, stated that were part-time students taking courses online (see figure 6).

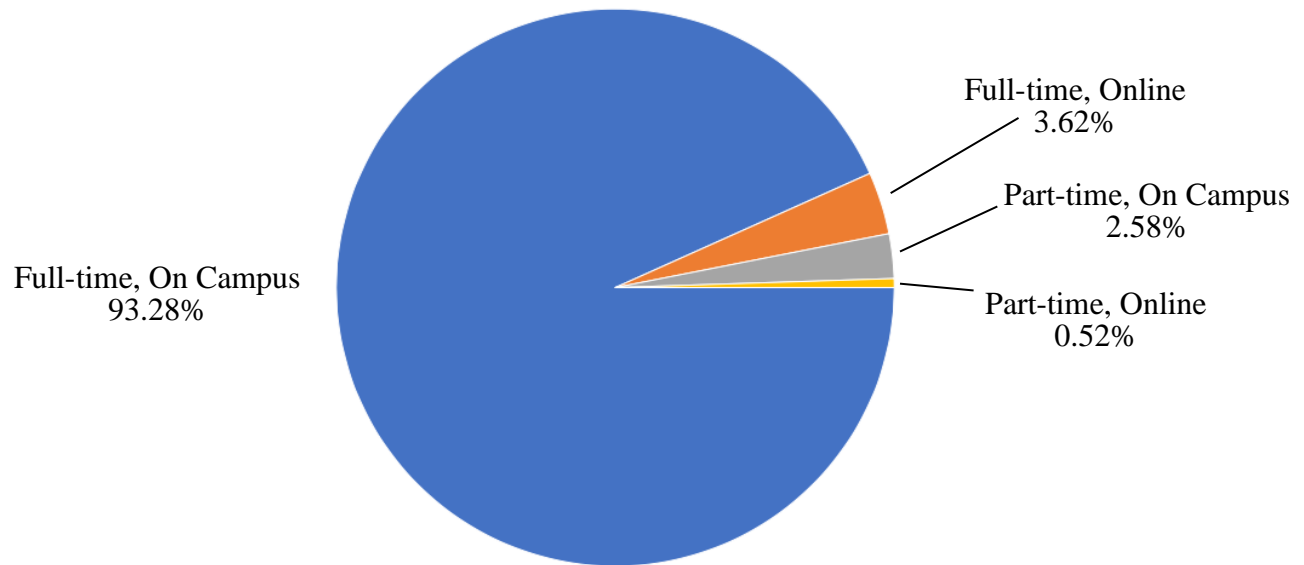


Figure 6. Distribution of collegiate enrollment.

From the 387 responses 111, or 28.68 percent, stated that they had not attended a church service in the past 30 days; 86, or 22.22 percent, stated that they have attended a church service 1-2 times in the past 30 days; 104, or 26.87 percent, stated that they have attended a church service 3-4 times in the past 30 days; 86, or 22.22 percent, stated that they have attended a church service 5 or more times in the past 30 days (see figure 7).

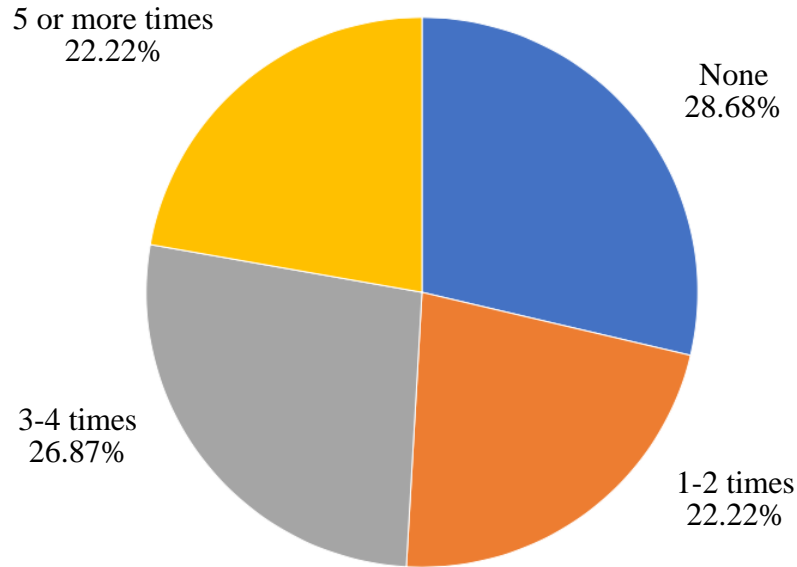


Figure 7. Distribution of church attendance.

Correlation Matrix

Several bivariate correlations were computed among the set of variables from the research. For this research, a correlation matrix provides a summary of the measured bivariate relationships among seventeen variables to include demographic questions and faith-based questions within the research tool.³ The correlation matrix for this research can be found in table 4. Some of the variables are negatively related because faith-based questions 2, 3, and 5 were reverse coded. The variables that are reverse coded are negatively related to the variables which shows internal consistencies (see table 4).

³ Schuyler W. Huck, *Reading Statistics and Research* (New York: Longman, 2000), 63.

Table 4. Correlation matrix for all latent variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
(1) Christian	1.00																
(2) Senior	*0.11998	1.00															
(3) Location	-0.01438	0.0309	1.00														
(4) Enrollment	*-0.10937	0.05091	*-0.12833	1.00													
(5) Church	***-0.45247	-0.01899	**0.15385	0.04363	1.00												
(6) Q1 Son of God, past belief	***-0.46972	-0.03535	-0.04046	0.04596	***0.47406	1.00											
(7) Q1 Son of God, current belief	***-0.49601	0.04993	-0.07884	0.06676	***0.63872	***0.78451	1.00										
(8) Q2 Bible inspired, past belief	***0.37873	*0.12101	0.05913	0.03385	***-0.3982	***0.46251	***-0.37583	1.00									
(9) Q2 Bible inspired, current belief	***0.42449	0.00559	0.08333	-0.05681	***-0.57212	***-0.32473	***-0.56471	***0.7196	1.00								
(10) Q3 God as Superstition, past belief	***0.4116	0.04854	*0.12397	-0.01354	***-0.46538	***-0.6991	***-0.56427	***0.53314	***0.4042	1.00							
(11) Q3 God as Superstition, current belief	***0.402	*-0.12184	*0.11697	-0.03333	***-0.61212	***-0.4398	***-0.73479	***0.35629	***0.6296	***0.64044	1.00						
(12) Q4 Forgivenness through Jesus, past belief	***-0.53685	-0.08204	-0.03464	0.0625	***0.51364	***0.8607	***0.67306	***-0.35463	***-0.39064	***-0.76802	***-0.47881	1.00					
(13) Q4 Forgivenness through Jesus, current belief	***-0.58216	0.02534	-0.03951	0.0705	***0.66471	***0.67369	***0.87024	***-0.43641	***-0.59974	***-0.60861	***-0.77666	***0.76526	1.00				
(14) Q5 God Aware of Actions, past belief	***0.43992	*0.11073	0.0771	-0.00724	***-0.48244	***-0.71492	***-0.6083	***0.33125	***0.45388	***0.80945	***0.54769	***-0.77486	***-0.63129	1.00			
(15) Q5 God Aware of Actions, current belief	***0.37747	-0.06869	*0.10709	-0.06046	***-0.61047	***-0.47471	***-0.74959	***0.35043	***0.62987	***0.56839	***0.84408	***-0.51143	***-0.76926	***0.68814	1.00		
(16) Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, past belief	***-0.52221	-0.05579	-0.0494	0.03816	***0.50018	***0.84587	***0.67698	***-0.54062	***-0.38215	***-0.75115	***-0.49097	***0.93222	***0.74338	***-0.79243	***-0.52892	1.00	
(17) Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, current belief	***-0.56379	0.03718	-0.07441	0.05777	***0.64255	***0.69169	***0.87362	***-0.43803	***-0.58805	***-0.62393	***-0.76506	***0.75598	***0.93262	***-0.66869	***-0.77361	***0.80306	1.00

Legend: * = <0.05 ** = <0.01 *** = <0.001

Notes:

- if Do_you_identify_yourself_as_an_e='Yes' then identify2=1;
- if Do_you_identify_yourself_as_an_e='No' then identify2=5;
- if Do_you_identify_yourself_as_an_e='I identified myself as an evangelical Christian when I entered college, but I no longer identify myself in that manner.' then identify2=5;
- if What_is_your_current_collegiate='College Senior' then status=1;
- if What_is_your_current_collegiate='Recent College Graduate' then status=2;
- if What_best_described_your_collegi='Full-time, on campus' then enroll_type=1;
- if What_best_described_your_collegi='Full-time, distance/online' then enroll_type=2;
- if What_best_described_your_collegi='Part-time, on campus' then enroll_type=3;
- if What_best_described_your_collegi='Part-time, distance/online' then enroll_type=4;
- if How_many_times_in_the_past_30_da='None' then attendance=0;
- if How_many_times_in_the_past_30_da='1-2' then attendance=1;
- if How_many_times_in_the_past_30_da='3-4' then attendance=2;
- if How_many_times_in_the_past_30_da='5 or more' then attendance=3;

- All Scales**
- Strongly Disagree = 1
 - Moderately Disagree = 2
 - Slightly Disagree = 3
 - Neutral = 4
 - Slightly Agree = 5
 - Moderately Agree = 6
 - Strongly Agree = 7

Chi-Square among Private Christian and Private Non-Christian Schools

A significant Chi-Square was found between Christian and private non-Christian colleges or universities and their response to identifying as a Christian. The Chi-Square was found to be $\chi^2(1)=4.21, p=0.04$. This means that there was a significant difference between the students who attended private Christian and private non-Christian schools. There were 156 students that identified themselves as Christian among private Christian schools, whereas only 69 identified themselves as Christian among private non-Christian schools. The separated demographic is found in figures 8 and 9.

From the 252 students attending a private Christian college, 156, or 61.9 percent, identified themselves as an evangelical Christian; 77, or 30.56 percent, did not identify as an evangelical Christian; and 19, or 7.54 percent, said that they identified as an evangelical Christian when they entered college but no longer identify themselves in that manner (see figure 8).

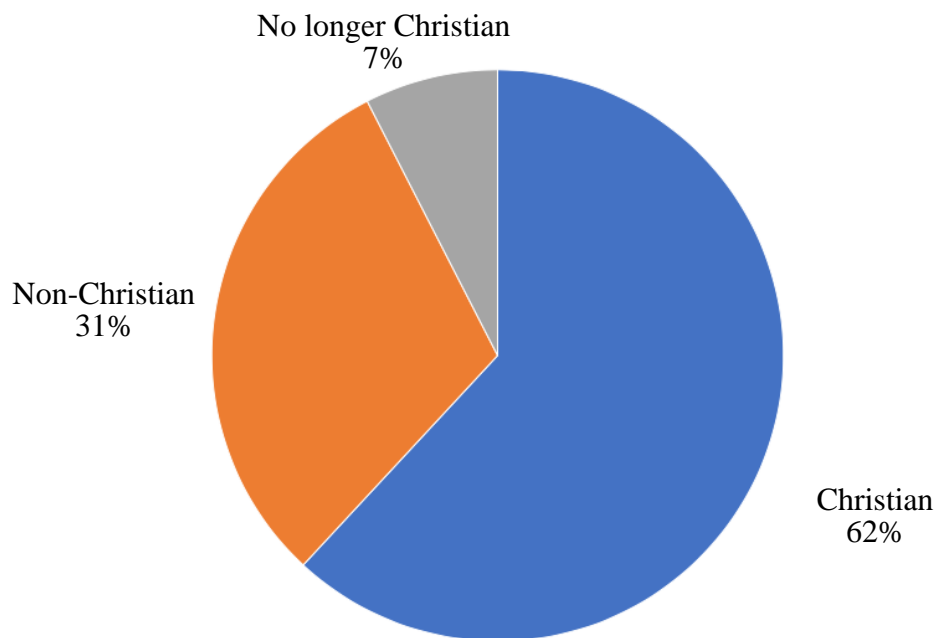


Figure 8. Distribution of personal faith for students attending private Christian college/university.

From the 135 students attending a private non-Christian college, 69, or 51.11 percent, identified themselves as an evangelical Christian; 48, or 35.56 percent, did not identify as an evangelical Christian; and 18, or 13.33 percent, said that they identified as an evangelical Christian when they entered college but no longer identify themselves in that manner (see figure 9).

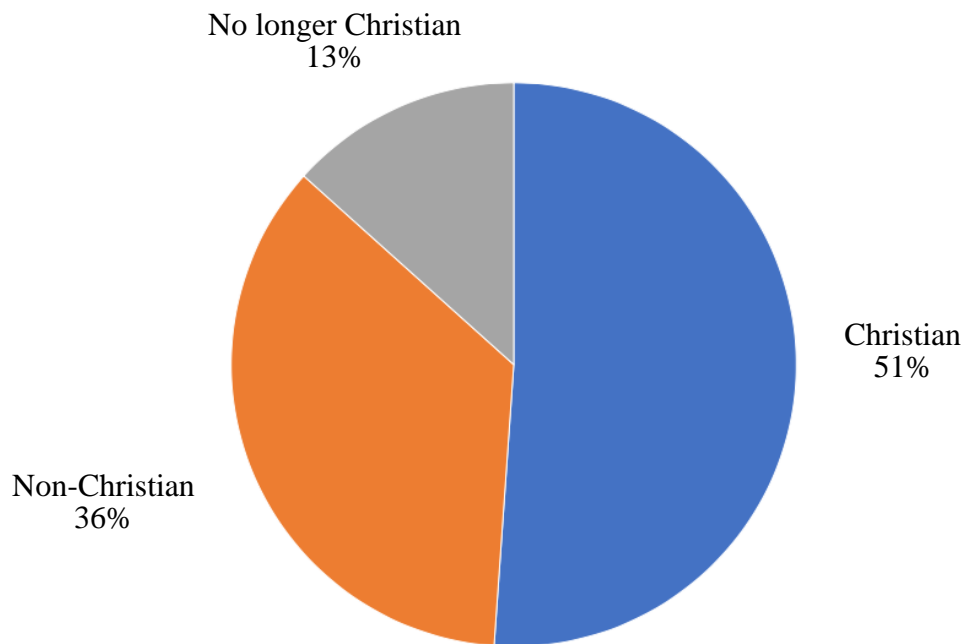


Figure 9. Distribution of personal faith for students attending private non-Christian college/university

Summary of Findings

The following section contains a detailed display of the findings as they relate to the research. All data contains the results of 387 population samples. This summary provides an explanation of the results of the dependent t-test in order to examine the differences between the faith-based questions as answered in the past compared to the questions answered in the present. Following a summary of the analysis of the findings, I evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research design.

Combined Data from All Private Schools

A dependent, paired samples t-test was used to examine the difference in the answers according to the students' past belief of entering private college as a freshman as compared to their current belief as either a college senior or recent graduate. This analysis can be used to determine differences over time within the same individual. In this instance, a highly significant p-value, which is a probability less than 5 percent change ($p < 0.05$), for each question pair shows that the mean difference, or decrease in confidence of core Christian doctrines, was meaningful. That is, confidence in core Christian doctrines diminished over time for students who attended private colleges or universities. The largest change was found in question 2, followed by questions 1, 5, 6, 3, and 4 (see tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Totals for private Christian and private non-Christian schools

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
Q1 Son of God, past belief	387	5.68	2.10
Q1 Son of God, current belief	387	5.29	2.33
Q2 Bible Inspired, past belief	387	2.62	2.04
Q2 Bible Inspired, current belief	387	3.07	2.25
Q3 God as Superstition, past belief	387	2.12	1.81
Q3 God as Superstition, current belief	387	2.43	2.07
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, past belief	387	5.68	2.07
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, current belief	387	5.41	2.26
Q5 God Aware of Action, past belief	387	2.08	1.79
Q5 God Aware of Actions, current belief	387	2.45	2.13
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, past b to belief	387	5.84	2.00
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, current belief	387	5.52	2.17

Table 6. Paired t-test for private Christian and private non-Christian schools

	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t-value	df	p-value
Q1: Son of God past/current	0.39	1.47	0.07	5.22	386	p<0.001
Q2: Bible Inspired past/current	-0.45	1.62	0.08	-5.43	386	p<0.001
Q3: God as Superstition past/current	-0.31	1.66	0.08	-3.61	386	p<0.001
Q4: Forgiveness through Jesus past/current	0.27	1.49	0.08	3.57	386	p<0.001
Q5: God aware of Actions past/current	-0.37	1.58	0.08	-4.59	386	p<0.001
Q6: Jesus Died and Arose past/current	0.32	1.32	0.07	4.81	386	p<0.001

Faith-based question 1: Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. The results of the dependent t-test for question 1 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean (M) of a freshman student = 5.68, and their standard deviation (SD) = 2.10. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 5.29, SD = 2.33 (see table 5). Belief in question 1 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.39 with a standard error of 0.07. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(386)=5.22$, $p<0.001$ (see table 6). Belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 2: The Bible was not inspired by God. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 2 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 2.62, and the SD = 2.04. Respondents report that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.07, SD = 2.25 (see table 5). Belief in question 2 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.45 with a standard error of 0.08. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a

student entered college until their senior year $t(386)=5.43, p<0.001$ (see table 6). Belief in the inspiration of Scripture significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 3: The concept of God is an old superstition. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 3 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 2.12, and the SD = 1.81. Respondents report that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 2.43, SD = 2.07 (see table 5). Belief in question 3 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.31 with a standard error of 0.08. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(386)=3.61, p<0.001$ (see table 6). Belief in God significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 4: God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. The results of the dependent t-test for question 4 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean M of a freshman student = 5.68, and the SD = 2.07. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 5.41, SD = 2.26 (see table 5). Belief in question 4 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.27 with a standard error of 0.08. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(386)=3.57, p<0.001$ (see table 6). Belief that God provided a way for forgiveness through Jesus significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 5: There is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 5 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student =

2.08, and the SD = 1.79. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 2.45, SD = 2.13 (see table 5). Belief in question 5 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.37 with a standard error of 0.08. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(386) = 4.59, p < 0.001$ (see table 6). Belief that God is aware of actions significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 6: Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day. The results of the dependent t-test for question 6 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 5.84, and the SD = 2.00. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 5.52, SD = 2.17 (see table 5). Belief in question 6 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.32 with a standard error of 0.07. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(386) = 4.81, p < 0.001$ (see table 6). Belief that Jesus was crucified, died, buried, but arose from the dead on the third day significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Data from Private Christian Schools

The data from private Christian schools were separated from private non-Christian schools, revealing that, among students attending private Christian college, the decrease in confidence was not significant. I used a dependent, paired samples t-test to examine the difference found in the answers according to the students' past belief of entering college as a freshman as compared to their current belief as either a college senior or recent graduate. In this instance there was not a highly significant p-value, which is a probability less than 5 percent change ($p < 0.05$), for each question pair.

Although data does not show a significant change in diminishment of Christian belief, this data is significant because it defies previous literature and research that shows a diminishment of Christian faith among college students. Data from this research shows was very little change of Christian beliefs among students attending private Christian colleges or universities (see tables 7 and 8). Because this sub-sample consisted of fewer than 384 responders, the results cannot be generalized to all students attending private Christian colleges and universities.

Table 7. Totals for private Christian schools

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
Q1 Son of God, past belief	252	5.77	2.11
Q1 Son of God, current belief	252	5.64	2.24
Q2 Bible Inspired, past belief	252	2.60	2.16
Q2 Bible Inspired, current belief	252	2.74	2.23
Q3 God as Superstition, past belief	252	2.05	1.84
Q3 God as Superstition, current belief	252	2.11	1.91
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, past belief	252	5.78	2.04
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, current belief	252	5.73	2.12
Q5 God Aware of Action, past belief	252	1.96	1.79
Q5 God Aware of Actions, current belief	252	2.01	1.87
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, past belief	252	5.93	1.94
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, current belief	252	5.82	2.07

Table 8. Paired t-test for private Christian schools

	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t-value	df	p-value
Q1: Son of God past/current	0.12	1.17	0.07	1.67	251	p=0.09
Q2: Bible Inspired past/current	-0.14	1.41	0.09	-1.57	251	p=0.11
Q3: God as Superstition past/current	-0.06	1.29	0.08	-0.73	251	p=0.46
Q4: Forgiveness through Jesus past/current	0.05	1.29	0.08	0.63	251	p=0.53
Q5: God aware of Actions past/current	-0.05	1.10	0.07	-0.80	251	p=0.42
Q6: Jesus Died and Arose past/current	0.11	1.11	0.07	1.60	251	p=0.11

Faith-based question 1, Christian school: Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. The results of the dependent t-test for question 1 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean (M) of a freshman student = 5.77, and their standard deviation (SD) = 2.11. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 5.64, SD = 2.24 (see table 7). Belief in question 1 was slightly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.12 with a standard error of 0.07. Data from this question shows a non-significant decrease ($p>0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(251)=1.67$, $p=0.09$ (see table 8). Although it was not significant, belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God slightly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 2, Christian school: The Bible was not inspired by God. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 2 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 2.60, and the SD = 2.16. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 2.74, SD = 2.23 (see table 7). Belief in question 2 was slightly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.14 with a

standard error of 0.09. Data from this question shows a non-significant decrease ($p>0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(251)=1.57$, $p=0.11$ (see table 8). Although it was not significant, belief in the inspiration of Scripture slightly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 3, Christian school: The concept of God is an old superstition. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 3 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 2.05, and the SD = 1.84. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 2.11, SD = 1.91 (see table 7). Belief in question 3 was slightly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.06 with a standard error of 0.08. Data from this question shows a non-significant decrease ($p>0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(251)=0.73$, $p=0.46$ (see table 8). Although it was not significant, belief in God slightly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 4, Christian school: God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. The results of the dependent t-test for question 4 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 5.78, and the SD = 2.04. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 5.73, SD = 2.12 (see table 7). Belief in question 4 was slightly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.05 with a standard error of 0.07. Data from this question shows a non-significant decrease ($p>0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(251)=0.63$, $p=0.53$ (see table 8). Although it was not significant, belief that God provided a way for forgiveness through Jesus slightly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 5, Christian school: There is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 5 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 1.96, and the SD = 1.79. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 2.01, SD = 1.87 (see table 7). Belief in question 5 was slightly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.05 with a standard error of 0.07. Data from this question shows a non-significant decrease ($p>0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(251)=0.80, p=0.42$ (see =table 8). Although it was not significant, belief that God is aware of our actions slightly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 6, Christian school: Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day. The results of the dependent t-test for question 6 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 5.93, and the SD = 1.94. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 5.82, SD = 2.07 (see table 7). Belief in question 6 was slightly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.11 with a standard error of 0.07. Data from this question shows a non-significant decrease ($p>0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(251)=1.60, p=0.11$ (see table 8). Although it was not significant, belief that Jesus was crucified, died, buried, but arose from the dead on the third day slightly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated

Data from Private Non-Christian Schools

The following data consists of the research from students attending private non-Christian colleges and universities. Data shows that among students attending private, non- Christian college, the decrease in confidence was significant. I used a dependent,

paired samples, t-test to examine the difference found in the answers according to the students' past belief of entering college as a freshman compared to their current belief as either a college senior or recent graduate. In this instance there was a highly significant p-value, which is a probability less than 5 percent change ($p < 0.05$), for each question pair (see Tables 9 and 10). This data is significant because the mean difference change among private non-Christian schools is so large that it is responsible for the overall decrease in confidence found in the combined private school respondents, both Christian and non-Christian schools (see tables 5 and 6). In other words, across the board confidence decreased even though it was not significant among private Christian schools. Because this sub-sample consisted of fewer than 384 responders, the results cannot be generalized to all students attending non-Christian private colleges and universities.

Table 9. Totals for private non-Christian schools

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
Q1 Son of God, past belief	135	5.53	2.08
Q1 Son of God, current belief	135	4.64	2.38
Q2 Bible Inspired, past belief	135	2.66	1.81
Q2 Bible Inspired, current belief	135	3.68	2.17
Q3 God as Superstition, past belief	135	2.27	1.75
Q3 God as Superstition, current belief	135	3.03	2.23
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, past belief	135	5.48	2.12
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, current belief	135	4.80	2.39
Q5 God Aware of Action, past belief	135	2.30	1.78
Q5 God Aware of Actions, current belief	135	3.26	2.35
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, past belief	135	5.67	2.12
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, current belief	135	4.95	2.26

Table 10. Paired t-test for private non-Christian schools

	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t-value	df	p-value
Q1: Son of God past/current	0.89	1.81	0.16	5.7	134	p<0.001
Q2: Bible Inspired past/current	-1.02	1.83	0.16	-6.50	134	p<0.001
Q3: God as Superstition past/current	-0.76	2.12	0.18	-4.17	134	p<0.001
Q4: Forgiveness through Jesus past/current	0.68	1.74	0.15	4.55	134	p<0.001
Q5: God aware of Actions past/current	-0.96	2.10	0.18	-5.28	134	p<0.001
Q6: Jesus Died and Arose past/current	0.72	1.58	0.14	5.28	134	p<0.001

Faith-based question 1, non-Christian school: Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. The results of the dependent t-test for question 1 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean (M) of a freshman student = 5.53, and their standard deviation (SD) = 2.08. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 4.64, SD = 2.38 (see table 9). Belief in question 1 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.89 with a standard error of 0.16. Data from this question shows a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(134)=5.70, p<0.001$ (see table 10). Belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 2, non-Christian school: The Bible was not inspired by God. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 2 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 2.66, and the SD = 1.81. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.68, SD = 2.17 (see table 9). Belief in question 2 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -1.02 with a standard error of 0.16. Data from this question shows a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in

confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(134)=6.50$, $p<0.001$ (see table 10). Belief in the inspiration of Scripture significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 3, non-Christian school: The concept of God is an old superstition. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 3 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 2.27, and the SD = 1.75. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.03, SD = 2.23 (see table 9). Belief in question 3 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.76 with a standard error of 0.18. Data from this question shows a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(134)=4.17$, $p<0.001$ (see Table 10). Belief in God significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 4, non-Christian school: God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. The results of the dependent t-test for question 4 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 5.48, and the SD = 2.12. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 4.80, SD = 2.39 (see table 9). Belief in question 4 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.68 with a standard error of 0.15. Data from this question shows a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(134)=4.55$, $p<0.001$ (see table 10). Belief that God provided a way for forgiveness through Jesus significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 5, non-Christian school: There is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 5 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 2.30, and the SD = 1.78. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.26, SD = 2.35 (see table 9). Belief in question 5 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.96 with a standard error of 0.18. Data from this question shows a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(134) = 5.28, p < 0.001$ (see table 10). Belief that God is aware of our actions significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 6, non-Christian school: Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day. The results of the dependent t-test for question 6 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 5.67, and the SD = 2.12. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 4.95, SD = 2.26 (see table 9). Belief in question 6 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.72 with a standard error of 0.14. Data from this question shows a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(134) = 5.28, p < 0.001$ (see table 10). Belief that Jesus was crucified, died, buried, but arose from the dead on the third day significantly decreased between the time students entered college and the time they graduated.

Data from Self-Identified Evangelical Christian Students

The main thrust of this survey was to determine factors relating to diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among students in private colleges and universities. There is an important sub-sample that can be found within this survey. This

sub-sample includes the 225 respondents who self-identified as an evangelical Christian. Because this sub-sample consisted of fewer than 384 responders, the results cannot be generalized to all self-identifying evangelical Christian students attending private colleges and universities.

I used a dependent, paired samples, t-test to examine the difference found in the answers according to the students' past belief of entering college as a freshman as compared to their current belief as either a self-reported college senior or recent graduate. This analysis can be used to determine differences over time within the same individual. In this instance a highly significant p-value, which is a probability less than 5 percent change ($p < 0.05$), for each question pair shows that the mean difference or drop in confidence was meaningful. That is, confidence statistically diminished over time for students who self-identified as evangelical Christian. Among the self-identified Christians, the biggest change was found in question 5, followed by 2, 1, 3 and 6 (see tables 11 and 12). The complete data for self-identified Christians can be found in Appendix 4, titled Data for Delf-Identified Evangelical Christian Students.

Table 11. Totals for self-identified Christians

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
Q1 Son of God, past belief	225	6.52	1.24
Q1 Son of God, current belief	225	6.28	1.54
Q2 Bible Inspired, past belief	225	1.96	1.70
Q2 Bible Inspired, current belief	225	2.26	1.99
Q3 God as Superstition, past belief	225	1.49	1.17
Q3 God as Superstition, current belief	225	1.72	1.52
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, past belief	225	6.62	0.97
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, current belief	225	6.52	1.23
Q5 God Aware of Action, past belief	225	1.41	0.98
Q5 God Aware of Actions, current belief	225	1.76	1.64
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, past b to belief	225	6.73	0.85
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, current belief	225	6.56	1.03

Table 12. Paired t-test for self-identified Christians

	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t-value	df	p-value
Q1: Son of God past/current	0.24	1.23	0.08	2.99	224	p<0.05
Q2: Bible Inspired past/current	-0.29	1.51	0.10	-2.91	224	p<0.05
Q3: God as Superstition past/current	-0.23	1.35	0.09	-2.57	224	p<0.05
Q4: Forgiveness through Jesus past/current	0.10	1.15	0.08	1.28	224	p=0.203
Q5: God aware of Actions past/current	-0.36	1.33	0.09	-4.01	224	p<0.001
Q6: Jesus Died and Arose past/current	0.17	1.01	0.07	2.56	224	p<0.05

Faith-based question 1, self-identified Christian: Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. The results of the dependent t-test for question 1 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean (M) of a freshman student = 6.52, and their standard deviation (SD) = 1.24. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 6.28, SD = 1.54 (see table 11). Belief in question 1 was significantly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.24 with a standard error of 0.08. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(224)=2.99$, $p<0.05$ (see table 12). Belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God significantly decreased between the time Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 2, self-identified Christian: The Bible was not inspired by God. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 2 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 1.96, and the SD = 1.70. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 2.26, SD = 1.99 (see table 11). Belief in question 2 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.29

with a standard error of 0.10. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(224) = -2.91, p < 0.05$ (see table 12). Belief in the inspiration of Scripture significantly decreased between the time Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 3, self-identified Christian: The concept of God is an old superstition. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 3 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 1.49, and the SD = 1.17. Respondents report that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 1.72, SD = 1.52 (see table 11). Belief in question 3 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.23 with a standard error of 0.09. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(224) = -2.57, p < 0.05$ (see table 12). Belief in God significantly decreased between the time Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 4, self-identified Christian: God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. The results of the dependent t-test for question 4 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean M of a freshman student = 6.62, and the SD = 0.97. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 6.52, SD = 1.23 (see table 11). Belief in question 4 was higher on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.10 with a standard error of 0.08. Data from this question reports a non-significant decrease ($p > 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(224) = 1.28, p = 0.203$ (see table 12). Belief that God provided a way for forgiveness through Jesus did not significantly decrease between the time Christian students entered college and the time

they graduated.

Faith-based question 5, self-identified Christian: There is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 5 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 1.41, and the SD = 0.98. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 1.76, SD = 1.64 (see table 11). Belief in question 5 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.36 with a standard error of 0.09. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(224) = -4.01, p < 0.001$ (see table 12). Belief that God is aware of actions significantly decreased between the time Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 6, self-identified Christian: Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day. The results of the dependent t-test for question 6 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 6.73, and the SD = 0.85. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 6.56, SD = 1.03 (see table 11). Belief in question 6 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.17 with a standard error of 0.07. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(224) = 2.56, p < 0.05$ (see table 12). Belief that Jesus was crucified, died, buried, but arose from the dead on the third day significantly decreased between the time Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Data from Self-Identified non-Christian Students

A secondary sub-sample can be found within this survey that includes 162 respondents who self-identified as non-Christian. Because this sub-sample consisted of

fewer than 384 responders, the results cannot be generalized to all self-identifying non-Christian students attending private colleges and universities.

I used a dependent, paired samples, t-test to examine the difference found in the answers according to the students' past belief of entering college as a freshman as compared to their current belief as either a self-reported college senior or recent graduate. This analysis can be used to determine differences over time within the same individual. In this instance a highly significant p-value, which is a probability less than 5 percent change ($p < 0.05$), for each question pair shows that the mean difference or drop in confidence was meaningful. That is, confidence statistically diminished over time for students who self-identified as non-Christian. Among the self-identified non-Christians, the biggest change was found in question 2, followed by 1, 6, 4, 3, and 5 (see tables 13 and 14). The complete data for self-identified Christians can be found in Appendix 4, titled Data for Self-Identified Evangelical Christian Students.

Table 13. Totals for self-identified non-Christians

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
Q1 Son of God, past belief	162	4.52	2.47
Q1 Son of God, current belief	162	3.93	2.56
Q2 Bible Inspired, past belief	162	3.53	2.14
Q2 Bible Inspired, current belief	162	4.19	2.10
Q3 God as Superstition, past belief	162	3.00	2.15
Q3 God as Superstition, current belief	162	3.41	2.32
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, past belief	162	4.37	2.45
Q4 Forgiveness through Jesus, current belief	162	3.86	2.45
Q5 God Aware of Action, past belief	162	3.01	2.21
Q5 God Aware of Actions, current belief	162	3.40	2.37
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, past b to belief	162	4.60	2.46
Q6 Jesus Died & Arose, current belief	162	4.07	2.50

Table 14. Paired t-test for self-identified non-Christians

	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t-value	df	p-value
Q1: Son of God past/current	0.6	1.73	0.14	4.34	161	p<0.001
Q2: Bible Inspired past/current	-0.66	1.74	0.14	-4.83	161	p<0.001
Q3: God as Superstition past/current	-0.41	2.01	0.16	-2.57	161	p<0.05
Q4: Forgiveness through Jesus past/current	0.51	1.85	0.15	3.53	161	P<0.001
Q5: God aware of Actions past/current	-0.39	1.88	0.15	-2.63	161	p<0.01
Q6: Jesus Died and Arose past/current	0.53	1.64	0.13	4.12	161	p<0.001

Faith-based question 1, self-identified non-Christian: Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. The results of the dependent t-test for question 1 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean (M) of a freshman student = 4.52, and their standard deviation (SD) = 2.47. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.93, SD = 2.56 (see table 13). Belief in question 1 was significantly lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.60 with a standard error of 0.14. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p<0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(161)=4.34$, $p<0.001$ (see table 14). Belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God significantly decreased between the time non-Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 2, self-identified non-Christian: The Bible was not inspired by God. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 2 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 3.53, and the SD = 2.14. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 4.19, SD = 2.10 (see table 13). Belief in question 2 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.66

with a standard error of 0.14. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(161) = -4.83, p < 0.001$ (see table 14). Belief in the inspiration of Scripture significantly decreased between the time non-Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 3, self-identified non-Christian: The concept of God is an old superstition. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 3 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 3.00, and the SD = 2.15. Respondents report that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.41, SD = 2.32 (see table 13). Belief in question 3 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.41 with a standard error of .16. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(161) = -2.57, p < 0.05$ (see table 14). Belief in God significantly decreased between the time non-Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 4, self-identified non-Christian: God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. The results of the dependent t-test for question 4 are as follows. Upon entering college, the mean M of a freshman student = 4.37, and the SD = 2.45. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.86, SD = 2.45 (see table 13). Belief in question 4 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.51 with a standard error of 0.15. Data from this question reports a significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(161) = 3.53, p < 0.001$ (see table 14). Belief that God provided a way for forgiveness through Jesus significantly decreased between the time non-Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 5, self-identified non-Christian: There is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions. The scale for this question was reverse coded. The results of the dependent t-test for question 5 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 3.01, and the SD = 2.21. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 3.40, SD = 2.37 (see table 13). Belief in question 5 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was -0.39 with a standard error of 0.15. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(161) = -2.63$, $p < 0.01$ (see table 14). Belief that God is aware of actions significantly decreased between the time non-Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Faith-based question 6, self-identified non-Christian: Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day. The results of the dependent t-test for question 6 are as follows. Upon entering college, the M of a freshman student = 4.60, and the SD = 2.46. Respondents reported that the confidence level of their beliefs changed by the end of college so that M = 4.07, SD = 2.50 (see table 13). Belief in question 6 was lower on average at the end of college. The mean difference was 0.53 with a standard error of 0.13. Data from this question reports a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence from the time a student entered college until their senior year $t(161) = 4.12$, $p < 0.001$ (see table 14). Belief that Jesus was crucified, died, buried, but arose from the dead on the third day significantly decreased between the time non-Christian students entered college and the time they graduated.

Regression Model

In this study, regression was used to predict the factors that relate to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among students attending private colleges or universities. Data was coded such that higher values indicated higher

confidence or belief. Specifically, questions 2, 3, and 5 were reverse coded. Questions 1, 4, and 6 were not reverse coded. Rather than using a scatter diagram, I used a regression equation to show predictions. In the regression equation Y' stands for the predicted score on the dependent variable, 1.66 in the constant (or intercept), and b is the regression coefficient.⁴

$$Y' = 1.66 + b_1 (\text{identify as Christian}) + b_2 (\text{senior vs. recent graduate}) + b_3 (\text{private Christian vs. private non-Christian school}) + b_4 (\text{geographic region of school}) + b_5 (\text{church attendance})$$

Overall the model was highly significant $F(5, 381) = 19.94, p < 0.001$. The intercept was 1.66. The model had a $R^2 = 0.21$, meaning 21 percent of the variation in the differences of belief between F and N can be explained by the model.

The preceding model found an intercept of 1.66. Identifying as a Christian was highly significant and positive toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = 0.59$, $SEE = 0.16$, $t = 3.79$, $p < 0.001$). Senior versus recent graduate was highly significant toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = -3.05$, $SEE = 0.75$, $t = -4.06$, $p < 0.001$). Private Christian versus private non-Christian school was highly significant toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = 3.14$, $SEE = 0.82$, $t = 3.84$, $p < 0.001$). Geographic region was non-significant toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = 0.30$, $SEE = 0.27$, $t = 1.11$, $p = 0.27$). Church attendance was highly significant toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = -1.46$, $SEE = 0.38$, $t = -3.86$, $p < 0.001$).

Four out of the five variables were significant predictors of the composite score change over time. Scores decreased over time so that a positive estimate (parameter) for identifying as a Christian would mean as a person changed to not identifying as a Christian their difference scores increase significantly, meaning that they become less confident in their Christian beliefs. Recent private college graduates are negatively associated with difference scores, meaning that a score is lower for private college graduates. The data

⁴ Huck, *Reading Statistics and Research*, 572.

received from students who attended a Christian school is significant because the data reveals that as students move from Christian to non-Christian schools the difference in confidence of belief composite score also gets larger. The larger composite score means that there is less belief. Church attendance was negatively related, meaning that the more frequently a person attends church the lower the change in their composite difference scores.

It is important to note that the results of this research do not clearly conclude that students who attend private Christian universities or colleges will remain strong in their faith. This research may support the value of Christian higher education because it is conceivable or possible that Christian institutions of higher education are more effective at helping students maintain strength in their faith. However, this is simply one possibility. Another possibility, for example, is that those students and families who make the sacrifice to attend or send their child to a private Christian institution of higher education may be more inclined to a stronger faith.

Open-Ended Question

The final question of the survey tool asked the following open-ended question: “What beliefs about God or religion have been the most difficult for you to believe or to defend?” I found 11 major religious themes from the answers given by the population of students attending private colleges or universities. Data from those who did not answer the open-ended question were excluded. In figure 10, the numbers along the left column represent the total number of answers and the bottom row displays the major religious themes. The major themes found are as follows:

1. The Problem of Evil and Human Suffering
2. God—His Existence, the Trinity, His Personal Interaction with People
3. Gender Roles & Identity
4. The Bible—Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Authority
5. Jesus—Salvation, Resurrection, His Deity

6. Faith and Knowledge
7. Creation
8. The Spiritual Realm including Heaven & Hell
9. Free Will
10. The Church
11. Morality—Excluding Gender Roles Issues

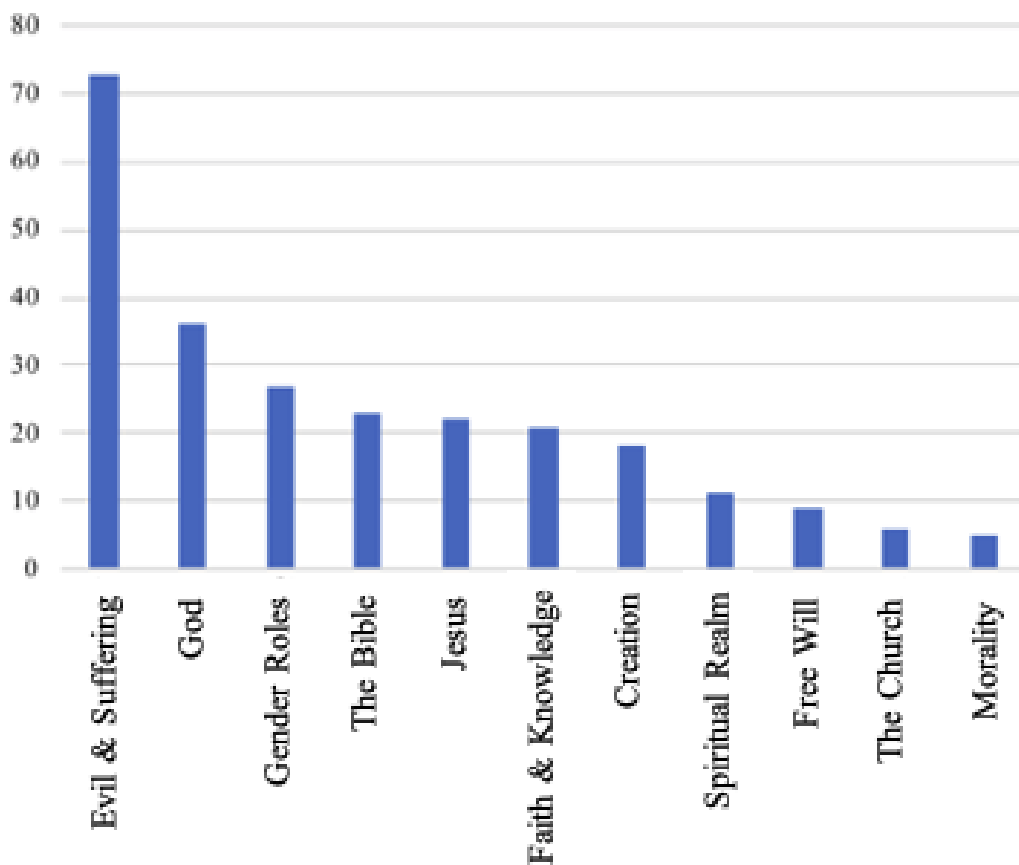


Figure 10. Distribution of responses to the open-ended question

The population for the survey totaled 387 students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 387 people who completed the survey, 251 provided an answer to the

open-ended question, and 136 did not provide an answer. The following percentages are based on the 251 responses to the open-ended question.

The major religious theme that received the most responses among students attending private colleges or universities were the issues surrounding the problem of evil and human suffering. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 73, or 29.08 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The problem of evil, suffering, pain, and God's judgement on humankind were included within the topic of Evil and Suffering.

Issues surrounding the person of God received the second highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 36, or 14.34 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The existence of God, the Trinity, and God's personal interaction with humankind were included within the topic of God.

Issues surrounding gender roles and identity received the third highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 27, or 10.76 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The negative treatment of homosexuals, homophobia, God's judgement on members of the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ as leaders in the church, LGBTQ lifestyle, and LGBTQ as a choice were included within the topic of Gender Roles and Identity.

Issues surrounding the Bible received the fourth highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 23, or 9.16 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The inerrancy, infallibility, and the authority of Scripture were included within the topic of the Bible.

Issues surrounding Jesus received the fifth highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools,

22, or 8.76 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Salvation through Christ, Jesus' resurrection, and his deity were included within the topic of Jesus.

Issues surrounding faith and knowledge received the sixth highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 21, or 8.38 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Science (excluding creation), knowledge, truth, believing that which cannot be seen, and intelligence were included within the topic of faith and knowledge.

Issues surrounding Creation received the seventh highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 18, or 7.17 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. God as creator, young earth, and the evolutionary process were included within the topic of Creation.

Issues surrounding the spiritual realm received the eighth highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. 11, or 4.39 percent, of the 251 respondents from private schools reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Heaven, hell, and the influence of spirits were included within the topic of the Spiritual Realm.

Issues surrounding free will received the ninth highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 9, or 3.56 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Predestination were included within the topic of Free Will.

Issues surrounding the church received the tenth highest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 6, or 2.40 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend.

Issues surrounding morality received the fewest response among students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 251 respondents from private schools, 5, or 2 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. All moral issues were included within the topic of general morality. There were no issues surrounding gender roles included in this category.

Knowing that there was a significant difference between the results of students who attended private Christian institutions and private non-Christian institutions, data was analyzed from that standpoint. When separating the two from one another, the variance in data showed a difference between the ranking of the major religious themes. The results are found in figure 11.

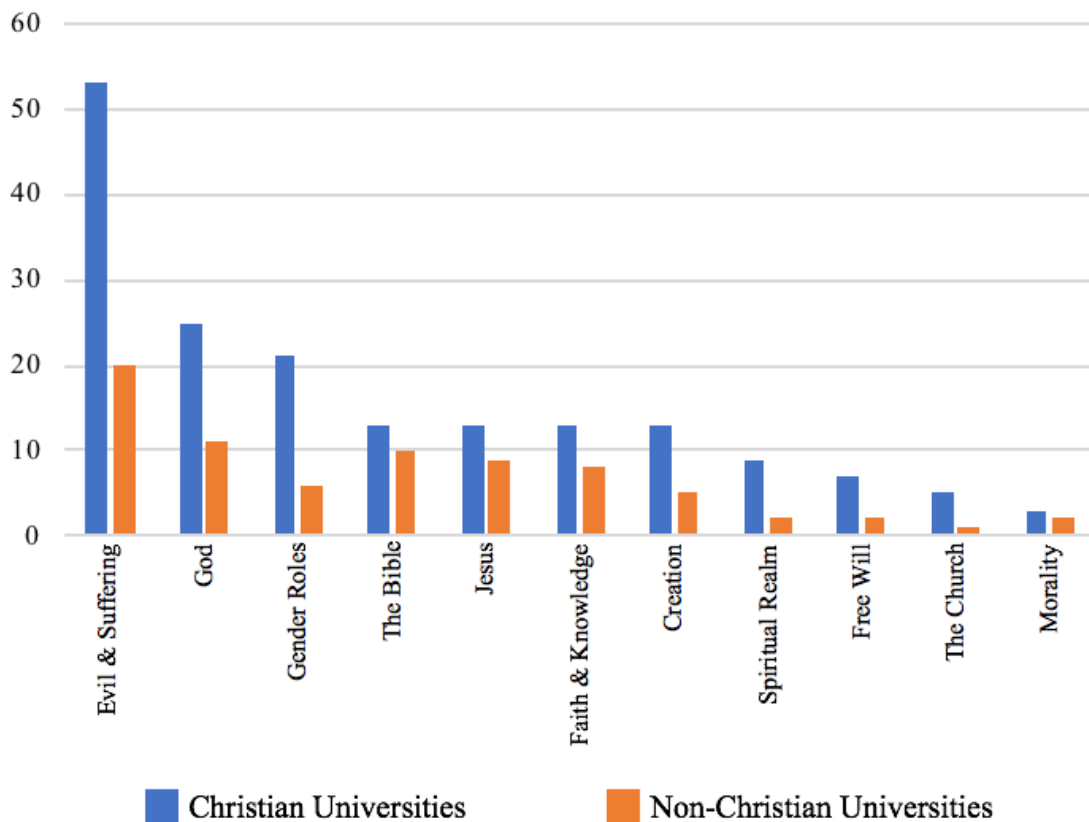


Figure 11. Distribution of separated responses to the open-ended question

In figure 11, the numbers along the left column represent the total number of answers and the bottom row displays the major religious theme. The blue bars represent private Christian universities, and the orange bars represent private non-Christian universities. The major themes found are as follows:

1. Evil & Suffering—including evil, pain, suffering, and judgement
2. God—His Existence, the Trinity, His Personal Interaction with People
3. Gender Roles & Identity
4. The Bible—Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Authority
5. Jesus—Salvation, Resurrection, His Deity
6. Faith and Knowledge
7. Creation
8. The Spiritual Realm including Heaven & Hell
9. Free Will
10. The Church
11. Morality—Excluding gender roles

The population for the survey totaled 387 students attending private colleges or universities. Of the 387 people who completed the survey, 251 provided an answer to the open-ended question and 136 did not provide an answer. From the 251 responses to the open-ended question, 175 of the responses came from students or recent graduates from private Christian colleges or universities and 76 came from students or recent graduates from private non-Christian colleges or universities.

Responses to the open-ended question from private Christian colleges and universities. The major religious theme that received the most responses among students from private Christian schools were the issues surrounding evil and suffering. Of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools, 53, or 30.28 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The problem of evil, suffering,

pain, and God's judgement on humankind were included within the topic of evil and suffering.

Issues surrounding the person of God received the second highest response among students from private Christian schools. Of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools, 25, or 14.29 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The existence of God, the Trinity, and God's personal interaction with humankind were included within the topic of God.

Issues surrounding gender roles and identity received the third highest response among students from private Christian schools. Of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools, 21, or 12 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The negative treatment of homosexuals, homophobia, God's judgement on members of the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ as leaders in the church, LGBTQ lifestyle, and LGBTQ as a choice were included within the topic of gender roles and identity.

Four major religious themes received the fourth highest response among students from private Christian schools. These major religious themes included Creation, the Bible, Jesus, and Faith and Knowledge. In each of these categories, 13, or 7.43 percent, of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of creation; God as creator, young earth, and the evolutionary process were included. Within the theme of the Bible; the inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the Scripture were included. Within the theme of Jesus; salvation through Christ, Jesus' resurrection, and his deity were included. Within the theme of faith and knowledge; science (excluding creation), knowledge, truth, believing that which cannot be seen, and intelligence were included.

Issues surrounding the spiritual realm received the fifth highest response among students from private Christian schools. Of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools, 9, or 5.14 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to

believe or defend. Heaven, hell, and the influence of spirits were included within the topic of the spiritual realm.

Issues surrounding free will received the sixth highest response among students from private Christian schools. Of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools, 7, or 4 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Predestination and individual choice were included within the topic of free will.

Issues surrounding the church received the seventh highest response among students from private Christian schools. Of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools, 5, or 2.86 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend.

Issues surrounding morality received the fewest response. Of the 175 respondents from private Christian schools, 3, or 1.71 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Any moral issues were included in this topic. Any topics dealing with gender roles were excluded.

Responses to the open-ended question from private non-Christian colleges and universities. The major religious theme that received the most responses among students from private non-Christian schools were the issues surrounding the problem of evil and suffering. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 20, or 26.31 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The problem of evil, suffering, pain, and God's judgement on humankind were included within the topic of evil and suffering.

Issues surrounding the person of God received the second highest response among students from private non-Christian schools. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 11, or 14.47 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The existence of God, the Trinity, and God's personal interaction with humankind were included within the topic of God.

Issues surrounding the Bible received the third highest response among students

from private non-Christian schools. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 10, or 13.16 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the Scripture were included within the topic of the Bible.

Issues surrounding Jesus received the fourth highest response among students from private non-Christian schools. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 9, or 11.84 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Salvation through Christ, Jesus' resurrection, and his deity were included within the topic of Jesus.

Issues surrounding faith and knowledge received the fifth highest response among students from private non-Christian schools. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 8, or 10.53 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Science (excluding creation), knowledge, truth, believing that which cannot be seen, and intelligence were included within the topic of faith and knowledge.

Issues surrounding Gender Roles and Identity received the sixth highest response among students from private non-Christian schools. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 6, or 7.89 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The negative treatment of homosexuals, homophobia, God's judgement on members of the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ as leaders in the church, LGBTQ lifestyle, and LGBTQ as a choice were included within the topic of Gender Roles and Identity.

Issues surrounding Creation received the seventh highest response among students from private non-Christian schools. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 5, or 6.58 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. God as creator, young earth, and the evolutionary process were included within the topic of Creation.

Three major religious themes received the eighth highest response among students from private non-Christian schools. These major religious themes included free will, the spiritual realm, and morality. In each of these categories, 2, or 2.63 percent, of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of free will, predestination and individual choice were included. Within the theme of the spiritual realm; heaven, hell, and the influence of spirits were included. Within the topic of morality, all moral issues were included. Gender roles were excluded from the topic of morality.

Issues surrounding the church received the fewest response among students from private non-Christian schools. Of the 76 respondents from private non-Christian schools, 1, or 1.33 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend.

Table 15 displays the religious theme rankings provided by the responses from the open-ended question. The first column titled, “Private Institutions Combined” displays the combined responses from the population of students attending private colleges or universities. The second column titled “Private Christian Institutions” displays the responses from the population of students attending private Christian colleges or universities. The third column titled “Private Non-Christian Institutions” displays the responses from the population of students attending private non-Christian colleges or universities. The percentages listed in table 15 show the actual percentage of responses that the corresponding major religious theme received within the column.

Table 15. Ranking of major religious themes among private institutions

Private Institutions Combined		Private Christian Institutions		Private Non-Christian Institutions	
1	Evil & Suffering 29.08%	1	Evil & Suffering 30.28%	1	Evil & Suffering 26.31%
2	God 14.34%	2	God 14.29%	2	God 14.47%
3	Gender Roles 10.76%	3	Gender Roles 12.00%	3	The Bible 13.16%
4	The Bible 9.16%	4	Creation 7.43%	4	Jesus 11.84%
5	Jesus 8.76%	4	The Bible 7.43%	5	Faith & Knowledge 10.53%
6	Faith & Knowledge 8.38%	4	Jesus 7.43%	6	Gender Roles 7.89%
7	Creation 7.17%	4	Faith & Knowledge 7.43%	7	Creation 6.58%
8	Spiritual Realm 4.39%	5	Spiritual Realm 5.14%	8	Free Will 2.63%
9	Free Will 3.56%	6	Free Will 4.00%	8	Spiritual Realm 2.63%
10	The Church 2.40%	7	The Church 2.86%	8	Morality 2.63%
11	Morality 2.00%	8	Morality 1.71%	9	The Church 1.33%

Students attending both private Christian and private non-Christian colleges and universities agreed on their first and second most difficult Christian beliefs. The problem of Evil and Suffering was resoundingly the highest among the 11 religious themes that students identified as being the most difficult to believe or defend. Disagreement between the two types of private colleges and universities entered at the third highest rank. Students attending private Christian institutions ranked Gender Roles and Identity as the third highest, whereas students attending private non-Christian institutions ranked it as sixth with almost 5 percentage points between them.

Another significant difference was the ranking of the Bible. Only 7.43 percent of students attending private Christian institutions reported the Bible as most difficult to defend, whereas 13.16 percent of students attending private non-Christian institutions reported it as most difficult to defend. The Bible exhibited the greatest difference than any

other religious theme with almost 6 percentage point separating private Christian school students and private non-Christian school students.

Open-Ended Question: Responses from Self-Identified Christian versus Self-Identified Non-Christian

One area of interest in this study includes the self-identified Christian versus the self-identified non-Christian. The result of this survey shows that both Christians and non-Christians attending private college find many of the same topics about God or religion difficult to believe or defend. When separating the two from one another, the variance in data showed a difference between the ranking of the major religious themes. The results are found in figure 12.

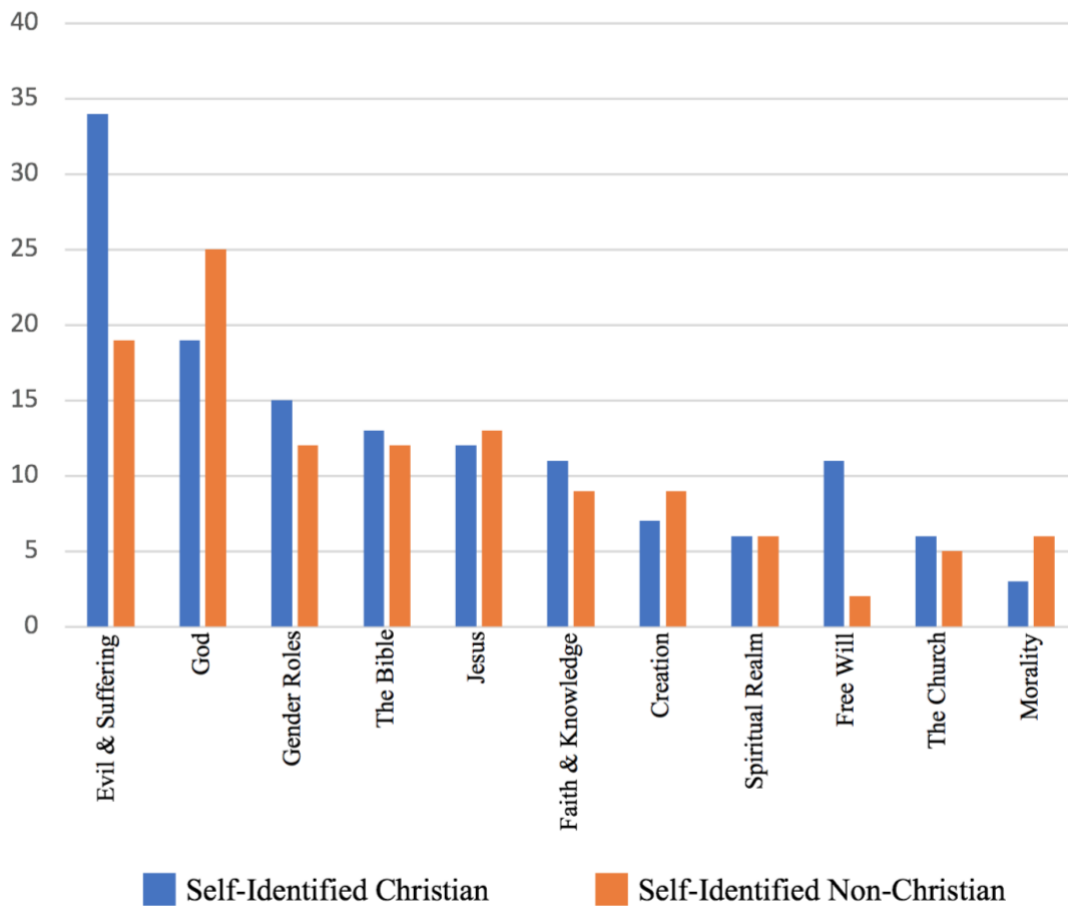


Figure 12. Distribution of Christian versus non-Christian responses.

In figure 12, the numbers along the left column represent the total number of answers and the bottom row displays the major religious theme. The blue bars represent self-identified Christian students at private colleges or universities, and the orange bars represent self-identified non-Christian students at private colleges or universities. The major themes found are as follows:

1. Evil & Suffering—including evil, pain, suffering, and judgement
2. God—His Existence, the Trinity, His Personal Interaction with People
3. Gender Roles & Identity
4. The Bible—Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Authority
5. Jesus—Salvation, Resurrection, His Deity
6. Faith and Knowledge
7. Creation
8. The Spiritual Realm including Heaven & Hell
9. Free Will
10. The Church
11. Morality—Excluding gender roles

The population for the sub-sample of self-identified Christians and non-Christians totaled 255 responses. Of the 255 responses, 137 self-identified as Christian and 118 self-identified as non-Christian. Because this sub-sample consisted of fewer than 384 responders, the results cannot be generalized to all students attending private colleges and universities.

Responses to the open-ended question from self-identified Christian students attending private colleges and universities. The major religious theme that received the most responses among self-identified Christian students were the issues surrounding evil and suffering. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 34, or 24.82 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The

problem of evil, suffering, pain, and God's judgement on humankind were included within the topic of evil and suffering.

Issues surrounding the person of God received the second highest response among self-identified Christian students. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 19, or 13.87 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The existence of God, the Trinity, and God's personal interaction with humankind were included within the topic of God.

Issues surrounding gender roles and identity received the third highest response among self-identified Christian students. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 15, or 10.95 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The negative treatment of homosexuals, homophobia, God's judgement on members of the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ as leaders in the church, LGBTQ lifestyle, and LGBTQ as a choice were included within the topic of gender roles and identity.

Issues surrounding the Bible received the fourth highest response among self-identified Christian students. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 13, or 9.49 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of the Bible; the inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the Scripture were included.

Issues surrounding Jesus received the fifth highest response among self-identified Christian students. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 12, or 8.76 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of Jesus; salvation through Christ, Jesus' resurrection, and his deity were included.

Two major religious themes tied at sixth place. These major religious themes included Faith and Knowledge, and Free Will. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 11, or 8.03 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to

believe or defend. Within the theme of faith and knowledge; science (excluding creation), knowledge, truth, believing that which cannot be seen, and intelligence were included. Within the theme of free will; predestination and individual choice were included.

Issues surrounding Creation received the seventh highest response among self-identified Christian students. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 7, or 5.11 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of creation; God as creator, young earth, and the evolutionary process were included.

Two major religious themes tied at eighth place. These major religious themes included the spiritual realm and church. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 6, or 4.38 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of the spiritual realm; heaven, hell, and the influence of spirits were included. Within the theme of church; religion as an institution was included.

Issues surrounding morality received the fewest response. Of the 137 respondents from private schools, 3, or 2.18 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Any moral issues were included in this topic. Any topics dealing with gender roles were excluded.

Responses to the open-ended question from self-identified non-Christian students attending private colleges and universities. The major religious theme that received the most responses among self-identified non-Christian students were the issues the person of God. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 25, or 21.19 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. The existence of God, the Trinity, and God's personal interaction with humankind were included within the topic of God.

Issues surrounding evil and suffering received the second highest response among self-identified non-Christian students. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 19, or 16.10 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to

believe or defend. The problem of evil, suffering, pain, and God's judgement on humankind were included within the topic of evil and suffering.

Issues surrounding Jesus received the third highest response among self-identified non-Christian students. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 13, or 11.02 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of Jesus; salvation through Christ, Jesus' resurrection, and his deity were included.

Two major religious themes tied at fourth place among self-identified non-Christian students. These major religious themes included the Bible and gender roles. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 12, or 10.17 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of the Bible; the inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the Scripture were included. The negative treatment of homosexuals, homophobia, God's judgement on members of the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ as leaders in the church, LGBTQ lifestyle, and LGBTQ as a choice were included within the topic of gender roles and identity.

Two major religious themes tied at fifth place among self-identified non-Christian students. These major religious themes included creation, and faith and knowledge. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 9, or 7.63 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of creation; God as creator, young earth, and the evolutionary process were included. Within the theme of faith and knowledge; science (excluding creation), knowledge, truth, believing that which cannot be seen, and intelligence were included.

Two major religious themes tied at sixth place among self-identified non-Christian students. These major religious themes included the spiritual realm and morality. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 6, or 5.08 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of free will; predestination and individual choice were included. Within the theme of the spiritual

realm; heaven, hell, and the influence of spirits were included. Any moral issues were included in this topic. Any topics dealing with gender roles were excluded.

Issues surrounding the Church received the third highest response among self-identified non-Christian students. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 5, or 4.24 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of church; religion as an institution was included.

Issues surrounding free will received the fewest response among self-identified non-Christian students. Of the 118 respondents from private schools, 2, or 1.69 percent, reported that this was the most difficult Christian belief to believe or defend. Within the theme of free will; predestination and individual choice were included.

Table 16 displays the religious theme rankings provided by the responses from the open-ended question among self-identified Christian and non-Christian students. The first column titled, “Self-Identified Christian” displays the responses from the population of students who self-identified as a Christian. The second column titled “Self-Identified Non-Christian” displays the responses from the population of students who self-identified as a non-Christian. The percentages listed in table 16 show the actual percentage of responses that the corresponding major religious theme received within the column.

Table 16. Ranking of themes among self-identified Christians and non-Christians

Self-Identified Christian		Self-Identified Non-Christian	
1	Evil & Suffering 324.82%	1	God 21.19%
2	God 13.87%	2	Evil & Suffering 16.10%
3	Gender Roles 10.95%	3	Jesus 11.02%
4	The Bible 9.49%	4	Gender Issues 10.17%
5	Jesus 8.76%	4	The Bible 10.17%
6	Faith & Knowledge 8.03%	5	Faith & Knowledge 7.63%
6	Free Will 8.03%	5	Creation 7.63%
7	Creation 5.11%	6	Morality 5.08%
8	Spiritual Realm 4.38%	6	Spiritual Realm 5.08%
8	The Church 4.38%	7	The Church 4.24%
9	Morality 2.18%	8	Free Will 1.69%

Qualitative Characteristics within the Research Sample

The qualitative research process consisted of six interviews. I conducted six follow-up interviews with private college seniors or recent graduates who desired to provide additional feedback for the study. Not every student who expressed an interest in the qualitative portion of the study was selected to participate in the follow-up interview. The interviews were conducted via a phone call and I used a template of questions to provide consistency for the interviews (see appendix 1).

The follow-up interview consisted of three sections: (1) two questions

regarding beliefs about God or religion that are difficult to defend, (2) one question about religious activities the respondent and their parents practiced in their home, and (3) two questions regarding church resources for in-home discipleship.

The two questions I asked in the first section consisted of the following questions with the same choices for answering.

1. What beliefs do other people have about God or religion that are difficult to defend?
2. What belief about God or religion do you find most difficult to believe or to defend?
3. Answer Selections:
 - a. Genesis account of creation
 - b. God exists in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
 - c. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ
 - d. Jesus Christ is the only way to God
 - e. God allows evil and suffering
 - f. Men and women are created equal, but different
 - g. The inerrancy of the Bible (the Bible is completely true)
 - h. The concept of eternal paradise (heaven)
 - i. The concept of eternal punishment (hell)
 - j. The active practice of homosexuality is a sin
 - k. Other

From the six people interviewed, one comment particularly stood out. When asked the second question regarding what belief about God or religion they found most difficult to believe or defend, the response sparked an interesting conversation. The respondent stated that faith in general was the reason he questioned so much about Christianity. He said it was very difficult to rationalize believing in something that could not be measured in a scientific way. Because of this, he questioned the existence of God which had a ripple effect for many Christian beliefs to include belief in Christ and the Bible, especially a literal interpretation of the written stories in scripture. He went on to say that he found it extremely difficult to stand against secular scientific thought in science classes. The respondent attended a private non-Christian university.

The previous individual was contacted because his survey results showed a decrease in Christian belief over his private college years. The respondent indicated on his survey that he was willing to participate in a follow-up interview so I e-mailed him to

see if he was willing to discuss his beliefs in greater detail. This led to the follow-up phone call between me and the respondent. The phone call lasted less than half of an hour. The respondent was assured that his personal information would remain private and would not be recorded anywhere within the dissertation. The respondent agreed that his demographic information that was asked at the beginning of the survey could be reported. In this instance, the respondent no longer identified himself as an evangelical Christian. He graduated from a private, non-Christian university in the Mid-West approximately one month prior to participating in this study. He was a full-time student who took classes on campus. He had not attended any church services in the past thirty days. Generally speaking, the respondent was willing to discuss his beliefs about God and religion.

The second section of the follow-up interviews reviewed the frequency of religious activity that took place in the home of the respondent. The respondent was asked, “What, if any, religious activities did you practice in your home with your parents and what was their frequency?” The respondent chose from the following options:

1. Praying as a family
2. Devotions or Bible study/reading
3. Scripture memory
4. Christian service projects
5. Worship in the form of singing
6. Conversations about current issues according to a biblical worldview
7. Defending your faith (apologetics)
8. Sharing your faith (evangelism)

Frequency was measured by selecting one of four options: (1) frequently, (2) somewhat frequently, (3) infrequently, or (4) almost never.

From the responses of this question, one response in particular stood from the rest. One person commented that he never participated in any of the items from the list with his parents within the context of his home. He only practiced these Christian

activities within the context of his church, and only some of these activities at best. He went on to comment that he did not think his parents were aware that they should lead him or his siblings in these disciplines at home. He asked whether this was the responsibility of his church or his parents.

The previous individual's survey results showed no change in Christian belief over his private college years. The phone call with the respondent lasted approximately thirty minutes. The respondent was assured that his personal information would remain private and would not be recorded anywhere within the dissertation. The respondent agreed that his demographic information that was asked at the beginning of the survey could be used. In this instance, the respondent identified himself as an evangelical Christian. He was a current senior at a Christian university in the South. He was a full-time student who took classes on campus. He had attended more than 5 church services in the past thirty days.

In the third and final section of the follow-up interviews respondents answered two questions regarding church resources for in-home discipleship. The questions consisted of the following with the same answer choices for all questions.

1. What, if any, resources did your church provide to your parents for discipleship within your home?
2. What, if any, resources did your family utilize that was provided by your church?
3. Answer Selections:
 - a. Prayer guides
 - b. Devotional guides
 - c. Scripture memorization
 - d. Christian service opportunities
 - e. Family worship opportunities
 - f. Articles/training on approaching current issues with a biblical worldview
 - g. Articles/training on defending your faith (apologetics)
 - h. Articles/training on sharing your faith (evangelism)
 - i. I am unsure what my church provided
 - j. None

The responses to the first question varied slightly. Two of the individuals being interviewed responded that they were unsure, two of the interviewees responded that they

knew their church provided discipleship guides, and two of the interviewees responded that they memorized Scripture as a child through church programs in addition to using discipleship guides. One of the interviewees reported that when she entered high school she no longer memorized Scripture.

Among the six students being interviewed, the responses to the second question were similar to each other. Four of the six people being interviewed said they did not utilize any of the resources of which they were asked. Two of the six respondents reported that they used devotional guides in their homes infrequently and that they stopped conducting devotions as a family altogether once they entered high school and or junior high.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The purpose of this section is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research design, focusing on the reliability of the Short Christian Orthodoxy (SCO) scale, the collection of demographic data, and the research tool used for this study.

Evaluation of the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale

The SCO scale was foundational for the research tool of this study. The scale identified beliefs that fall into the following categories: the existence of God, Jesus as divine, Jesus' mission to save humankind, Jesus' death and resurrection, and the inspiration of the Bible. The various items that made up the scale represented one or more of those elements. A tenant of the scale is that it defines Christian orthodoxy.⁵ The six-item SCO Scale was both a robust and standardized survey instrument that added great value to this research by identifying and quantifying core doctrines of the Christian faith and the personal confidence level that private college students placed in them.

⁵ Peter C. Hill and Ralph W. Hood, Jr., *Measures of Religiosity* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), 15-16.

Evaluation of Data Collection and the Research Tool

The purpose of this section is to evaluate data collection and instrumentation used to determine a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among college students attending private school. Both strengths and weaknesses of the data collection process and instrumentation will be discussed.

The research survey was administered online using Google Forms and was advertised through social media, specifically Facebook. A weakness of this research design was that a convenience sample, or non-probability sampling, was used. A more desirable research design would have been to use a random sampling where individuals within a certain population have equal probability to be chosen. This would have allowed for the research to be generalized in a more comprehensive manner.⁶

Within the context of data collection, it was not possible to verify that the respondent met the criteria as being a college senior or recent college graduate. I assumed that each respondent reported truthfully that they were either a senior or recent graduate of a private college or university. A more desirable research design would have been to collect the sample in person or verify via a video call that the respondent met the criteria.

I used a mixed methods design in this study, which was a potential weakness. A longitudinal research design would have been a stronger research design; however, due to time constraints a longitudinal design was not a feasible option. Each respondent answered the faith-based questions twice, once from their current perspective and once from their perspective when they entered private college as a freshman. I assumed risk by not conducting a longitudinal design as the respondent had to answer in a retrospective manner for half of the faith-based questions.

A strength of the research design was the ease and completeness of the online research tool. Using Google Forms and conducting the research online was highly intuitive

⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 158.

for the respondent. Before responding to any question, the person participating in the survey understood exactly what they were completing and gave consent. They read and agreed to the following statement as they started:

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify any variation among college students regarding their confidence in core Christian doctrines. This research is being conducted by Grady Adkins for the purpose of doctoral research studies. In this research you will be asked questions regarding your faith during college. Any information you provide will be strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.⁷

The survey design was set up so that each respondent had to answer each question before moving to the next question. This provided accuracy and completeness for data. The respondent could not complete the survey until they answered every question, excluding the open-ended question. Only after every required question was answered could they submit their survey, which then recorded data from their responses.

The research sample added to the strength of the survey as the population came from a diverse range of private schools across the nation. The sample population consisted college seniors and recent graduates attending schools from all regions of the United States to include North, South, East, West, and Mid-West. This allowed for a robust sampling. In addition to the vast and diverse location of schools, the sampling size itself was 387, which provided a margin of error less than 5 percent with a confidence level greater than 95 percent.

The manner in which the survey questions were asked added great value and strength for the survey. Some questions were asked in a positive manner and some were asked in a negative manner. Equal numbers of positive and negative statements were used (three each) to maintain a balanced scale. This was done so that the diversity of content

⁷ This paragraph was taken directly from the online survey tool created for this research. All of the research instruments used in this thesis were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in this thesis research.

was evident to the respondent and they had to read and analyze the question rather than simply skimming the questions quickly in an attempt to answer the questions in a similar fashion. Presenting questions in a positive and negative manner created additional work when analyzing data. I had to reverse code the negative statements so data would be analyzed correctly. This extra step could have caused issues during data analysis. Because I was cognizant of the negative statement it did not pose a threat during data analysis, and rather strengthened the survey tool.

Conclusion

This chapter described how data of the research was compiled, analyzed, and summarized. The analysis of findings was presented in three sections: (1) an overview of the characteristics of the demographic sample, (2) an analysis of the survey, (3) an overview of the qualitative interview for illustrative purposes.

The characteristics of the demographic sample also provided me with potential factors that relate to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines. A glimpse of the demographic make-up for this survey is as follows:

I received 387 responses to the survey. Among those respondents, 58.14 percent currently identified as Christian, 32.3 percent identified as non-Christian, and 9.56 percent identified as a Christian when they entered private college but no longer identify themselves as a Christian. Of the respondents, 65.12 percent reported as attending a Christian college or university and 34.88 percent reported as attending a private non-Christian college or university. Next, 52.2 percent responded to the survey as a recent private college graduate and 47.8 percent responded as a college senior at a private institution. Among the respondents, 52.71 percent identified that their collegiate institution was located in the Mid-West, 5.68 percent identified that their collegiate institution was located in the North, 22.48 percent identified that their collegiate institution was located in the South, 14.21 percent identified that their collegiate institution was located in the East, and 4.91 percent identified that their collegiate institution was

located in the West. Of the respondents, 93.28 percent identified themselves as full-time, residential students. And finally, 28.68 percent of the respondents stated that they had not attended a church service in the past 30 days, 22.22 percent stated that they have attended a church service 1-2 times in the past 30 days, 26.87 percent stated that they have attended a church service 3-4 times in the past 30 days, and 22.22 percent stated that they have attended a church service 5 or more times in the past 30 days.

The analysis of the findings from the quantitative portion of the research provided important data. I conducted data analysis three different ways to include all private institutions combined, private Christian institutions, and private non-Christian institutions. Respondents answered six questions according to their confidence in Christian doctrines as a freshman and then again according to their current belief. There was a significant diminishment in Christian doctrines in all six questions among all private institutions combined. According to the research, the top three doctrines that are most likely to diminish at private college include (1) inspiration of Scripture, (2) the divinity of Christ, and (3) the providence of God. There was not a significant diminishment in Christian doctrines in any of the six questions among Christian institutions. In fact, the research reports very little change in confidence of core Christian doctrines among students attending Christian colleges or universities. Then again, there was a significant diminishment in Christian doctrines in all six questions among private non-Christian institutions.

I asked respondents what belief about God or religion was most difficult to believe or defend. This was the final question of the quantitative section of the survey. Respondents reported eleven major religious themes in this open-ended question. The themes included the following with their percentage of responses:

1. Evil & Human Suffering—29 percent, including evil, pain, suffering, and judgement
2. God—14 percent, His Existence, the Trinity, His Personal Interaction with People
3. Gender Roles—11 percent

4. The Bible—9 percent, Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Authority
5. Jesus—9 percent, Salvation, Resurrection, His Deity
6. Faith and Knowledge—8 percent
7. Creation—7 percent
8. The Spiritual Realm including Heaven & Hell—4 percent
9. Free Will—4 percent
10. The Church—2 percent
11. Morality—2 percent, Excluding Gender Roles Issues

The qualitative section of the research was conducted for illustrative purposes only. I interviewed six respondents via a phone call and asked questions about their faith background, parental involvement in discipleship, and resources that their church provided for discipleship during their formative years. Nominal or a lack of parental involvement in the discipleship process during the student's formative years was a trending theme among the six interviewees. The most common form of discipleship that parents practiced in their homes included prayer, devotions, and minimal Scripture memory. The most common resources churches provided to parents included devotional guides. Among the six students I interviewed, generally parents did not practice in-home discipleship consistently and received nominal resources from their local church to help equip parents for discipleship of their children.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This research explored the factors relating to diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among students in private colleges and universities. I used a mixed-methods approach that was an exploratory sequential design. This chapter seeks to answer the primary research questions found in this thesis, explore and assess the contributions found in this research study, and provide recommendations for application and practice related to the research.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine areas where students attending private colleges or universities find themselves least equipped to defend core doctrines of the Christian faith. The goal was to provide churches and parents with recommendations to strengthen areas where young adults find themselves the least equipped to defend their Christian beliefs stemming from core Christian doctrines.

This research attempted to determine areas where college students in private schools find themselves least equipped to defend core Christian doctrines so that churches and parents can work together to build a greater confidence in students during their formative years. The end goal of this research was to produce and provide data that could be used to support spiritual formation during the formative years of a person's life, and to equip and impact family ministries for churches and families in their discipleship and apologetic efforts.

The hope of providing practical and applicational ideas for churches,

specifically family ministries was a main impetus for this research. With this in mind, the goal of this research was to buttress family ministries and parents with information that could lead to a more comprehensive understanding regarding Christian formation, specifically religious issues that students attending private colleges and universities might face.

Research Questions

Three questions served as the exploration into the factors relating to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among college students attending private schools.

1. Among students in private colleges and universities, what factors significantly relate to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines?
2. Among students in private colleges and universities, what core Christian doctrines are most difficult to defend and to maintain while in college?
3. Among students in private colleges and universities, what personal doctrinal beliefs are most likely to change during college?

Research Implications

This section presents a summary of findings and implications relating to each research question.

Research Question 1: Significant Factors Relating to Diminished Confidence

The purpose of this study was to answer the question, “Among students in private colleges and universities, what factors significantly relate to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines?” I used six demographic considerations to determine significance relating to a diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines. These demographic considerations consisted of (1) identifying as Christian, (2) college senior versus recent college graduate, (3) private Christian school versus private non-Christian school, (4) church attendance, (5) the geographical location of the institution, and (6) student enrollment status. Four of the six considerations were found to be

significant predictors of the composite score over time that related to a diminished confidence of core Christian doctrines among students attending private colleges and universities. The four significant factors included (1) identifying as Christian, (2) college senior versus recent college graduate, (3) private Christian school versus private non-Christian school, and (4) church attendance. The geographical location of the private college and the student enrollment status—full-time versus part-time, were not significant predictors of diminished confidence among private college students.

Identifying as a Christian was highly significant and positive toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = 0.59$, $SEE = 0.16$, $t = 3.79$, $p < 0.001$). The confidence levels of students identifying as Christian diminished more than students identifying as non-Christian. The reason for this is fairly straightforward. The student who identified as a non-Christian was absent of any confidence in core Christian doctrines when they entered private college as a freshman; therefore, their confidence levels had little to no change upon graduation. The exception to this would be the student who started believing in the Christian faith during their college years which would result in a higher confidence in Christian doctrines upon graduation. The majority of students that were surveyed reported as being a Christian. These students had a higher confidence level than those who identified as non-Christian when they entered private college their freshman year. This means there was a greater possibility for a decrease in confidence throughout their college years. Likewise, literature reports that anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of young

adults will spiritually decline and disengage from the church.¹

Senior versus recent graduate was highly significant toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = -3.05$, $SEE = 0.75$, $t = -4.06$, $p < 0.001$). The confidence levels of seniors who participated in this research diminished more than recent college graduates. The private college environment could be a possible factor for the diminishment. College students are in a state of transition and constantly encounter new people and ideas, whereas recent college graduates have settled into routines such as career, marriage, and the stability of a home. Simply put, a college student's life has greater instability than a recent college graduate. Budziszewski interviewed college students about their college experience and two students reported the following about their experience:

Student 1: "When I entered college I did not know what to expect. I was alone, I discovered, more alone than I thought I would be. At first my roommate and I got along, but that lasted about two weeks. Then I began to get more and more frustrated. I had left a boyfriend in California, and that complicated things."

Student 2: "My first two years at college were probably some of the most stressful of my life, and I thought high school was stressful! But I also know that I have done the most growing emotionally, physically (dorm food = fattening), mentally, and most importantly spiritually, through trials, the missing people, and the loneliness."²

The private college environment can encourage students to experiment with new

¹ The major publications on which this research has focused include Christian Smith and Melinda Linquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005); Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford, 2009); Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University, 2011); Kenda C. Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (New York: Oxford, 2011); David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me. Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); Barna Group, "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," *Barna Update*, September 16, 2006, accessed June 16, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years/>; Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H, 2008); LifeWay, "LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church," LifeWay Christian Resources, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

² J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 22.

things while undergoing great transition and change. For many college students, this can become a period of instability, whereas recent college graduates are settling into normalcy. This could be one of the factors why this research showed a greater diminishment in core Christian doctrines among seniors than recent college graduates.

Private Christian school versus private non-Christian school was highly significant toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = 3.14$, $SEE = 0.82$, $t = 3.84$, $p < 0.001$). This category was the highest predictor of the factors relating to diminished confidence of core Christian doctrines among students attending private colleges and universities. There was a non-significant decrease of confidence in core Christian doctrines ($p > 0.05$) among students attending Christian colleges and universities. This non-significance was validated in every faith-based question that students attending private Christian college answered. During an interview with a recent college graduate from a Christian university, the student made the following comment in regard to dorm life on campus:

I am thankful for the dorm life at my school. Yes, we had rules that other schools probably didn't, but it also created an environment where I built lasting friendships with other guys on my hall. Our curfew was 12:00am Sunday through Thursday and 12:30am on Friday and Saturday, which meant we had to be on our hall by that time. Members of the opposite sex were not allowed on our hall, except two times a year when we had open dorms. We had a hall meeting followed by small group at 10:00pm once a week. People from other schools might think that those rules are difficult, but I am thankful for them because they helped me build great relationships, encounter less temptation, and become a better student. After all, isn't that why I went school in the first place?³

The environment of a school can influence the student greatly. This is one of the reasons why there was a non-significant change in confidence of core Christian doctrines among students attending private Christian universities.

There was a significant decrease in confidence in core Christian doctrines among

³ I conducted this interview with a recent college graduate from Liberty University, which happens to be my alma mater as well. I would also have the reader know that when I attended Liberty, some 18 years ago, it was much more difficult and stricter than it is now. We also had to walk to and from school in the snow, uphill—both ways.

students attending private non-Christian schools. In his book, *How to Stay Christian in College*, Budziszewski reports that college can be like living on a different planet. He comments,

The sheer weirdness of the new environment puts some students into what sociologists call “culture shock”—taking weirdness too hard and becoming deeply homesick and depressed. At the other extreme, some students adapt by “going native”—losing their sense of who they are and plunging into the ways of the people around them.⁴

The environment of a private non-Christian college or university is a major factor which can lead to a diminished confidence in Christian doctrines. The college environment is one of the factors why the diminishment was significant among private non-Christian schools and it was not significant among Christian schools.

Church attendance was highly significant toward predicting changes in confidence ($\beta = -1.46$, $SEE = 0.38$, $t = -3.86$, $p < 0.001$). Students who frequently attended church services had less change in confidence from the time they entered private college until the time they graduated than students who less frequently attended church services. This means that the more frequently a student attends church services, the less likely their confidence in Christian doctrines will diminish during their private college years. The opposite is also true. The less frequently a student attends church services the more likely their confidence in Christian doctrines will diminish during their private college years.

Research Question 2: Core Christian Doctrines That Are Difficult to Defend

Research question 2 was answered by the open-ended question within this study. The open-ended question addressed Christian doctrines that are difficult to believe or defend. I found eleven major religious themes from the answers given by the population of students attending private colleges or universities. The major themes that college students attending private schools find difficult to defend are listed in table 15.

⁴ Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, 27.

Table 15. Ranking of major religious themes among private institutions

Private Institutions Combined		Private Christian Institutions		Private Non-Christian Institutions	
1	Evil & Suffering 29.08%	1	Evil & Suffering 30.28%	1	Evil & Suffering 26.31%
2	God 14.34%	2	God 14.29%	2	God 14.47%
3	Gender Roles 10.76%	3	Gender Roles 12.00%	3	The Bible 13.16%
4	The Bible 9.16%	4	Creation 7.43%	4	Jesus 11.84%
5	Jesus 8.76%	4	The Bible 7.43%	5	Faith & Knowledge 10.53%
6	Faith & Knowledge 8.38%	4	Jesus 7.43%	6	Gender Roles 7.89%
7	Creation 7.17%	4	Faith & Knowledge 7.43%	7	Creation 6.58%
8	Spiritual Realm 4.39%	5	Spiritual Realm 5.14%	8	Free Will 2.63%
9	Free Will 3.56%	6	Free Will 4.00%	8	Spiritual Realm 2.63%
10	The Church 2.40%	7	The Church 2.86%	8	Morality 2.63%
11	Morality 2.00%	8	Morality 1.71%	9	The Church 1.33%

I divided the answers to the open-ended question into three categories: (1) all private institutions, (2) Christian institutions, and (3) non-Christian institutions. The top three answers totaled over 50 percent of all responses in every category. The top three answers of all private institutions and Christian institutions were the same. Students reported that the Problem of Evil and Human Suffering, God, and Gender Roles were the most difficult Christian beliefs to defend. The difference came among students attending non-Christian schools. Issues surrounding Gender Roles ranked sixth among students attending non-Christian schools. Students from private non-Christian schools reported that the issues surrounding suffering, God, and the Bible were the most difficult Christian beliefs to defend. This differentiation makes sense. Students attending Christian colleges and universities are regularly exposed to the Bible and interact with it, whereas this is less common for students attending private non-Christian schools. Therefore, over 60 percent

of students attending private colleges and universities reported that the Christian doctrines most difficult to defend include the Problem of Evil and Human Suffering, God, Gender Roles, and the Bible.

Research Question 3: Personal Beliefs That Are Likely to Change during Private College

Research question 3 was answered by the faith-based questions of this study. The research was designed to measure five main categories of Christian belief: (1) the existence of God, (2) Jesus as divine, (3) Jesus' mission to save humankind, (4) Jesus' death and resurrection, and (5) the inspiration of the Bible. These Christian beliefs were addressed through six faith-based questions represented by the following statements.

1. Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
2. The Bible was inspired by God.
3. The concept of God is an old superstition.
4. God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus.
5. There is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions.
6. Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day.

There was not a significant change of personal Christian beliefs among students attending Christian colleges and universities in any of the five main categories, or the six faith-based questions. One can conclude that the confidence levels among students attending Christian colleges and universities are not likely to decrease significantly during their time at school.

There was a significant change of personal Christian beliefs among students attending private non-Christian colleges and universities in all five main categories and six faith-based questions. One can conclude that the confidence levels among students attending non-Christian colleges and universities are likely to decrease significantly during their time at school.

Research Connection to Precedent Literature

One of the aims of this chapter is to reveal the connection of this research to the precedent literature. There are three connections to the precedent literature. First, the research from this study supports the statistics found in the precedent literature. Second, I found some possible differences that arose from the research. Third, gaps in the precedent literature were unveiled from the findings of this study.

In Support of the Precedent Literature

According to the precedent literature, statistics show that anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of young adults decline in their Christian faith.⁵ Fuller reports that 50 to 60 percent of emerging adults do not stay strong in their faith.⁶ Barna reports that 61 percent of young adults become spiritually disengaged.⁷ LifeWay Research reports that more than 65 percent of young adults stopped attending church between the ages of 18-22.⁸ The findings of this research support the statistics presented in the precedent literature.

There was a significant decline in confidence in core Christian doctrines for every faith-based question presented in the research of this study among students who attended private colleges and universities. In all six of these faith-based questions there was a highly significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in confidence among students attending

⁵ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23; Kara Powell, Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 17; Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 2.

⁶ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 15. Fuller Youth Institute bases this estimate on the research from three other sources. These researchers include Barna Group, LifeWay Research, and the research provided by Christian Smith in his book *Souls in Transition*.

⁷ Barna Group, "Most Twentysomethings."

⁸ LifeWay, "LifeWay Research Uncovers."

private colleges and universities.⁹ This supports the research presented in the precedent literature.

According to the research of this study, there could possibly be a relationship between the environment of the American university and diminishment in confidence of core Christian doctrines among its students. This is supported by the precedent literature as well as the research found in this study. Budziszewski, professor of government and philosophy at the University of Texas, points out that many evangelical adolescent students feel as though their faith is under attack at universities across the United States.¹⁰ He reports that Christian students hear comments from peers and professors such as, “Faith is just a crutch. The Bible is just mythology. Morality is different everywhere. Everyone must find their own faith. Jesus was just a man who died.”¹¹ These encounters challenge the doctrinal truths of Scripture and the faith of Christian college students. A dark side to adolescent life constantly defies Christian beliefs, often resulting in negative peer pressure, drugs, alcohol, crime, pornography, sex, pregnancy, abortion, slanderous talk, gender identity issues, hatred, and anger.¹² All too often evangelical college students face increasing pressures to conform to a secularized culture, even while their own faith is still developing.¹³ The tension of faith and secular conformity is a constant battle for

⁹ The six faith-based questions include the following: Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God, the Bible was inspired by God, the concept of God is an old superstition, God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions, Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day.

¹⁰ Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, 17. Budziszewski provides example after example of the transitions and changes college students go through. His book offers practical advice for the Christian on how to combat giving into the negative transition and stand firm in the faith.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 3.

¹³ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 78. Smith discusses the regular practice of religious faith: “But doing so requires that religion be a very high priority – or at least a consistent habit – that trumps the demands of the rest of life, a commitment around which the competing needs of school, work, and play are adjusted, rather than vice versa.” Ibid.

students that seems to be compounded on American university campuses. The findings from the research of this study support the precedent literature in that the confidence levels of seniors who participated in this study diminished more than recent college graduates. When taking into consideration the precedent literature, a plausible conclusion explaining the difference between the decrease in confidence between a private college senior and recent private college graduate could be the influence of the American university on the student. Simply put, every private college senior who participated in this study was still enveloped in their school's environment. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that there is a potential correlation between the environment of a private college/university and the diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines.

Using the results of this study, one cannot conclude that a school's environment determines causation for a decreased confidence in core Christian doctrines. For instance, the difference in diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines between a Christian college and private, non-Christian college could simply be that those students and families who make the sacrifices to attend Christian school are more inclined to remain committed to the Christian faith and principles. Therefore, a person cannot generalize the research of this study in a way to support the value of Christian higher education.

Possible Differences between Precedent Literature and this Study

There are possible differences between the precedent literature and the findings of this research. One of the largest possible differences found in the research stemmed from the difference between the diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines among students attending private Christian colleges as compared to students attending private non-Christian colleges. Again, according to the precedent literature, statistics show that anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of young adults decline in their Christian

faith.¹⁴ Overall the statistics that support this seem to be true; however, one of the nuances found in this study revealed a possible difference in these statistics. Where the findings of this study showed a significant decrease in confidence of core Christian doctrines among students attending private colleges, this did not hold true when I separated data between private Christian colleges and private non-Christian colleges.

Among students attending private Christian college, the decrease in confidence was not significant. I used a dependent, paired samples, t-test to examine the difference found in the answers according to the student's past belief of entering private college as a freshman as compared to their current belief as either a senior or recent graduate. In this instance there was not a highly significant p-value, which is a probability less than 5 percent change ($p < 0.05$), for each question pair. This data is significant because it shows a difference from precedent literature that shows a diminishment of Christian faith among young adults. Data from this research shows that there was very little change of Christian beliefs among students attending private Christian colleges or universities. This was one of the largest differences this study revealed in the precedent literature.

There was non-significant decrease ($p > 0.05$) in confidence among students attending Christian colleges and universities in all six of the faith-based questions of this research.¹⁵ This non-significant diminishment of Christian religious belief among students attending Christian colleges and universities does not support the research presented in the precedent literature.

The difference between a student's confidence in Christian beliefs attending Christian colleges and private, non-Christian colleges could provide a foundation for

¹⁴ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23; Powell, Mulder and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 17; Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 2.

¹⁵ The six faith-based questions include the following: Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God, the Bible was inspired by God, the concept of God is an old superstition, God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions, Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day.

further research or a replication study and prove to be beneficial. A potential research question could include the following, “How does the collegiate environment shape a student’s confidence or belief in core Christian doctrines?” A researcher should take many factors into consideration in regard to the collegiate environment. Some of these include (1) is the school Christian in practice? (2) Is the school Christian in name only? (3) From what belief system does a student’s professors teach? (4) What is the influence of a student’s peer group? (5) How involved is the student in a Christian community or church? Some of these factors need to be considered within a collegiate environment.

A second potential difference between the precedent literature and the research of this study is regarding church attendance among young adults. In 2009, Christian Smith concluded that the weekly religious attendance of Protestant young adults decreased by 30 percent as compared to high school teenage years.¹⁶ He reports that fewer than 1 out of 10 emerging adults, ages 18-23, are attending a weekly organized religious group or meeting other than a worship service.¹⁷ In a 2011 survey, research showed that 59 percent of young adults, ages 18-29 with a Christian background, reported that they stopped attending church even though they had previously been a

¹⁶ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 112. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame, conducted important research on what is happening in the lives of American adolescents ages 18 to 23. Smith and Snell conducted interviews and recorded sociological data that shows that parents and religious congregations are the two main entities that socialize religious faith in emerging adults. Smith conducted this research through the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR).

¹⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 141.

regular attender.¹⁸ The difference was found among the distribution of church attendance of the respondents within this study.

From the 387 respondents of this study, 28.68 percent (111 respondents) stated that they had not attended a church service in the past 30 days, 22.22 percent (86 respondents) stated that they have attended a church service 1-2 times in the past 30 days, 26.87 percent (104 respondents) stated that they have attended a church service 3-4 times in the past 30 days, and 22.22 percent (86 respondents) stated that they have attended a church service 5 or more times in the past 30 days. This study reports that 49.09 percent (190 respondents) stated that they have attended a church service 3-5 times in the past 30 days, which is an average of one service per week. This shows that roughly 50 percent of Christian students attending private colleges and universities in this sample attend a church service once a week.

Additions to the Precedent Literature

This research added a great deal to the precedent literature because of the focus on private college students specifically. The precedent literature by Christian Smith, Patricia Snell, Lisa Pearce, Melinda Denton, Kenda Dean, David Kinnaman, Thom Rainer, Kara Powell, David Setran, Chap Clark, Chris Kiesling, LifeWay Research Group, the

¹⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23. Kinnaman is president of the Barna Group. The research to support this study was not conducted Kinnaman himself, but rather the Barna Group. The statistics presented include all Christian groups to include both Protestant and Catholics. The statistics increase if Catholics are removed and only Protestants are reflected. Among Protestants, the statistics are 61 percent, 58 percent, 41 percent, 35 percent respectively. Every one of these categories increased when only Protestant Christians were considered. All participants were ages 18-29 and considered themselves to be Christian. Rainer reported that 70 percent of young churchgoing American adults drop out of church between the ages of 18 and 22. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 3. Gallup Poll reported that 40 percent of 18-29 year olds who attended church when they were 16-17 no longer attend church. George H. Gallup, Jr., "The Religiosity Cycle," *The Gallup Poll*, June 4, 2002, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/6124/religiosity-cycle.aspx>; Frank Newport, "A Look at Religious Switching in America Today," *The Gallup Poll*, October 19, 2006, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/23467/look-religious-switching-america-today.aspx>. In 2007, LifeWay Research reported that more than 65 percent of young adults who attended a Protestant church for at least a year in high school will stop attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18-22 (LifeWay, "LifeWay Research Uncovers"). In 2009, Smith's data from the NSYR indicated that there is a 30 percent drop in weekly religious service attendance across Protestant denominations (Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 112.)

Barna Group, and the Fuller Youth Institute was included the larger focus of emerging adults rather than limiting its research to private college students. An emerging adult is defined as a person between the ages of 18 and 23.¹⁹ Generally speaking, most emerging adults have not experienced a first job, purchased a house, have a spouse, etc. The precedent literature included research among emerging adults who are college-aged but was not limited to actual private college students. This is where the research of this study added a great deal to the current research and literature. The research gathered by this study was limited to seniors and recent graduates who attend/attended private colleges or universities.

A major finding in this study was that students who attend Christian colleges or universities generally do not experience a diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines. This research shows that there was a non-significant diminishment in all six faith-based questions among students attending Christian colleges or universities. This was different than those who attended private non-Christian colleges. In private non-Christian colleges this study reported that there was a significant diminishment in all six faith-based questions representing core Christian doctrines. The environment between the two types of higher education institutions could be a major factor. Smith comments that college students face increasing pressures to conform to a secularized culture, even while their own faith is still developing.²⁰ The tension of faith and secular conformity is a constant battle for students that seems to be compounded on American university campuses. Marsden believes that there is a constant conflict between evangelical faith and secularism in many American universities. Much of the educational system not only plays into this tension, but also promulgates attacks on biblical values, principles, and

¹⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 6.

²⁰ Smith discusses the regular practice of religious faith. He states, “But doing so requires that religion be a very high priority—or at least a consistent habit—that trumps the demands of the rest of life, a commitment around which the competing needs of school, work, and play are adjusted, rather than vice versa.” Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 78.

teachings, claiming that religion does not promote intelligence.²¹ Again, these could be reasons why the diminishment is taking place on the non-Christian campus and it is not taking place on the Christian campus. I would recommend this study become a foundational study for future research that might focus on the college environment and the effects on its students. A factor that must be identified in any replication study is if the Christian college is Christian in practice, or only by name.²²

Another area where this study added to the precedent literature is in identifying specific issues of the Christian faith that college students have difficulty believing or defending. Respondents reported eleven major religious themes in this open-ended question. The themes included the following, with their percentage of responses:

1. Evil & Human Suffering—29 percent, including evil, pain, suffering, and judgement
2. God—14 percent, His Existence, the Trinity, His Personal Interaction with People
3. Gender Roles—11 percent
4. The Bible—9 percent, Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Authority
5. Jesus—9 percent, Salvation, Resurrection, His Deity
6. Faith and Knowledge—8 percent
7. Creation—7 percent
8. The Spiritual Realm including Heaven & Hell—4 percent
9. Free Will—4 percent
10. The Church—2 percent
11. Morality—2 percent, Excluding Gender Roles

The two religious issue that college students attending private universities stated

²¹ George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 5.

²² The reason this is important is that I identified one college in the Midwest where roughly half of its student who participated in this study identified their school as being non-Christian and half identified it as being Christian. If a replication study were going to be conducted in the future, the researcher may want to delineate between confessional and non-confessional Christian institutions.

as the most difficult to believe or defend were the problem of evil and human suffering, and God. Evil and human suffering included issues such as the why evil exists, pain, suffering, and judgement. God included issues such as His existence, personal interaction with people, and the Trinity. These findings supplement Christian Smith's research on Moralistic Therapeutic Deism among emerging adults, which adopts a moralistic approach to life. The most important values, or even doctrines, consist of being nice, kind, pleasant, and respectful.²³ The doctrine of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism concerns itself with being a good person and defining "good" within the context of culture and society at that particular moment. From an evangelical viewpoint, the cautionary concern is that society defines what is good and right rather than God. Smith comments,

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs—especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved.²⁴

With that said, it is no wonder that college students have difficulty defending issues surrounding suffering and God if they are able to define right and wrong, and they are not interested in a God who is personally involved with their life. If a college student's most important value is being nice, kind, pleasant, and respectful, then it is no wonder they have difficulty defending that there is a God who judges people.

Application for Research Findings

The goal of this research was to determine factors that potentially lead to a college student's diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines. The end goal of this research is to potentially produce and provide data that can be used to support spiritual formation during the formative years of a person's life and to equip churches and families in their discipleship and apologetic efforts.

²³ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-63.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 clarifies that parents are primarily responsible for instructing and instilling the Word of God to their children. The role of the church is to equip and disciple; therefore, discipleship becomes a partnership between the church and family.²⁵ The church is to shine a light to show every generation the glory of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The family is to nurture the hearts of the emerging generation so that they will love God. Both the church and the family were designed by God with a purpose to work together so that God's redemptive and restorative story can be told and known by all the world.²⁶ God created the church and the family to accomplish His mission to make disciples. If churches and families partnered together to influence their sons and daughters, then the unfavorable statistics of diminishing confidence of the Christian faith among private college students could begin to rise. Churches and families can utilize three points of application from the research of this study to fulfill their partnership.

Churches and parents can intentionally build into children and students through their junior high and high school years to help students increase confidence in core Christian doctrines. This research identified eleven areas of the Christian faith that private college students feel less equipped to defend. Churches and families can partner together through intentional discipleship and education. Churches can utilize small groups within their student ministries to begin conversations about these difficult topics. Churches can also create resources for parents to continue the conversations in their home. According to the results of the open-ended question, the following Christian beliefs would be a good place to start:

1. The problem of evil, why pain and suffering exist, and why a loving God casts judgement on people.
2. The existence of God, the Trinity, and God's personal interaction with people.

²⁵ See Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:42; Eph 4:11-12; 2 Tim 4:2-5.

²⁶ Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact when Church and Family Collide* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 79.

3. The inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the Bible.
4. God's created design for the male and female.
5. Jesus, the divine Son of God who was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day.
6. Forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ.
7. Intelligence and faith work together.
8. God as creator of the universe.

Likewise, it is important to note the student's greatest decrease in confidence of Christian doctrines during college. According to the research of this stud, the order of the greatest decrease to the smallest decrease among private college students is the following, in descending order:

1. The Bible was inspired by God.
2. Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
3. God is aware of our actions.
4. Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day.
5. God is not an old superstition.
6. God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus.

Using this data churches and parents can prioritize the topics used to disciple their youth to help bolster a strong foundation for these Christian doctrines and beliefs.

A second application for this research is to help parents and high school students understand the value of Christian higher education. This research may support the importance of attending a Christian university or college. From the respondents attending Christian colleges and universities, the research showed little to no diminishment of confidence in Christian doctrines. This is not to say that every student who attends a private non-Christian college or university experience a diminishment of confidence in Christian beliefs, nor is it a guarantee that every student who attends a Christian school will maintain a strong confidence in Christian beliefs. Simply stated, the research of this study showed that students who attend Christian colleges and universities upheld their

Christian beliefs more so than that of those who attended non-Christian private colleges and universities.

A third application for this research is for churches to intentionally equip and partner with parents for the work of the ministry. During the follow-up interviews with students, I observed that there was little discipleship taking place within the context of the home. Maybe this is due to a prevailing thought among parents that the church is responsible for the discipleship of their children, or possibly parents would rather allow professionals to be the primary person who shapes their children's souls.²⁷ Whatever the case, the fact of the matter is that biblically speaking parents are primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children. This means that the local church must equip parents for discipleship of their children.²⁸ This model of family-equipping discipleship is founded biblically, and practically speaking, the most viable option. The church must train, equip and provide resources for parents so that children are properly disciplined within the context of the home according to the discipleship model found in Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

Churches can encourage and equip parents to do this through a variety of ways. Barna says, "The role of the church is to equip and reinforce rather than lead [in children's discipleship]."²⁹ With this in mind, the church should be the best partner a parent will ever have. Churches must understand that their role of equipping families for discipleship is vital. It is unrealistic to expect that all parents are equipped and prepared to lead their children toward Christian maturity.³⁰ In fact, the church must find ways to engage parents

²⁷ Timothy Paul Jones and John David Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry* (Nashville: Randall House, 2015), 13.

²⁸ Timothy Paul Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 143.

²⁹ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), 98.

³⁰ Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 79.

so that spiritual growth is a part of everyday life and practice.³¹ This is important because parents provide the best spiritual nurturement for their child, not a church program.³² Understanding that the best method of family discipleship is the partnership of the church and the family, it is important for both churches and families to know practical ways to partner with each other so that spiritual growth can take place within the context of the home.

There are two practical strategies for partnership between church and family. The first strategy is to develop resources for parents.³³ This is especially important in the matters of family devotions and helping talk through family issues. Some recommended resources for churches to use or create for families include weekly e-mails from ministry leadership, family devotions, recommended websites and podcasts, books, blogs, and the use of social media. Churches can be strategic in how they use these resources to help families stay plugged into their spiritual walk throughout the week. Parents of children in this generation are especially apt to use social media, podcasts, and phone apps. It is beneficial for churches to take advantage of these outlets.

The second strategy is to provide venues for training, equipping, and helping parents lead discipleship in their child's life.³⁴ One example is to create a family worship service that takes place consistently. This service should be led by ministry leadership with the intent to expose parents to their child's curriculum or teaching series. This will also allow children to participate in the worship experience as a family if a church does

³¹ Marcia J. Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Children, Parents, and 'Best Practices' for Faith Formation: Resources for Child, Youth, and Family Ministry Today," *Dialog* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 350.

³² Scottie May, Katie Stemp, and Grant Burns, "Children's Place in the New Forms of Church: An Exploratory Survey of Their Ministry with Children and Families," *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 283.

³³ Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 151.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

not provide a family worship service on a regular basis. Finally, this service will create a platform for ministry leaders to talk with parents. It is an opportunity to explain resources to parents and help them catch the vision that parents should take lead in the discipleship of their children. A family worship service also helps build community within the church. It will help young parents connect with other parents.

It is difficult for the ministry leader to build a relationship with every child and every parent involved with the ministry. Therefore, small group leaders are vital for the success of a children's and student ministries. These leaders can intentionally build relationships with children and parents. Small group leaders do this by investing in the lives of children over time to help them build an authentic faith.³⁵

God laid out a plan for parents to teach their children about Him. Parents must fully invest themselves into the discipleship of their children. When the church and home partner together this becomes an obtainable goal. When working together, the church and families have more potential to build a lasting Christian foundation into the lives of their children and students.

With these two strategies in mind, the third application is to use the data from this research and prioritize topics used to disciple youth to help bolster a strong foundation for Christian doctrines and beliefs. Likewise, incorporate frequent discussions from a biblical worldview regarding current topics. The direct application from this study would be for churches to include training for parents and leaders in their discipleship efforts for youth prioritized in the following order:

1. The problem of evil, why pain and suffering exist, and why a loving God casts judgement on people.
2. The existence of God, the Trinity, and God's personal interaction with people.
3. The inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the Bible.
4. God's created design for the male and female.

³⁵ Reggie Joiner and Tom Shefchunas, *Lead Small* (Cumming, GA: Orange, 2012), 19.

5. Jesus, the divine Son of God who was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day.
6. Forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ.
7. Intelligence and faith work together.
8. God as creator of the universe.

Similarly, as churches work to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, according to the research of this study it would be beneficial to include frequent training and teaching in their ministry on the following doctrines and prioritized accordingly:

1. The Bible was inspired by God.
2. Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
3. God is aware of our actions.
4. Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day.
5. God is not an old superstition.
6. God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus.

Further Research

The researcher organized possibilities for further research into three categories – (1) Christian influence prior to college, (2) Christian influence during college, and (3) the influence of church on the student. These possibilities were presented in a way to spur on ideas for future research projects that will enhance this study and explore more deeply other factors relating to diminished confidence in core Christian doctrines among students in private colleges and universities.

Christian Influence Prior to College

This section presents ideas for further research that focusses on the home life of the college student prior to entering college. The central idea of this section could possibly identify any potential factors that lead to a student's predisposition of a stronger faith during college. Additionally, this section further explores more deeply question 3 of the post survey questions included in this research. To explore these questions properly

the researcher would need a sample size big enough so that the results could be generalized universally. Potential ideas for further research could include the following:

1. At what age did the student profess Jesus Christ as Lord of their life - admitted to being a sinner, believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and His work of redemption on the cross, sought forgiveness for sins, and became a Christ-follower?
2. Did the student grow up living with both parents? Were the student's parents married and lived together? Did both of the student's parents identify themselves as Christian? Did the student's father identify as Christian, but their mother did not? Did the student's mother identify as Christian, but their father did not? Did neither parent identify as Christian? Did the student grow up primarily living with one parent? Did the student live with their father who identified as Christian? Did the student live with their father who did not identify as Christian? Did the student live with their mother who identified as Christian? Did the student live with their mother who did not identify as Christian? Did the student grow up living with someone other than their parents? Did the person/people the student grew up with identify as Christian? Did the student grow up in a family that did not identify as Christian, and someone else took on the responsibility of influencing them for Christ, ie. took the student to church, conducted Bible study, mentored the student, created discipleship opportunities?
3. What, if any, Christian disciplines were practiced in your home and what was the frequency, especially during the student's high school years leading up to college? Did the student pray with their family and if so, how often? Did the student's family conduct devotions, Bible study, or read the Bible together, and if so, how often? Did the student's family memorize scripture together and if so, how often? Did the student have conversations about current issues according to a biblical worldview with their family and if so, how often? Did the student discuss how to defend their faith with their family and if so, how often? Did the student practice sharing their faith with their family and if so, how often? What did the student use to conduct devotions with their family, if any?
4. How and to what capacity did the student practice Christian disciplines on their own, apart from their family? Did the student practice the spiritual discipline of prayer and to what frequency? Did the student practice the spiritual discipline of reading the Bible and to what frequency? Did the student practice the spiritual discipline of scripture memory and to what frequency? How frequently did the student attend church and in what church ministries were they active?

Christian Influence During College

This section presents ideas for further research that focusses on Christian influence during college life. The central idea of this section could possibly identify any factors that may bolster a student's confidence in their faith during college. To explore these questions properly the researcher would need a sample size big enough so that the results could be generalized universally. Potential ideas for further research could include

the following:

1. To what degree, if any, does a confessional Christian university versus non-confessional Christian university affect the diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines among students attending those schools? What doctrines of Christian faith does the college/university identify as non-negotiables? Does the student have to sign agreement with the college's statement of faith? Does the student have to identify as an evangelical Christian in order to gain acceptance into the university?
2. Does the university provide and or require chapel/convocation attendance? How frequently does the university provide and or require chapel/convocation attendance? Does the college require church attendance apart from university chapel/convocation? What is the frequency of church attendance apart from university chapel/convocation? Is the student a resident student or online student living outside of the proximity of the university and does the university require chapel/convocation attendance for online students?
3. Is there a greater or lesser diminishment in confidence of core Christian doctrines among different majors that the college/university offers? Is the Bible integrated into all classes the college/university offers? What, if any, majors or classes did not integrate the Bible into teaching? According to the student, would they identify any teaching that opposed biblical teachings?
4. What factors led to a diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines among students who identified as Christian when they began college, but no longer identify as a Christian? Does the student point to one event that led to their diminishment in confidence of core Christian doctrines? Does the student identify that their diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines happened over time? Would the student agree or disagree that their diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines was a direct result of the influence of their college? Would the student agree or disagree that their diminishment of confidence in core Christian doctrines was a direct result of their own decisions and not related to the influence of college on their life?

Influence of Church

This section presents ideas for further research that focusses on the influence of church on the students both prior to and during college. The central idea of this section could possibly identify any factors that may bolster a student's confidence in their faith during college. To explore these questions properly the researcher would need a sample size big enough so that the results could be generalized universally. Potential ideas for further research could include the following:

1. To what frequency did the student attend church prior to college? Did the student's desire to attend church stem from self or from their parents? What was the student's involvement at church? Did the student participate in ministry outside of the main worship service?

2. To what frequency did the student attend church during college? Did the student's desire to attend church stem from self or from someone else? What was the student's involvement at church? Did the student participate in ministry outside of the main worship service?
3. What was the student's general feeling about church prior to entering college? Did the student generally agree or disagree with the teachings of their church? Did the student generally have a positive or negative feeling about church? What motivated the student to attend church regularly?
4. What was the student's general feeling about church during college? Did the student generally agree or disagree with the teachings of their church? Did the student generally have a positive or negative feeling about church? What motivated the student to attend church regularly?

APPENDIX 1
ONLINE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Demographic Information

1. Do you identify yourself as an evangelical Christian?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I identified myself as an evangelical Christian when I entered college, but I no longer identify myself in that manner.

2. What is your current collegiate academic level?
 - College Senior
 - Recent College Graduate

3. What type of college/university do you attend?
 - Public
 - Public, community college
 - Private, Christian
 - Private, Non-Christian

4. What geographical region of the United States is your college/university located?
 - South
 - North
 - East
 - Mid-West
 - West

5. What best describes your collegiate enrollment as a student?
 - Full-time, on-campus
 - Full-time, distance/online
 - Part-time, on-campus
 - Part-time, distance/online

6. How many times in the past thirty (30) days have you attended any church service?
 - None
 - 1-2
 - 3-4
 - 5 or more

Faith-Based Questions

The following questions include several statements related to specific religious beliefs. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements, and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your answer by rating each statement according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement. If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about a position, select the neutral option.

Note: You will answer each question twice. Your first answer will be based on your belief when you entered college as a freshman. Your second answer will be based on your current belief.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

7. When I entered college as a freshman, I believed that Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree
8. I currently believe that Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree
9. When I entered college as a freshman, I believed that the Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in human history.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree
10. I currently believe that the Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in human history.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree

11. When I entered college as a freshman, I believed that the concept of God was an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree
12. I currently believe that the concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree
13. When I entered college as a freshman, I believed that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of people's sins.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree
14. I currently believe that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of people's sins.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree
15. When I entered college as a freshman, I believed that despite what many people believe, there was no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions.
- Strongly Disagree
 - Moderately Disagree
 - Slightly Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Slightly Agree
 - Moderately Agree
 - Strongly Agree

16. I currently believe that despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions.

- Strongly Disagree
- Moderately Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Moderately Agree
- Strongly Agree

17. When I entered college as a freshman, I believed that Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but on the third day He arose from the dead.

- Strongly Disagree
- Moderately Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Moderately Agree
- Strongly Agree

18. I currently believe that Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried but on the third day He arose from the dead.

- Strongly Disagree
- Moderately Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Moderately Agree
- Strongly Agree

Open-Ended Survey Question

19. What beliefs about God or religion have been the most difficult for you to believe or to defend?

Please provide your contact information to be entered into a drawing for a \$100 Amazon Gift Card. By providing this information you are consenting to a potential follow-up interview regarding this survey. The data collected from the follow-up interview will be vital for this research project. Thank you.

- Name:
- Phone number:
- Email address:

Post Survey Questions

(Not included in the quantitative research tool and will be conducted via phone call)

1. What beliefs do other people have about God or religion that is difficult to defend?

Select all that apply.

- Genesis account of creation
 - God exists in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
 - The virgin birth of Jesus Christ
 - Jesus Christ is the only way to God
 - God allows evil and suffering
 - Men and women are created equal, but different
 - The inerrancy of the Bible (the Bible is completely true)
 - The concept of eternal paradise (heaven)
 - The concept of eternal punishment (hell)
 - The active practice of homosexuality is a sin
 - Other _____
-

2. What belief about God or religion do you find most difficult to believe or to defend?

- Genesis account of creation
 - God exists in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
 - The virgin birth of Jesus Christ
 - Jesus Christ is the only way to God
 - God allows evil and suffering
 - Men and women are created equal, but different
 - The inerrancy of the Bible (the Bible is completely true)
 - The concept of eternal paradise (heaven)
 - The concept of eternal punishment (hell)
 - The active practice of homosexuality is a sin
 - Other _____
-

3. What, if any, religious activities did you practice in your home with your parents and what was their frequency?

Praying as a family

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

Devotions or Bible study/reading

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

Scripture memory

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

Christian service projects

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

Worship in the form of singing

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

Conversations about current issues according to a biblical worldview

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

Defending your faith (apologetics)

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

Sharing your faith (evangelism)

- Frequently
- Somewhat Frequently
- Infrequently
- Almost never

4. What, if any, resources did your church provide to your parents for discipleship within your home? Select all that apply.

- Prayer guides
- Devotional guides
- Scripture memorization
- Christian service opportunities
- Family worship opportunities
- Articles/training on approaching current issues with a biblical worldview
- Articles/training on defending your faith (apologetics)
- Articles/training on sharing your faith (evangelism)
- I am unsure what my church provided
- None

5. What, if any, resources did your family utilize that was provided by your church? Select all that apply.

- Prayer guides
- Devotional guides
- Scripture memorization
- Christian service opportunities
- Family worship opportunities
- Articles/training on approaching current issues with a biblical worldview
- Articles/training on defending your faith (apologetics)
- Articles/training on sharing your faith (evangelism)
- Unsure
- None

APPENDIX 2

THE CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY SCALE

THE FINAL VERSION OF THE CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY SCALE, INCLUDING INSTRUCTIONS

ATTITUDE SURVEY

This survey includes a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements, and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your opinion on the line to the left of each statement, according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement, by using the following scale:

Write down a -3 in the space provided if you *strongly disagree* with the statement.
-2 in the space provided if you *moderately disagree* with the statement.
-1 in the space provided if you *slightly disagree* with the statement.

Write down a +1 in the space provided if you *slightly agree* with the statement.
+2 in the space provided if you *moderately agree* with the statement.
+3 in the space provided if you *strongly agree* with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about an item, write down a "O" in the space provided.

1. _____ God exists as: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. * _____ Man is *not* a special creature made in the image of God, he is simply a recent development in the process of animal evolution.
3. _____ Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
4. _____ The Bible is the word of God given to guide man to grace and salvation.
5. * _____ Those who feel that God answers prayers are just deceiving themselves.
6. * _____ It is ridiculous to believe that Jesus Christ could be both human and divine.
7. _____ Jesus was born of a virgin.
8. * _____ The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in the history of Man.
9. * _____ The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
10. _____ Christ will return to the earth someday.
11. * _____ Most of the religions in the world have miracle stories in their traditions; but there is no reason to believe any of them are true, including those found in the Bible.
12. _____ God hears all of our prayers.
13. * _____ Jesus Christ may have been a great ethical teacher, as other men have been in history. But he was not the divine Son of God.
14. _____ God made man of dust in His own image and breathed life into him.
15. _____ Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of man's sins.
16. * _____ Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of Man's actions.
17. _____ Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried but on the third day He arose from the dead.
18. * _____ In all likelihood there is no such thing as a God-given immortal soul in Man which lives on after death.
19. * _____ If there ever was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, he is dead now and will never walk the earth again.
20. _____ Jesus miraculously changed real water into real wine.
21. _____ There is a God who is concerned with everyone's actions.
22. * _____ Jesus' death on the cross, if it actually occurred, did nothing in and of itself to save Mankind.
23. * _____ There is really no reason to hold to the idea that Jesus was born of a virgin. Jesus' life showed better than anything else that he was exceptional, so why rely on old myths that don't make sense.
24. _____ The Resurrection proves beyond a doubt that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah of God.

Note. No response is scored as "O" on the (-3 to +3) response scale for each item. It is suggested that a participant's data be discarded if he/she does not answer 10 or more items. Data can easily be prepared for analysis rescaling responses such that -3 = 1, -2 = 2, -1 = 3, 0 (or no response) = 4, +1 = 5, +2 = 6, and +3 = 7. The keying of all negatively-worded items — indicated above by an asterisk (*) — is reversed so that for all items a low score indicates an unorthodox belief and a high score indicates an orthodox belief. The C.O. score is then computed for each subject by summing over the 24 items.

APPENDIX 3

THE SHORT CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY SCALE

THE SHORT CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY (SCO) SCALE

ATTITUDE SURVEY

This survey includes a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements, and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your opinion on the line to the left of each statement, according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement, by using the following scale:

In the space provided, write down a:

- 3 if you *strongly disagree* with the statement
- 2 if you *moderately disagree* with the statement
- 1 if you *slightly disagree* with the statement

- +1 if you *slightly agree* with the statement
- +2 if you *moderately agree* with the statement
- +3 if you *strongly agree* with the statement

If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about an item, write down a "0" in the space provided.

1. _____ Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
- 2.* _____ The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in human history.
- 3.* _____ The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
4. _____ Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of people's sins.
- 5.* _____ Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions.
6. _____ Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried but on the third day He arose from the dead.

Note: No response is scored as "0" on the (-3 to +3) response scale for each item. It is suggested that a participant's data be discarded if he/she does not answer four or more items. Data can easily be prepared for analysis by rescaling responses such that -3 = 1; -2 = 2; -1 = 3; 0 (or no response) = 4; +1 = 5; +2 = 6; and +3 = 7. The keying of all negatively worded items — indicated above by an asterisk (*) — is reversed so that for all items a low score indicates an unorthodox belief and a high score indicates an orthodox belief. The SCO score is then computed for each participant by summing over the six items. Finally, it is recommended that one or two "buffer items" be inserted before the first item above, so that participants will feel comfortable with both the content of the survey and its format before completing the SCO scale. It is suggested that these items be two of the original CO scale items not included in the SCO scale, such as "God exists as: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" and "Those who feel that God answers prayers are just deceiving themselves" (a reversed item).

APPENDIX 4

DATA FOR SELF-IDENTIFIED EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN STUDENTS

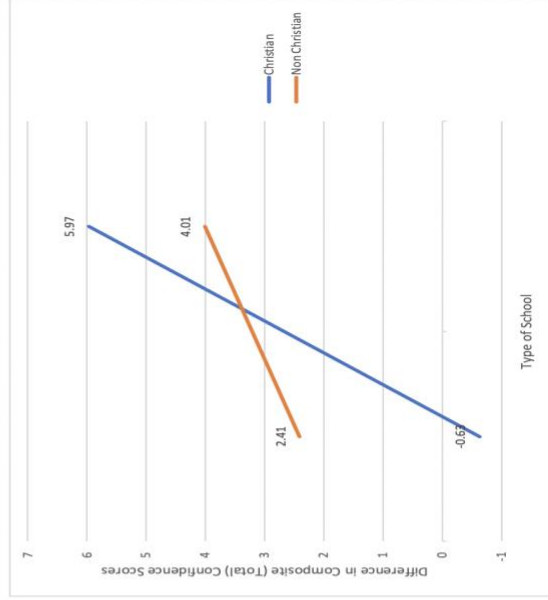
I used a dependent (or paired samples) t-test to look at the difference in questions from the past vs. now. This analysis can be used to determine differences over time within the same individual. In this instance a highly significant p-value (probability less than 5% chance) for each question pair shows that the mean difference or drop in confidence was meaningful. That is, confidence statistically diminished over time for students who were christians and also among those who were not christian. For Christians, the biggest change was found in question 5, followed by 2, 1, 3 and 6. For non-Christians, the biggest change was found in question 2 then 1, 6, 4, 3, 5. Looking at the absolute value for the mean difference shows which questions saw the largest drop in confidence.

Self-identified Non-Christian			
Question	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Q1_past	162	4.52	2.47
Q1_now	162	3.93	2.56
Q2_past	162	3.53	2.14
Q2_now	162	4.19	2.10
Q3_past	162	3.00	2.15
Q3_now	162	3.41	2.32
Q4_past	162	4.37	2.45
Q4_now	162	3.86	2.45
Q5_past	162	3.01	2.21
Q5_now	162	3.40	2.37
Q6_past	162	4.60	2.46
Q6_now	162	4.07	2.50

Self-identified Christian			
Question	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Q1_past	225	6.52	1.24
Q1_now	225	6.28	1.54
Q2_past	225	1.96	1.70
Q2_now	225	2.26	1.99
Q3_past	225	1.49	1.17
Q3_now	225	1.72	1.52
Q4_past	225	6.62	0.97
Q4_now	225	6.52	1.23
Q5_past	225	1.41	0.98
Q5_now	225	1.76	1.64
Q6_past	225	6.73	0.85
Q6_now	225	6.56	1.03

	Mean Difference	Std. Dev	Std. Error	Paired Samples (dependent) t-test
Q1_past & Q1_now	0.6	1.73	0.14	drop in confidence t(161)=-4.34, p<0.001
Q2_past & Q2_now	-0.66	1.74	0.14	drop in confidence t(161)=-4.83, p<0.001
Q3_past & Q3_now	-0.41	2.01	0.16	drop in confidence t(161)=-2.57, p<0.05
Q4_past & Q4_now	0.51	1.85	0.15	drop in confidence t(161)=-3.53, p<0.001
Q5_past & Q5_now	-0.39	1.88	0.15	drop in confidence t(161)=-2.63, p<0.01
Q6_past & Q6_now	0.53	1.64	0.13	drop in confidence t(161)=-4.12, p<0.001

	Mean Difference	Std. Dev	Std. Error	Paired Samples (dependent) t-test
Q1_past & Q1_now	0.24	1.23	0.08	drop in confidence t(224)=2.99, p<0.05
Q2_past & Q2_now	-0.29	1.51	0.10	drop in confidence t(224)=-2.91, p<0.05
Q3_past & Q3_now	-0.23	1.35	0.09	drop in confidence t(224)=-2.57, p<0.05
Q4_past & Q4_now	0.10	1.15	0.08	drop in confidence t(224)=1.28, p=0.203
Q5_past & Q5_now	-0.36	1.33	0.09	drop in confidence t(224)=-4.01, p<0.001
Q6_past & Q6_now	0.17	1.01	0.07	drop in confidence t(224)=2.56, p<0.05



REGRESSION MODEL PREDICTING DIFFERENCE IN COMPOSITE (TOTAL) CONFIDENCE SCORES PAST-NOW

Data was coded such that higher values indicated higher faith. Specifically, questions 2, 3, and 5 were reverse coded. Questions 1, 4 and 6 were not.

F(3,383)=13.61, p<0.001

r square=0.096

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	p Value
Intercept	-9.24	1.99	-4.63	<0.001
Identify as Christian	2.01	0.60	3.34	<0.001
Private Christian vs. Non-Christian	7.85	1.44	5.47	<0.001
Identify as Christian crossed with type of school (private Christian or not)	-1.25	0.42	-2.99	<0.01

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	p Value
Christian	0.63	0.14	4.34	<0.001
Christian Private School	-0.63	0.14	-4.34	<0.001
Non Christian	5.97	0.14	41.93	<0.001
Non Christian Private School	2.41	0.14	17.21	<0.001

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ABSTRACT

FACTORS RELATING TO DIMINISHED CONFIDENCE IN CORE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES AMONG STUDENTS IN PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine areas where students attending private colleges or universities found themselves least equipped to defend core Christian doctrines of the faith to define areas that churches and parents can better partner in equipping young adults with apologetic and foundational truths.

Based on a review of significant texts, research reports that anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of young adults spiritually decline and disengage from the church. With this in mind, the research of this study examined the factors relating to the diminishment in confidence of core Christian doctrines among college students in private colleges and universities.

Using a short Christian orthodoxy scale that consisted of six questions foundational to Christian belief, quantitative data was collected from college seniors or recent graduates of private higher educational institutions based on the core Christian beliefs they held when they entered college compared to beliefs when they graduated from college. Using a dependent t-test, the results of this study report a significant decrease in confidence of core Christian doctrines among college students in private colleges or universities. The exception were students who attended a Christian college or university where the research of this study did not report a significant decrease of

confidence in core Christian doctrines during their college years.

College students attending private schools reported eleven major religious themes that were difficult to believe or defend. These themes included issues surrounding theodicy, God, gender roles, the Bible, Jesus, faith, knowledge, creation, the spiritual realm, free will, the church, and morality. Core Christian doctrines that had the greatest diminishment during the college years are the following, in descending order: (1) the Bible was inspired by God; (2) Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God; (3) God is aware of people's personal actions; (4) Jesus was crucified, died, and buried but arose from the dead on the third day; (5) God is not an old superstition; (6) God provided a way for the forgiveness of sin through Jesus.

The qualitative research process consisted of six interviews for illustrative purposes. The follow-up interview consisted of three sections that included (1) two questions regarding beliefs about God or religion that are difficult to defend, (2) one question about religious activities the respondent and their parents practiced in their home, and (3) two questions regarding church resources for in-home discipleship.

KEYWORDS: faith; foundation; diminished confidence; Christian doctrines; private college; private university; church dropout; moralistic therapeutic deism; Christian formation; faith development, Christian Smith, Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale

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