

LIPSCOMB NOW:

# INTERSECTIONS

OF FAITH & CULTURE

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MAKING THE CASE FOR  
**CHRISTIAN  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION**



International mission trips are one of the primary spiritual development opportunities at Christian universities today. At Lipscomb University, more than 600 students participated in 60 mission trips to 24 nations in 2018. Such trips not only serve as spiritual formation opportunities for students, but also spread God's love and healing around the world.

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# INTERSECTIONS

OF FAITH & CULTURE

Volume 5 Number 1

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# There are few purchases consumers make that impact their lives like that of higher education.

*When speaking to prospective students and their families on the importance of that purchase, I often contrast buying a college education with buying a carton of milk.*

*As consumers, students don't expect to become the product they purchase—obviously, they don't become milk. However, they do become a product of the university where they chose to spend formative years developing into the person God intends for them to be.*

A good liberal arts education will teach students how to think rather than what to think. A Christian institution even more so. At Lipscomb, students are encouraged to engage in deeper conversations with faculty, administrators and peers. Honest, open and thorough inquiries about the world in which we live lead students to understand what it means to intentionally, courageously and graciously obey God's will and to serve others on campus and the community at large. Deep thinking results in deeper convictions.

Leading Christian universities provide strong fundamentals and bold vision to satisfy the needs of students today wanting to go out into the world with substantial knowledge, training and compassion to be the hands of Jesus. I hope you will be inspired by the articles of this publication and the next generation of students who are honing their skills to become leaders in their fields of study, churches and families.

Blessings,

L. Randolph Lowry  
President  
Lipscomb University



*P.S. If you find this publication helpful, please do two things: email comments and suggestions to [scott.sager@lipscomb.edu](mailto:scott.sager@lipscomb.edu) and pass on a copy of this issue on to members of your church family.*

# MAKING THE CASE FOR *Christian Higher Education*

The creators of *Intersections* could think of no one better to make the case for pursuing a Christian higher education than a few of the university presidents currently charged with providing that Christian education to thousands of students across the nation.

**Michael Williams**, president of Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama; **Bruce McLarty**, president of Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas; **L. Timothy Perrin**, president of Lubbock Christian University in Lubbock, Texas; and **John deSteiguer**, president of Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, provided their insight along with **L. Randolph Lowry**, president of Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, on what makes a Christian university the right choice in today's increasingly secular world.



**Lowry:** With the celebration of another commencement season in May, more than 800 graduates left the Lipscomb University campus equipped with degrees and the knowledge, skills and confidence to pursue careers, additional education or other goals and dreams. As products of a Christian institution, they took with them a faith-based perspective of the world and went out into the world academically and spiritually prepared to be leaders in their fields, communities, families and churches.

We often see headlines about the high cost of a college education, but not as much about the return on investment of a degree. Numerous studies show that those with a bachelor's degree or higher earn higher salaries and have more career opportunities throughout their lives.

Aligning with our spiritual mission, Christian colleges strive to offer affordable quality education, by starting with lower sticker prices than other private schools and offering more institutional financial aid. The result is students from Christian institutions take out an average of \$6,108 in federal loans, compared to the \$7,063 national average, according to a 2017 Council for Christian Colleges and Universities Consortium Report. Other studies show a direct correlation between college education and social values, happier families, healthier lifestyles, a higher standard of living and critical thinking skills among numerous other benefits. More than 35 percent of CCCU students participate in community service compared to less than 26 percent of all college students, totaling about 5.4 million community service hours performed by CCCU students each year.

While many American colleges today strive to develop superior leaders and workers, Christ-centered institutions strive to do that plus develop each student as a person and a child of God. Students at CCCU institutions report higher levels of exposure to diverse perspectives, contact with students of different backgrounds, ability to examine their own strengths and weaknesses, connection of what they are learning to societal problems and the acquiring of job-related skills and knowledge than found in the national average.

Read on to see how the presidents of four Church of Christ-affiliated colleges approach the difficult task of molding not only a well-rounded leader, but also a God-centered person, and the importance of a Christian higher education in this process amidst the challenges of today's society:

**Intersections:** *The trends seem to indicate that fewer young people from Churches of Christ congregations are opting for Christian education. Why do you think this number is on the decline?*



**Perrin:** There are likely multiple explanations for this trend. One part relates to the decline in membership within the Churches of Christ as well as the growing fragmentation of our fellowship. In addition, sociologists tell us that we

are living in a post-denominational time in which people of faith often have diminished loyalty to any particular religious group. That leads both to fewer parents and students choosing a college or university that shares their religious heritage and to fewer students who self-identify as members of the Church of Christ. This trend may also reflect other changes within our fellowship over the last 50 years, including greater economic mobility and other factors. In short, the answer is complex and defies easy explanations.



**deSteiguer:** Without a doubt, Christian higher education is valuable on all levels—spiritually, academically, vocationally, relationally and financially. Unfortunately, I think the accurate and precise message

of the high value of Christian education is being swamped by louder claims concerning cost, outcomes, effectiveness and debt, in relation to higher education in general, not just Christian higher education.

**Intersections:** *Parents are rightly concerned about student debt and the cost of an education. In this economic climate how do you make a compelling case for the value proposition of Christian education to today's parents?*



**Williams:** This is the one of the most important decisions a person will make in their whole life. Only two outrank it: marriage and the decision to follow

Jesus Christ. But there is an enormous amount of scrutiny about the cost of higher education right now. The average debt is about \$27,000 for one of the single biggest decisions a person makes, with life-changing implications. And yet, one of our young people can borrow that same amount to buy a truck and society applauds them and calls them a great American. It's the values that are turned upside down. So higher education has somehow become this commodity that is not really valued. But even if you look at economic earning power only, we know that higher education propels it. Even further, a Christian higher education is life-shaping, not just for economic development, but for shaping a person's life overall. How many of a person's values are shaped between the ages of 18 and 23? All the literature would support that the college years are an absolutely critical time. Can you really put a price tag on that?



**McLarty:** In regards to a Christian higher education, we are talking about buying a house, not a car. We're talking about an investment; not a consumable.

We're talking about something that will have more value in 30 years; and not something that will have no value in 30 years. Your college education is something you will build on for the rest of your life. It will open doors and open doors and open more doors. So the idea that you are making a lifetime investment, is the essential thing for parents to see. Don't believe the headlines. One of the things the media does is to average everything from Harvard University to community colleges. They average all the tuition amounts together and create an eye-catching headline that students leave college \$100,000 in debt. You have to almost work at it, and make a lot of poor decisions, to leave college \$100,000 in debt. Almost no students go to any of our (Church of Christ-affiliated) schools without some assistance from government or from the school itself. Almost nobody is paying full sticker price.

**Intersections:** *If you were in a town hall meeting with high school seniors and they asked you to make the case to them personally for why they should choose a Christian education over a seemingly more prestigious state school, what would you say?*

**McLarty:** I once heard Wes Moore, author, Rhodes Scholar, White House Fellow and combat veteran, say, "Higher education is not just about what you learn, it's also about who you learn from and who you learn with." This is the heart of my message to a 17-year-old. It is what you learn. Harding needs to prepare students for a career; it needs to be academically excellent; and I do need to make that case to people. But it's also about who you learn from, because that person at the front of the classroom becomes hero, a model, a person you want to be like. Doesn't it make sense that that person should be someone who has faith at the core of their being?

If that professor becomes your hero, you are following someone who is following Christ. How much better is that than if the person you admire and want to be like is walking away from God. Finally, the real magic of Christian higher education is more than the administration, the heritage or the teachers, it's who you are in class with. When we gather students from all over the country who love God and want to change the world for the better, put those folks together in dorms, and in clubs and on athletic teams, and let them challenge, love and inspire each other, you have something incredible that is going to happen.

**Perrin:** The Christian university offers three critical strengths: (1) the advantage of being small; (2) the focus on undergraduate education and on student success; and (3) the shared Christian worldview of faculty, staff and students. As a student at LCU, I had incredible opportunities to serve and to lead because of the relative small size of our student body. My classes were smaller so I had the opportunity to get to know my professors and they knew my name. I could participate in a wide range of activities. I could be a student athlete and serve in student government. As a student at a Christian college you have the opportunity to make an impact and to be an influence that may not be possible elsewhere.

The second great strength is the focus on undergraduate education. At LCU, you have the opportunity to be taught by senior members of our faculty as a freshman. Indeed, you might have the chance to begin an undergraduate research project early in your time as a student with a senior faculty member who is a leader in the person's field. While LCU and many of our peers have strong and growing graduate programs, we continue to emphasize the classroom experience of our undergraduate students. The primary responsibility of our full-time faculty is to teach, and they view students as the reason for their work. We emphasize the

student experience, which sets us apart from many research-based institutions.

The third distinctive is perhaps the most significant. At a Christian university, you will be challenged to think from a Christian perspective about each and every subject you study. What does it mean to bring a Christian perspective to questions of criminal justice or biochemistry or education? The faculty bring to their work a shared Christian worldview that provides an anchor for every inquiry. This does not mean that everyone agrees about every issue. Far from it! But it does mean that there is broad agreement about the authority of Scripture and the truth of the story of God's love for His creation that is revealed in and through the Word.

**Intersections:** *What do university presidents need from ministers and leaders in our local churches to better help families understand the value of Christian education? How can a better partnership emerge?*

**Williams:** I was the first one to go to college out of my family. They were so proud of my brother and I because we went to one of "our colleges." No one talks like that anymore. We've got to have church leaders who will invest in the idea that they have poured their lives into the faith development of these young men and women, and when they turn 18-years-old, they don't want to watch most of them walk off the spiritual cliff. It's no secret that the most secular spots in our society are in higher education. Why would we pour in and invest so much to create these supportive environments for teenagers and then watch them at 18 walk into the lion's den.

**deSteiguer:** This is a two-way street. The Christian colleges need our congregations, and our congregations need strong Christian colleges. As Christian college leaders, we need to proactively invite ministers and church leaders to our campuses and include them in our community more and more.

At the same time, we need our church ministers and leaders to promote, publicly and to families, the importance of our colleges.





# FOUR REASONS WHY *Christian Education* NEEDS TO BE A PRIORITY

In American society, the value of higher education is widely recognized. College graduates, on average, have significantly higher lifetime earnings and report greater life satisfaction than those without a college degree. They even have longer life spans on average than non-college graduates.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, while Christians generally support higher education, many Christian parents and church leaders seem unaware of the value of distinctively Christian colleges and universities. Whether it's a preference for the large size of a state university or the low price tag of a community college, many Christian parents don't consider a Christian institution when helping guide their child in selecting a college. Here are four reasons why I believe Christian education needs to be a priority:

**1. Christian higher education offers an integrated and coherent approach to education.** I earned a bachelor's degree at a large state university. The education I received was adequate in its own way, but from a Christian perspective, something was missing. Although I was involved in a Christian group on campus, my study of history, psychology, chemistry and other subjects was disconnected from my relationship with God.

Christian higher education is based on the belief that as Christians, our lives are meant to be lived as an integrated whole. We live out our Christian faith just as much at work on Monday as we do at church on Sunday. Also, the academic life falls under the lordship of Christ. Thus, a Christian college seeks to integrate faith into all aspects of the institution—not just in chapel or

dorm room Bible studies, but the classroom, the athletic field and in small group discussions. If God is truly the Creator of all things, then our studies should reflect that. Students at Christian colleges/universities effectively learn about business, but they are also challenged to understand the field of business from a Christian perspective and to live out their Christian faith as *ethical business professionals*.

**2. The college years are critical years for faith development.** The research indicates that the young adult years (ages 18-25) are an important time of emotional and spiritual development. It's natural for young Christian adults to experience a struggle to “own” their parents' faith, and they often ask probing questions of their inherited beliefs. Christian colleges recognize this fact and provide a holistic learning community that seeks to nurture students' spiritual growth. Christian college students are not shielded from life's tough questions and issues of faith and doubt—that's one of the important features of higher education. But they do so within a supportive faith community, one in which the philosophy professor and volleyball coach act as spiritual mentors, instead of heaping it all on the campus minister. Not surprisingly, then, research on faith development indicates that, on average, students at Christian colleges are more likely to maintain religious commitments into their adult years than students at secular institutions.<sup>2</sup> Of course, there are no guarantees in higher education. But college students are more likely to grow in their Christian faith at schools that support and reinforce that faith.



### 3. Christian higher education is committed to academic excellence.

If what I said so far gives the impression that Christian colleges are only about spiritual growth, then let me correct that impression. As institutions that seek to follow the apostle Paul's admonition to "do all to the glory of God," Christian colleges are committed to academic excellence across a wide variety of majors and minors. For example, in the nationally-administered Student Satisfaction Survey, students at member schools of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities reported significantly higher satisfaction rates than their peers at non-CCCU schools on a wide variety of questions related to academic quality. Examples include statements such as, "Faculty care about me as an individual;" "There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus;" and "The quality of instruction I receive is excellent."<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Christian colleges, with their belief that "all truth is God's truth," seek to foster diversity and open dialogue—two important essential traits of a healthy learning community. Given the polarized and politicized state of many secular campuses today, in which shouting and protests often crowd out genuine dialogue, one could argue that students are more likely to experience genuine interaction with different people and ideas at a Christian college than at a secular one. In fact, in the most recent National Survey of Student Engagement, students at CCCU institutions reported that their school encouraged interaction with people from different racial and religious backgrounds at a higher level than did non-CCCU students.<sup>4</sup>

### 4. Christian higher education is surprisingly affordable.

Of course, a major criticism of Christian colleges—and all private colleges, for that matter—is that they're too expensive compared to state universities.

While it's true in general that private higher education, with its commitment to small class sizes and personalized attention from professors, is more expensive than public education, the difference is less than many realize. That's because private colleges are also committed to providing *significant financial aid* to make a college education accessible to as many students as possible.

In fact, a 2015 study of college costs revealed that when one factors in scholarships and other sources of financial aid, the average *out of pocket* cost for a bachelor's degree at a private college was only \$5,000 more than at a public university (\$63,000 vs. \$58,000).<sup>5</sup>

And the situation is even more favorable for CCCU institutions: In a study conducted in 2014, the average student debt for CCCU graduates was about \$20,000—which was \$5,000 *less* than the average student debt for graduates of public universities.<sup>6</sup>

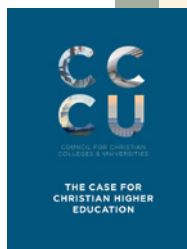
## INTERSECTIONS Recommends...


### The Case for Christian Education

#### *The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities*

The complete 2018 report can be found online at this link:

[www.cccu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-Case-for-CHE\\_WEB\\_pages.pdf](http://www.cccu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-Case-for-CHE_WEB_pages.pdf)



In summary, Christian colleges and universities offer a coherent learning experience, are committed to faith formation, are academically excellent and are affordable. They prepare young people to be successful professionals who integrate their faith in all that they do. Of course, as Christians, we know that life is bigger than a successful career. Our lives are meant to develop into the person God has designed each of us to be by finding our calling in life and playing our part in God's redemptive work in the world. A Christian college is a great way to begin that journey. 

#### **Rick Ostrander, Ph.D.**

*Vice President for Research and Scholarship  
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities*



# A Charge to Keep

**Bob Russell**

*Retired Senior Minister of the  
Southeast Christian Church*



*The following is an edited excerpt from Russell's plenary address, a message to Christian college presidents, at the Association for Biblical Higher Education 2018 annual meeting last February. The complete address can be viewed at:*

[www.abhe.org/abhe71downloads/](http://www.abhe.org/abhe71downloads/)

**I am an unashamed graduate of a Christian college. I grew up in a wonderful Christian home. My dad was a factory worker and an elder in the church. All six of my parents' children had a Bible college education. For a period, I was almost the black sheep of the family. I was so into sports in high school that I was determined to go to a secular college and play basketball.**

I was blessed to play on an excellent high school basketball team and our goal was to be state champs our senior year. In a one-and-done state tournament game we were ahead by 14 points in the last quarter. Sadly we fell apart, the opponents banked in a shot at the buzzer and we were beaten in overtime.

I was depressed. My lifelong goal was shattered. My older sister, Rosanne, who later became registrar of her alma mater, was attending Cincinnati Bible College and invited me to come visit just to get away and hopefully lift my spirits. Soon I was feeling an inner prompting and knew it was the place for me, too.

What I felt then and know now is that a Christian education is special. The goal is to produce graduates who can speak the truth of God in love. Hopefully they will find creative, compassionate ways to explain the Word of God in such a way that they will make the message about God, our Savior, attractive.

Most of you are familiar with David Brooks, popular New York Times columnist and author of the best-selling book *The Road to Character*. He was the keynote speaker at the 40th Anniversary Celebration Gala in Washington, D.C. This is what this secular columnist said when speaking to Christian educators:

*"You [Christian colleges] have what everybody else is desperate to have: You have a recipe to nurture human beings who have a devoted heart, a courageous mind and a purposeful soul. Almost no other set of institutions in American society has that, and everyone wants it. From my point of view, you're ahead of everybody else and have the potential to influence American culture in a way that could be magnificent.*

*"I visit many colleges a year. I teach at a great school, Yale University... My students are wonderful; I love them. But these, by and large, are not places that integrate the mind, the heart and the spirit. These places nurture an overdeveloped self and an underdeveloped soul... The head is large, and the heart and soul are backstage... My students are so hungry for spiritual knowledge.*

*"Now, you in this room, have the Gospel. You have the example of Jesus Christ. You have the beatitudes; the fire of the Holy Spirit; you believe in a personal God who is still redeeming the world... Carrying the Gospel is your central mission to your students and to those you serve beyond the campus walls, but that's not all you have. You have a way of being that is not all about self. You have a counterculture to the excessive individualism of our age."*

Wow! That's powerful stuff coming from a man who is not even a preacher but who sees our opportunity from a pragmatic perspective—and is envious of it. It's imperative that we make the most of it.

How can we be more effective at balancing head and heart? At the risk of being presumptuous, I'd like to make four suggestions. You may have some better ones but here are four things I'd emphasize if I were in a position to do so.

**Make a concerted effort to have chapel services that are warm and engaging:** I've spoken at over a dozen Christian college chapels and am aware this is a challenge in every school. But don't be satisfied with stale, dead chapel services. Don't let pseudo-intellectuals dictate a sterile mood in chapel. Be humble enough to have discussions with other institutions where there is an air of expectancy and excitement in chapel. What are they doing that we can learn from? Chapel is a place where students' hearts can be softened and Jesus can speak to them.

**Give students exposure to faculty and administration outside the classroom:** Don't be satisfied to impart knowledge and leave. Kids need the inspiration of a personal relationship with faculty and administrators who genuinely know the Lord. Dr. Lewis Foster was my favorite professor. He was brilliant. He was an honor graduate of Yale and Harvard and served on the NIV translation team. My best memory of him was when he played softball with us one day. Dr. Foster slid into second base hard trying to prevent a double play. My kind of guy! I saw you can be a godly man and a manly man. I didn't need apologetics nearly as much as I needed the inspiration of a godly man.

**Seek opportunities to openly demonstrate that sometimes heart trumps academics and celebrate those occasions:** Sure we're an institution of higher learning. There are rules—this is not Christian service camp. But the Spirit of Christ is more important than the letter of the handbook or even the approval of the accrediting association.

One morning my roommate went to sleep in a 7 a.m. Greek class. The elderly professor was passionate about Greek but he loved preacher boys who went to small churches on the weekends to speak. At the end of the class he said, "Mr. Humphries, I'd like for you to stay after class." We knew Tim was in deep trouble. The professor asked, "Mr. Humphries I understand you are preaching somewhere on the weekends. What time did you get back last night?" When Tim said he got in around midnight, the professor responded, "In the future if you get in late it's not necessary for you to come to class on Monday morning. I'll not dock your grade if you're not here."

What do you think that did for other young men who had a heart for preaching? When you show heart over rigid requirements you demonstrate the spirit of Christ and God blesses it because, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom."

**Be intentional to find ways to involve students in a good local church:** My grandson struggled some through his days at a Christian college. There were a number of factors that contributed to his struggle, and many were because of his own nature. But it was his involvement in a local church, and an internship with a willing congregation that made all the difference with him.

We can't separate Jesus from the Bible and shouldn't separate Jesus from the Church either. The Church is under vicious attack today from without and within. The old ways of the Church are ridiculed. The Church is accused of being legalistic, irrelevant, intolerant, homophobic and self-centered. On many Christian college campuses it's hip to denigrate the Church. Students are told, "You may find more genuine fellowship in a commune or a coffee shop than in a formal church." So folks are starting churches with the slogan, "This is a church for people who don't like church." Or "This is not your mother's church."

Frankly, I am really sick of hearing the Bride of Christ ridiculed and mocked. Jesus loved the Church and gave Himself for her. He said the gates of Hades will not stop the Church. He didn't say that about Christian colleges or other parachurch

organizations. Find ways to praise the Church, not denigrate it. Find ways to give kids exposure to a vibrant church. Honor the Church. Find ways to point out the good the Church has accomplished and don't overlook it.

God's people in churches started 106 of the first 108 colleges in our country. And guess who started and funded most of the hospitals? It, too, was Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalians and Catholic churches. The Church has funded most inner city missions that minister to the addicted and homeless. The Church started most orphanages and homes for the elderly. Who consistently visits with and conducts services for those in prison? The Church. Who establishes Crisis Pregnancy Centers to help women in desperation? The Church. Who teaches the moral values that provide the foundation for reliable business? The Church. Seventy years ago who taught some of us to sing—long before the civil rights movement—"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow black and white, they are precious in His sight?" The Church.

May God bless you as you lead a new generation into a deeper walk with our lord Jesus Christ. 🙏



# Christian Education *on Trial*



**Mark Lanier ('81)**  
*Founder of The Lanier Law Firm*

**Lawsuits are like coins; each one has two sides. A goal for me in a trial is to assess the available evidence from both sides and determine what is the just result. I tend to see life choices much the same. On Christian education, I look at the evidence from my own experience as well as that of my children. I come down strongly in favor of a Christian education, at least as far as undergraduate school.**

I did half of my college education at a large public university in my home state of Texas. During my time there, my major areas of study were Greek, Hebrew and economics. I finished my undergraduate degree at Lipscomb University in Nashville, earning a degree in Biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek) and moving economics to become my minor. Comparing the education of the secular school and Christian school in areas of scholastics, social interaction and networking opportunities, I find that both can work in the life of a believer, but the advantage clearly falls on the side of the Christian education.

**Scholastics:** My Hebrew and Greek classes were much more focused on practical aspects of life and Biblical understanding while studying at Lipscomb. The insights went beyond simple understanding of grammar and content and probed issues of faith and religious practice. That might seem natural for Bible-oriented scholastics, but even in areas of economics, I found the education at Lipscomb to be first-rate. The idea behind a Christian world view prompted professors to take all areas of scholastics seriously. Moreover, the teachers were interested in students as individuals, rather than as the means to an end of a teaching day.

**Social Interaction:** One thing is clear from personal experience: one can find friends who are interested in Christian faith at both secular schools and Christian schools. Similarly, both schools offer their fair share of those with no interest in matters of faith. But there seems a much higher percentage of those intimate with their faith at the Christian school. This manifests in group mission trips, group activities built around faith and group service projects. These same important parts of life were present in my state university, but if you balanced the percentage involved and interested in such activities, the larger numbers were in the Christian school. This translated to more chances to plug in, more people among whom to find friends with similar interests and

greater opportunities for enrichment through fellowship.

**Networking:** School produces friends and acquaintances for life. Whether one finds a future spouse, or just those with similar interests, one's future interactions can be tied to the networking relationships made during school. When those opportunities are laden with people of faith, the network is tighter and the bonds are anchored in a bedrock not found in the secular environment.

My firsthand experience on both sides of the coin has been reproduced in the generation of my children. Four of our five chose Christian schools for undergraduate work; one chose a secular Ivy League school. All got a great education, but the four in the Christian schools have the better bonds and results from teachers who cared and friends who believe. Their "years later" networking shows it.

When I put Christian education on trial, I find in its favor! 

## INTERSECTIONS *Recommends...*



Mark Lanier, one of America's top trial lawyers, uses his experienced legal eye to examine the plausibility of the Christian faith. Bringing science, current knowledge and common sense together in a courtroom approach, this "trial" displays a rich understanding of God and a strong foundation for Christian faith.

Following the format of a traditional legal trial, Lanier takes us from opening statement to closing summation by way of testimony from well-known witnesses: the scientist, the theologian, the linguist, the humanist, the philosopher, the psychologist and the ancient biblical eye-witness. These sources and many others investigate the sticky subjects of the Christian worldview that are commonly scrutinized by skeptics or overlooked by marginal believers. *Christianity on Trial* provides a thought-provoking starting point in the search for truth

# “TODAY’S EMERGING ADULTS ARE...”

**Scott Sager**

*Vice President for Church Services,  
Lipscomb University*



**Chris Gonzalez**

*Associate Professor and Director of  
Marriage and Family Therapy,  
Lipscomb University*



## WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR CHRISTIAN CULTURE?

The headlines regarding emerging adults (age 18-27) can often seem discouraging: “Decline in Worship Attendance,” “Poor Scores on Religious Knowledge Tests,” “More Spiritual than Religious,” and “Declining Attendance in Mainstream Churches.” And while these headlines are often the rule, we as Christians have been called to raise up young people who are exceptional—and exceptions to the rule.

The story of Joseph tells of an exceptional young man who shows the capacity in a foreign land to honor God regardless of circumstances. His character and life choices result in God using him to influence a nation, his family and the world during a time of famine. The story of Daniel tells of a young man taken away from his family and placed in the foreign soil in the capitol of a world empire where he does not compromise his convictions and rises to great influence to preserve his people and faith in God. His life was also exceptional. The story of Esther tells of a remarkable young woman who honored God and called her people to fast and pray in order to preserve the nation.

Each of these lives was exceptional. And each story was told because they were an exception to the rule—most Israelite young adults assimilated into foreign culture, lost their faith, and were never heard from again. We call this period in which they lived the Exilic Period, or period of The Exile, in which God’s people were taken from the familiar, the faith center, the family and friends who could support them and plopped down in a foreign soil where faith was tested.

Today we live in an exilic period here in the United States. Our

culture is post-Christian and the secure faith structures once built into the culture are crumbling and young adults find their faith challenged, confronted, and sometimes violently opposed in classrooms, on college campuses, and inside dormitories across our land.

Yet the same God who acted powerfully in the pre-Christian culture for Joseph, Daniel and Esther is still active in the post-Christian culture of today. God has our young adult population exactly where he wants them, inviting them to make a Jeremiah 29 type difference in post-Christian soil.

## WHAT WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT EMERGING ADULTS

For more than 10 years I have searched the research literature, contemplated the developmental, cultural and systemic theory, and conversed with today’s emerging adults on matters of faith, religion and spirituality. Surfacing from this investigation are some common themes that have substantial implications for how the Church intersects culture and new adults. There are at least eight key themes to keep in mind when considering the faith, religion and spirituality of emerging adults.

- 1. The span of young adulthood is still growing.** The emerging adults arriving on campuses this year on one level are some of the brightest and engaging students to ever arrive, but they are maturing differently than generations before them. Many come from broken

homes. School and extra-curricular activities have been their “part-time job” as after-school activities have kept them quite busy. And as they arrive on campus they view themselves as no longer children, but not yet adults.

Adolescence has a slow fade into full adulthood through the developmental stage called “emerging adulthood.” Many emerging adults will reach the age of 26-27 before most will start thinking of themselves as a “responsible adult.” During the years of 18-27 this group will be on a quest for personal discovery and meaning, often wanting to travel, add a gap-year before college and live at home whenever possible.

**2. The desire to change the world through a new cause is strong.**

Emerging adults are drawn to a cause and will buy their shoes, purchase their clothing and determine their fashion accessories based upon the cause they represent. Yet the 24/7 connection to news has led many young adults to “cause overload”—there is simply more need in the world than an emerging adult can generally bare. Over time, causes seem to shift with the trends—and most emerging adults lack a sense of obligation to any one cause. This lived experience of “changing the world” unites many and is a compelling narrative they can all share. But Christian emerging adults struggle to explain how world change and the Kingdom of God fit together in this narrative. A cause for the cause’s sake seems to be enough for most emerging adults.

**3. Service is their doctrine, but connecting it to Jesus is a challenge.**

Emerging adults long for a cause greater than themselves. Although very good at its core, this longing runs the risk of driving them to “cause-intoxication” with service. Some are in danger of making service the new “works righteousness” and settling for a civil religion of good works for good works’ sake. Motivation for service is often ego driven: “It feels good,” “I made a difference,” “It looks good on a resume” or “It’s a great place to meet folks and maybe a future mate!” But there is great difficulty in seeing Jesus as the cause for social justice and action.

**4. Loyalty to friends and a cause takes precedence even over personal truth.** “Tolerance” is the driving force behind social interactions of emerging adults. To their credit, they do not want to hurt anyone else’s feelings (at least not in front of them). Emerging adults look at older adults as being too rigid; too willing to sacrifice a friendship over a belief. Older adults look at emerging adults as too soft, unwilling to stand for truth in a world of “anything goes.” Yet the emerging adult really does not understand why a friendship ought to be jettisoned just because beliefs are different. This

relational loyalty is an asset when it can hold conflicting realities in tension in a healthy way, but it is a liability when they relieve the tension by letting go of a truth altogether.

In general, truth is contextual for most emerging adults: “I am right, but you are not necessarily wrong.” A desire to preserve the relationship is the core value while truth claims can be quarantined or held at bay in order to preserve a friendship. This genuine concern for the feelings of others means emerging adults will flee before they fight (and will avoid the faith fight wherever possible). Solidarity with friends is heightened by a feeling of personal singleness (perhaps feeling alone in a broken home) and a singleness view of the world—which we’ll explain later.

**5. Emerging adults are broadly connected yet often feel confused.**

Clearly there is a danger of addiction to technology. This generation has never known a world without technology at the forefront in every facet of life. Most of them secretly wish that limits would be placed on their technological usage and realize that responding to all Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat in a timely manner (or else risk hurting the feelings of friends and connections) is a daunting task.

In the midst of the connectedness, most emerging adults feel an ambiguity in that many of their “friendships” are more “virtual friendships” than “personal relationships.” Basic Ambiguity Theory indicates that for a relationship to be growing and thriving it requires both physical presence and psychological presence in order to develop. Many times the friendships of emerging adults are virtual in nature and they seldom see the person they are “friending” except through cyberspace. All the while, opportunities for genuine relationships are all around them while they focus upon texting friends far away instead of engaging current classmates.

**6. Curating an “image” while being “real and authentic” are both important to emerging adults.** “Authentic-y” might be a word to describe the desire for an “image of authenticity” to be communicated while crafting a highly sculpted Snapchat or Instagram page that gives the right message about themselves. The role of body image is highly significant and no generation has ever been more keenly aware of “looks” and what is modeled as cool or trendy at a given moment. Environmental causes are often tied to image, and sexual freedoms are often seen as an expression of newfound freedom and a new experience. This generation longs for a “meaningful outcome” for life—but are not sure where to find it.

- 7. Looking for vibrant faith in a personal mosaic.** Emerging adults deeply desire spiritual experiences of many kinds. They would like to experience more, see more, contemplate more and generally desire a freedom to search and journey into personal faith. As a matter of fact, “faith” is often viewed in a journey motif. This search for meaning has often sent emerging adults into new brands of churches geared specifically to reach the emerging adult. Most of these new brands of church are single generation churches led by emerging adults for emerging adults and provide few mentors and older role models. This means most emerging adults are learning discipleship from their peers, if at all.

Yet emerging adults are also looking for older mentors at other churches to supplement their faith development, but on their own terms and timing. This quest to build a personal path to discipleship means many emerging adults have jettisoned more organized faith and faith structures for a post-denominational “personal mosaic.” In one’s own personal mosaic, spirituality is found in a buffet of choices pieced together by each believer. Church identity in one institution is seen as too restrictive and may feel oppressive by today’s emerging adult.

### *Emerging adults long for a cause greater than themselves.*

- 8. Emerging adults are forming faith in a “singleness” context.** Emerging adults have the furthest marital horizon before them than at any time in American history, with today’s average age of marriage nearing 30 years old. Furthermore, the marital option they face is not the question of “When are you going to marry?” but the question “Will you choose marriage or something else?” With a decade of singleness before marriage, if marriage even happens, they are the first generation to begin making major life choices with no significant context of a “spouse/parent” alongside them. They view the world from a “singleness” viewpoint and assess faith institutions from the lens of a single. This means most view the traditional organized church as a “place for married people, with families.” It is critically important to see that most emerging adults see no ecclesial place for themselves in today’s Church. They just do not fit!

This generation of emerging adults desire to change the world—now! They need to be valued as “single” and “whole” and a vibrant piece of the Kingdom of God with resources ready to make a difference today. Emerging adults want to be accepted, affirmed and involved as a single adult. They want to be valued as a major source of energy in church life. They want to be championed as a key asset: just as Jesus, Paul, etc. were in the early church. Yet most churches imply, “Get into a life situation that is acceptable (marry), then you can be a **real** member.”

### THE CASE FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

During the exilic period of Joseph, or Daniel, or Esther, three options were available, but only one could produce exceptional young people for God. The three options were: 1) assimilation: melt into the culture like everyone else, 2) entrenchment: be like the Amish and avoid contact with the culture in any way, and 3) radical rededication: determine to raise up godly young people for a post-exilic world. Leaders during the exile decided they were tired of losing young people, and so they did something radical.

They invented synagogue.

Read through the whole Bible and you will see that God never commanded synagogue. But the synagogue, the place of spiritual learning in the midst of an oppressive culture, became the center of Israel’s family, community and spiritual life. The synagogue is mentioned in the New Testament on 56 occasions and came to denote a place of worship and study that the early church would emulate. Before the Babylonian captivity, worship centered upon the Temple in Jerusalem. During the Exile, with worship in Jerusalem an impossibility, the synagogue arose and took the place as the site for reading the Torah, prayer and religious instruction. In synagogue, the people learned God was still their sanctuary (Ezek. 11:16). In synagogue, the people found a place of instruction and all education: for studying Scripture and passing on the faith (Ezra 8; Neh. 8–9).

The synagogue for this generation of emerging adults will be the exceptional Christian colleges and universities where faith and learning are taken seriously. This will occur at the truly exceptional campus ministries and campus centers at our state schools as well. But the last best place for emerging adults to become exceptional disciples of Jesus is on a Christian campus surrounded by women and men of deep faith committed to faith and learning in the name of Jesus Christ. ☪



# THE RISE of the Secular Student

**Randy Harris**

*Professor of Bible, Missions and Ministry  
Abilene Christian University*



In my freshman Bible class about the life and teachings of Jesus, most semesters I show my students a video of a modern-day exorcism. A troubled young woman thrashes about uncontrollably, speaking in many voices—often profanely—and attempts to fight off those trying to assist her. A priest says the traditional prayers of exorcism, attempting to expel the demons that haunt her. At the conclusion of the video, I ask my students two questions: How

many think she is truly possessed by demons? How many think she has a mental illness that should be treated with drugs and therapy? My friends from the Southern hemisphere, though rejecting the ritualized prayers as a means of exorcism, have no doubt that she is demon possessed. My Western students, however, tend to think that what she needs is not a minister, but a psychiatrist. In a real way, this describes the issue of secularism.

Charles Taylor, in his magisterial work *A Secular Age*, describes a variety of ways of being secular. There are some ways in which we are all secular. For instance, when your plumbing goes bad, you



probably call a plumber rather than praying over your pipes. Or when your children have an infection, you are more likely to go to the doctor for an antibiotic than you are to call a shaman to cast out the evil spirits. In that sense, most of us in the global, developed West are secular. We deal with our worldly problems in worldly ways.

But as Taylor points out, there is another kind of secularity, which is relatively new to the Western world. This secularity has to do with contested beliefs. Until the modern age, the “default setting” for people in the Western world was belief in God. And in today’s world, at least in many segments of our culture, the “default setting” is to deny the existence of God. Thus, in Taylor’s words, we find ourselves “cross pressured.”


It is not that belief in God has disappeared in the Western world—it most assuredly has not. It is that this belief is now contested, that there are secular explanations for things that were once explained exclusively in religious terms. And young people today grow up in this contested, cross-pressured world. It is virtually impossible to wall-off Christian young people from the questions that are posed to their religious convictions: Where did human beings come from? Can you really believe in the resuscitation of a corpse? What

makes your morals better than anyone else’s? Aren’t all religions just the result of superstitions that, in our maturity, we have outgrown?

So, our question is, how do we spiritually form young people in a world where belief is no longer the default setting, but everything is contested ground? One approach would be to teach them that all unbelief is unreasonable or immoral. That is, unbelievers are either stupid or bad. This approach seems to me untenable, however, because our young people will have friends and colleagues who are both good people and smart people who do not share their convictions.

I want to suggest what I hope and trust is the approach of contemporary Christian education—to take seriously unbelief as an option. At the same time, I want to point out that such secularism carries with it its own assumptions, which are often unproven and in some cases, highly unlikely. That is, to contest the ground that is being contested.

There is a risk involved in this, of course. A risk I consider largely unavoidable. It is possible—as we introduce young Christians to secular explanations for human beings, the world and morality—that they may find this explanatory system more coherent and plausible



*How do we spiritually form young people in a world where belief is no longer the default setting, but everything is contested ground?*

than Christian explanations, in which case, unbelief may ensue. I suppose one could hope that they never encounter a smart secularist. Good luck on that.

## Many unbelievers are... “haunted by transcendence.”

But I am, after all, a spokesman for Christian faith and a believer in a crucified and risen Savior. I further believe that the world and human beings, as we experience them, are utterly inexplicable without reference to something greater than this secular world. And I think that many unbelievers are, in Taylor’s words, “haunted by transcendence.” That is, they have those fleeting experiences of something greater than the merely human and physical.

So how then shall we live? And this is where I suppose I wish to make my case for Christian education. In our secular age, all young people are going to encounter the possibility of unbelief. The secular age raises questions that cannot be avoided. The questions to ask are: Do we want young people to encounter these questions from the point of view of secularists, with no convictions about transcendence? Or, do we want young people introduced to these difficult questions in this cross-pressured world by Christians who finally believe that these most difficult questions can only be answered in light of a living God?

One cannot avoid the risk that not everyone will come to the same conclusions that I do. And not all of these stories will have a happy ending. I just know that I would like young people to be introduced to the hard questions of faith by people who actually have some faith of their own. [🔗](#)

## INTERSECTIONS *Recommends...*

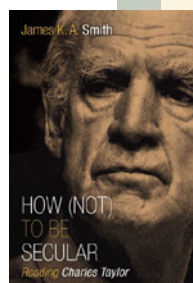
### A Secular Age

*Charles Smith*



What does it mean to say that we live in a secular age? Almost everyone would agree that we—in the West, at least—largely do. And clearly the place of religion in our societies has changed profoundly in the last few centuries. Charles Taylor takes up the question of what these changes mean, of what happens when a society in which it is virtually impossible not to believe in God becomes one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is only one human possibility among others.

*How (Not) to Be Secular* is both a reading guide to *How*



### How Not to be Secular

*Jamie K. Smith*

*How (Not) to Be Secular* is both a reading guide to Charles Taylor’s work *A Secular Age* and philosophical guidance on how we might learn to live in our times. Jamie Smith’s book is a compact field guide to Taylor’s insightful study of the secular, making that significant work accessible to a wide array of readers. Even more, though, Smith’s *How (Not) to Be Secular* is a practical philosophical guidebook, a how-to manual on how to live in our secular age. It ultimately offers us an adventure in self-understanding and maps out a way to get our bearings in today’s secular culture.

# Mentoring Students Through the Power of Story and the Gospel of Grace

*Every human inevitably encounters feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness, guilt and condemnation. We all contemplate our inescapable death and wonder if our life is being lived the way it was intended by God. These philosophical wrestling matches are not to be escaped. We struggle with them because we are human, created to question who we are and where we fit into God's creation.*

**But college students—especially freshman—often wear masks designed to make their peers believe that the inner wrestling matches, the feelings of lacking and imperfection, somehow don't pertain to them. This age group is clever at staging an idyllic existence, preferably through social media outlets such as Instagram and Facebook.**

Beneath that façade, however, most college students live lives that are far from perfect—lives that are disrupted by parental divorce, the death of friends or relatives, sexual or verbal abuse, friendships gone awry, or other tragic events that chip away their self-confidence. Upon entering college, many long to connect honestly with their peers about their fears and doubts; instead, they trade their authenticity for a veneer of false perfection.

One's ability to internalize the message of the Gospel—the message of life-giving grace—depends upon the willingness to come to terms with life's ultimate questions in an honest and straightforward way. This internalization of the gospel is the premise that lies behind the honors freshman seminar class that has been offered to my students for 10 years—eight years at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, and the past two years at Lipscomb University.



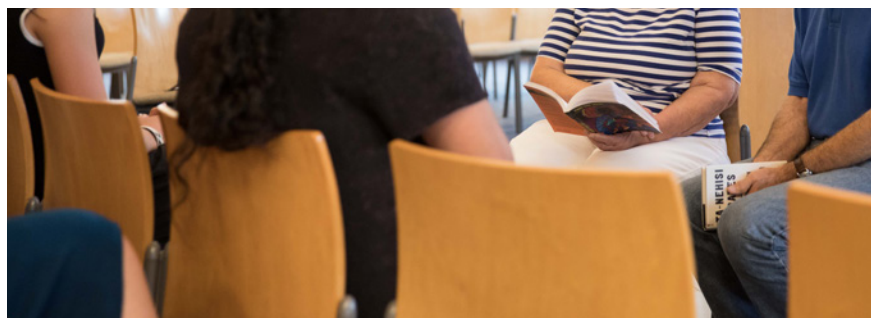
Jan and Richard Hughes, at left, teach a freshman seminar course every fall on self-examination and understanding perspectives through reading and writing projects.

This class has three main objectives for the student: 1) *understanding another's perspective* on how they lived through difficult life situations 2) *self-examination* by spiritually connecting with their own unique story and 3) *writing exercises* to help express their journey and sharpen their communication skills. Over the course of the term, the students read four or five compelling memoirs: *Sacred Journey* by Frederick Buechner, *Traveling Mercies* by Anne Lamott, *The Color of Water* by James McBride, *All Over but the Shoutin'* by Rick Bragg and *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. After reading each memoir, students are asked to write a two-page paper about him or herself—a memory from their own life that the prescribed memoir has awakened in them. In this writing exercise, they examine their journey through the medium of another's story. They are able to feel a sense of connection that then opens the door to honest communication with their peers, creating transparency, connection

and feelings of sameness. Their mask can start to come off and the real person can be seen because they realize they are all sharing the same existential feelings. Slowly but surely, the striving for false perfection eases into a feeling that says, “I’m pretty normal, and perfection isn’t attainable. Asking questions to the hard things leads to growth, not isolation.”

Many of the students’ shared memoirs are happy reflections. But many are not. In fact, over ten years of gathering the collective data from this class, students increasingly want to share stories that are painful and reveal their vulnerabilities. They feel relief in sharing a comment, such as, “If you don’t know this about me, then you don’t know me at all.” The honest reflections about their own stories are the ones that carry the potential to open the students’ hearts to the power of the Gospel of Christ. That same dynamic is true in the memoirs they read from the assigned reading, not to mention those of their peers.

When American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner was only ten years old, his father committed suicide. That sad and tragic event defined his life in far-reaching ways, yet ultimately opened him to the truths of the Gospel. Best-selling author and political activist Anne Lamott, whose faith in God helped pull her out of a life of alcoholism, sex and depression in her twenties, connects with readers through humor, extreme openness and her Christian faith. American writer and musician James McBride endured a difficult childhood (one of 12 children and born into a mixed race family—a white, Jewish mother and an African American father). He struggled to understand his questions of race and identity, and only found his answers as an adult, when he learned his mother’s story. She was first abused by her father as a child, then as an adult was disowned by her family when she married an African American man. Though disowned, she finally found meaning and acceptance in a community of Christians and gave her life to Christ. Because of his memoir, in 2015, McBride won the National Humanities Medal



awarded by Barack Obama, who stated that he, “...humanize[d] the complexities of discussing race in America. Through writings about his own uniquely American story, and his works of fiction informed by our shared history, his moving stories of love display the character of the American family.”

All three of these authors are able to reach a wide range of people who have various backgrounds, which highlights the point that every person’s story matters.

While our students often share stories of joy, achievement and success, the memoirs they compose implicitly grant them permission to reflect on the pain in their own lives and share the experience for the purpose of unity and feeling heard. Whether their stories are easy on the ears or weigh heavy on the heart, they are spoken aloud in a circle of their peers. With each successive memoir that is read, they write additional stories and read them aloud as well. Through that process, each student comes to see that he or she is not alone—that all the other students have struggles too.

To insure that our class is a place of safety, we commit to each other that no stories shared will ever leave the classroom. In this cocoon of safety, the students are free to share their richly textured and beautifully written stories, often about their own inadequacies, frustrations with fate, their sense of guilt, bouts with emptiness and meaninglessness, anxieties over family and friends ... and the list goes on. By entering into the world of shared brokenness and difficult questions, the Gospel inevitably brings ultimate answers. It speaks the word of life-giving grace into the void of unknowingness, which brings a centering peace and a revised faith. ☪



**Richard and Jan Hughes**

*Richard is Scholar-in-Residence at Lipscomb University, Jan is co-teacher of Lipscomb’s Writing Your Own Story course*



# We're in the business of changing lives

**Kent Gallaher ('91)**

*Chair of Department of Biology  
Lipscomb University*



*The following is drawn from a speech that Kent Gallaher, who has been both a student and a professor at Lipscomb, regularly gives to prospective Lipscomb University students, describing student/faculty relationships at the university.*

Growing up is hard.

There's a lot of "stuff" that can get in the way of one's healthy social/emotional/spiritual development. I came to Lipscomb in the 1980s. I was a 24-year-old transfer student, who had previously been dismissed from another Christian college when I was 20. So for several years I had lived a difficult life. When I arrived at Lipscomb I was hardened, emotionally guarded and spiritually broken.

But I met people at Lipscomb whom God used to change my life. Professors who gently began the process of softening me and who invested their lives in my recovery. Men and women who showed me how to live as a mature Christian should. They became my mentors.

Several of them have now passed away, but I can tell you that their fingerprints are on my life. Their influence can be seen in my marriage, how I parented my children and in my choice of career. Those good people will be part of my life for the rest of my life.

Students, this whole mentoring thing is going to seem weird in the beginning. You'll drop by my office to ask me questions about course content, but before you know it, we'll be talking less about class and more about life.

It's a beautiful thing really. You'll be surrounded by men and women who have made the conscious decision to minister in higher education. We have chosen to be at this place, at this time, because we know that someone like you might need to know someone like us.

Although I look like a football coach, I'm a real, live published scientist, with a Ph.D. in plant physiology and biochemistry. So I am sometimes asked, "Why teach at Lipscomb?" I was asked that very question by one of the members of my graduate committee during my doctoral defense, "Why are you going to waste your life teaching at some little Christian school that no one's ever heard of before?" After a few seconds I simply asked him how old he was. Confused, he replied, "I'm 57." Then I said, "I mean no disrespect, but I don't want to wake up one morning and find that I'm 57 and wonder if I ever made a difference in anyone's life. Lipscomb will let me make a difference every single day."

You see at Lipscomb, it's really all about relationships. Mentoring manifests itself in some of the most personal and memorable moments in life.

I could tell you about **Michael** and **Rachel**: I was Michael's best man at their 2003 wedding. They have two beautiful daughters who call me grandfessor.

Or I could tell you about **Jacob**: He was tragically killed two days after he proposed marriage to his longtime girlfriend and less than a week before he was to report for his first year of medical school. I was one of Jacob's mentors, and in that painful moment his family reached out to me to preach his funeral. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my professional life.

Or I could tell you about a young lady named **Anna**: When she decided to make an eternal commitment to God, I was the one who baptized her in the Osmon Fountain in the middle of Bison Square.



Anna has a very serious condition called fibrous dysplasia, and in the fall of her sophomore year she was scared having yet another invasive brain surgery. She asked me to come be with her family. So I found myself that fall in Columbus, Ohio, sitting at the OSU James Cancer Center, just trying to comfort everyone involved.

Or I could tell you about all of the students that I've led to Christ over a 22-year career. Or about a couple named **Brandon** and **Savannah** whose wedding I officiated last spring. Or of the international students that my wife and I have fostered from places like Brazil, Madagascar, Scotland, Rwanda and the Czech Republic. Or of the students I've mentored in research and with whom I have traveled the world. Or of the social club for which I serve as faculty sponsor.

The bottom line is this, I have discovered that authentic mentoring relationships are time consuming, sometimes uncomfortable and often involve personal sacrifices, but the payoff is beyond compare!

You see, when that day comes—when my career is over and I reflect on whether I did anything significant with my life, whether I did the thing I so naively said more than 20 year ago: did I make a difference?—that's when they will come to me. I will see their faces in my mind's eye. All those former students that I've mentored, not just in science, but in life. They will be my evidence of a life well-lived in service to my God.

You see, in Christian higher education we're in the business of changing lives. You can get a great education at a lot of schools, but the thing that sets Christian education apart is a faculty that has dedicated their lives to mentoring students not just in their academic discipline but in life. And I can tell you, that those relationships do not end when they graduate. Your children represent our life's work. [👉](#)

## Getting to know 'Dr. G'



*Chandler Montgomery ('17), a Lipscomb molecular biology graduate from Nashville now in medical school at Vanderbilt University, came to know Dr. Kent Gallaber ('91), known as Dr. G on campus, when he became his academic advisor in his freshman year.*

### *How did you come to build a relationship with Dr. G?*

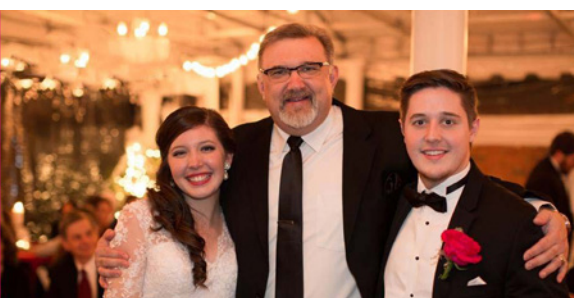
Because he has an open door policy, I could talk to him about school and life in general. He was always friendly and made me feel at home. He never tells you what to do. Sometimes he'll give his opinion, but he really wants students to decide on their own.

### *How did your relationship with Dr. G impact your college career?*

The beginning of my freshman year, was an adjustment for me, for sure. My first semester was difficult, but knowing Dr. G and other faculty in biology and other departments made me feel like I had a home on the third floor of McFarland. Throughout college, I knew I had an advocate. He could see me going farther than I could even see myself going.

### *What type of spiritual role did Dr. G play in your life?*

Talking about his faith and talking to students about their faith is just as important to him as teaching biology. I saw him not just as a mentor, but as an example of someone who is strong in their faith and purposely tries to share that faith with other people. He was an example of how someone can incorporate their faith within their job. It made me even more willing to come to him and be open up about the struggles I had going on. I know he prays for students every single day.



## Arsany & Dr. Klarissa Jackson

*Arsany Abouda, a molecular biology junior originally from Egypt, began working with Dr. Klarissa Jackson, assistant professor of pharmaceutical sciences, in Lipscomb's Summer Pharmacy Research program after his freshman year. In the hard sciences, a faculty mentorship can mean the difference between a stalled or a successful career.*

***How will this mentoring relationship enhance your future professional career?***

Our mentoring relationship isn't just about getting the research work done. She cares about me understanding the material and applying it to my intended career more than just doing the laboratory work itself. I remember many times where Dr. Jackson took hours of her time explaining to me difficult material about our research that I had no clue about. When presentation times come, she spends hours of her time watching me practice and helping me create the best presentation possible. It all shows me how much Dr. Jackson cares about my success.

***How has your mentoring relationship made your college experience better?***

Before knowing Dr. Jackson, I had not received much encouraging feedback from people surrounding me because they thought college was going to be impossible for me (because his family immigrated from Egypt in 2009). She changed the way I look at myself because of how much she encouraged and supported me throughout my research work. She has made me keep pushing myself further and taught me not to compare how smart I am with any other student, but rather how competitive I can be with all college students in the U.S.

***How has your mentoring relationship made your college experience better?***

Besides our work, we would talk about church and community service and how we both serve children in Sunday School. Dr. Jackson has strengthened my relationship with God because of how honest and faithful she is at all times.



Dr. Klarissa Jackson (left) has been working with Arsany Abouda (right) since his freshman year at Lipscomb.



## Zo, Angela & Becky Tallon

*Zo Ratsiatandra ('12), IT service manager at Excis in Madagascar, and Angela Moore ('15), web specialist at WireMasters Inc. in Columbia, Tennessee, were both students of Becky Tallon, an associate professor of computing full-time and part-time at Lipscomb for 29 years. The female IT students of today need more than coding skills to succeed in the tech industry of tomorrow.*

*How did your mentoring relationship with Becky Tallon enhance your academic success?*

**Angela:** I felt such support from her that when courses would become extremely challenging or it was hard to see graduation down the line, I was able to persevere and keep going.



**Tallon:** Angela's classes were online, yet I maintained physical office hours. As students encountered some of the more difficult material, Angela chose to come to my office in person. I could see with each visit her confidence start to build and her shyness diminish. She started to delve into material not covered in class.

*Has your relationship influenced your spiritual life?*

**Zo:** It taught me how to share with others and how to help others. Nowadays, I am part of an association called Women in Tech Madagascar, which is an organization helping women to be familiar with IT and to dare to pursue a career in IT. As a member of WITM, I participate in various free trainings and workshops to teach those who are interested, especially women and young ladies.



**Tallon:** I went to the same church as Angela so I made a point to speak to her each time I saw her. We have a tech workshop at our church, and I encouraged Angela to participate. Most of the participants are elderly people and they loved Angela. She was patient and made them feel good about themselves as they learned to use their iPhone or their iPad. Angela continued working with this until she got a web development job.

## Patrick Chaffin & Charles Frasier



*Recently, one of Lipscomb's legendary professors, Charles Frasier ('66), who has been a guiding force in the accounting department for more than 45 years, retired.*

*One of his former students, Patrick Chaffin ('96), now senior vice president of asset management at Ryman Hospitality Properties spoke about his influence at a recent retirement event for Frasier.*



The way he conducted himself in class, the way he conducted himself in church—he was the consummate professional. Those were the skills that you modeled. The technical skills we learned, and he was great at teaching that, but it was who he was and how he conducted himself which is what I really keyed in on and paid attention to. Mr. Frasier had a different level of credibility among us all because we knew when he left teaching, he was going to go out and work. We held him in high esteem because he was the real deal.

There are three professors who stand out to me while I was here at Lipscomb, because they took a personal interest in me. They took a personal interest in me in the classroom, and for years afterwards. They continued to check in to see how I was doing, to see how my personal life as well as my professional life was developing. And Mr. Frasier is at the top of that list. So he is more than a professor. He is a very special friend.



# Fossils and Faith

**Freshman class explores the boundaries and intersections of science and faith**

**Alan Bradshaw**

*Chair of Physics, Lipscomb University  
Research Assistant Professor, Vanderbilt University  
Elder, Brentwood Hills Church of Christ*



**W**hat do physics, fossils and faith have in common?

More than you would expect.

All three have been aspects of a freshman honors course I have taught for more than a decade. Sometimes called “Secrets of the Universe,” more recently called “Defense Against the Dark Arts and Sciences,” the course is designed to explore the boundaries between faith and science and how one can ascertain truth from both those pursuits.

It is part of Lipscomb’s freshman-level seminar series, called Lipscomb Experience, focusing on enhancing students’ critical thinking, writing and study skills as they embark on their college careers. Fall seminars are based on various real-world themes such as comic books, the “Serial” podcast, baseball literature, controversies in science, effecting social change, food, political science fiction and “Star Wars.”

As a scientist myself, I developed the course to look at the fundamental difference between the truth you find in science and the truth in faith. In the most recent iteration of the course, students explore what happens when you misuse one or the other: either trying to ascertain eternal truths from the study of science or trying to impose faith issues on scientific questions.

Over the years, I have used numerous exercises and metaphors to help students use scientific concepts to reveal the value of thinking about common things in a different way. Assignments and discussion challenge

students to recognize their preconceptions of reality and look at those beliefs again through the lens of modern science, nature, experiential learning and faith.

For example, the students read the novella *Flatland*, a parable about a three-dimensional sphere that travels to the two-dimensional Flatland to try to get the flat squares and circles to think beyond their two dimensions. We took current theories in science (such as string theory) and looked at what could be, what impossibilities became possible.

In one recent year, **Daniel Gordon** ('04, M.Div. '09), a long-time minister from Hendersonville and an adjunct Bible instructor at Lipscomb, took 20 students to three Tennessee fossil digs and to a University of Tennessee-Martin geology laboratory to meet Michael Gibson, professor of geology at UT-Martin.

Gibson instructed the students on how to find fossils and about what they were finding in the rocks. The building of relationships among the students as they participated was of key importance, said the professors. The class was divided fairly evenly between science majors and other majors, and the discussions were lively on both the paleontological digs and in the classroom, said participants.

“Students came in excited and receptive to explore positive attitudes toward science and deep faith convictions,” said Gordon. “The personal encounter

they had with other people, fossils and the physical activity was rewarding and influential. Almost all said they enjoyed the experience and felt enhanced in their faith life.”

No one told them what to think. We encouraged them to consider differing assertions, apply their own observations and come up with their own conclusion, but never challenging the basic girders of their faith. The biggest critics of any idea are the most polar and the most vocal, so they end up defining the debate. We introduced some of the more reasoned voices.

Students say the class opened up many more questions than it ever answered, but it also made them more comfortable with those uncertainties. **Hannah Holbert**, a sophomore biology major, said the class helped her be more comfortable with hypothetical ideas. “I went into (the archaeological digs) with an open mind, and it both reinforced things I believe and brought up new ideas,” said Holbert.

“Our Lipscomb Experience class helped me overcome believing the myth that science and faith contradict one another,” said **Ashtyn Smith**, a junior from South Carolina. “The fossil dig was a really interesting experience and encouraged discussion about what we believe regarding evolution and the age of the earth.”

The presidential election and the “fake news” phenomenon of 2016 provided plenty of discussion fodder for the class as well. It made it clear to students that the value of being able to discern truth is not limited to the scientific world.

Throughout our lives, people are putting out truth claims, and it is in Christian higher education where we can learn how to evaluate those, both intellectually and spiritually. My class shows students how to evaluate and apply the similarities and differences in applying the scientific method to truth claims versus how they can address issues of faith: in short, how you can get to what’s real. 🌐

*This story was co-written by Janel Shoun-Smith, Lipscomb University senior manager of communication.*





# The Church of Today, not just Tomorrow

## How the ENGAGE Youth Theology Initiative Motivates a New Generation

In July 2017, the College of Bible & Ministry at Lipscomb University launched the ENGAGE Youth Theology Initiative, a summer scholars program designed specifically for high school students longing to go deeper into the exploration of Scripture, theology and Christian leadership.

Funded by a generous grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc., ENGAGE brings together rising high school sophomores, juniors and seniors from racially diverse backgrounds in Churches of Christ to wrestle with: 1) the contemporary call to racial justice and healing; 2) the histories of both the church and the U.S. civil rights movement; and 3) what it means to live a life of Christian vocation and service.

In July 2017 the inaugural class of 26 teenage participants arrived on Lipscomb's campus, representing seven states and 22 congregations from across the United States. Students spent seven days on Lipscomb's campus studying theology, Scripture and history with university professors and immersing themselves in the spiritual, cultural, historic and entertainment opportunities available in the great city of Nashville.

Students also spent three days traveling through Alabama on the "Bus Ride to Justice" pilgrimage—a historical and interactive tour of various sites and memorials of the civil rights movement, including: 1) the Tuskegee Airmen National Historical Museum; 2) the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham; 3) the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma; 4) a walking tour of Montgomery and the Alabama State Capitol; 5) the Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project <sup>1</sup>; and 6) the Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Multicultural Center.



**Claire Davidson Fredricks**

*Program Director,  
ENGAGE Youth Theology Initiative  
College of Bible & Ministry  
Lipscomb University*

During this experience, students also met attorney Fred D. Gray, a legendary civil rights leader, lawyer, author and longtime elder at the Tuskegee Church of Christ in Alabama. Gray provided legal representation to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, the coordinators of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the 1965 Selma March, and victims of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. He successfully argued four cases before the U.S. Supreme Court before the age of 30 and filed lawsuits that eventually desegregated all public schools, colleges and universities in the State of Alabama.

What students learned from Dr. Gray is that one doesn't have to be employed by a church or called to preach in order to be used by God for His Kingdom purposes. Gray integrated his faith, talents and legal profession to bring about a more just society in the state of Alabama, to advocate for the voiceless and to lift up the oppressed.

Through daily Bible study, the ENGAGE participants learned that the biblical text has much to say on the subjects of justice and mercy and that these are the "weightier matters of the law" to which Jesus himself called his followers to attend (Matt. 23:23). Over time, the students began to view themselves as ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-21).

Students today are eager to discover how their faith and vocation can connect to real-world issues in the here and now, as it pertains to poverty, immigration, education, health care, crime and mass incarceration. One of the main goals of the ENGAGE initiative was to help students understand how they—using the gifts and skills that God has given them—can become the answer to the many prayers we pray on behalf of suffering people, the wounded, the impoverished and the outcast. We can't really love "the other" until we know "the other," so a crucial process of the ENGAGE initiative was helping students develop awareness and empathy practices, such as active listening, constructive dialogue, conflict transformation and holding space for one another's stories.

Through team-building games students learned how to be flexible, bend and receive help from one another. In one class, the ENGAGE students wrote and shared personal narratives related to race and discovered that empathy comes through listening and attempting to understand the perspective of “the other.”

*As different as we all are, we're alike, for the most part,” one participant said. “It was an amazing thing to witness a female student, who is active in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, come face-to-face with the son of a law-enforcement officer and dialogue respectfully with him, then end the week as good friends, realizing that they both really wanted the same things after all.”*

The ENGAGE participants learned how to “let their little lights shine” as they sang freedom songs and hymns and marched in the July heat across the historic Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. They also learned that the young people who marched in the “Children’s Crusade” in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 (the ones who were attacked by dogs and fire hoses in Kelly Ingram Park) were the same age then as our ENGAGE students are now (15–18 years old). Those students didn’t wait to take actions that would change the world and “set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

What the ENGAGE experience taught all of us is that high school kids don’t want to wait to be the “church of tomorrow” or “world-changers, someday.” They want to claim their rightful place as the “church of today” and begin to live right now into God’s Kingdom purposes for each of them.

*For more information about the ENGAGE Youth Theology Initiative, please visit [engage.lipscomb.edu](http://engage.lipscomb.edu).*





## **Invitation: Holistic Integration of Adolescent Multiple-Selves**

*I am captivated by Andrei Rublev's 15th century painting, *The Trinity*. This famous Russian icon depicts three angels, also interpreted as the Holy Trinity, seated around a table, sharing food from a cup. This image captures the true meaning of reciprocity and hospitality and is based on a story from Genesis about the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah. When I view this beautiful icon, I am drawn to the open space...an invitation to participate.*

Through the years, I have had the great honor of immersing myself into the dynamic field of adolescent psychosocial development. This field of inquiry has both fascinated me and informed my ministry. I'd be lying, though, if I didn't admit that it often provided its fair share of frustration. I first encountered the concept of adolescent multiple-selves in *Hurt*, written by Dr. Chap Clark. This idea intrigued and tugged at me, but I was resistant. Acknowledging this reality would mean admitting that my students were somehow operating with many different selves, and this notion unsettled me.

New discoveries and insights often make their way into mainstream consciousness, take root and have a way of shaping and informing adult interactions with adolescents. This concept, though, had not, and really still has not, surfaced to influence cultural awareness. This was a new and crazy concept, that, if true, would mean that youth ministry

programming and nearly everything we thought we knew about adolescent spiritual formation would need to change. It would mean admitting that much of what I was doing in ministry would have little lasting impact. Bewildered yet intrigued, I was determined to know more.

We all know that the transition from childhood to adolescence ushers forth significant changes in physical development, cognitive advances and social expectations. It's common to hear exasperated parents describe their teens as withdrawn and sullen. They know a shift has occurred, yet they feel powerless to respond. These rapid changes introduce challenges for the adolescent, who is increasingly negotiating multiple relationships and increased diversity of values in their many social contexts<sup>1</sup>. Their increased cognitive abilities, observed especially as students transition from junior high to high school, enables them to perceive the range of embedded values and expectations that they encounter across various social contexts. Negotiating these often-conflicting social settings, coupled with the increased ability to differentiate between them, supports "the creation of multiple selves in different relational contexts."<sup>2</sup>

High school students, in my experience, often describe this developmental reality as "wearing different masks." The mid-adolescent



might wonder why they are outgoing and rambunctious during youth group but quiet and reserved in band. How is it they can be dependable and responsible at home, then completely irresponsible around friends from their cheer team? They recognize that they wear various masks in different settings. They can even pick up on the contradictions in how they behave or believe in one setting versus another, but they are unable to integrate the many masks into one core-mask and resolve the conflicts. The creation of multiple-selves, coupled with the ability to pick up on the contradictions, naturally raises the concern: "Who am I?" This leads to frustration and stress and contributes to an increasing lack of self-coherence.

What adults and adult-run organizations (like sports teams, school boards, youth ministries, etc.) fail to realize is that they are actually creating the environments that facilitate and perpetuate the proliferation

.....

**For a mid-adolescent to achieve higher levels of cognitive ability, integrated and congruent social scaffolding is needed.**

.....

of adolescent multiple-selves. Our children are growing up in a culture that introduces them, at earlier and earlier ages, to increased public social comparisons and conditional adult support. When we add to that the increased demands of performance pressures (hear, objectification) found in organizations like sports leagues, churches and schools (public and private), we see that adults are actually facilitating the creation of multiple-selves. This adolescent reality is a function of self-protection and preservation; high levels of conditionality lead to hopelessness, low self-esteem and the developmental need to protect the self.

The backdrop I've sketched is a rather sobering reality, but it need not be. In my opinion, local congregations are uniquely positioned with the resources to reverse this trend. Research minces no words—for a mid-adolescent to achieve higher levels of cognitive ability, typically associated with late adolescence or beyond, integrated and congruent social scaffolding is needed. Social scaffolding is defined as unconditional and consistent adult support across the adolescent's social environments. Higher order abstract ability doesn't just happen; "development may be delayed or even arrested if there is not sufficient support for the transition to higher levels of conceptualization."<sup>3</sup> It should not be surprising, then, that university freshman and sophomores are still operating in multiple-selves—adolescence is extending!

To put it bluntly, high school students need authentic, agenda-free, loving adults who can be present in their multiple social contexts. Churches have multi-generational resources to offer, but that only just begins to move us in the right direction. Our children, created in the image of God, come to embrace and live into that image only in the context of healthy, life-giving reciprocal relationships. I envision these adults as prophetic destabilizers<sup>4</sup> who have taken the time to understand adolescents and are motivated to respond. By showing up in their many social contexts, these adults create a destabilizing effect that disrupts the transactional dynamics that adolescents employ to learn the system, thus encouraging a healthy reconceptualization of their socially constructed selves and thus promoting healthy and integrated development of the image of God within.

Our typical discipleship programming is disappointing. It evokes a mindset of what is "right and wrong" or "good and evil." Such dichotomous categorical thinking misses the point. As adolescents progress in cognitive ability, they must subsume their point of view in order to internalize another's<sup>5</sup>. An adolescent in the throes of transactional relationships of self-protection cannot internalize the Church's point of view, values, ideals or beliefs. Therefore it does no good to hammer them with rights and wrongs. They will simply "play the game" until they feel threatened or objectified and develop another self.

A transformative approach is to cultivate an environment of faith exploration. If our youth only receive faith from previous generations, they are not truly being welcomed into the church where they are expected to participate and contribute. So, we ought to stop passing on our faith, because such language ignores the agency of the receiver, turns parents into faith distribution managers and children into consumers, which reduces God to a static commodity that is consumed rather than engaged in relationship. All humanity is created in the image of God and as such, our natural inclination is towards God. Let us seriously consider how we might create space for relationship...how we might echo true hospitality.

In The Trinity icon, the Spirit's hand gestures toward the open and fourth place at the table. It's as if the Spirit is inviting and clearing space for the viewer—for you, for me... for our teens. The table is set. The invitation has been given.

**Steve Bonner**  
*Associate Dean of Undergraduate Bible and Professor  
 College of Bible & Ministry  
 Lipscomb University*



# *We cannot afford to fail*

## A review of the Churches of Christ and affiliated higher education institutions

In previous generations and during much of the 20th century, Church of Christ affiliated colleges and universities in the United States were beneficiaries of a certain type of “brand loyalty” from Church of Christ congregations, church leaders, church members and alumni from affiliated institutions who would encourage young people in their congregations to go to an affiliated institution of higher education. However, enrollment data from the past 17 years reveals significant declining numbers of Church of Christ enrollees in affiliated institutions, suggesting that the era of brand loyalty has substantively diminished from what it once was.

The number of Church of Christ freshman enrollees in the 14 Church of Christ-affiliated colleges or universities dropped from 4,411 in fall 2000 to 2,177 in fall 2017, representing a 50.6 percent decline.<sup>1</sup> There are many potential reasons for this diminishing brand loyalty. One is that some church leaders and members no longer encourage their young to go to affiliated institutions due to perceived disagreements over doctrinal issues that divide churches, therefore encouraging them to attend public institutions. As disruptive to brand loyalty and to the Church as this phenomenon might be, it is likely that society and culture play a much bigger role.

One of two behavior patterns appear to have developed among the college-going population from the broader Christian

**Trace Hebert, Ph.D.**

*Associate Dean,  
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community. First, research shows that the majority of young people stop attending church after they leave home.<sup>2</sup> For some, this is permanent, while others may re-engage with church later. Secondly, for those who continue to engage in church or who re-engage at a later date, many are less likely to have brand loyalty to the Church of Christ, and are instead captivated by the message of non-denominational Christianity.<sup>3</sup> In such cases, there is a desire for spiritual direction that embraces Christian service and ‘living out Christ in community’ without concern for any particular church heritage or the doctrines that have historically divided churches. This phenomenon also impacts choices for which college or university to attend; therefore attending an affiliated institution may no longer be a priority for many.

While brand-loyalty of the college-going population from Churches of Christ has diminished, the enrollment of affiliated colleges and universities has remained strong, with most affiliated institutions maintaining or expanding their total enrollments. Evidence shows that there are still plenty of young people willing to invest in Christian higher education, including Church of Christ-affiliated institutions, with many of these institutions enrolling substantial numbers of students having had no prior knowledge of the Churches of Christ. This presents a challenge for affiliated institutions to effectively serve students from diverse religious heritages.

While enrollment at affiliated institutions has remained strong, the data reveals that the membership of Churches of Christ in the United States is not faring as well. Churches of Christ have long enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with

affiliated institutions of higher education and their alumni, who have established and worked with congregations all over the country and throughout the world in very substantial numbers. With declining numbers of Church of Christ students attending and graduating from affiliated institutions, it should come as no surprise that there are corresponding declines in contributions toward the establishment, maintenance and growth of Church of Christ congregations as well.

Data reveals that between the years 2000 and 2017, the Church of Christ adherent population has declined by 183,235 adherents, which represents an 11.1 percent decline in total population. Additionally, between the years 2000 and 2017, Churches of Christ have experienced a total loss of 1,054 congregations, which represents an 8 percent decline. The data also reveals that the smaller the congregation is, the risk of closing increases. This presents an alarming concern from a data analysis perspective. Across the United States, 84 percent of Church of Christ congregations have fewer than 200 adherents, and 64 percent have fewer than 100 adherents, which presents a substantial at-risk population.<sup>4</sup>

The reason for the losses in the number of congregations and adherent population are a subject of much discussion among church analysts. One factor pertains to the observations of administrators, faculty and staff who regularly visit congregations in the course of their work regarding what they perceive to be the “graying of the population” of Churches of Christ, particularly within the smaller congregations. If there is validity to this widely held perception about the age demographic of the Church of Christ skewing considerably older, then the data reveals alarming concern for the sustainability of the smaller congregations across the country.

From a data analysis perspective, the inability of congregations to attract or retain significant numbers of young people, an aging church demographic (particularly within smaller congregations), declining brand loyalty yielding declining numbers of Church of Christ enrollees in affiliated institutions, and subsequent fewer alumni contributing to the establishment and maintenance of the Churches of Christ, all present a cumulative effect that will likely result in accelerated declines in the number of church adherents and congregations in the years to come.

Having said that, there is still significant evidence highlighting the ongoing importance of the relationship between the Churches of Christ and affiliated colleges and universities. These institutions combined enroll over 35,000 students each year. One example of how important these colleges and universities are to the Churches of Christ is recent data revealing that these institutions enrolled 805 undergraduate students majoring in Bible, religion or ministry

**35,000+**  
Annual Enrollment at the 14 Church of Christ  
affiliated Colleges and Universities

*“While brand-loyalty of the college-going population from Churches of Christ has diminished, the enrollment of affiliated colleges and universities has remained strong, with most affiliated institutions maintaining or expanding their total enrollments.”*

805 Undergrads majoring in  
746 Graduate students majoring in

**Bible • Religion • Ministry**

**during Fall 2017**  
at the 14 Church of Christ affiliated  
Colleges and Universities

*“...in respect to people with formal training in Bible, religion or ministry...the overall numbers that these colleges and universities have and have had for many decades is unparalleled from any other source.”*

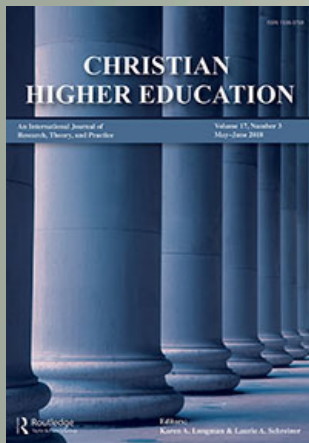
in the fall 2017 semester. This represents 3.2 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment for these institutions. There were also 746 graduate students majoring in Bible, religion or ministry, or 6.9 percent of total graduate enrollments. It is understood that any graduate of these institutions with any major can make important contributions to the Church, and it is also understood that not all of these students will go into church work, but in respect to people with formal training in Bible, religion or ministry (beyond required religion courses for any major), the overall numbers that these colleges and universities have and have had for many decades is unparalleled from any other source.

This newest data on the numbers of Bible, religion and ministry majors reinforces the analysis that the symbiotic relationship between the Church of Christ and these institutions has been a vital

part of the church's history in the United States and is still likely to remain important for the foreseeable future irrespective of the overall Church of Christ enrollment trends data.

Churches of Christ in the United States have been challenged to maintain unity of purpose and direction and to effectively 'make the case' to its young people and this has resulted in a troubling picture for those who have a Kingdom mind-set about the Church of Christ heritage and who would prefer to see this church retain its youth and to ultimately thrive and grow. Only time will tell whether the church can unify, find its voice and make the case for Christ in a way that will attract and retain younger people and maximize the benefit that can be provided by graduates from these institutions. ☺

## INTERSECTIONS *Recommends...*



### **On the Distinctive Function of Christian Higher Education and the Common Good**

**By Christopher S. Collins and J. Caleb Clanton (Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California, USA; Lipscomb University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA)**

Despite myriad benefits of higher education to communities and the public at large, a commonplace perception these days is that the most important benefit of higher education centers on what accrues to individual degree earners. The purpose of this article is to reflect on the distinctive function of Christian higher education and to consider the myriad benefits of that function to communities and the public at large. The authors outline three contributions to the common good that appear to be connected in important ways to the distinctive function of Christian higher education.

1. Christian higher education is in a position to offer a principled and persistent public witness to the effect that humans are ultimately answerable to something that is not of human origin.
2. Christian higher education educates students in ways that are informed by the Christian faith and does not abide by an expectation that it remain neutral with respect to religious, moral and philosophical comprehensive doctrines.
3. Christian higher education institutions can be transparent and intentional about educating students to be knowledgeable of, and equipped to, pursue the most basic of human goods.

The authors conclude that there are elements related to the distinctive function of Christian higher education that provide the potential to contribute to the common good. A deeper recognition of the potential contributions of Christian higher education to the common good will hopefully encourage influencers to align their institution through policies, curriculum development, hiring, enrollment and even branding to achieve full realization of this potential.

To access the full article go to:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15363759.2018.1404359>



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**Four Reasons Why Christian Education Needs to be a Priority (page 6)**

<sup>1</sup>Philip Trostel, "It's Not Just the Money: The Benefits of College Education to Individuals and Society," Lumina Foundation Report, 2015, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Damon Maryl and Jeremy Uecker, "Higher Education and Religious Liberalization Among Young Adults," *Social Forces*, Vol. 90 (September 2011), pp. 181-208.

<sup>3</sup>National Student Satisfaction Survey, 2017.

<sup>4</sup>National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2015-2016. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

<sup>6</sup>The Institute for College Access & Success data, 2014. <http://www.college-insight.org>

**The Church of Today, not just Tomorrow (page 28)**

<sup>1</sup>The Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project in Montgomery, Alabama, attempts to collect and preserve soil samples from the sites of over 4,000 lynchings in the U.S.A. that occurred in twelve Southern states between the end of Reconstruction (1877) and the Civil Rights era (1950).

**Invitation: Holistic Integration of Adolescent Multiple-Selves (page 30)**

<sup>1</sup>I also acknowledge the physical effects of pubertal maturation, but it is beyond the scope of this article to address.

<sup>2</sup>Susan Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2012), 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 59.

<sup>5</sup>I am informed by Robert Kegan's Order of Consciousness, but do not have the space here to treat his influence

**We Cannot Afford to Fail (page 32)**

<sup>1</sup>Hebert, T. (November 1, 2017). Report to the Presidents of Church of Christ Affiliated Colleges and Universities. .

<sup>2</sup>Barna Group (2013, June). Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennials. Retrieved from <https://www.barna.com/research/three-spiritual-journeys-of-millennials/>

<sup>3</sup>Tryggestad, E. (April 1, 2012). *Declining Numbers, But Signs of Hope?* The Christian Chronicle.

<sup>4</sup>Retrieved from: [https://www.21stcc.com/pdfs/ccusa\\_stats\\_sheet.pdf](https://www.21stcc.com/pdfs/ccusa_stats_sheet.pdf)

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# “We’re Losing Our Young People” Isn’t a New Concern

## The Exile and the Case for Christian Education

In 587 BC King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem tearing down her walls, sacking the Temple and carrying the best and brightest of Israel’s young people back to Babylon. The king’s aim was to see the Jewish people assimilated into Babylonian culture and to lose all distinctiveness. This goal was mostly successful as the biblical pages of scripture tell us of the exceptions who did not assimilate: Esther, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego..

But for the most part, the older generations of God’s people in Babylon looked around and began to exclaim, “We’re losing our young people.” The old paths of Temple, Torah and family tradition were mostly gone, and the young people were being swallowed up by the secular culture of Babylon and its philosophical, cultural and material allurements. Most of the young people embraced the Babylonian’s ways and would soon be lost forever unless someone acted.

So in the Exile, the religious leaders of God’s holy people did something radical—they invented what would eventually be called, “Christian education.” They called it “synagogue.” Any careful reading of the entire Bible will discover that not one time, nowhere in all of scripture, did God ever command, “Thou shalt create synagogue.” Parents and grandparents invented it because something radical had to be done to pass the faith on to the next generation.

They were losing their young people to a secular culture and so devised a place where young people could go to school, study God’s word, be mentored by Godly older adults and find their way in society. The synagogue became the last, best hope for Israel and allowed God’s people to return from the Exile stronger than when they left because they now had a vehicle for doing “God-centered education.”

All the statistics indicate the truth of our concern: “We’re losing our young people.” But that does not have to be the case. There are places where a commitment to serious academics, deep study

of God’s word, mentoring for discipleship and societal engagement are available to young people who want to be the next exception to the secular assimilation rule. This is the case that can be made for a truly Christian education.

God is looking for the next Esther or Daniel that has been shaped and prepared “for such a time as this.” Investing to raise up such a person is well worth the cost.



*Scott Sager*

Scott Sager  
Vice President for  
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## Best Practices?

Email Scott at [scott.sager@lipscomb.edu](mailto:scott.sager@lipscomb.edu) to tell us the good work your church is doing. We'll share it with others.



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