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EMERGING ADULT SPIRITUAL FORMATION: PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS IN FELLOWS PROGRAMS

By

CHAD H. DONOHOE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Abstract

In every generation there are cultural and personal challenges to the Christian faith and practice of emerging adults. The literature review identified four main areas of research: the parable of the sower, religious faith and practice in the broader emerging adult culture, moral formation at secular universities, and the role of the local church. It is important to discover fruitful ways for the local church to produce deep and lasting moral formation in the lives of emerging adults. The purpose of this study was to discover how Fellows alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Program.

Three research questions guided this study: How do Fellows alumni describe the formative practices of the Fellows Program? How do Fellows alumni describe the impact of their Fellows Program? How do Fellows alumni describe the role of the local congregation in their Fellows Program? This study used a qualitative research design and a semi-structured interview protocol with seven alumni of The Fellows Initiative. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The findings of the study revealed that there is not an overall decline in the religious faith and practice of emerging adults during the college years. The findings also demonstrated that there are significant factors with respect to the increase or decline of faith and practice for emerging adults. Further, what emerging adults need is the cultivation of right loves through the development of convictions, character, and community through the local church. The study provided three primary conclusions. The local church is a strategic gift in the lives of emerging adults to provide a curriculum of coherence, liturgical living, and space to process.

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Chapter One

Introduction

On the first page of the introduction to his book *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood,* sociologist Christian Smith of the National Study of Youth and Religion states, "The conclusion is that - notwithstanding all that is genuinely good in emerging adulthood – emerging adult life in the United States today is beset with real problems, in some cases troubling and even heartbreaking problems."[1]

"Emerging adulthood" is a term coined by Jeffrey Arnett in his book, *Emerging Adulthood: the Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties,* describing young people in their late teens through mid to late twenties.[2] He makes the case that emerging adulthood is a "distinct new period of life that will be around for many generations to come."[3] Whereas past generations assumed that the criteria for adulthood included the sociological transitions of leaving home, finishing school, establishing a career, getting married, and having children; emerging adults today state the criteria for adulthood as accepting responsibility, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent.[4] According to Arnett, five essential qualities distinguish

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[1] Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

[2] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 15.

emerging adulthood: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling 'in-between,' and a sense of possibility and hope.[5]

C. Smith affirms these five essential qualities, observing that they are often accompanied by "large doses of transience, confusion, anxiety, self-obsession, melodrama, conflict, disappointment, and sometimes emotional devastation."[6] He adds, "emerging adulthood is at heart about postponing settling down into real adulthood."[7] Jana Sundene and Richard Dunn, in their book *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation*, affirm the research of both Arnett and C. Smith on emerging adults, and they note two overarching themes in the emerging adult world: "the instability of their world and the societal value shifts that affect their daily decisions."[8]

Arnett, C.Smith, Sundene and Dunn all observe the instability of truth in the emerging adult world. Emerging adults simultaneously prize their own stylized spirituality while embracing diversity and the broad acceptance of different lifestyles and values that comes with it.[9] In their book *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry,* David Setran and Chris Kiesling also reference C. Smith's and Arnett's research on emerging adults, asking,

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[5] Ibid., 8.

[6] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 15.

[7] Ibid., 231.

[8] Jana L. Sundene, and Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 31.

[9] Ibid., 36.

"How does all of this relate to the Christian vision of growth, maturity, and kingdom responsibility?"[10]

In their book *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults,* Christian Smith and Patricia Snell note that there are typically two unhelpful cultural reactions to the issues and struggles facing emerging adults. One reaction is fear that emerging adults are hopelessly lost. The other reaction is to assume that emerging adults will simply "grow out of it."[11] C. Smith and Snell argue that neither reaction is helpful or fully accurate. One of their conclusions is that religious communities can play a vital role with respect to "community, instruction in their faith, and moral teaching."[12] C. Smith observes that many emerging adults' significant problems stem from their commitment to moral individualism and moral relativism. Setran and Kiesling agree with C. Smith, noting that emerging adults are "devoid of clear boundaries for right and wrong outside of personal opinion."[13] It is also important to note that the significant problems that plague emerging adults reflect "larger problems in the culture and society in which they have been raised."[14]

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

In every generation, there is cause for concern regarding the cultural streams in which emerging adults constantly swim. Despite a fairly optimistic outlook in many areas

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[10] David P. Setran, and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 4.

[11] Christian Smith, and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

[12] Ibid., 241.

[13] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 4.

[14] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 8.

from both the research and the emerging adults, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist

Denton, in their book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American*

Teenagers, highlight a number of troubling themes in the realm of emerging adult faith

and religious practice. Much of the trouble can be summed up as "Moralistic Therapeutic

Deism," a phrase they coined, and which they suggest is the "de facto dominant religion

among contemporary U.S. teenagers."[15] Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is the

belief that:

> 1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human
> life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other,
> as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of
> life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to
> be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve
> a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die. [16]

Essentially, the major tenets of the MTD faith are to be good and feel happy, what C.

Smith and Denton refer to as "divinely underwritten personal happiness and interpersonal

niceness."[17] Setran and Kiesling agree with C. Smith's and Denton's assessment of MTD,

noting that for emerging adults, "the purpose of life is happiness, self-fulfillment, and a

degree of goodness sufficient to earn entrance to heaven."[18]

C. Smith and Denton voice their concern that due to MTD, only a minority of

emerging adults are absorbing the substance and character of their faith traditions. In

particular, they conclude that among emerging adults, the historical Christian tradition

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[15] Christian Smith, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162.

[16] Ibid., 162-163.

[17] Ibid., 171.

[18] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 22.

has "substantially morphed into Christianity's misbegotten step cousin, Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."[19]

The Modern Secular University

Sharon Parks, in her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith,* states, "It has become a matter of considerable urgency that we more adequately understand the formation of the young adult imagination and its implications for forming meaning, purpose, and faith."[20] Parks argues that higher education is a critical mentoring environment and community for young adults, but she is concerned that emerging adults are not being encouraged to ask "big questions" concerning meaning and faith.[21] Sharing this concern, C. Smith and Snell contend that a crisis of knowledge and value has permeated the emerging adult culture. They observe that for emerging adults, "the world they have inherited, as best as they can make sense of it, has told them that real knowledge is impossible and genuine values are illusions."[22] Julie Reuben, in her book *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality,* speaks to this crisis of knowledge and value, arguing that the separation of fact and value has become a normative guide in higher education and has subsequently led to the separation of knowledge and morality.[23]

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[19] Smith, and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 171.

[20] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xii.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 293.

[23] Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 268.

This crisis of knowledge and morality is especially troubling when one considers the significant formation that takes place during the college years. Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini, in their book *How College Affects Students,* note that between the freshmen and senior years, emerging adults "changed significantly on a broad spectrum of value, attitudinal, psychosocial, and moral dimensions."[24] Alexander Astin draws a similar conclusion in his book, *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited,* stating: "clearly that students change in many ways after they enter college."[25] Of further importance, Pascarella and Terenzini note, "shifts in identity begun in college probably continue to age 30 and beyond."[26]

While there are no simple answers to the crisis of morality in the modern university, it is worth reflecting on the work of others who have sought to understand and address the challenges of emerging adult formation in the university years. In his book, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years*, Steven Garber explores the shaping of Christian faithfulness during the "critical years" of emerging adulthood.[27] Garber asks:

> What happens during their university years that so forms their vision and virtues that they make it through the proverbial "valley of the diapers" of their twenties and thirties with their convictions and character intact? How does a person decide which cares and commitments will give shape and substance to

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[24] Ernest T. Pascarella, and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 572.

[25] Alexander W. Astin, *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*, 1st ed., The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 396.

[26] Pascarella and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 586.

[27] Sharon Daloz Parks, *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

life, for life? How do students learn to conscientiously connect what they believe about the world with how they live in the world?[28]

Garber's question regarding which cares and commitments are worth loving and pursuing is echoed by C. Smith and Snell two decades later as they observe, "nearly all emerging adults have a general vision…of what a 'good life' looks like. But more specific questions about careers and causes and life devotions are as yet unformed."[29] C. Smith and Snell conclude, "Very many emerging adults simply don't know how to think about things, what is right, or what is deserving for them to devote their lives to."[30] They lament that emerging adults "lack larger visions of what is true and real and good, in both the private and the public realms."[31]

Reuben also argues that morality in higher education; which includes cares and commitments and the connection of beliefs to behaviors, has been relegated from the course of study to extracurricular influences.[32] Reuben's conclusion is straightforward: "universities no longer have a basis from which to judge moral claims."[33] Garber agrees, asserting that moral meaning, though critical during the university years, is largely forsaken on the secular university campus because higher education too often "excludes the deepest human questions – those of meaning and morality – from the curriculum."[34]

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[28] Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior*, Expanded Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 20.

[29] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 53.

[30] Ibid., 293.

[31] Ibid., 294.

[32] Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 268.

[33] Ibid., 269.

[34] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 68.

If academics are separated from moral guidance in higher education, how are meaning, purpose, and faith developed during the university years? The thesis Garber puts forth is that for emerging adults, the weaving together of convictions, character, and community during the university years is critical for a strong vision of moral meaning.[35] Garber describes convictions as a sufficient worldview, character as the embodiment of that worldview through mentors, and community as the support and structure where the worldview is worked out.[36]

Local Congregations

Emerging adults critically need religious communities to provide convictions, character, and community – especially during the formative years of college when habits of the heart are strongly shaped. Parks insists that religious faith communities are crucial during the college years:

> Young adults are naturally renegotiating questions of their personal future, happiness, God, the ethical dimensions of their choices, suffering, and death…These are religious questions because they touch the whole of life. If they are seemingly set aside because there is no place for them, no language to give them public voice, the development of faith becomes disjointed.[37]

Parks warns of the danger that the emerging adult's faith may become "disjointed" when they do not have adequate space to wrestle through the big questions of faith and life. She argues that religious faith communities should be integral in the lives of emerging adults. Setran and Kiesling agree, but believe that most emerging adults lack an "ecclesiological

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[35] Ibid., 37.

[36] Ibid., 37-38.

[37] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 198.

vision, a sense of why the local church might be an important – even central – aspect of their lives."[38]

Sociologist James Hunter, in his book *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World,* stresses the crucial need for formation through the local church. Hunter writes, "as a community and institution, the church is a plausibility structure and the only one with the resources capable of offering an alternative formation to that offered by popular culture."[39] According to Hunter, the church, as a community and an institution, is a strategic gift for emerging adults. A healthy local congregation provides emerging adults with a needed vision of Christian formation.

James K.A. Smith, in his book *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation,* also addresses the need for the local congregation to be the primary place of formation in the lives of emerging adults. J. Smith argues that the local congregation is able to fight against the secular culture of the modern secular university through the church liturgy, where "habits are inscribed in our heart through bodily practices and rituals that train the heart, as it were, to desire certain ends."[40]

In summary, emerging adults, including those from strong faith traditions, are swimming in the currents of the religion of the day – Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Too often, Christians are marked more by Moralistic Therapeutic Deism than by the historic Christian faith. When emerging adults attend secular universities, intense formation takes

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[38] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 95.

[39] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 282-283.

[40] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 58.

place, yet the university is not able to truly help students wrestle through moral meaning with a biblical vision of the "good life." Also, formation is too often disconnected from the life of the local church. So how can those who minister to emerging adults in these critical years move them from the shallow faith of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to deep Christian maturity marked by strong convictions, character, and community?

Lesslie Newbigin, author of *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society,* states:

The congregation has to be a place where its members are trained, supported, and nourished in the exercise of their parts of the priestly ministry in the world. The preaching and teaching of the local church has to be such that it enables members to think out the problems that face them in their secular work in the light of their Christian faith.[41]

Newbigin, like Garber, discusses the need for congregations to prepare emerging adults for the problems they will face in their secular work and world. The Fellows Program Initiative seeks to develop convictions, character, and community with great intentionality so that emerging adults seamlessly weave together the Christian faith with their career, personal life, and their place in God's story. Through the context of a local congregation, Fellows Programs emphasize vocational formation, theological integration, biblical study, mentoring, and service.[42] Though there are many Fellows Programs around the country, there is a deficiency in the literature regarding their practices and impact. There are currently no published sources exploring the practices and impact of Fellows Programs.

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[41] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 230.

[42] thefellowsinitiative.org, accessed July 16, 2015.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to discover how Fellows alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Program.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. RQ1: How do Fellows alumni describe the formative practices of their Fellows Program?

2. RQ2: How do Fellows alumni describe the impact of their Fellows Program?

3. RQ3: How do Fellows alumni describe the role of local congregations in their Fellows Program?

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for those who work with emerging adults and desire to see Christian formation pursued through the church. Although Fellows Programs are designed for emerging adults who are recent college graduates, an understanding of their principles of effective formation will be helpful for those working with undergraduate emerging adults. Also, individuals and churches will benefit from this study's exploration of best practices for "seamless lives of faith."[43]

The findings of this study will also be significant for emerging adults. What are the ideas in the culture and university that have shaped their thinking? What routine experiences have shaped their hearts? The researcher hopes that emerging adults will be encouraged to put into practice what has been discovered from this study.

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[43] thefellowsinitiative.org, accessed July 16, 2015.

Further, this study is important because "the emerging adult world is not an isolated subculture or counterculture. It is firmly embedded in the larger American society and reflects, like a mirror, the character of American institutions and culture more broadly."[44]

Definition of Terms

In the context of this study, the terms are defined as follows:

<u>Emerging Adult</u> – "in the scholarly literature, emerging adulthood refers to 18-29 year olds."[45]

<u>Fellows Program</u> – "an intensely practical nine-month experience designed to prepare recent college grads to live seamless lives of faith."[46]

<u>Formative</u> – positive growth in furthering maturity towards Christ.

<u>Moral Individualism</u> – "the absolute authority for every person's beliefs or actions is his or her own sovereign self."[47]

<u>Moral Relativism</u> – the belief that there is not a real, objective, universal basis for definite rights and wrongs.

<u>Moralistic Therapeutic Deism</u> – the belief that God wants people to be good, the goal of life is to be happy, and that God is not always directly involved in the affairs of life.

<u>Postmodernism</u> – a late 20th-century reaction to the assumed certainty of objective efforts to explain reality.

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[44] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 326.

[45] Ibid., 16.

[46] thefellowsinitiative.org, accessed July 16, 2015.

[47] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 49.

Religious Commitment – sincere engagement and involvement in religious faith and practice.

Vocation – "a purpose for being in the world which is related to the purposes of God."[48]

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[48] Walter Brueggemann, "Covenanting as Human Vocation : A Discussion of the Relation of Bible and Pastoral Care," *Interpretation* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 1979): 126.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to discover how Fellows alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Program. With all of the cultural and personal challenges that emerging adults face, it is important to consider the various factors that enhance or harm emerging adults' faith. The literature review begins with a focused study on the parable of the sower, which addresses the reality that there will be various responses to the gospel in every generation and culture. Along these lines, the research of C. Smith and Snell reveals six types of responses to religion and spirituality in the emerging adult culture: Committed Traditionalists (less than fifteen percent), Selective Adherents (thirty percent), Spiritually Open (fifteen percent), Religiously Indifferent (twenty-five percent), Religiously Disconnected (no more than five percent), Irreligious (no more than ten percent).[49]

Based on their findings, some emerging adults are simply more open to the message of the gospel than others. However, there are real challenges to the moral formation of emerging adults from all categories, including the "Committed Traditionalists" and "Selective Adherents" who are more open to religion and spirituality. After the parable of the sower is considered, three areas of literature will be reviewed to provide the groundwork for the qualitative research. The three areas include the emerging adult culture, moral formation at secular universities, and the role of the local church.

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[49] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 166-168.

Biblical Framework

The parable of the sower is found in Matthew chapter thirteen, Mark chapter four, and Luke chapter eight. Matthew and Mark situate this story at the Sea of Galilee, and all three gospel writers begin with the fact that because a large crowd had gathered around Jesus, he got into a boat and began to teach this parable to the crowd on the shore. When Jesus was asked by his disciples why he spoke in parables, he quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, "to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand."[50] So parables function to conceal truth from those who do not treasure the words of Jesus, yet they reveal truth to Jesus' disciples about God and his kingdom. In all three accounts, Jesus calls out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."[51] With this parable, Jesus calls for a response from the hearer.

This parable was told to a farming community. They understood quite well the image of a farmer taking seed from a bag which hung over his shoulder and scattering the seed on the ground. Palestinian farmland was known to be rocky, and there was only a thin layer of soil, so the imagery is fitting. The Sower is Jesus, as well as anyone else who faithfully proclaims the gospel. Jesus tells his disciples that the seed is the word of the kingdom. All of Jesus' seeds are good, so the emphasis in this parable is on the various types of soil, which represent the receptivity of human hearts to the gospel. This parable illustrates to Jesus' disciples that there will be various responses to the word of the kingdom.

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[50] Matthew 13:10.

[51] Matthew 13:9.

There are four types of listeners to Jesus' parable, and each type of listener correlates to one of the four types of soil. First, the Pharisees and scribes were opponents of Jesus who were hostile to his teaching. Like the first soil, the gospel is trampled and taken away from their hard hearts. Second, there were many in the crowd who were curious about the gospel, but not committed to it. Like the second soil, they were initially excited about Jesus, but withered away when they were tested. Third, Judas was part of the inner circle until the end. Like the third soil, he was choked out by greed and by his expectation of what a messiah should really be. Fourth, the disciples were far from perfect, but God had opened their hearts to receive the good news of the kingdom. Like the fourth soil, they were fruitful.

Jesus explains to his disciples, "to you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God."[52] The Greek word for "secrets" is "mysterion." Through this parable, Jesus reveals truth about the nature of God and his kingdom which is not readily apparent. So what are some of the secrets of this kingdom that this parable reveals? Jesus was just beginning his public ministry, and to many Jesus and his words seemed unimpressive. Like a tiny seed, the kingdom of which Jesus spoke was not obvious to the eyes, but the secret of the parable is the result of this powerful seed. Whereas a five-fold to fifteen-fold return was typical for a farmer in that day, Jesus claims the good soil will grow and yield a hundredfold. The secret of this kingdom is that its message and glory will eventually cover the whole earth. Yet, through this parable Jesus is teaching his disciples not to be surprised or discouraged by the negative responses to the gospel. This was true of the first century, and it is true in the twenty-first century. There is a warning

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[52] Matthew 13:11.

in this parable to all who hear –listeners must watch their own hearts because it is very natural to reject this kingdom.

After the disciples question why he speaks in parables, Jesus explains the details of the parable to them. The first seed along the path is trampled; it is devoured by Satan.[53] This is a warning that when a hard heart encounters the good news of the gospel, it will bear no fruit. The second seed that fell on the rocky soil withered away because it had no moisture and could not take the heat.[54] This represents a heart that is initially receptive to the gospel, yet ultimately withers when tested because it has no depth of soil and the gospel never takes root. This is a warning that when a shallow heart encounters the good news of the gospel, it will bear no fruit. The third seed falls among thorns and is choked out.[55] Jesus explains that this seed is choked out by the worries of life, the deceitfulness of riches, and by the seduction of pleasure. This is a warning that listening to the good news of the gospel with a divided heart will bear no fruit. The fourth seed fell into good soil, grew, and yielded fruit.[56] Jesus explains that this represents those who hear the word of God, hold it fast in their hearts, and bear fruit with patience. Of all four soils, only the fourth produces fruit.

This parable is important with respect to the faith and moral formation of emerging adults. It reveals that every generation faces challenges to the gospel. Like the first soil, the hearts of some emerging adults will be hardened to the good news of the kingdom. Others, like the second soil, may be initially receptive to the gospel, yet wither

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[53] Luke 8:5, 12.

[54] Luke 8:6, 13.

[55] Luke 8:7, 14.

[56] Luke 8:8, 15.

when their faith is tested. There will be some who, like the third soil, are always in danger of being choked out by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Yet the fourth soil provides hope because the sower is good, the seed is powerful, and God will produce fruit in the lives of many emerging adults. It is important to identify the "cares and riches and pleasures of life" that emerging adults face – especially those who are raised in Christian families and churches.[57] Further, the church must come alongside emerging adults with the goal of fostering mature faith, which produces much fruit. It is important for emerging adults to note Jesus' call to "bear fruit with patience."[58] Though the emerging adult years are by no means easy, Jesus still calls them to be faithful and fruitful.

The parable of the sower illustrates that in every generation and culture, there will be various responses to the good news of the kingdom of God. Those who research and work with emerging adults should not be surprised to find that their responses to the gospel and their moral formation correspond with the four soils. Many emerging adults will reject the good news of the kingdom of God due to a hard, shallow, or divided heart. Yet others will flourish in the gospel and be faithful and fruitful. The following literature areas will consider the soil of the broader emerging adult culture as well as the soil of the secular university. Finally, the soil of the local congregation will be considered.

Moral Formation of Emerging Adults

In the previous section, the parable of the sower provided a biblical framework for the various responses of emerging adults to the good news of the kingdom of God. The

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[57] Luke 8:14.

[58] Luke 8:15.

focus of this section will be the moral formation in the broader culture of eighteen to twenty-two year-old emerging adults. According to C. Smith, a new phase of life has developed over the last four decades that is "not simply an extension of teenage life… nor is it the beginning of fully settled adulthood, as marked by marriage, children, career jobs, and home ownership."[59] He argues that emerging adulthood has its own "distinctive characteristics, tendencies, and experiences."[60] Understanding the religious landscape, beliefs, behaviors, and challenges of emerging adults has implications for all who seek to come alongside them in their journey to mature moral formation.

<p align="center">*Times Have Changed*</p>

What marks the transition to adulthood? Five traditional sociological milestones have stood the test of time: "leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having children."[61] In 2000, Parks wrote that these milestones "all endure as primary indicators of adulthood."[62] However, according to the current research on emerging adults, times have changed. Setran and Kiesling sum up the research with the statement that "the last fifty years have witnessed a gradual delaying of traditional milestones."[63] Arnett refers to the past few decades as a "quiet revolution."[64] Arnett argues that rather than the five traditional milestones of adulthood, according to emerging adults, the key transitions include "accepting responsibility for one's actions,

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[59] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 279.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 2.

[62] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 4.

[63] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 2.

[64] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 3.

making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent."[65] Marriage and

family were not part of the equation. Whereas in 1950 the median age of marriage was

twenty for women and twenty-two for men, in 2000 it was twenty-five for women and

twenty-seven for men.[66] Arnett adds that today's emerging adults view marriage and

family "not as achievements to be pursued but as perils to be avoided."[67] So, from a

marriage and family perspective, times have changed.

In their article *Changes in the transition to adulthood in the UK and Canada: the
role of structure and agency in emerging adulthood,* James Cote and John Bynner argue

that many social scientists and developmental psychologists do not agree with Arnett and

others who claim that emerging adulthood is a new developmental stage. Cote and

Bynner agree that the term emerging adulthood accurately describes the delayed

transition to adulthood in the twenties with respect to worldview development,

occupation, and marriage and family. However, they argue that the delay towards

adulthood is not a developmental delay, but rather is induced by economic and social

conditions. They conclude, "The simpler explanation is the structural one: as a cohort,

young people are denied viable sources of financial independence until their late twenties

and social anomie has created widespread identity confusion as a 'new normal' state of

affairs."[68]

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[65] Ibid., vi.

[66] Ibid., 4.

[67] Ibid., 6.

[68] James Côté, and John M. Bynner, "Changes in the Transition to Adulthood in the UK and Canada: The Role of Structure and Agency in Emerging Adulthood," *Journal of Youth Studies* 11, no. 3 (June 2008): 251-268.

Their point is that the transition to adulthood is currently delayed by "economic, social and demographic factors," which may change in the future.[69] Arnett's response to the critique of emerging adulthood as a new life stage is that "emerging adulthood is a useful term for 18-25 year olds in industrialized societies."[70] He points out that there is indisputable evidence among young adults that marriage and family are delayed until the late twenties, more are pursuing higher education than in past generations, and there is more instability of jobs, relationships, and residences than ever before. He concludes that "this is enough to merit recognition that a separate period of life now exists between adolescence and young adulthood."[71]

Cultural Shifts

Many scholars point to a number of recent critical cultural shifts that impact the lives of emerging adults. C. Smith and Snell point out that "to adequately understand the religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults requires…more fully understanding the cultural and institutional contexts that emerging adults are in part generating and that in turn powerfully form their lives."[72] C. Smith explains that "in the last several decades, a number of macro social changes have combined to create a new phase in the American life course."[73] He notes six particularly important trends: the growth of higher education,

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood in Europe: A Response to Bynner," *Journal of Youth Studies* 9, no. 1 (February 2006): 111-123.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 281.

[73] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 13.

delay of marriage, unstable economy, parental support, birth control, and postmodernism.[74]

Along with C. Smith, Wuthnow, in his book *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion,* identifies the delay of marriage and children, the growth of higher education, and the uncertainties of work and money as important trends in emerging adult culture. Wuthnow also identifies the nature of their social relationships, globalization, and the information explosion as other key themes in emerging adult culture.[75] Writing a decade earlier, Parks also named the economy and pluralism as a couple of key factors.[76] Setran and Kiesling point to the delay of marriage, the expansion of higher education, and the long term financial support of parents as social and cultural factors that have delayed traditional adulthood.[77] Summing up the research, C. Smith writes:

> …transition to adulthood today is more complex, disjointed, and confusing than it was in past decades. The steps through schooling, a first real job, marriage, and parenthood are simply less well organized and coherent today than they were in the past. At the same time, these years are marked by a historically unparalleled freedom to roam, experiment, learn, move on, and try again.[78]

According to C. Smith and Snell, emerging adulthood is complex and confusing, yet there is much room to explore and experiment. They conclude that this age is marked by "a great deal of transience, confusion, anxiety, self-obsession, melodrama, conflict,

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[74] Ibid., 13-15.

[75] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[76] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, xi.

[77] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 2-3.

[78] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 15.

stress, disappointment, and sometimes emotional damage and bodily harm."[79] These

factors have deep moral implications in the lives of emerging adults.

<div align="center">Challenges in Emerging Adult Moral Formation</div>

A rise in academic literature has provided further insight into the significant features

of emerging adulthood from both a psychological and sociological perspective.[80] Many of

these significant features provide challenges in the moral formation of emerging adults.

This chapter will explore some of the themes with respect to worldview and formative

practices that arose from the literature.

Instability

A major theme from the literature was instability with respect to residential

(where's home?) and relational (who's there for me?) up-rootedness. Arnett identified

instability as one of the five main features of emerging adulthood, along with identity

exploration, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities.[81] Sundene and Dunn also

name instability as an overarching theme.[82]

Where's Home?

Arnett refers to the emerging adult years as "the age of instability" due to this

period of exploration when emerging adults' plans will be constantly revised.[83] These

explorations in love, work, and education often lead to revisions of plans which

necessitate a change in residence. Arnett points out that "rates of moving spike upward

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[79] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 280.

[80] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 6.

[81] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8.

[82] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 31.

[83] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 10.

beginning at age 18, reach their peak in the mid-twenties, then sharply decline. This shows that emerging adults rarely know where they will be living from one year to the next."[84] Sundene and Dunn agree with Arnett and note that emerging adults "do more exploring than their predecessors."[85] Sundene and Dunn point to the unstable job market as a factor that compounds instability, since emerging adults will be more likely to change jobs or pursue more education than previous generations.[86] C. Smith and Snell conclude, "Perhaps the most pervasive, consistent theme in the lives of emerging adults is the fact of their frequent and varied major life transitions."[87] These explorations and transitions include traveling, leaving home for college, dropping out for a semester, transferring to another college, spending summers at home, studying abroad, graduating and moving for a job, changing jobs, and similar experiences. Ernest Paskarella and Patrick Terenzini point out a startling statistic that "since the late 1980's, 50 percent or more of the students who initially enrolled at a four-year college eventually attended two or more undergraduate institutions."[88]

C. Smith and Snell point out that these various transitions are actually disruptions to the religious faith and practice of emerging adults because they break routine. They make the point that "it can be harder to think about visiting a church and praying or reading scripture regularly, for instance, when the new apartment sink does not drain, you have not figured out your favorite places to go shopping yet, and your new roommate is

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[84] Ibid., 11.

[85] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 31.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 34.

[88] Pascarella, and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 146.

messier and louder than you imagined."[89] Further, research shows that religious

commitment declines when one moves to a dominant culture that deemphasizes religion,

such as a secular university campus.[90] C. Smith and Snell conclude that all of the

disruptions, distractions, and transitions make it challenging for emerging adults to "put

down roots within particular religious communities that engage in committed faith

practices."[91] Wuthnow agrees with C. Smith and Snell that due to the need for emerging

adults to stay mobile for jobs, "they sink shallow roots in their communities."[92]

<u>Who's there for me?</u>

Another key aspect of instability is the reality of relational up-rootedness that

emerging adults experience. Moving away from home is a major transition from familiar

faces and routines. According to Timothy Clydesdale in his book *The First Year Out:*

Understanding American Teens after High School, an emerging adult's family provides a

"recurring system of relationships that in turn cultivate certain patterns."[93] So moving

away from home is both a major transition away from cultivated patterns and a transition

to new patterns. C. Smith and Snell add that transitions expose emerging adults to new

social contexts which may pull them in a new direction with respect to religious beliefs

and practices.[94] Alexander Astin, Helen Astin, and Jennifer Lindholm, authors of

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[89] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 76.

[90] Roger W. Stump, "Regional Migration and Religious Commitment in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23, no. 3 (September 1984): 302.

[91] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 280.

[92] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 49.

[93] Timothy T. Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*, Morality and Society Series (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 52.

[94] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 76.

Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives, agree and add that attending college places emerging adults in a very diverse environment compared to their family home. They note that "such alterations in the students' environments could well increase the likelihood that they will abandon some of the customary behaviors that are part of family tradition."[95]

Value Shifts

Another recurring theme in the literature is the way that societal value shifts have affected the worldview of emerging adults. C. Smith and Snell contend, "Emerging adults' religious and spiritual assumptions, experiences, outlooks, beliefs, and practices do not exist in compartmentalized isolation from their larger cultural worldviews and lived experiences but are often related to and powerfully shaped by them."[96] Regarding the issue of the larger cultural worldviews, N. Jay Demerath, in his article *Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism,* asserts that the values of liberal Protestantism have won the day and permeated the culture.[97]

In agreement, C. Smith and Snell claim, "If we wish to understand the religious and spiritual lives of contemporary American emerging adults, we must not lose sight of the power liberal Protestantism still exerts among the majority of them…in ways and

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[95] Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer A. Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 89.

[96] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 33.

[97] N. J. Demerath III, "Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 4 (December 1995): 458.

with influence about which most emerging adults have no idea."[98] C. Smith and Snell

note that in the emerging adult research:

> Individual autonomy, unbounded tolerance, freedom from authorities, the
> affirmation of pluralism, the centrality of human self-consciousness, the practical
> value of moral religion, epistemological skepticism, and an instinctive aversion to
> anything "dogmatic" or committed to particulars were routinely taken for granted
> by the respondents.[99]

Their point is that many evangelical, Protestant emerging adults think and talk like liberal

Protestants. Arnett points out that an "essential part of a world view is a set of values, that

is, a set of moral principles that guides decisions about the issues that come up in the

course of daily life."[100]

Sundene and Dunn name "value shifts" as an overarching theme of emerging

adult life. Specifically, they point to the instability of truth and information, the embrace

of diversity, shallower relationships, and personalized spirituality.[101] Agreeing with the

theme of instability of truth, C. Smith points to moral individualism and moral relativism

as aspects of the darker side of emerging adulthood.[102] C. Smith strongly asserts that "the

widespread moral individualism and… moral relativism among emerging adults today

tell us that the adult world that has socialized these youth for 18-23 years has done an

awful job when it comes to moral education and formation."[103]

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[98] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 289.

[99] Ibid., 288.

[100] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 165.

[101] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 33-36.

[102] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 60.

[103] Ibid.

<u>Moral individualism</u>

Setran and Kiesling make the case that prior to the nineteenth century, character was chiefly rooted in the objective belief in the moral authority of God through the Scriptures. Yet starting with the nineteenth century and continuing to the present day, there has been an erosion of the notion of any absolute moral authority, where objective moral convictions have been replaced by personal preferences.[104] This movement away from objective moral beliefs has paved the way for moral individualism in the lives of emerging adults. C. Smith and Snell define moral individualism as "the absolute authority for every person's beliefs or actions is his or her own sovereign self. The words duty, responsibility, and obligation feel somehow vaguely coercive or puritanical."[105] Setran and Kiesling agree and fear that "the high value placed on individualism may yet contribute to a society of cultural narcissists who rarely make decisions on the basis of community flourishing."[106] They go so far as to claim that moral individualism is the "default position undergirding the emerging adult culture."[107] C. Smith's research backs this claim with the statistic that "six out of ten (60 percent) of the emerging adults we interviewed expressed a highly individualistic approach to morality."[108] Arnett points out that it is difficult to characterize the religious lives of emerging adults due to their diverse

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[104] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 141-142.

[105] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 49.

[106] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 60.

[107] Ibid., 141.

[108] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 21.

beliefs, but he claims that "if there is a unifying theme in all of this diversity, it is their insistence on making their own choices about what to believe and what to value."[109]

Arnett explains that one of the reasons for the high degree of individualized morality is that emerging adults "value thinking for themselves with regard to religious questions and believe it is important to form a unique set of religious beliefs rather than accepting a ready-made dogma."[110] Picking up on the notion of unique religious beliefs, Sundene and Dunn refer to this as stylized spirituality. They claim that today, "the personalization of spirituality has less to do with being private and more to do with being individually stylized."[111] C. Smith and Snell conclude that the dominant outlook of emerging adults is that "religion should always in the end remain a personal matter, something an individual may or may not choose to get into because it is meaningful to him or her."[112] C. Smith believes that the confusion comes down to a proper understanding of moral claims. He distinguishes between objectively true moral claims versus moral claims that take on a "quasi-true status for certain individuals as a result of those individuals believing them to be true," and he believes that most of the moral individualism expressed by emerging adults falls into the second category.[113]

"Feels Right." So how does moral individualism play out in the lives of emerging adults? Emerging adults base moral decisions largely on their intuition of what "feels right" and "feels good." C. Smith and Snell refer to the vast majority of emerging adults

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[109] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 187.

[110] Ibid., 172.

[111] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 36.

[112] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 287.

[113] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 23.

as "moral intuitionists" because they rely on their subjective feelings of what is right or wrong in various circumstances.[114] They note that in common speech, the phrase "I think that…" has been replaced by "I feel that…"[115] Setran and Kiesling affirm C. Smith's and Snell's notion of emerging adults as "moral intuitionists," and they add that most emerging adults appeal to a sense of feeling good, feeling happy, or experiencing a subjective peace. They make the important point that in doing so, the criteria for moral judgments resides "solely within the self."[116] Sundene and Dunn echo these sentiments about emerging adults, and they identify a number of emerging adults as those "who tend to approach religion pragmatically, nondoctrinally and moralistically."[117] C. Smith and Snell note that rather than religious beliefs as commitments, what actually drives life are the subjective feelings of what's "right, worthy, and important."[118] In their conclusion, C. Smith and Snell sum up a pervasive trend that emerging adults have not been adequately equipped with "intellectual and moral tools" to think critically.[119] Therefore, "most simply choose to believe and live by whatever subjectively feels 'right' to them, and to try not to seriously assess, much less criticize, anything else that anyone else has chosen to believe, feel, or do."[120]

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[114] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 46.

[115] Ibid., 51.

[116] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 143-144.

[117] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 127.

[118] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 286.

[119] Ibid., 293.

[120] Ibid.

"Makes Me Happy." Personal happiness is another highly motivating factor in the moral individualism of emerging adults. When asked how emerging adults decide what's right or wrong, C. Smith and Snell note that thirty-nine percent of emerging adults chose the answer "Do what would make you feel happy" above "Follow the advice of a parent or teacher or other adult you respect" (thirty-four percent) or "Do what you think God or the scriptures tell you is right" (eighteen percent).[121] The goal of personal happiness runs deep in emerging adult culture, so much so that emerging adults, according to Setran and Kiesling, are quick to reject "any sense of regret about the past."[122] C. Smith and Snell also pick up on this theme, and they mention that emerging adults "explicitly denied feeling any regrets about any of their past decisions, behaviors, or problems."[123] This highlights the reality that emerging adults put a lot of stock in making decisions that further their personal happiness, and they do not always have a clear sense of guilt over what is morally wrong.

Moral relativism

C. Smith named postmodernism as one of the six macro-social changes in modern culture that have contributed to the emerging adult phase of life. Simply stated, postmodernism is a critique of certainty, reason, authorial voice, and the word of God. [124] Moral relativism is a philosophy that flows out of postmodern thought. Moral relativism is the belief that there is not a real, objective, universal basis for definite rights and wrongs. Instead, morality is a social construct. According to C. Smith, "about three out of

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[121] Ibid., 50-51.

[122] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 37.

[123] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 41.

[124] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 13-15.

ten (30 percent) of the emerging adults we interviewed professed a belief in strong moral relativism. (In our nationally representative survey, 47 percent of American emerging adults agreed that 'morals are relative, there are not definite rights and wrongs for everyone.')."[125]

"Basis for Judgments." In light of moral relativism, it is important to consider how emerging adults decide what is right and wrong. C. Smith claims, "One in three (34 percent) of the emerging adults we interviewed said that they simply did not know what makes anything morally right or wrong."[126] So to make moral decisions, emerging adults consider what others would think of them (forty percent), whether the decision will functionally improve their situation (sixty percent), whether it does not hurt other people (fifty-three percent), whether the majority of society agrees (twelve percent), laws, rules, and regulations (twenty-three percent), and a notion of karma – "what goes around comes around" (seventeen percent).[127]

"Do Not Judge." Though emerging adults decide what is right and wrong for them, they are nonetheless very cautious about being perceived as intolerant. Setran and Kiesling point out that one of the "postures" of emerging adults is moral privatization. They explain, "Many emerging adults feel that they should neither judge others nor be judged by others in matters of morality."[128] Therefore, a pervasive sentiment in the emerging adult culture is that when it comes to morality, "There is really no way to know

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[125] Ibid., 27.

[126] Ibid., 36.

[127] Ibid., 35-47.

[128] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 144.

what is really true. Anyone could be right, or wrong, or some of both."[129] This breeds

skepticism about all moral truth claims.

Sundene and Dunn agree that emerging adults have become more open and

accepting of diverse beliefs and lifestyles, and they are concerned that such tolerance

"ends up devaluing distinctions in a young adult's own faith system."[130] David

Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, and Aly Hawkins, in their book *You Lost Me.*

Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church…And Rethinking Faith, refer to tolerance as

the "cultural North Star" for emerging adults, and that "inclusiveness, diversity, and

political correctness are ideals that have shaped this generation."[131] Kinnaman and

Hawkins lament that one of the consequences of tolerance is that emerging adults are

"reluctant to try to convince a friend to become a Christian" out of fear of being

offensive.[132] Lesslie Newbigin observes, "In a pluralistic society such as ours, any

confident statement of ultimate belief, any claim to announce the truth about God and his

purpose for the world, is liable to be dismissed as ignorant, arrogant, dogmatic."[133]

Summing up the literature with respect to the value shifts of moral individualism

and moral relativism in emerging adult culture, C. Smith and Snell say it well:

> Finally, and overarching all of these assumptions and outlooks, most emerging
> adults are stuck at the place of thinking that nobody ultimately really knows what
> is true or right or good. It is all so relative and impossible to know in a pluralistic
> world with so many competing claims. Best, then, they suppose, to remain
> tentative, to keep options open, to not get too committed, to push dealing with

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[129] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 163.

[130] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 35.

[131] David Kinnaman, and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 171.

[132] Ibid., 177.

[133] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 10.

religious matters off to some future date when through marriage and parenting it becomes more practically important. In the meanwhile, emerging adults have self-sufficiency to achieve, materially secure lifestyles to secure, and fun to be enjoyed.[134]

Essentially, the personal outlook of most emerging adults is one of feeling "stuck" - paralyzed by their perception of the moral relativity of their pluralistic cultural moment. So according to C. Smith and Snell, emerging adults keep their options open, delay religious matters until later, and focus on the pursuit of success and happiness. For many emerging adults, this mindset frames their entrance into college.

As previously mentioned, C. Smith and Denton label the moral value shift in the emerging adult culture as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. This is the belief that God wants people to be good and happy, though he is not particularly involved in a moment-by-moment basis. C. Smith and Snell claim that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is "still alive and well," though for many emerging adults it has become "somewhat diluted" as they have matured out of their teenage years.[135] They believe that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism grows weaker in many emerging adults as they experience more of life and find that this worldview is too shallow for the challenges that they face. They reason that the worldview of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism "simply is set within a wider range of alternative ways that emerging adults think and talk about and practice religious faith."[136] Whereas C. Smith and Denton prefer the label of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Wuthnow says the best word to describe emerging adult faith and practice is

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[134] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 287.

[135] Ibid., 155.

[136] Ibid., 154-155.

"tinkering."[137] He identifies a tinkerer as one who resourcefully "puts together a life from whatever skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand."[138] He explains that with respect to beliefs and practices, they do not rely on one way of doing things.[139] In his article *Emerging Adults and the Future of Missions,* Rick Richardson compares these two overarching interpretive ideas and concludes that "the faith trajectory of emerging adults may be summarized as movement from the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism of their teens toward the bricolage (tinkering and picking and choosing) of their twenties."[140]

The examination of the literature regarding emerging adults' worldviews with respect to instability and value shifts will be followed by an examination of the literature with respect to religious beliefs and formative practices.

Religious Practices

C. Smith and Snell argue, "Emerging adults are, on most sociological measures, clearly the least religious adults in the United States today."[141] But they clarify that since 1972 the members of this group have not become "dramatically less religious" than young adults of previous generations, with the exception of Catholics and mainline Protestants.[142] Citing the research of C. Smith, Snell, Wuthnow, Kinnaman, and Hawkins, Setran and Kielsing observe, "Disrupted by the transitions and distractions in their lives, many in this age group diminish the faith commitments and practices that defined their

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[137] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 13.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid., 13-14.

[140] Rick Richardson, "Emerging Adults and the Future of Missions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 2 (April, 2013): 79-84.

[141] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 281.

[142] Ibid.

childhood and adolescent years."[143] Setran and Kiesling also point out that "basic belief

in God's existence and personal involvement… reaches its lowest point in the years after

high school."[144] Yet recent data from the Pew Research Center suggests that even though

emerging adults' religiosity reaches its lowest point after high school, the "…young

adult's beliefs about life after death and the existence of heaven, hell and miracles closely

resemble the beliefs of older people today."[145] They conclude that for those who affiliate

with a religion, "the intensity of their religious affiliation is as strong today as among

previous generations when they were young."[146] C. Smith and Snell state, "The myth of

overall religious decline among emerging adults must be dispelled. At the same time,

there is no denying that some emerging adults undergo a waning of their religious belief

and practice during this life phase. Numerically, these outweigh those who are becoming

more religious."[147] He continues, "most emerging adults tend not to change religiously,

many tend to decline, and a few tend to increase religiously."[148] So C. Smith and Snell

assert that there is not an overall religious decline among emerging adults, but they

acknowledge that the research points to a waning of religious belief and practices. But

this begs the question, is it possible for religious practices to decline, yet for emerging

adults' faith to remain strong?

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[143] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 4.

[144] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 12.

[145] Allison Pond, Gregory Smith, and Scott Clement, "Religion Among the Millennials," pewforum.com, February 17, 2010, accessed February 13, 2014, http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 283.

[148] Ibid.

Spiritual but not religious

Is it possible that emerging adults remain spiritual, but not religious? In other words, can their inner lives of faith remain strong while their observable religious behavior declines? Astin, Astin, and Lindholm believe so, observing, "while students' degree of religious engagement declines somewhat during college, their spirituality shows substantial growth."[149] But Setran and Kiesling warn that "While such analyses reveal a purported uptick in spiritual interest," these estimates are exaggerated due to the ever-broadening definition of "spirituality" used by social scientists.[150] Indeed, under the umbrella of "spirituality," Astin, Astin, and Lindholm include: "becoming more caring, more tolerant, more connected with others, and more actively engaged in a spiritual quest."[151] To Setran and Kiesling's point, that list is fairly broad and vague.

Along with Setran and Kiesling, C. Smith and Snell believe that "these claims are often exaggerated and misunderstood."[152] C. Smith and Snell point out that statistically, approximately fifteen percent of emerging adults are spiritually open, twenty-five percent are religiously indifferent, five percent are religiously disconnected, and ten percent are irreligious. This is compared to fifteen percent who are committed traditionalists and thirty percent who are selective adherents.[153] Based on their conclusion, approximately fifty-five percent of emerging adults are not actively interested in faith and practice.[154]

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[149] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 10.

[150] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 15.

[151] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 10.

[152] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 295.

[153] Ibid., 166-168.

[154] Ibid.

Wuthnow also concludes that approximately fifty-five percent of twenty-one through forty-five year-olds are not actively interested in faith and practice.[155] C. Smith and Snell add, "The surveys themselves are constructed in a way that leaves the language of 'spirituality' as the only way for respondents to register any kind of religious or nonatheistic interest."[156] Further, they warn that the research is distorted by those who want to sell books and are "alienated from mainstream religion" or who "want to make the case that traditional churches are failing to reach young people today…"[157]

Yet C. Smith and Snell do acknowledge that according to the research, there is "some basis in fact" for the claim that emerging adults are spiritual but not religious.[158] They state, "Clearly, personal involvement in actual religious communities is not for most of the emerging adults of any tradition examined here a necessary part of a life of faith."[159] Kinnaman and Hawkins agree, and mention that "most young Christians are struggling less with their faith in Christ than with their experience of church."[160] To this point, Setran and Kiesling observe, "Scholars across the board agree that Christian *practices and institutional participation* are far more likely to decline even when beliefs remain intact."[161] Likewise, Wuthnow points out that when emerging adults were asked

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[155] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 134.

[156] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 296.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., 295.

[159] Ibid., 136.

[160] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 27.

[161] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 13.

the best way to understand God, two-thirds "opt for personal experience over church

doctrines."[162]

Yet, C. Smith and Snell are emphatic that faith and practice must go together.

They recognize that there is a widespread belief that what really matters in the emerging

adults' stage of life is internal faith, rather than the external expression of that faith

through religious practice. But they make the strong point that "the emerging adults who

do sustain strong subjective religion in their lives, it turns out, are those who also

maintain strong external expressions of faith, including religious service attendance."[163]

Wuthnow also concludes that the "dominant pattern among young adults is not

spirituality *or* religion, but spirituality *and* religion."[164] Setran and Kiesling affirm the

findings of C. Smith and Snell when they claim, "The erosion of Christian beliefs,

therefore, is coupled with a similar erosion of Christian behaviors."[165]

Church attendance

USA Today reported that "Seven in 10 Protestants ages 18-30 – both evangelical

and mainline – who went to church regularly in high school said they quit attending by

age 23."[166] Kinnaman and Hawkins assert, "Millions of young adults leave active

involvement in church as they exit their teen years."[167] They claim that fifty-nine percent

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[162] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 133.

[163] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 252.

[164] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 134.

[165] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 14.

[166] Kathy Lynn Grossman, "Young Adults Aren't Sticking with the Church." *USATODAY,* August, 6, 2007, accessed July 17, 2015, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2007-08-06-church-dropouts_N.htm.

[167] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 19.

of emerging adults drop out of church.[168] Further, they reveal, "Ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance."[169] C. Smith and Snell believe this language of "black hole" is overstated.[170] They actually refer to Kinnaman and Hawkins as holding alarmist and inaccurate views.[171] Kinnaman and Hawkins respond that there are "some who claim that…the dropout problem is a myth, an alarmist's way of selling books…"[172] They go on to state that the dropout problem is "real and even urgent."[173] Setran and Kiesling agree that there is a "black hole" of church decline, especially when one considers the weighty decisions that emerging adults are making in this period of their lives.[174]

Statistics. So what do the statistics on emerging adult church decline reveal? According to Arnett, when emerging adults were asked, "How often do you attend religious services?" twenty-five percent said three to seven times per month, twelve percent said one to two times a month, seventeen percent said "once every few months," and forty-six percent said about one to two times per year.[175] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm agree, "The rate of frequent attendance declines from 44 percent in high school to 25 percent in college, and the rate of nonattendance nearly doubles (from 20% to 38%)."[176]

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[168] Ibid., 23.

[169] Ibid., 22.

[170] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 282.

[171] Ibid., 323.

[172] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 32.

[173] Ibid., 32-33.

[174] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 85.

[175] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 168.

[176] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 89.

Wuthnow also observes that "regular attenders" constitute approximately twenty-five

percent of emerging adults.[177]

C. Smith's and Snell's statistics are a little higher, reporting that 30.9 percent are

regular attenders, 35.4 percent never attend, and the rest attend between a few times a

year and once a month.[178] However, C. Smith and Snell argue that this data does not tell

the whole story and that forty-four percent of emerging adults say their religious faith is

"extremely important" or "very important" in their daily lives, compared to the 26.8

percent who view religious faith as unimportant.[179] They also make the case that

emerging adults' frequency of religious service attendance is fairly stable compared to

other generations, but that the major difference is due to the involvement of different

religious groups, with evangelical Protestants being much higher than mainline

Protestants.[180] Also, though C. Smith and Snell do acknowledge that there are "certain

social and cultural forces at work during emerging adulthood" that act as a "powerful

gravitational field of a black hole," the research does not indicate an "overall, massive

decline in religion."[181] Instead, C. Smith and Snell report, "A little more than half of

emerging adults remain quite stable in their levels of religious commitment and practice

or lack thereof."[182] They note that the highest, moderate, and lowest levels of religious

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[177] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 53.

[178] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 112.

[179] Ibid., 112-113.

[180] Ibid., 95.

[181] Ibid., 282.

[182] Ibid.

commitment remain quite stable.[183] Thus, C. Smith and Snell resist the notion of a broad

decline in religious practice among all emerging adults. So what factors contribute to

emerging adults' levels of religious commitment?

     Causal Factors for Religious Increase or Decline. Arnett claims, "In statistical

analyses, there was no relationship between exposure to religious training in childhood

and any aspect of their religious beliefs as emerging adults."[184] Along these lines,

Kinnaman and Hawkins strongly state that "the spiritual lives of millions of young people

are at stake" and that "even though the childhood and early adolescent years are the time

during which spiritual and moral compasses are calibrated, the experimental and

experiential decade from high school to the late twenties is the time when a young

person's spiritual trajectory is confirmed and clarified."[185] According to Arnett,

Kinnaman, and Hawkins, regardless of childhood faith, the religious life of emerging

adults is largely up for grabs.

     C. Smith and Snell are not as pessimistic, noting, "The religious lives of youth

during this period reflect a lot more stability and consistency than many seem to have

previously realized, compared to the amount of change and upheaval that has so often

been assumed."[186] Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, in their article *Finding Faith,*

Losing Faith, agree with this more hopeful outlook, claiming that only a subset of

emerging adults experience an intense religious growth or decline. They note that fifteen

to eighteen percent experience growth, twenty to twenty-two percent experience decline,

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[183] Ibid.

[184] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 174.

[185] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 31.

[186] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 254.

and drastic changes are rare. They also claim that the religiosity of parents and peers does matter.[187] In his article *Religious Resources or Differential Returns?* Brandon Vaidyanathan agrees, concluding that among evangelical Protestants, parental religiosity seems to matter.[188]

C. Smith and Snell make an important observation about causal factors for sustained faith from the teenage years into the emerging adult years:

> In order to sustain high levels of religious commitment and practice during the emerging adult years, five distinct factors seem especially important: first, strong relational modeling and support for religious commitment (parental religion); second, genuine internalization of religious significance (importance of faith, religious experiences, no doubts); and third, the personal practice of religious faith (prayer).[189]

Their point is that the parents' religion, mentors, personal prayer and scripture reading, high teenage importance of faith, and positive religious experiences are key factors that carry over from teenage faith to emerging adult faith. They add, "In short, the combination of the teenager's parental religion, importance of faith, prayer, and the scripture reading makes an enormous substantive difference in religious outcomes during emerging adulthood."[190]

Looking at the big picture, C. Smith and Snell conclude that not all emerging adults can be lumped together, but rather that they fall into levels of religiousness which remain quite stable. Yet more than forty percent of emerging adults experience some sort

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[187] Mark D. Regnerus, and Jeremy E. Uecker, "Finding Faith, Losing Faith: The Prevalence and Context of Religious Transformations During Adolescence," *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 3 (March 2006): 217-237.

[188] Brandon Vaidyanathan, "Religious Resources or Differential Returns? Early Religious Socialization and Declining Attendance in Emerging Adulthood," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 2 (June 2011): 366-387.

[189] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 217-219.

[190] Ibid., 220.

of religious decline (12.9 percent experience steep decline, 28.4 percent experience

shallow decline), whereas only 3.6 percent experience a significant religious increase.

And finally, teenage faith shapes emerging adult faith.[191] C. Smith and Snell maintain,

"Emerging adulthood tends both to raise the stakes on and remove social support for

being seriously religious. As a result, many youth do pull back from, or entirely out of,

religious faith and practice during their transitions out of the teenage years."[192]

Unfortunately, the timing of when emerging adults' social support is removed, and when

they pull back from religious faith and practice, is when they set foot on college

campuses. So what happens to the moral formation of emerging adults during the critical

years of college?

Moral Formation in the Modern Secular University

The examination of what literature offers in the area of moral formation in the

broader emerging adult culture is now followed by an examination of literature with

respect to moral formation in the modern secular university. According to Pew Research,

"Just under 11.5 million students, or 39.6% of all young adults ages 18 to 24, were

enrolled in either a two- or four-year college in October 2008 (the most recent date for

which comprehensive nationwide data are available)."[193] Wuthnow notes that more

American emerging adults are attending and graduating college than ever before in the

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[191] Ibid., 243.

[192] Ibid., 283.

[193] Paul Taylor, "College Enrollment Hits All-Time High, Fueled by Community College Surge," pewsocialtrends.org, October 29, 2009, accessed January 14, 2015, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2009/10/29/college-enrollment-hits-all-time-high-fueled-by-community-college-surge/.

nation's history.[194] With so many emerging adults choosing to pursue higher education, it is important to understand how and to what degree they are shaped by their college experience. More specifically, for the millions of emerging adults who attend college, what happens to their moral formation during these years?

In the literature there is little debate that college changes students. Astin begins with the strong statement that "Few people will argue with the premise that attending college can have a profound effect on one's life. With the possible exception of getting married or having children, few choices have more far-reaching implications than the decision about college."[195] Pascarella and Terenzini agree and point out that along with gains in cognitive and intellectual growth and skill, students "changed significantly on a broad spectrum of value, attitudinal, psychosocial, and moral dimensions."[196] They note, "Maturation during the undergraduate years is holistic in nature and embraces multiple facets of individual change."[197] These social scientists agree that change takes place in the moral dimensions of emerging adults' lives during the college years, but does "significant change" necessarily mean that most or many emerging adults lose or diminish in their faith during these years?

Does College Corrode Faith?

Recently, the researcher was in a conversation with a father who wants to send his son to a Christian college because he has heard the statistics that eighty percent of college students abandon their faith. He might have been exaggerating to make a point, but this

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[194] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 36.

[195] Astin, *What Matters in College?* 1.

[196] Pascarella, and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 572.

[197] Ibid.

begs the question, does the college experience actually corrode students' faith? Setran and Kiesling observe, "Christians often blame colleges for the faith decline of emerging adults, assuming that the combination of liberal teaching, the loss of parental oversight, and the loose moral culture of the campus creates a perfect storm hastening the demise of strong faith."[198] But according to Pascarella and Terenzini, "Whereas pre-1990 studies indicated that students' religious activities and religiosity declined somewhat during the college years, the more recent evidence (although limited) points to increases or refinements in student's religious values during college."[199]

Along these lines, C. Smith and Snell note that the belief that higher education corrodes religious faith and practice is widely accepted because this seemed to be true of the baby boomer generation. However, recent studies continue to confirm that "the religiously undermining effect of higher education on recent generation of youth has disappeared."[200] They believe that for baby boomers, "college did indeed seem to tend to corrode religious faith and practice."[201] However, Wuthnow is not as quick to make a distinction between baby boomers and emerging adults. He points out that "younger adults at the start of the twenty-first century are like younger adults in the early 1970s" in terms of regular attendance at religious services.[202] He notes that for both the baby boomer and emerging adult generations, decline in religious participation has much to do with marriage and family. Simply put, when couples marry and have children, they are

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[198] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 21.

[199] Pascarella, and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 335.

[200] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 248.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 53.

more likely to establish religious routines. The difference between baby boomers and emerging adults is that on average, emerging adults delay marriage and children until later in their twenties and beyond. According to recent data from Pew Research Center, twenty-six percent of emerging adults are married. When other generations were young adults, thirty-six percent of generation X were married, forty-eight percent of baby boomers were married, and sixty-five percent of the silent generation were married.[203] Wuthnow clarifies, "Taking marriage rates into account significantly reduces the difference between church attendance in the late 1990s and in the early 1970s."[204]

C. Smith and Snell maintain, "Going to college no longer seems to corrode the religious faith and practice of students as it did in decades past."[205] Kinnaman and Hawkins agree that college is not an "automatic faith killer," and that most of those who lose their faith actually do so before they enter into college.[206] C. Smith and Snell further argue that emerging adults who do not attend college have higher declines in religious participation than emerging adults who do attend college.[207] They conclude, "While the transition from the teenage to the emerging adult years does entail an overall decline in religious involvement…attending college per se is not an experience that particularly contributes to that decline."[208] On the other hand, Wuthnow notes, "However, nobody

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[203] Bruce Drake, "6 New Findings about Millennials," pewresearch.org, March 7, 2014, accessed February 13, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/07/6-new-findings-about-millennials/.

[204] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 62.

[205] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 256.

[206] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 140.

[207] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 249.

[208] Ibid., 250.

claims that religious participation has been rising in recent decades" on college campuses.[209]

Commitment Levels

So the research suggests that college does not automatically corrode faith. Yet, what happens to the religious interest and commitment level of an emerging adult during the college years? The answer to this depends upon the researcher's perspective. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm assert, "Students' level of Religious Commitment changes very little during college."[210] Religious commitment is understood as trusting in a higher power, and being helped, strengthened, and guided by spiritual/religious beliefs. Further, they report, "Fewer than 30 percent of the students change their freshmen level of commitment (high, middle, low) during college, and extreme changes are rare: only 1 percent…"[211]

Along these lines, Pascarella and Terenzini explain, "The percentage of students on the far left or far right remained virtually unchanged from first to senior year."[212] This suggests that even with slight changes to religious commitment, emerging adults are not losing their faith in droves, as some may assume. While college campuses can be places where religious beliefs are challenged, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm observe, "During the college years, Religious Skepticism shows very little overall change, with the number of high-scorers increasing slightly from 19 to 20 percent."[213]

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[209] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 51.

[210] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 85.

[211] Ibid.

[212] Pascarella, and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 576.

[213] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 109.

With respect to spirituality, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm note that juniors are more inclined than freshmen to rate "integrating spirituality in my life" as a "very important" or "essential" life goal (50 percent, compared with 42 percent as freshmen).[214] They add, "Regardless of the type of campus students attend, one of the largest changes during the first three years of college occurs in students' propensity to engage in a spiritual quest."[215] They define "spiritual quest" broadly as the "inner process of seeking answers to who we are, why we are here, and how we can live a meaningful life."[216]

Setran argues that much of this research can be overly optimistic and misleading because the definition of "spiritual" is too broad.[217] In fact, Laura DeHaan, Julie Yonker, and Carolyn Affholter, in their article *More Than Enjoying the Sunset,* analyzed empirical studies from 1990 to 2010 and concluded that there was a great deal of variety in the comprehensiveness of the notions of "spirituality" and "religion." Further, they note that there was little agreement regarding the conceptualization of "spirituality" and "religion" across studies.[218] Clydesdale agrees and goes so far as to claim that asking a freshman whether they have an interest in spirituality is like asking a soldier whether they are interested in peace.[219] Of course they are, but what does that actually mean in their daily lives? Even though many of these researchers have a broader understanding of religion

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[214] Ibid., 31.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid., 47.

[217] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 15.

[218] Laura DeHaan, Julie E. Yonker, and Carolyn Affholter, "More than Enjoying the Sunset: Conceptualization and Measurement of Religiosity for Adolescents and Emerging Adults and Its Implications for Developmental Inquiry," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 30, no. 3 (September, 2011): 184-195.

[219] Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, 49.

and spirituality than the Christian worldview, C. Smith's and Snell's perspective is confirmed that for more than half of emerging adults, religious commitment remains quite stable at the highest, moderate, and lowest levels. As for the forty percent of emerging adults who decline in commitment, there are identifiable factors that lead to either a steep or shallow decline in commitment.[220]

What about Freshmen?

As already noted, the freshmen year can be a time of great upheaval. Clydesdale is quick to point out that most freshmen are not trying out "possible selves," and they "demonstrated remarkably settled lives and continued well-established life patterns during their first year out."[221] Clydesdale believes that college freshmen focus on the daily life management of their personal relationships, personal gratification, and economic lives.[222] He notes, "Religious and spiritual identities are peripheral to that quest and stowed in an identity lockbox for a later point in the life cycle."[223] Agreeing with Clydesdale's concept of a lockbox, Setran and Kiesling comment, "Religion does not seem applicable to the all-consuming flow of daily life, faith is set to the side and rarely engaged, critically examined, or applied to the decisions and practices of life."[224] Sundene and Dunn also conclude that emerging adults are "likely to do one of three things: fragment their identity…redefine how a Christian acts and believes, or put their

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[220] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 282.

[221] Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, 46.

[222] Ibid., 2.

[223] Ibid., 50.

[224] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 18.

religious identity 'away' for a time intending to 'take it up' later."[225] Clydesdale also

points out that one of the reasons for the lockbox is the cultural pressure on emerging

adults to "earn their own degrees and climb their own occupational ladders…"[226] C.

Smith and Snell agree and state that for emerging adults, deep involvement in religion

and a religious community does not appear to be "relevant to or important for achieving

identity and financial independence."[227] Clydesdale notes that this lockbox effect is not

true of approximately thirty percent of emerging adults who view religion as of great

importance.[228]

<div align="center">*Challenges to Moral Formation in the Modern University*</div>

Although college itself does not corrode faith, there are still challenges to an

emerging adult's moral formation during these years. C. Smith and Snell point to the

challenges of new ideas which can cause religious doubt, a new environment and less

parental oversight with respect to faithful religious practices, as well as the party lifestyle

which can cause "cognitive dissonance" in the pursuit of religious practice.[229] On top of

that, according to Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, time constraints make it difficult for the

"thoughtful exploration of life's so-called big questions."[230] Along these lines, Parks

observes, "Young adulthood is rightfully a time of asking big questions and discovering

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[225] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 128.

[226] Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, 27.

[227] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 76-77.

[228] Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, 50.

[229] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 248.

[230] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 44.

worthy dreams."[231] Yet, there are challenges to pursuing the big questions and worthy dreams in the modern secular university.

The Challenge of Secularism

According to Reuben, education in the nineteenth century revolved around the idea of the "unity of truth," where all truths agreed and assumed a moral dimension. Proper education was concerned with intellectual growth as well as morality.[232] Reuben makes the case that around the turn of the twentieth century, American higher education transformed into the modern secular university. In this transformation to the modern university, the notion of the "unity of truth," which encompasses the good, the true, and the beautiful, was forsaken and fragmented. A distinction was made between "facts" which could be empirically verified by science, and "values" which were subjective and could not be verified. According to Reuben, "The old triad – the good, true, and beautiful – was updated as service and character, research and objective knowledge, and culture and art." During this process, moral formation was removed from the course of study and relegated to the status of an extracurricular activity.[233]

Rueben notes that universities "increasingly relied on extracurricular activities to serve students religious needs...an institutional arrangement that cemented the separation of the intellectual and the devotional."[234] These extracurricular activities include the domain of student affairs. A growing number of student affairs professionals argue that one of the fundamental purposes of higher education is to help students find their purpose

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[231] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 5.

[232] Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 17.

[233] Ibid., 267-269.

[234] Ibid., 118.

in life, and that they are well situated to mentor students in their moral development and their search for meaning and purpose. They use the language of "moral compass" and view moral development as "an aspect of cognitive development, assisting students in meaning making and decision making, where moral actions are weighed and moral principles serve as the boundaries for those actions."[235]

Debora Liddell and Diane Cooper, in their article *Moral Development in Higher Education,* agree that student affairs professionals are situated to address students' meaning and purpose in life, as well as the moral implications of their decisions.[236] But there are critics who stress that moral formation through student affairs professionals is not enough. In her article *Spirituality in the Academy,* Lindholm argues, "For spirituality to have a central place in campus life, the essential tenets of an institution's role in a student's spiritual development should also be reflected in the core values, beliefs, and commitments of academic affairs educators."[237] Lindholm's point is that moral development must be the focus of both student affairs as well as academic affairs. William Willimon, addresses this challenge in his article *Has Higher Education Abandoned Its Students?* He believes that "faculty assume that they have no responsibility for student life other than to attend to the students' brains…"[238] He continues, "I believe that faculty must recover their care for other aspects of students'

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[235] Margaret A. Healy, et al., "The Role of the Campus Professional as a Moral Mentor," *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 139 (Fall 2012): 83-92.

[236] Debora L. Liddell, and Diane L. Cooper, "Moral Development in Higher Education," *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 139 (Fall 2012): 5-15.

[237] Jennifer A. Lindholm, "Spirituality in the Academy: Reintegrating Our Lives and the Lives of Our Students," *About Campus* 12, no. 4 (September 2007): 10-17.

[238] William H. Willimon, "Has Higher Education Abandoned Its Students?" *About Campus* 2, no. 4 (September, 1997): 4-9.

lives, that they must question the neat separation they have made between the academic and social, the intellectual and the physical, the classroom and the dorm."[239]

Such holistic care for emerging adults, including their moral formation, is increasingly difficult with the separation of facts and values. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm also share that the "spiritual aspects of student development were cornerstones of early American college curricula."[240] They contend that the dichotomy between facts and values, as well as scientific worldviews, won the day and continues to "exert a powerful influence" and "dominate societal values and individual goal orientations."[241] Setran and Kiesling sum up the literature well:

> Removed from family and home contexts, many rely on higher education institutions to fill the moral void. Yet while early colleges did sponsor moral education through Bible studies, codes of conduct, moral philosophy courses, and faculty modeling and mentoring, much of this has been discarded since the early twentieth century…separating facts and values, concern for morality is typically relocated to the co-curriculum and marginalized from the larger purposes of these institutions.[242]

Setran and Kiesling make the point that higher education institutions once offered moral education, but inevitably marginalized morality once they separated facts and values with respect to the notion of the unity of truth.

<u>Missing morality</u>

Parks points out that higher education institutions "hold a special place in the story of human development, particularly in the process of becoming a young adult in

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[239] Ibid.

[240] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 139-140.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 142.

faith."[243] Yet, the literature contains no shortage of critique of the modern university with respect to the neglect and marginalization of moral formation in the lives of emerging adults. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm comment, "While higher education continues to put a lot of emphasis on test scores, grades, credits, and degrees, it has increasingly come to neglect its students' 'inner' development – the sphere of value and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and of self-understanding."[244] Garber sums up the issue at hand:

> The years between adolescence and adulthood are a crucible in which moral meaning is being formed, and central to that formation is a vision of integrity which coherently connects belief to behavior personally as well as publicly; the conditions of modern consciousness, especially as they are manifest in the modern university, make it increasingly difficult for young people to come through those years with the habits of heart required to develop and sustain that kind of integrity.[245]

Garber contends that higher education formation should focus on integrity – helping emerging adults to connect what they believe with how they behave. He asks, "How is it that we have strayed so far from educational visions that saw the formation of moral meaning as at the heart of learning?"[246] He points out that higher education institutions gave up on being places that probe the deeper worldview questions.[247] The question that echoes throughout Garber's book is, "How does someone decide which cares and commitment will give shape and substance to life, for life?"[248]

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[243] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 10.

[244] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 2.

[245] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 20.

[246] Ibid., 75.

[247] Ibid., 80.

[248] Ibid., 25.

There is cause for concern regarding the cares and commitments of emerging adults in the university culture. C. Smith and Snell state, "Any notion of the responsibility of a common humanity, a transcendent call to protect the life and dignity of one's neighbor, or a moral responsibility to seek the common good was almost entirely absent among the respondents."[249] The cares and commitments of the "good life" for emerging adults are, for good or for ill, being shaped prior to and during the university years. The university years should be a critical time of moral formation where emerging adults wrestle to connect knowing with doing, and where further shaping and reshaping of cares and commitments takes place. C. Smith and Snell lament, "In the end, each individual does what he or she wants and nobody has any moral leverage to persuade or compel him or her to do otherwise."[250] Unfortunately, the fostering of cares and commitments has been marginalized and neglected, and the value of higher education has been largely reduced to instrumental values.

Greedy "good life"

Many social scientists have argued that purpose of higher education has digressed from the pursuit of a good moral education to the instrumental pursuit of fun and future economic success. According to Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, "Annual surveys of entering college freshmen…show that the personal goal of 'being well off financially' has grown dramatically in popularity, while the value of 'developing a meaningful philosophy of life' – which was the highest ranked concern in the 1970s – has declined sharply among students."[251] In agreement, C. Smith and Snell point out that for most emerging adults, as

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[249] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 68.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 2-3.

well as the wider community, the motivation behind the pursuit of higher education is "so that one can get a better job, earn more money, and become a good salary earner and supporter of a (materially) comfortable and secure life."[252]

Arnett points out that most emerging adults enter college with only a general idea of what they want to study, yet they want to get a degree in order to make considerably more money than their peers who do not go to college.[253] Further, Setran and Kiesling make a good point that "media portrayals of college and postcollege life certainly depict the 'me-centered' life as the normative pattern of emerging adulthood."[254] C. Smith sums it up well when he says that emerging adults are captivated by consumerism, which hinders them from a vision of higher education that serves a common good, and fuels their "me-centered" consumeristic desires. He contends that higher education should be about "expanding people's horizons and depths of understanding, engaging students with the big questions that matter most in life…"[255] With respect to "big questions," Paul Lakeland, in his article *Preserving the Lifeworld, Restoring the Public Sphere, Renewing Higher Education,* asserts, "The question that the student should be asking to keep in mind is this: how can I prepare myself to place my personal career responsibility in the context of the society in which I shall live?"[256]

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[252] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 54.

[253] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 122.

[254] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 234.

[255] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 101.

[256] Paul Lakeland, "Preserving the Lifeworld, Restoring the Public Sphere, Renewing Higher Education," *Cross Currents* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 488.

Shallow vocational vision

According to Garber, "True education is always about learning to connect knowing with doing, belief with behavior; and yet that connection is incredibly difficult to make for students in the modern university."[257] He argues that what is needed is a vocational vision that takes into account proper cares and commitments. His point is that one cannot truly pursue vocation for the good of all "apart from a transcendent reality."[258] Picking up on this theme, Setran and Kiesling root vocation in the biblical narrative of God's purpose for and providence in one's life. Garber, Setran, and Keisling argue that a purposeful vocational vision is challenged by the emerging adult's view of higher education as a passport to privilege.[259]

Kinnaman and Hawkins refer to vocation as "that powerful, often ignored intersection of faith and calling."[260] They lament that millions of Christ-following young adults are interested in mainstream professions, yet "most receive little guidance from their church communities for how to connect these vocational dreams deeply with their faith in Christ."[261] Their conclusion is that the Christian tradition has for the most part lost the sense of vocation as a "biblically robust, directive sense of God's calling, both individually and collectively."[262] Setran and Kiesling argue that emerging adults need to

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[257] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 43.

[258] Ibid., 55.

[259] Ibid., 27.

[260] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 29.

[261] Ibid.

[262] Ibid., 207.

be challenged with the identity questions of "Who am I?" and "Whose am I?"[263] Asking these questions can lead emerging adults to the deeper reality of what it means primarily to be called by God, and secondarily to live out their primary callings in all areas of life.[264] In his book *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good,* Garber asks very pointedly, "In the context of one's calling, how does one learn to see with the eyes of the heart, to see oneself as responsible for the way the world is and isn't?"[265] His point is that "*to have knowledge of* means *to have responsibility to* means *to have care for*."[266]

The Challenge of Socialization

The university campus is a formative force which extends far beyond the boundaries of the classroom and into the community life of students. J. Smith points out that the university has "worlds within worlds" and is an "identity-forming institution."[267] He recognizes that although emerging adults attend college for a classroom education, "It is also the site of dorm rooms and dining halls, frat houses and football stadiums. In some ways, the classroom, lab, and library are only a slice of the student's experience of the university."[268] Agreeing with J. Smith, Pascarella and Terenzini note, "The majority of American postsecondary institutions have important social and intellectual sub-

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[263] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 119.

[264] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 119-120.

[265] Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 38.

[266] Ibid., 100.

[267] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 114.

[268] Ibid., 114-115.

environments and peer cultures that exert more immediate and powerful impacts on individual students."[269]

It is important to consider what contributes to the "immediate and powerful" moral formation that takes place in the stop-gap of college. Christians are often troubled by the secular ideas that are taught at public universities. Reuben makes an important contribution here with respect to the trend of moral formation that takes place outside the classroom. She points out that by the early twentieth century, university leaders established a growing number of extracurricular activities due to the belief that moral formation takes place largely outside of the classroom in the community life of students.[270] Along these lines, C. Smith and Snell are convinced that the emerging adult's "religious stability and change" has much to do with "significant personal relationships."[271]

So in the college years, emerging adults will be shaped for good or for ill by the involvement or absence of parents, faculty, mentors, peers, and faith communities. Parks refers to this as a "mentoring community" and states, "At its best, higher education is distinctive in its capacity to serve as a mentoring environment in the formation of critical adult faith…higher education inevitably functions, at least to some degree, as a mentoring community for those who are young adults in faith… even if only by default."[272] Parks believes that due to the various sociological influences, higher education inevitably becomes an environment that shapes faith, even if it is by default.

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[269] Pascarella, and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 601.

[270] Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 255.

[271] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 209.

[272] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 159.

There is cause for concern here, since it is possible for adults to be largely absent in the lives of emerging adults. Parks stresses the importance of mentoring communities, including the formative practices of the commons, the hearth, and the table. According to Parks, the commons is where people gather with a "sense of a shared life."[273] She refers to the practice of the hearth as places where "we are warmed in both body and soul, are made comfortable, and tend to linger."[274] She names the practice of the table as a place where "we learn delayed gratification, belonging, commitment, and ritual."[275] For Parks, the commons, the hearth, and the table are places of imagination and faith formation where emerging adults can engage in the big questions of their lives and their generation.

Absence of adults

    C. Smith and Snell point out that the most important influence on teenage faith, even above peer influence, is the religious lives of parents.[276] Yet for emerging adults who attend college, the active presence of parents is removed. Reuben notes that in previous generations, "college authorities saw themselves as surrogate parents, responsible for students' moral and spiritual welfare."[277] This is the notion of *in loco parentis,* "in place of parents." In her article *The New In Loco Parentis*, Nancy Thomas explains, "The doctrine of in loco parentis provided that the college had a right to step into the place of the student's parents (by promulgating and enforcing academic and nonacademic codes of conduct) and a duty to protect the safely, morals, and welfare of its

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[273] Ibid., 10.

[274] Ibid., 154.

[275] Ibid., 156.

[276] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 285.

[277] Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 22.

students."[278] Arnett also observes that until the 1960s, college officials acted *in loco parentis* in order to enforce rules and monitor curfews, and especially to discourage sexual activity.[279] Randall Bowden, in his article *Evolution of Responsibility,* comments that a radical shift began in the 1960s when courts began to reject *in loco parentis* in response to students who invoked their legal rights as adults. Whereas universities once governed the academic and moral development of students, after 1960 this notion was in flux.[280] In their article *The Impact of Living in Co-Ed Residence Halls on Risk-Taking Among College Students,* Brian Willoughby and Jason Carroll note that not only has *in loco parentis* diminished, but that currently more than ninety percent of college housing is co-ed in nature.[281] Their research demonstrates that students who live in the social environment of co-ed residence halls are more prone to the risk-taking behaviors of sexual hook-ups and binge drinking.[282] Parks addresses the confusion of the modern university which perceives emerging adults on one hand as independent thinking adults, yet on the other hand as "dependent neophytes in need of being awakened."[283] So the reality is that many emerging adults are away from the oversight of parents, and at the same time the university has abandoned its former role of moral guidance.

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[278] Nancy L. Thomas, "The New in Loco Parentis," *Change* 23, no. 5 (October 9, 1991): 32.

[279] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 85.

[280] Randall Bowden, "Evolution of Responsibility: From in Loco Parentis to Ad Meliora Vertamur," *Education* 127, no. 4 (Summer 2007): 480-489.

[281] Brian J. Willoughby, and Jason S. Carroll, "The Impact of Living in Co-Ed Resident Halls on Risk-Taking Among College Students," *Journal of American College Health* 58, no. 3 (December, 2009): 241-246.

[282] Ibid.

[283] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 160.

With parents out of the picture on a university campus, faculty members have the potential to fill the adult void. But how do faculty perceive the moral formation of emerging adults? Parks states, "Every institution of higher education serves in at least some measure as a community of imagination in which every professor is potentially a spiritual guide and every syllabus a confession of faith."[284] The key word in that statement is "potentially." Astin, Astin, and Lindholm observe that "many faculty members associate spirituality with religion, and since most of our colleges and universities are secular, they assume that spirituality (religion) has no place in the academic environment, except possibly as a subject to be taught or studied by people in departments of religious studies."[285] Accompanying this notion are some troubling statistics that "most students (62 percent) report that their professors 'never' encourage discussions of religious/spiritual matters…"[286] Further , in a recent study, "73 percent of the students said that when their professors taught about ethical issues, the usual message was that uniform standards of right and wrong don't exist ('what is right and wrong depends on differences in individual values and cultural diversity')."[287]

With respect to mentors, C. Smith and Snell state, "The empirical evidence tells us that it does in fact matter for emerging adults' religious outcomes whether or not youth have had non-parental adults in their religious congregations to whom they could turn for help and support."[288] Further, they note that non-parental adults can actually "substitute

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[284] Ibid., 159.

[285] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 6.

[286] Ibid., 37.

[287] John Leo, "Professors Who See No Evil," *U.S. News & World Report* 133, no. 3 (July 22, 2002): 14.

[288] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 285.

for parents as formative influences."[289] So the evidence suggests that mentors are a significant factor in the ongoing faith of emerging adults. Yet during the college years, there is the unfortunate reality of emerging adult decline in church participation, hindering their involvement with mentors. Further, emerging adults who do attend church regularly are largely on their own to forge relationships with mentors. On another sobering note, Kinnaman and Hawkins report, "A majority of the young adults we interviewed reported never having an adult friend other than their parents."[290] C. Smith sums up the problem well:

> …structurally, most emerging adults live this crucial decade of life surrounded mostly by their peers – people of the same age and in the same boat – who have no more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective, or balance than they do. It is sociologically a very odd way to help young people come of age, to learn how to be responsible, capable, mature adults.[291]

C. Smith's point is that in the university years, peers dominate the sociological structure, which is problematic in producing mature adults.

"Peer pressure"

Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, in their book *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses,* add that in the beginning of the twentieth century, university leaders looked to dormitories to foster a "college spirit," which included the development of character and morality.[292] Reuben also makes the case that "student life," with a special focus on dormitories, "replaced the classroom and the chapel as the locus

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[289] Ibid.

[290] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 29.

[291] Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 234.

[292] Richard Arum, and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 127-128, accessed July 28, 2014, http://libproxy.wustl.edu/login?url=http://site.ebrary.com/lib/wustl/docDetail.action?docID=10443372.

of the moral mission of the university."[293] She continues, "Educators believed that by

building dormitories for their students they could also build a close-knit student

community and use peer pressure to encourage high moral standards."[294] This research

affirms the common understanding that peer pressure shapes morality. Kinnaman and

Hawkins assert, "Young adults also look to their peers to be their moral and spiritual

compass. They tend to base their views of morality on what seems fair-minded, loyal, and

acceptable to their friends."[295] Stating it even more strongly, Astin argues, "The student's

peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development

during the undergraduate years…students' values, beliefs, and aspirations tend to change

in the direction of the dominant values, beliefs, and aspirations of the peer group."[296]

Yet with the absence of adult spiritual guides, and with the decline in spiritual

practices by emerging adults, the assumption that peers will encourage high moral

standards is problematic. In fact, C. Smith and Snell note that most emerging adults do

not discuss religion very often.[297] Other sociologists agree that religion remains in the

background during college, and is not a subject frequently discussed with peers or

professors.[298] Further, C. Smith and Snell state, "Most emerging adults would rather

spend large amounts of time merely 'hanging out' with various intimates and

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[293] Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 255.

[294] Ibid., 261.

[295] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 172.

[296] Astin, *What Matters in College?* 398.

[297] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 153.

[298] Jeremy E. Uecker, Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret L. Vaaler, "Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood," *Social Forces* 85, no. 4 (June 2007): 1667-1692.

acquaintances, for instance, than being part of clubs or interest groups."[299] So not only do most emerging adults not discuss religion often, they also seem to be hesitant to participate in a religious community. Further, recent data from the Pew Research Center notes that emerging adults have fewer attachments to religious institutions, yet they connect with friends and affinity groups through social media.[300] The implication is that many emerging adults are content to engage with their community online, rather than in person. This poses a challenge for churches and campus ministries seeking to gather emerging adults into their community.

In summary, college itself does not appear to corrode the religious faith and practices of emerging adults. However, the secular university environment provides challenges to the moral formation of emerging adults. The movement of secularism creates a challenge to provide a framework for moral development during the university years, and the peer culture, absent of adult mentors, creates a challenge to the mature moral formation of emerging adults.

Moral Formation in Congregational Life

When emerging adults attend secular universities, intense formation takes place. Yet, as the literature has established, the modern secular university is no longer a place of intentional moral education and development. Garber asks, "How is it that we have strayed so far from educational visions that saw the formation of moral meaning as at the heart of learning?"[301] He laments the shift of the higher educational institution from its role as a place of intentional moral formation to a place that neglects the deeper

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[299] Ibid., 74.

[300] Drake, "6 New Findings about Millennials."

[301] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 75.

worldview questions.[302] Parks also notes that during the university years, "Young adults are naturally renegotiating questions of their personal future, happiness, God, the ethical dimensions of their choices."[303] She recognizes that these are inherently religious questions. Like Garber, she fears that emerging adults' faith will become disjointed if these questions are set aside.[304] Yet, it is easy to avoid these questions during the university years, especially since this tends to be a period of decline in religious participation for many emerging adults.

Disengagement From Local Congregational Life

It is important to assess why many emerging adults disengage from the life of the church. According to Kinnaman's and Hawkin's research, "no single reason pushes a majority of young adults to drop out."[305] Their assessment seems to be accurate according to the literature. As already noted, disruptions, distractions, and delayed marriage are among some of the major factors for church decline among emerging adults. Kinnaman and Hawkins point out six themes of emerging adults' perceptions of the church: overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive, and doubtless.[306] C. Smith and Snell also note that for most emerging adults, church is not a place of real social belonging, compared with their social enclaves.[307]

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[302] Ibid., 80.

[303] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 198.

[304] Ibid.

[305] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 91.

[306] Ibid., 92-93.

[307] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 152.

Another major theme that emerged was the anti-institutional bias of emerging adults. Kinnaman and Hawkins note that this generation is "skeptical, even cynical, about the institutions that have shaped our society."[308] Arnett agrees and claims that many emerging adults reject religious institutions due to the fact that they are skeptical about the morality of those institutions.[309] Further, C. Smith and Snell note that the anti-institutional bias of many emerging adults stems from their belief that the institutional church is "rigid and inauthentic" compared to their personal expression of faith.[310] Kinnaman and Hawkins rightly point out that one must keep in mind that the research examines "primarily their perceptions of what's gone wrong."[311]

With respect to many secular university campuses, another factor for church decline could be the presence of campus ministries. Setran and Kiesling point out that parachurch campus ministries provide easy access to religious participation, which can function as an alternative to church. They go so far as to say that parachurch organizations can actually "de-motivate church involvement."[312] Many campus ministries provide easy access to Bible studies, community gathering events, and a worship service on campus, which for many emerging adults takes care of the felt need for church involvement. On the other hand, C. Smith and Snell note that the presence and influence of parachurch campus ministries are an important factor why, in recent decades, college

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[308] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 49.

[309] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 187.

[310] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 287.

[311] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 91.

[312] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 89.

no longer seems to corrode faith. They claim that parachurch ministries "provide

alternative plausibility structures for sustaining religious faith and practice in college."[313]

However, Thomas Bergler, who wrote *Taming the Juvenilization of American*

Christianity, points to a dark side of many youth religious gatherings. Though Bergler

does not target emerging adults in college parachurch ministries, his concerns very much

apply. Bergler believes that the religious practice of many youth groups has led to the

"juvenilization" of American Christianity. He writes, "Juvenilization is the process by

which the religious beliefs, practices, and development characteristics of adolescents

become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages."[314] Therefore, it is realistic that

many emerging adults will grow dissatisfied with the local church since it is not tailored

to them and does not seem to fit their experiences. He notes that because of

juvenilization, the faith of emerging adults is an immature faith.[315] Though various

concerns regarding the juvenilization of emerging adults' faith are valid, Kinnaman and

Hawkins note an encouraging counter-trend in his data that forty-two percent of emerging

adults reported that they are "very concerned about my generation leaving the church."[316]

Also, forty-one percent desired "a more traditional faith, rather than a hip version of

Christianity."[317] And thirty percent reported that they are more excited about church than

at any other time in their life.[318]

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[313] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 249.

[314] Thomas E. Bergler, "Taming the Juvenilization of American Christianity: Developing Youth Ministry Leaders Who Can Help the Church Grow Up," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 9, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 7-34.

[315] Ibid.

[316] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 27.

[317] Ibid.

[318] Ibid.

Congregation as the Answer to Moral Formation

Whereas many emerging adults are suspicious of the church as an institution, Hunter concludes that the church is a strategic gift because it is an institution of formation. He notes, "Only with strong communities can one find the relational means to sustain the difficulties endemic to life in the modern world. Only with strong institutions can one find the resources to resist its destructive influences and pressures. Nowhere is this more important that in the task of formation."[319] According to Hunter, the church is a strategic community and institution which can stand against such destructive influences and pressures, and destructive influences and pressures are alive and well on secular university campuses. Unfortunately, many emerging adults neglect to participate in a local church during their college years. Setran and Kiesling rightly point out that although many emerging adults will return to church after their college years, they will "return as people irrevocably shaped by some of the most critical decisions of life."[320] Setran and Kiesling believe that emerging adults lack an ecclesiastical vision, and that "communal formation through the local congregation can serve as one of the most powerful forces of spiritual growth in emerging adults' lives, countering many of the deforming beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors endemic to this stage, while forming them in ways that lead to mature adult faith."[321] They make an important point that the church stands as a powerful community which counters the deforming beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors so prevalent in emerging adult culture, and at the same time, the church forms mature faith in emerging adults.

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[319] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 282.

[320] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 85.

[321] Ibid., 95.

Worldview Formation

Regarding the issue of religious socialization in emerging adult culture, C. Smith and Snell explain that "the two crucial contexts of youth religious formation" are the family and the church. They emphasize, "If formation in faith does not happen there, it will – with rare exceptions – not happen anywhere."[322] With respect to this critical mission of the church, Francis Schaeffer wrote the following in his book *A Christian View of the Church*:

> It is not a day for small games. We need to teach a Christianity of content and purity of doctrine. And we need to practice that truth in our ecclesiastical affairs and in our religious cooperation if people, young and old, are to take our claim of truth seriously…we must have a practice of orthodoxy and community.[323]

Schaeffer was addressing the need for churches to remain strong in orthodox content and true community. He was concerned that the church was in danger of losing its youth by not teaching and practicing purity of doctrine. Schaeffer goes on to say that what is desperately needed is a "revolutionary message in the midst of today's relativistic thinking."[324]

Echoing this sentiment about the urgent need for the church to teach and practice truth, Newbigin states, "To be faithful to a message which concerns the kingdom of God, his rule over all things and all peoples, the Church has to claim the high ground of public truth."[325] He insists that the church must be a community of truth where "through the constant remembering and rehearsing of the true story of human nature and destiny, an

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[322] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 286.

[323] Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian View of the Church*, 2nd ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), 96.

[324] Ibid., 409.

[325] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 222.

attitude of healthy skepticism can be sustained."[326] Here Newbigin is referring to a

healthy skepticism which allows one to be in the world but not "bemused or deluded" by

the world.[327] Newbigin argues that the church will not occupy the cultural high ground

through political parties or campaigns. Instead, he says:

> It will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known, and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel.[328]

Newbigin concludes that the only hope is local congregations that deeply believe in, live

by, and bear the gospel in every sector of public life.

Setran and Kiesling also argue that what emerging adults really need is for the

church to provide deep teaching. Specifically, "the church must be willing to teach the

whole counsel of Scripture and the particular doctrines of faith…providing theological

depth to complement the academic depth emerging adults receive in their classrooms."[329]

They insist that due to the biblical illiteracy among emerging adults, the full story line of

the Bible must be taught so that the biblical story will come to define their lives. They

also encourage churches to tackle worldview issues "related to science, sexuality,

alcohol, politics, environmental issues, and other religions" because these are real issues

in the lives of emerging adults, and they need to be prepared to face these various

worldview questions.[330] Along these lines, Kinnaman's and Hawkins' research points out

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[326] Ibid., 229.

[327] Ibid.

[328] Ibid., 232-233.

[329] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 96.

[330] Ibid., 97.

that roughly twenty-four percent of emerging adults from Christian backgrounds claim that church is too shallow and does not adequately prepare them for life.[331]

Liturgical Formation

J. Smith argues that along with focusing on worldview training and theology, one must also consider what Christians do in worship.[332] His main point is that believers must think deeper than worldview training and "take seriously the central role of formative practices."[333] J. Smith compares the forming institution of the university with the church when he asserts, "The university can't help but be a formative institution because of powerful (though often unofficial) liturgies that shape our identity and self-understanding."[334] He continues to make the case that it is the rituals, operating largely outside of the classroom, which "mold, shape, and form us into certain kinds of people."[335] J. Smith promotes a vision of the power of the local congregational liturgy to shape the hearts, minds, and loves of emerging adults. In agreement, Setran and Kiesling address the need for the formation that takes place in deep worship. In particular, they state, "Through its liturgical structure, the church calls emerging adults to participate in practices that counter the destructive patterns that can evolve at this time of life."[336]

E. Byron Anderson, in his article *Worship: Schooling in the Tradition of Jesus,* writes of corporate communal worship schooling believers' bodies and minds, and

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[331] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 116.

[332] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 134.

[333] Ibid., 24.

[334] Ibid., 112-113.

[335] Ibid., 117.

[336] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 104.

forming them in the way of Christ. He notes that like school, believers go to a place of worship for instruction and preparation. Also, Christians gather with a group of people for a common purpose and with a particular set of practices. His point is that followers of Christ need to think of worship as "one of the places for our apprenticeship in the Christian life."[337] He makes an important point that "the ways in which we learn to embody our faith through worship determine, or at least condition, for good or for ill, our way of being in the world, in our communities, and in our families."[338] This is significant since during the college years emerging adults make crucial decisions with respect to their present and future vocations, communities, and families. Along these lines, J. Smith argues that the primary goal of a Christian education is to produce "peculiar people – a people who desire the kingdom of God and thus undertake their vocations as an expression of that desire."[339] Although the modern secular university cannot produce these "peculiar people," the local church is in a position to come alongside these emerging adults, instructing them and inviting them into these practices which have the possibility to reframe their vocational desires. Setran and Kiesling discuss the need for emerging adults to pursue a type of formation through the church which counters the formation of the culture:

> As emerging adults are surrounded by cultural forces competing for their allegiance, identity formation must include not only various forms of refusal but also an active engagement in an alternative culture – a "community of truth" – that forms them to see themselves and the world in a uniquely Christian way.[340]

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[337] E. Byron Anderson, "Worship: Schooling in the Tradition of Jesus," *Theology Today* 66, no. 1 (April 2009): 21-32.

[338] Ibid.

[339] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 34.

[340] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 75.

Setran and Keisling make the point that emerging adults need the alternative culture of the church to resist the cultural forces competing for their hearts. As Anderson puts it, "If the church does not, or will not, engage us in practices of worship that shape explicitly Christian lives – that is, in practices that habituate us, enclothe us, and indwell us in the Jesus tradition – then other cultural forces will gladly step in to fill the empty space."[341]

Setran and Kiesling also speak to the need for emerging adults to establish classical spiritual disciplines other than church worship, which counteract "lifestyle patterns" that move them "away from the priorities of the kingdom."[342] These spiritual disciplines include abstinence, which "can reveal for emerging adults their true sources of strength, comfort, and contentment."[343] The spiritual disciplines also include the formative disciplines of engagement in God's word, singing, and confession, because "not only are they are aimed at a kingdom vision of the good life but because they actually engage us with the Holy Spirit, the presence of God himself."[344]

True Community Formation

Setran and Kiesling state, "The development of strong biblical community is another key contribution of the church during the emerging adult years."[345] They highlight the reality that the church is a unique community because it is "unchosen" and calls for a commitment to love people who will be "annoying, uncool, physically or

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[341] Anderson, "Worship."

[342] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 44.

[343] Ibid., 46.

[344] Ibid., 52.

[345] Ibid., 98.

mentally deficient, and broken."[346] Also, they point out the importance of the church as

an intergenerational family in contrast with the predominant peer culture on a university

campus.[347] Along with Newbigin, Setran and Kiesling address the crucial nature of the

church as a "plausibility structure" for faith.[348] Setran and Kiesling state:

> Many emerging adults are living in school and work worlds that completely reject
> the plausibility of Christian beliefs and practices. Without weekly, embodied
> contact with a local body of believers affirming common doctrines and practices,
> emerging adults can begin to doubt the legitimacy of their worldviews and to
> wonder whether their own beliefs are simply absurd.[349]

Their point is that emerging adults desperately need weekly, embodied contact with the

beliefs and practices of the local congregation to fight against the creeping doubt that

their faith is absurd. Newbigin speaks to this reality when he claims that to the

predominant culture, "everything suggests that it is absurd to believe that the true

authority over all things is represented in a crucified man. No amount of brilliant

argument can make it sound reasonable…"[350] Newbigin's answer is that the local church

provides a plausibility structure for the gospel when it is a community of praise, truth,

concern for its neighbor, mutual responsibility toward one another, and hope.[351]

Summary of Literature Review

In light of the literature examined, there are three primary themes regarding the

moral formation of emerging adults. The first theme focuses on the cultural shifts and

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[346] Ibid.

[347] Ibid., 99-103.

[348] Ibid., 102.

[349] Ibid.

[350] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 232.

[351] Ibid., 227-233.

challenges regarding the religious beliefs and practices of emerging adults. The second

theme examines the moral formation of emerging adults in the modern secular university.

The third theme focuses on the moral formation of emerging adults through the local

church.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to discover how Fellows alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Program. The assumption of this study was that Fellows Program alumni have gained much experience and knowledge with respect to emerging adult formation. Further, as alumni, they can add perspective on how the Fellows Program impacted their lives over time. Therefore, a qualitative study was utilized to better understand the formative experiences, impact, and role of local congregations in Fellows Programs. According to Sharan B. Merriam in *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation,* "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."[352] Therefore, this study was designed to allow the researcher to understand and learn from alumni.

In order to address the purpose of the study, the researcher identified three main areas of focus in emerging adult formation. These areas of focus include emerging adult culture, the modern secular university, and the role of the local church congregation in emerging adult formation. To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do Fellows alumni describe the formative practices of their Fellows Program?

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[352] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

2. How do Fellows alumni describe the impact of their Fellows Program?

3. How do Fellows alumni describe the role of local congregations in their Fellows Program?

Design of the Study

Merriam lays out four characteristics of qualitative research: "The focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive."[353] This study used a basic qualitative research design with a semi-structured interview protocol. Because the researcher was the "primary instrument of data collection and analysis," this allowed for flexibility that was appropriate to gather data through participants' experiences and their meaning.[354] The researcher's goal was to explore the experiences and impact of Fellows Programs on multiple alumni, then to draw conclusions inductively. This qualitative method allows for "richly descriptive" data from the perspective of interview participants.[355] Face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to observe both verbal and nonverbal communication to gain a better understanding of how alumni experienced formation through their Fellows Program. Alumni stories and descriptions of their experiences, the subsequent impact of those experiences, and the role of the local congregation painted a fuller picture of what they were doing, thinking, and feeling.

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[353] Ibid., 14.

[354] Ibid., 266.

[355] Ibid., 16.

Participant Sample Selection

This study required participants with knowledge and experience with emerging adult formation. For this reason, a purposeful study sample was selected. According to Merriam, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned."[356] Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of alumni of Fellows Programs, due to their personal formative experiences as emerging adults in Fellows Programs. Participants were chosen for a unique sample due to the "unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest."[357]

This study includes interviews of seven alumni from The Fellows Initiative. The Fellows Initiative is an association of Fellows Programs, governed by a board of directors that "ensures that the essential components of Fellows Programs are in place. Each local program is committed to the same core principles and has essential components."[358] For variation of experience, alumni were selected from two different Fellows Programs within the association of The Fellows Initiative – four from Falls Church Fellows and three from The Capital Fellows. Both Fellows Programs share similar institutional structure, values, and goals, which helps to limit these variables. These two Fellows Programs were selected based on the longevity of their programs (approximately ten to twenty-five years) for the sake of gathering data regarding best practices, as well as geographical proximity for face-to-face interviews in light of limited resources for travel by the researcher. The seven participants were recommended by The Fellows Initiative

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[356] Ibid., 77.

[357] Ibid., 78.

[358] thefellowsinitiative.org, accessed July 16, 2015.

Coordinator and the researcher's advisor, based on the diversity of their experiences as well as their intentionality in the program. The participants ranged in age from approximately twenty-four to forty years old so that they could provide perspective of impact over time since having finished the program. There was a mix of both male and female participants in order to see if any themes emerged based on gender.

Once the potential participants were recommended by The Fellows Initiative coordinator, the researcher made initial contact via e-mail, indicating the purpose of the study. The e-mail also inquired about their willingness to participate in the study. After the participants responded positively, all participants were given a "Research Participant Consent Form," followed by a personal phone call in order to establish the time and place for the interview.

Data Collection

This study utilized a semi-structured interview protocol for primary data collection. The semi-structured protocol enabled the researcher to engage the participant being interviewed with flexibility, allowing for some fairly structured questions along with non-predetermined follow-up questions for clarity or further insight and dialogue. According to Merriam, "This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic."[359] The semi-structured interview method allowed for comparison of common themes, experiences, impact, challenges, and patterns among the various Fellows Program alumni.

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[359] Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 90.

Seven Fellows Program alumni were interviewed for approximately an hour each over the course of one week. The data was initially coded to the research questions within twenty-four hours of each interview to allow for the emergence of new questions for subsequent interviews.

The following questions formed the protocol for the interview:

(1) What are some of your favorite memories of the Fellows Program? (Probe: "ah ha" moments? Significant role(s) of local church?)

(2) Describe the design (basic routines, activities) of your Fellows Program. (Probe: What was helpful about that… routine/practice, etc.? Local church? People: Fellows, families, mentors, congregation, etc.?)

(3) What were some of the challenges that you faced during your Fellows Program? (Probe: Challenging/difficult adjustments? What did you learn? How did you mature/grow?)

(4) How has your Fellows Program experience continued to impact your life? (Probe: How has your participation in the local church changed as a result of your Fellows Program experience? Has it had the lasting impact that you were longing for? What are some practices (habits of heart, routines, etc.) that continue today as a result of your Fellows Program? What do you wish you were doing?)

(5) If you could design a Fellows Program for college undergraduates, how would it be similar or different?

A pilot test of the interview protocol was performed on a Fellows Program alumnus to test the clarity and focus of the interview questions. Because the semi-structured format was used, questions were not always asked in the same order, and some questions were explored more in some interviews than they were in others, depending on the participant's experiences and answers.

Data Analysis

This study utilized the constant comparative method of data analysis, routinely analyzing the data through the interview process in order to compare it for similarities and differences.[360] Through the use of this method, the study was able to take into account various patterns with respect to all interview participants. Also, the constant comparative method allows for revision or addition of data categories throughout the research and interview process.

All interviews were scheduled within the same week and recorded with a digital recorder. Within twenty-four hours of each interview, the researcher listened to the interview recording and wrote observer comments in order to note key observations, thoughts, and concepts that were "interesting, potentially relevant, or important" to this study.[361] Each interview was transcribed by a research assistant, and then analyzed and coded by the researcher. The analysis focused on discovering common themes and significant differences with respect to the experiences, impact, and role of local congregations on the alumni of Fellows Programs.

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[360] Ibid., 30.

[361] Ibid., 172.

Researcher Position

In a qualitative study, the research is filtered by the researcher. Therefore,

Merriam states, "Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions

regarding the research to be undertaken."[362] For this reason, it is important to note that

the researcher received a Master of Divinity degree and a Master of Arts in Counseling

degree and is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The

researcher has been a college pastor for more than ten years, serving the same secular

university in which he graduated with a degree in education. The researcher is also the

executive director of the Oread Center, a Christian Study Center, which is a member of

the Consortium of Christian Study Centers. The researcher's college ministry experience

has provided ample opportunity to participate in the formation of emerging adults. The

researcher is convinced that the local church needs to be in the center of emerging adult

formation, especially for the formation of deep convictions, character, and community.

Further, the researcher assumes that many of the formative experiences designed by

Fellows Programs which shape recent college graduates will be applicable to

undergraduates as well.

Study Limitations

Only a select sample of Fellows Program alumni were interviewed. Therefore, the

data may not be representative of every Fellows Program in North America. Further,

because of the limited sample selection, some of this study's research and findings may

not be generalized to every Fellows Program. Due to limited research and time, the

analysis is not necessarily applicable to all times and situations.

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[362] Ibid., 219.

Readers who seek to apply some of this study's findings must determine the applicability and limitations of their own context. As Merriam states, "The person who reads the study decides whether the findings can apply to his or her particular situation."[363] This section has detailed the proposed methodology of data collection and analysis. In the next chapter, the data and findings will be discussed.

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[363] Ibid., 226.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover how Fellows alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Program. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Fellows alumni describe the formative practices of their Fellows Program?

2. How do Fellows alumni describe the impact of their Fellows Program?

3. How do Fellows alumni describe the role of local congregations in their Fellows Program?

In this chapter, seven research participants will be introduced and common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions will be presented.

Study Participants

In the following section, each participant will be briefly introduced. Seven Fellows Program alumni were selected to participate in this study. All of these Fellows alumni were part of The Fellows Initiative, an association of Fellows Programs which share similar institutional structures, values, and goals. For variation of experience, alumni were selected from two different Fellows Programs within the association of The Fellows Initiative – four from Falls Church Fellows and three from The Capital Fellows. The participants ranged in age from approximately twenty-four to forty years old, enabling them to provide a perspective of impact over time since having finished the

program. All names and identifiable information of participants have been changed to protect their identity.

Greg is twenty-six years old and participated in the Fellows Program in 2011-2012. He currently teaches Christian studies at a Christian school.

Kathy is thirty-five years old and participated in the Fellows Program in 2002-2003. She currently directs a non-profit Christian ministry.

Robin is twenty-seven years old and participated in the Fellows Program in 2010-2011. She currently works as a patent legal.

Mike is twenty-four years old and participated in the Follows Program in 2011-2012. He is currently pursuing a career in writing and the arts.

Doug is forty years old and participated in the Fellows Program in 1996-1997. He currently serves a congregation as an Anglican pastor.

Beth is twenty-four years old and participated in the Fellows Program in 2012-2013. She currently works as a recruiter for non-profits.

Lauren is twenty-four years old and participated in the Fellows Program in 2012-2013. She currently works in development for a Christian school.

Formative Practices

The first research question addressed how Fellows Program alumni describe the formative practices of their Fellows Program. Each Fellows Program, consisting of approximately twelve people, had a similar formal design which included living with a host family, serving the local church, working three days a week, biblical study, a weekly roundtable meal, theological coursework, seminars, retreats, mentoring, and service. The

researcher has divided formative practices into three categories based on the alumni's responses during the interview process.

Intentional Community

Many of the alumni felt disoriented at the beginning of their Fellows Program. Greg felt "lost and sad" about college ending. Doug and Beth admitted that they graduated college with a sense of not being ready to settle into real life, and Lauren expressed that in light of having her whole life in front of her, she was not ready for all of the big life choices. All of the alumni expressed gratitude for having the Fellows Program as a nine-month transition period to grow in the knowledge of God and self through intentional community, without being firmly committed to the major decisions of life. Beth referred to the Fellows Program as a "safety net" in light of the reality that she had just finished college and was wresting with her identity. She mentioned that at times she felt sad, angry, and frustrated because, in her words, "You don't really know much…everything is new and changed." Kathy stated that though she did not know it at that time, she needed an "incubator." She went on to say, "And I think that's a pretty common experience as Fellows thinking they're ready for things that they're not."

It became clear during the interviews that in retrospect, all of the alumni saw the Fellows Program as a safe opportunity to explore and wrestle with the question "What am I going to do with my life?" in the context of deep community. Two of the alumni stated that exact question, and Greg mentioned that it was a theme for all of the Fellows. Mike insightfully shared:

> I thought broadly that the program was designed to enable us to bump into the different forms or degrees of this term we call vocation… And for a lot of us to deepen and widen in our understanding of calling, extending beyond the work and the dignity of work to something that's more encompassing within the world…it's

that calling forth of the entire Christian life… …and the different programs were well-designed to enable you to touch, to bump into those different parts.

Kathy also spoke of the Fellows Program as a safe and nurturing environment where they were "bumping up against themselves" as they experienced their own frailty and failure. Summing up the sentiment of all of the alumni, Greg stated that the Fellows Program gave him the space to really wrestle with knowledge of God and self so that at the end of his Fellows year, he was ready for the next step.

Fellows Community

For nine months, the Fellows rubbed shoulders with one another on a daily basis through classes, Bible studies, meals, service projects, and other such pursuits. All of the Fellows expressed that a huge aspect of their Christian formation occurred through the intentionality of the Fellows community. A few stated emphatically the best aspect of the Fellows Program was the deep relationships that formed with the other Fellows. Robin summed up the experience of all of the alumni when she spoke of the relational transformation that took place throughout the year. Reflecting on an end of the year road trip with her Fellows, she said:

> …it was just sort of like we had gone into each other's lives enough at that point where we've done all the little nitty-gritty drama or whatever. It was just like we were doing real life…we got to know each other and were very vulnerable with each other. So we were okay being really open and also in pointing out in a loving way areas that each other needs to grow in. So it is at that point in a friendship where you feel comfortable and secure.

Later in the interview, she made an interesting point that what fostered such deep community was accountability among the Fellows, which could not truly be structured by the program.

Many of the alumni expressed that due to this intentional community of friends, they gained a much deeper knowledge of themselves. Beth stated, "I think being around those people almost every single day for a year puts a big mirror in front of you...you kind of see things in yourself that you might not have seen before." She reflected that it was actually weird having Fellows tell her things about herself that she did not know and that her own family did not recognize. Lauren echoed this feeling when she mentioned, "I learned a lot just from being around them and was challenged a lot to analyze myself and my personality and see what can I take from these people that they are giving so well in their lives."

Roundtable – The Community Meal

Without exception, all seven of the alumni pointed to Roundtable as one of the most significant and favorite features of the Fellows Program. Roundtable is the weekly gathering around a meal every Monday night. The format was fairly simple – two Fellows would cook, two Fellows would clean up, and typically one Fellow would present a topic to the group for discussion. During Doug's interview, he mentioned that his Fellows Program actually started Roundtable in 1996 out of a desire to be together in a less formal and structured setting. Many of the alumni got visibly excited as they discussed Roundtable due to the formative impact it had in their lives.

At the end of each interview, the researcher asked what features of the Fellows Program they would extend to undergraduate ministry on a university campus. Robin, who made it clear that she prefers relationships over programs, first and foremost mentioned the importance of a weekly dinner with a small group of people, adding that it needed to be "as mandatory as you can make it." Her reasoning was that there is security

in knowing that you will walk through life with the same three to ten people week after week. Along these lines, Mike agreed that the commitment to a weekly meal together "forced you, even in moments when you didn't feel like it, to love people...independent of how you're feeling in the moment." Mike also reflected on Roundtable being wonderful because "…young people crave that sense of being able to recollect, to come together and talk about how was your week. It's a very rare thing, even within friends, to do so meaningfully. We're really good at bumping into one another and just talking about nothing." Robin referred to Roundtable as "a sacred Fellows time." Beth spoke favorably of the camaraderie, discussion, and learning from one another. Lauren mentioned that it fostered times of great growth within the community. Greg summed up the sentiments of the alumni when he stated, "There's something to be said about learning how to do leisure well, and food, and talk intentionally in relationships...that was a good ritualistic part of the week, something to look forward to each time."

Host Family Community

Living with a host family was another significant feature of the Fellows Program for many of the alumni. Coming home to a host family each night for nine months provided another intentional community with the potential for deep formation. But whereas the Roundtable meal received high marks from all alumni, living with a host family received mixed reviews. Mike said that it was "quietly inspiring" to witness a good marriage lived out faithfully. A few other alumni agreed that living with a host family could be life changing for those not raised in Christian home, or for those who come from divorce. Kathy, who comes from a divorced home, stated that her host family was "hugely memorable" because of the way they exercised hospitality. She reflected:

>I just remember being struck repeatedly throughout the year by how they exercised hospitality because I grew up in a house where there was a lot of entertaining, a lot of fancy, fancy parties and lots of glitz and sparkle and everything looking just so…It's just remarkable to me how much they adopted me as part of their family even though they didn't know me…I wasn't catered-to, but I was cared for in a very intentional way.

This host family provided a rich opportunity for Kathy to experience the difference between entertaining and true hospitality. It was profoundly significant for her that she was cared for with intentionality.

On the other end of the spectrum, Beth strongly stated that her host family was her biggest challenge, and that they "did not have any business hosting a Fellow" due to the passive-aggressive nature of the family. Adding to the stress, she never felt like she had enough time for her host family due to her busy schedule. Lauren also mentioned that she and many of the Fellows were stressed because they did not have enough time for the families. So roughly half of the alumni that were interviewed felt stressed and conflicted that they were not intentional enough with their host families during that year. Like Beth, Lauren stated that her host family was her biggest challenge. She admitted that because her host family was completely different from her own family, she did not want to go home each day.

Classroom Content

All of the alumni mentioned the classroom as another feature of the program where deep formation took place. Some of the alumni were quick to note the importance of good theology. Lauren and Beth mentioned that they had many "a-ha" moments in class because of the theological discussions. Specifically, Beth mentioned the significance of the four chapter gospel which includes God as Creator – man's fall into sin – redemption through Christ – and the final restoration of the world - "Ought, is, can,

will. Creation, fall, redemption, restoration. That was something I really connected

with…it informs the way I think about issues now in a big way…it frames the way I look

at life in a lot of ways." Lauren said her growing understanding of the Four Chapter

Gospel was "incredibly life-changing" because she saw purpose and the ability to honor

God in "every little thing that you do." Due to the impact of the Four Chapter Gospel in

his life, Greg mentioned that one of his main goals as a teacher is to instill a holistic

vision of the gospel in his students. All of the alumni commented that the class content

was great, but some of the alumni found it difficult to keep up with the readings and

process the continual flow of deep conversations. Robin, whose experience represented a

few of the alumni, lamented that she could have gotten a lot more out of the classes

intellectually if she applied her brain more, but what she did get intellectually was

"awesome."

Another theme that emerged in the interviews was the challenge of living "in

tension." Referring to the various class presentations by trusted teachers throughout the

year, Beth recalled:

> Sometimes they conflicted with each other. Sometimes they contradicted each
> other. Sometimes they didn't make sense with the reality that we were
> experiencing, and I think that was very frustrating at times… so sifting through
> what's this person's opinion coming from their experience and what is truth that I
> should be taking with me – I think we all to some extent are still sorting through
> some of those things. It's two years later.

Along the same lines, Robin commented that at times, "I had the feeling there were no

right answers, you know that there's a tension." But she concluded that it was necessary

to have some classes that were very straightforward and some that she referred to as more

"free thinking." Lauren agreed that it was healthy to live in the tension of having to

"work out for yourself…what you believe in." She continued, "You shouldn't just be

eating every single thing they're saying and believing it's one hundred percent truth. That there should be some debating going on, both internally and in the classroom." Greg also stated the importance of growing in faith by feeling the tension of conflicting views, and ultimately arriving at one's own conclusion with deeper roots. Mike articulated well the consensus of the alumni with respect to their appreciation of how the Fellows Program fostered an environment to wrestle with paradox and tension:

> And I think the program and my experience in it helped shape me in a direction where I am able to entertain paradox more, I guess. And seeing it as a good thing. And a skill I am able to kind of carry out into the world. You enter into systems of society…that are just broken, messy, whatnot and even just your own views, attitudes, postures about life in the moment are not always pure and often conflicting. To be able to rest in the fact that not everything is settled and yet to still kind of keep moving, act to the best of your ability is something that grew out of that fellows year. It comes from sitting with questions and not craving answers.

Mike's point is that the Fellows Program classes prepared them for the realities of a broken and messy world, full of conflicts and questions which are not easily resolved.

Another tension that a few of the alumni recalled was deep personal conviction based on various class discussions. Throughout the interviews, it became clear that these classes were not just theoretical; they were practical to life. According to Mike, the classes challenged them to embody what they discussed in class. He explained, "It's one thing to make an intellectual connection and really be convinced of something, and it's another thing to act in that way, and that's a big part of what we went through." This sentiment was echoed by Greg, who added, "It's one thing to read a great book…it's another thing to be in a group of people who are trying to – who are all wrestling with these ideas and being challenged to put it into practice."

The alumni repeatedly spoke of personal formation through these classes. Kathy recalled her experience of sitting in class the first six weeks of the program with the topic

of sexuality, sharing, "I remember spending most of that six weeks feeling like – I had to invent a word called 'cromit' because I remember just sitting in the back of the room thinking, I don't know if I want to cry or throw up in this trash can right here." For Kathy and many of the other alumni, class discussions became very personal and convicting, especially since her college life included decisions that she deeply regretted. Kathy continued that the classes were "…painting a picture of reality for me that makes so much sense that I really have to contend with the fact that I've been living in non-reality for a long time." Yet she also pointed out that some of the Fellows did not take the classes to heart. Referring to her teacher's convicting lectures, she said, "This guy is dropping truth bombs, and you are missing it." When discussing this frustration with her teacher, he emphasized that like the parable of the Sower; some of the soil will simply not be ready.

Some of the alumni expressed that the classes were deeply formative based on the community of Fellows. Mike mentioned that based on a few of the required books for class discussions, he and the other Fellows also felt the tension of personal conviction regarding the patterns of their lives. Specifically, he noted the conviction that "We're just touch and go without having real encounters." Out of this conviction, he and the others began to process the different disciplines of their lives and how to resist being shallow. Greg also referred to the impact of class and community:

> I think the thing about the Fellows Program that makes it effective is that it's incredibly practical. If you were to remove it from the context of community with other Fellows, with the church body, within the workplace, then it just becomes dismembering, it becomes disembodied… I'm just somebody who's studying these things and on this individual journey…I was being challenged to live out and was seeing people live it out in my life as I was doing it. And so what made the ideas have – carry weight was the fact that it was being lived out.

Greg's point is that ideas and convictions become disembodied apart from a good community where all are being challenged to live it out. Further, Robin expressed thankfulness that the program was designed to go from class to work the following day, so that the ideas could be worked out in a larger community beyond just the "Christian bubble."

One of those ideas that came out of class was the formative practice of asking good questions. Lauren commented that the classroom time really equipped her to have conversations with people in an intelligent way and to ask herself "How can I help change their ideas?" and "How can I help formulate this big question that they have in their life?" She said, "I can't tell you all of the conversations that have come up and been spurred on by the questions we were asked in class and the topics we discussed and read and had lectures on." She concluded, "The classroom stuff comes out through the relationships, and that's where I'm seeing it really grow for me." Beth also said that the classes emphasized asking good questions and really taught her the art of "getting to know them, asking them questions, and drawing them out. So when I think about friends at work who'd I'd love to have some of those deeper conversations with about the Lord, starting with asking them questions. That's something I really learned about."

Many of the alumni commented on meaningful conversations that took place with their teachers outside of the formal classroom setting. Specifically, Robin spoke of one-on-one discussions with the teacher as providing the opportunity to delve in deeper. She discussed the benefit of being able to expand the ideas that were taught in class, which opened the door to new questions. Mike greatly appreciated that the program created a sense of exploration. He said, "Some of the most impactful moments I've ever had in

Fellows were the conversations that happened after class." He spoke of class as providing the raw materials that needed to be "shaped around and pushed back against and carved at." Mike mentioned that he could not stress enough how powerful it was to have the unstructured post-class conversations.

Retreats

All of the alumni named the retreats as a pivotal piece of the Fellows Program. In particular, the one retreat that rose to the surface was the Knowing and Doing retreat, which took place in the middle of the Fellows year. Rest and self-exploration were the two features of the Knowing and Doing retreat that almost all of the alumni referenced. Kathy, Robin, and Lauren all mentioned the importance of pulling away from the distractions of life to rest and relax. A few of the alumni mentioned the importance of having this retreat in a comfortable setting, which included sharing meals together and enjoying God's creation. Greg talked about the significance of this retreat as a "rich time of friendship" with the other Fellows. One fellow remarked that it created great space just to grow.

Doug, Kathy, Robin, and Beth all mentioned the importance of self-exploration on this retreat. Career counseling was integrated into this retreat for all of the Fellows, and each of them took vocational inventory tests and met with one of their professors for a few hours of personal guidance regarding their vocational interests. Some of the alumni referred to this self-exploration as "pivotal" and a "seminal moment."

This section has explored how Fellows Program alumni describe the formative practices of their Fellows Program. In particular, the alumni pointed to their relationship with the other Fellows, the roundtable meal, and their host families as places of

intentional community which fostered formative practices. The alumni also spoke of the formation that took place as a result of the classroom discussions and retreats. Next, the role of the local congregation in the formative experience of the alumni will be considered.

Role of the Local Congregation

The second research question addressed how Fellows Program alumni describe the role of the local congregation in their Fellows Program. Another important feature of the Fellows Program involves the partnership with a local church. The alumni were involved in a local church through attending worship, serving the church in various capacities, and exposure to the pastors and other members of the church. The researcher is interested in how the Fellows describe their formative experiences through the local church, and has divided the research into three categories based on the alumni's responses during the interview process.

Rooted in the Church Community

Some of the alumni reflected on their change in perspective on the local church from their college years. Lauren admitted that she thought college was for something else, and not a time to commit to a local church. As an undergrad, she did not feel the need to invest in a church during college because it is such a transition season of life. Greg echoed Lauren's perspective when he stated, "I didn't need it. I wasn't learning anything. It was hard to get up on Sunday mornings…I'll pick church up after college." He mentioned that it is very hard for a young person who is figuring out who they are to commit to a church for four years during college. Both Lauren and Greg look back with regret at their former perspectives. Lauren stated, "This is very important, and this should

be one of the pillars of your college experience is being involved in a church in the community and even serving there a little." Greg said, "I really came away with the strong conviction I do want to be implicated in a community of people, in a church."

Similarly, Kathy's perspective on church commitment in college was that if church does not fit your needs and personality and expectations fully at all times, then you just move on. Yet during her Fellows year, her perspective on church drastically changed to the point where she could emphatically say that church is "hugely, hugely, hugely helpful." She said it was key for her to grasp the value of commitment and stability. It amazed her to hear from people who modeled commitment to the same church for twenty years. She spoke of the "dynamic relationship" that was created by the Fellows investing in the church, and the church investing in the Fellows. She shared, "It just became a huge education in what it was… to live a rooted life …to have a sense of belonging and a sense of rootedness which always felt – for me, that always felt a little elusive or arbitrary." Kathy and Doug both mentioned how important it was to experience a multi-generational church where young adults can be immersed into the broader church community rather than just a college age gathering which, according to Doug, gives you "a pretty myopic view of humanity."

Serving the Church Community

Part of the design of the Fellows Program is involvement in the local church through serving in the youth group. Many of the alumni recognized and commented on the importance of integrating into the church through service. Robin mentioned the importance of "not leeching off what the church can provide, but giving back." For Kathy, it is now a matter of principle to invest in the church. Lauren admitted that in the

past, the church was a whole lot more about her than what it should have been. She

mentioned that she and the other Fellows learned a lot about serving from the members of

the church. She commented, "Different standards…were kind of set for how to give to

people, how to open your home up. We learned that just by looking at the church

members and seeing how giving they are, giving of their time, has caused me to be more

giving of my resources, seeing other people do that for me…"

For Lauren and the other Fellows, watching the members of the church

sacrificially serve raised the standard for her own investment inside and outside of the

church. She reflected that the generous service of church members caused her to want to

be more generous with her finances and time, "…to give of my time to whoever it is that

God puts into my path. Because when I asked for that time, people were so generous with

me, and so how can I do that for others." Doug mentioned that serving the church

provided the hands-on practical ministry experience he needed to point him towards

vocational ministry. As a pastor, he reflects back that working with sixth graders at

church instilled skills for his calling, and that those skills developed in youth ministry

were very transferable to his pastoral ministry.

Liturgy of the Church Community

One of the assigned readings for many of the Fellows was *Desiring the Kingdom:*

Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation, by James K.A. Smith.[364] In his book, J.

Smith articulates the need for deep formation though the liturgical practices of the local

church. So during the interviews, the researcher asked the alumni to share their

perspective on the liturgical practices of the church with respect to their formation. The

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[364] J. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

alumni's answers were varied. Mike, who is Catholic, spoke of his love for the church calendar because, "It implicates us in a story bigger than ourselves and enables us to see, 'oh my life is just not about me.' And God is at work even when my life, which feels like my universe sometimes, feels big and intimidating and what not. It's important for us to feel small. It's important for us to feel our created-ness."

In contrast, reflecting on her participation in an Anglican church during her Fellows year, Robin said, "I'm assuming liturgy is when you read what it says up on the screen about the prayers and such?...I thought it was good. I don't think liturgy affects me to the same extent that it may affect other people." Kathy spoke of feeling rooted in the local church. When the researcher asked Kathy whether the church liturgy helped in her rootedness, her answer was mixed. She said, "So it is the people, but over time it's also the liturgy because it is familiar. Like you eat the same stuff at Thanksgiving dinner." She mentioned that when she attended other churches due to traveling, sometimes those churches "feel bare" due to the lack of liturgical practices – "man, there's no Sanctus. There's no Agnus Dei…"

Mentors in the Church Community

It should be noted that all of the alumni pointed to various adults in their local congregations who had a huge impact on their lives during their Fellows year. These various mentors included members of their host families, class professors, pastors, seminar presenters, and their weekly one-on-one mentors. The researcher has opted to place these significant relationships under other categories. This section addresses how Fellows Program alumni describe the role of the local church in their Fellows Program. In particular, the alumni stressed the formative experience of being rooted in and serving

the local congregation. A few of the alumni stressed the importance of liturgical

formation through their local congregation. Next, the long term impact of the Fellows

Program will be considered.

Impact

The third research question addressed how Fellows Program alumni describe the

impact of their Fellows Program. The researcher was interested in the program's lasting

impact, continued practices, and participation in the local church as a result of the

alumni's experience in their Fellows Program. The researcher has divided the impact of

the Fellows Program into eight categories based on the alumni's responses during the

interview process.

Deep Community

All of the alumni discussed the impact of deep community during their Fellows

year. This deep community included the other Fellows, their church community, and their

host family.

Fellows Community

Nine months is a relatively short period of time, yet all of the Fellows mentioned

the lasting relationships they formed as a result of the Fellows Program. Some of the

alumni indicated that the deep community which formed was not based on the Fellows

having similar backgrounds and personalities. Lauren said the program leaders

"purposefully made those choices to bring in people with different backgrounds." Kathy

stated matter-of-factly, "I would not pick these people." Yet with all of the differences in

backgrounds and personalities, deep friendships were formed. Mike attributed these deep

friendships to "the shared experience of studying things together and discovering things

together throughout the year." He said that out of his Fellows class, some of them were his best friends now, and these friendships were his "richest gain" in the program. Robin said that the one major lasting impact of the Fellows Program was the community of friendships. She emphasized, "Those are friendships I'll keep up for my whole life. We've been at each other's weddings and everything." She was overseas for a year following her Fellows year, and admitted that she was terrified of losing this deep community of friends, but found that reentry into her community of friends was "seamless."

Echoing Mike and Robin, Beth said that continuing these friendships is very much a priority. She currently rooms with another Fellow from her program. She lamented that she misses the challenging and stretching conversations of the Fellows program. Lauren said that she entered the Fellows Program not longing primarily for community, but rather to grow through studying the Bible and being mentored. But she commented on how meaningful the community was to her, sharing that one of the Fellows was in her wedding, and she still keeps in touch with all of them. Lauren mentioned that she knew of other fellows who "almost went into kind of a depression after the Fellows because they had been in this community of people and they were very isolated all of a sudden…that was a really hard transition."

One of the themes that rose to the surface was the depth of community that came through conflict. Beth talked about how at first she had a hard time with some of the Fellows, but she said, "…and now, when I see them, it's like seeing a family member…we eventually kind of worked through that stuff and all have remained really close." She mentioned that ten out of the thirteen Fellows remained in the area after their

Fellows Program, and all of them continue to volunteer with the youth group, so they see each other once or twice a week.

Continuing with the theme of moving through conflict to feeling like family, Kathy talked about a Fellow whom she was "not particularly fond of" during the Fellows year. But a mentor challenged them to consider that they both had very similar instincts. Kathy jumped to the end of the story: "We've attended each other's births. We are godparents to each other's children. We spend Thanksgiving together. We're very, very close. And we would say over the years, it had very little to do with being the same people." It is worth noting that this deep friendship began during the end of their Fellows year in 2003 – twelve years ago.

Greg also experienced conflicted relationships at the beginning of the Fellows Program, but deep friendships at the end. He admitted that he felt distant from the other Fellows due to a judgmental heart. But in the middle of the program at the Knowing and Doing retreat, he said he "really starting warming to the friendships and enjoying them more…" This "warring of his heart," as he called it, culminated in the final retreat of the year. His Fellows class took stones and wrote a word for each person on a stone and gave a reflection on each person. He reflected, "I was being forced to come face to face with each person and each tension and my own hardness of heart in different ways." He wrote the lies and false identities on the stones, asked the class to come with him to throw the rocks into the ocean. He said, "That was a very redemptive, rich thing for me." He says he is still connected with his Fellows class, and that two of those Fellows are now his roommates and best friends.

Doug said that he attributes so much of the good stuff in his life to his Fellows year – namely his marriage to a Fellow of the previous year, and also a deep community of friends. At the end of the interview, when asked the last question about the lasting impact of the Fellows Program, in a very nonchalant manner he revealed the depth of his friendships which took the researcher by surprise. He talked about a monthly dinner club, based on Roundtable, which he and his wife established with two other couples out of their Fellows Programs. At the time of the interview, this dinner club was in its eighteenth year. He then casually mentioned that the three couples bought a farmhouse together out in the country. Every Thanksgiving the couples, along with some friends, would gather for a weekend at a parishioner's home in the country to talk and play. In Doug's words, "We became a very close family." So they decided to buy a farmhouse together. He showed the most expression when he said, "Isn't that awesome?"

Local Church Community

The local church provided another significant community which fostered lasting impact in the lives of the Fellows. As previously mentioned, many of the Fellows had a shift in perspective from how they viewed and participated in the local church during college to their view and participation after their Fellows year. Kathy talked about how the design of the Fellows Program fights against the perspective of trying to find a church that really meets one's needs. She made the point that the Fellows Program places the Fellow in a church, which is "great in some ways and hard in other ways…but you're in it. And you can't get out of it. It's great preparation for marriage." Kathy reflected on her commitment to the local church following her Fellows Program:

> …when we bought our first house, we basically looked where the Falls Church was, drew a five-mile radius around it, and only looked for houses in that area

because we felt like if we're serious about the local church being an anchor – and we do profess that Christianity is an anchor in our life, the church is the earthly manifestation of that, so that has to mean something. It's not a club or an interest. It's a real anchor. Then we should in fact anchor around it because if we want to be involved in any real way, if we want to serve in any real way, we need proximity to be able to do that…And so we basically have done that for thirteen years… It informs a lot of decisions about how far we are willing to commute for work… our friends live close by intention…and what we know is we don't need a new church because this is where we're known.

She made another insightful comment that came out of her experience in the Fellows Program, sharing that if they had to move locations, "We [would] need to just find a church that we feel we can build a home in, and then build it and trust that the home will come."

Lauren also mentioned how meaningful the local church has become to her and her husband. When asked about her favorite memories from the Fellows Program, the first thing she mentioned was the impact of her church. She said, "I think getting involved in McLean Presbyterian Church was huge for me and something that really shaped us going forward, me and my husband…" She talked about the impact of being mentored by a member of the church, as well as her involvement in the youth group. She explained, "I think you have that family feel when you're integrated into both aspects of the church and not just one little segment." She commented that the Fellows Program did a really good job of integrating the Fellows into the whole life of the church, "which is the real reason that I continue to go there." She mentioned that she took a year off from serving the youth after her Fellows year because she got married, but now is back volunteering with the youth. She said, "I really wanted to make sure I saw those girls grow as they're getting ready to graduate in the next two years." So due to her

relationships with mentors, pastors, friends, and the youth group, she says church feels like home, and "It feels so natural to walk through the doors."

Greg had a slightly different perspective regarding what it means to be implicated in a long-term commitment to the local church. Whereas Kathy spoke of being implicated in a local church for life, Greg says that sometimes one's theological convictions may shift enough to justify a shift in churches. He talked about how he recently changed from a Presbyterian church to an Anglican church. He was quick to point out that it is important for a young person to be involved in the life of a local church, but that commitment may only be for four years until their convictions lead them to join another church.

Host Family Community

Another community of impact was the host family. Many of the Fellows talked about significant, ongoing relationships with members of their host families. In particular, Kathy referred to her host family as "surrogate parents on the east coast." She said her host family was part of her wedding ceremony and also godparents to one of her children. She added that her family sometimes vacations with her host family. Greg also mentioned that living with his host family was "one of the most life-giving things that year," as he experienced different family traditions, different disciplinary approaches, and different types of brokenness within a family. He mentioned that he still goes with them to get a Christmas tree every year, and he visits them at least once a month: "I just walk in like I'm still part of the family, like a fourth son." He said it deepened what he wants for his own family someday. In fact, he says that the way his host family poured into him has inspired him to open up his home to others and to pour into them.

On the other end of the spectrum, some of the alumni were impacted through negative experiences with their host families. Yet, the alumni who struggled with their host families also reflected that God was at work through the struggles, teaching them more about themselves, as well as what not to do in raising a family. Beth learned to communicate clearly, as well as the value of home as a "peaceful, calm, welcoming space." She mentioned that due to her experiences with the host family throughout the year, she learned how to deal with uncomfortable situations. Lauren said that the Lord used conflict with her host family to show her what a people pleaser she was. So for all of the alumni, deep formation took place through living with host families – some based on good experiences, others based on bad experiences.

Habits of Conversation

Another lasting impact that some of the alumni mentioned was their confidence and desire to ask questions and pursue answers. For nine months, the Fellows were immersed in a community where big questions and deep conversations were encouraged on almost a daily basis. Kathy said the Fellows Program "creates a precedent…it's sort of the habit of 'I could approach people. I could ask people. I could engage people in a discernment process.'" She talked about how the Fellows framework was "hugely helpful" to instill the habit of pursuing others with the big questions of life. She said that as a matter of discipline, she and her husband are always drawing others into their decisions. They make a list of three or four people and ask them some questions. She commented that she does not know of any Fellows who have not had this instinct honed into them as a result of the Fellows Program. She even mentioned that her sister came out to live with her and her husband, and according to Kathy, "a lot of what I learned in

Fellows I was kind of passing on to her, and now she's built this really dynamic, rich life, but it's basically same principles."

Robin also commented that the Fellows Program helped her to be comfortable with the fact that she may not know all of the answers, but she is now better equipped to know how to think well and to dive in to pursue answers. She also mentioned how the Fellows Program taught her how to ask questions, "and also just being okay with going into areas that are usually uncomfortable to a lot of Christians." For Lauren, the Fellows Program taught her to be more aware of and engaged in the conversations that are going on around her. She said she attended a conference recently that she doubts she would have attended before the Fellows Program. She said, "Because of my experiences in the Fellows Program, I have a lot more of a desire to work through some of the bigger conversations going on in the Christian community."

Habits of Time and Commitment

All of the alumni mentioned that the Fellows Program was very structured and very busy. Kathy referred to it as a "blitz of extracurricular craziness." Beth loved the schedule because she likes structure, whereas Kathy thought it was too much. Beth and Kathy represent the spectrum of opinions on the structure and busyness of the schedule.

Many of the alumni talked about the value of learning commitment that year. It is important to remember that the Fellows Program begins a few months after the semi-structured life of college. Some of the alumni simply were not prepared for such a regimented schedule. Kathy recalled that one of her biggest challenges during the Fellows year was "having to learn commitment for commitment's sake, not for preference sake." Kathy says she struggled during the first semester with a lot of other

people having a say in how she spent her time. Her attitude was "Who the hell are you to run my schedule?" She laughs about it now, and recognizes that it was really good for her to face her attitude of entitlement and to learn that her life was not about her. She says that all of the Fellows got that message loud and clear, and that it was a "hugely maturing experience." Robin also mentioned that during the program, many of the Fellows were frustrated with the structure. But she says that as she has spoken with some of them after the program, they have admitted that they were "just kind of being a baby." Kathy summed up the struggle with commitment:

> The transition into adulthood is just slower in general. I think kids don't come in with as many skills… But I do think a lot of the principle of how it's structured is they want people to realize, "You can do it, actually. You may think you don't like to, you don't want to, you don't have to. Doesn't matter. You can. And you will."

Kathy recognizes that the transition to adulthood is challenging with respect to the maturity of commitment, and the Fellows Program prepares these emerging adults for habits of commitment. She actually says that the program is "hugely habit forming" in that it sets the precedent that one does have the time and ability to make big commitments and stick to them.

Some of the alumni also spoke about the value of learning their limits through failure. Robin mentioned that with so many commitments, something will suffer, and it will be different for each person. According to Beth, "The program is set up so that you have to fail at something." Beth explained that the schedule is packed and that it is not possible for everyone to excel in all aspects of the program. When asked what she learned about herself in failure, she said, "Oh gosh. I learned my own limits." Mike also stated that one of the overarching challenges "was not being able to do everything at the highest

pitch. And in the midst of that, you just realize your limitations." He concluded that recognizing one's limitations is a gift because one simply cannot have it all on this side of eternity. Kathy spoke for many of the alumni when she mentioned that because the environment was so nurturing, it was safe place to "fall on your face" and learn lessons.

Another theme was learning to prioritize commitments. Beth said one of her "a-ha" moments was when one of the Fellows Program leaders admitted that the program was arranged so that they would be overwhelmed and have to make choices of how to prioritize commitments. She reflected, "There were a lot of lessons learned about prioritization of people, and how even good things, like doing things in the church, can become bad when you're…neglecting the people that you care about most." The program forced Mike to wrestle with confusion over various commitments and disciplines and ask the question "Why am I in motion?" Robin said her main challenge was time. Pulled in a million different directions, she said the program helped her to figure out how to pick and choose without being coddled and told "Okay, here is what you are going to do." Lauren said the Fellows Program did a good job of explaining that the rest of life will always be busy, and that they will always have the challenge of time.

Some of the alumni commented that in light of the busy schedule, they wish the program included more time for processing and reflection. Robin likened it to drinking out of a fire hose. Beth and Lauren mentioned that it was hard to process all of the things they were learning because the participants just have to keep going, and there was not enough built in time for reflection. Lauren said reflection time was missing, and she wished that the Fellows Program did a better job of helping her learn how to build that into her life.

Exposure to a Cohesive Life

Another theme that was very significant for some of the alumni was exposure to a cohesive life through various mentors. Kathy said, "I would not have identified it at the time at all. It was a huge amount of exposure to actual people who were saying how this worked in their own life." She mentioned that at first she did not see the point, since it seemed random and was not very syllabus-driven. She continues:

> But in retrospect, I think probably the most memorable thing was being exposed to so many people in the church and a huge variety of people, some of whom were really interesting and glitzy and some of whom were kind of like regular people. Faithful wives, whatever. I would say that was probably, in retrospect, one of the most valuable things. And then I think the diversity of activity was hugely important because it basically modeled how you had a robust and a full and vigorous life of faith. It was every single day you were engaged in this.

This constant "over the shoulder" pedagogy, as Kathy's professor referred to it, was significant for her to see those with a "robust and a full and vigorous life of faith."

Yet for Doug, the exposure to various people seemed too random. He said that he would have liked more structure to aspects of the program, and he felt that there was more than enough exposure through the host-family, mentors, classes, and workplace. He reasoned that Fellows get "a whole heck-of-a-lot of exposure" and that "you don't have to force it" by bringing in random people who were discussing random things.

Lauren talked about how meaningful it was to be exposed to Christian leaders who embodied a "cohesive life." The researcher asked her to comment more about what a "cohesive life" means to her. She said a cohesive life is "being able to live in the world but not be of the world. And that was something that Fellows did really well…" She talked about how the program helped her to see that all vocational pursuits can be glorifying to God. She continued:

And I learned through the Fellows Program by meeting people, by having these conversations, all of these things can be of the Lord. All of these things can be done unto the Lord. And to me, that's what a cohesive life looks like. It's doing whatever you're doing to the glory of God, impacting those around you… And so it's living that life that people ask, "Why?" And, "What makes you different?" And I saw that in a lot of people.

For Lauren, a cohesive life means that all of the believer's life is lived to the glory of God, which impacts those around the believer. She mentioned how important it is for college students to think about the big picture of their lives and to have these conversations about what it means to live a cohesive life. She lamented, "I think life is moving so fast in college – you're focused on grades, grades, grades, getting that job, relationships that you're having, and for some people it's partying and different things, distractions, that they're not stopping to think about these things very often at all."

A few of the alumni discussed how the exposure to cohesive lives implicated them in their own lives. Greg said that watching his host family and learning from his mentors "widened a range of views of how – what it means to be implicated in my job and in people's lives…the Fellows Program strengthened those things." Lauren talked about how exposure to different people in the Fellows Program specifically opened her eyes to those who were hurting. She shared, "That's helped me immensely in the way that I've lived in the last year and just seeing people in a different way." Mike reflected, "It's helped me to be a better lover, in general. Not only of the people around me but to enter into the workforce…and care meaningfully about doing excellent work…my heart just grew." He went on to say that the Fellows Program opened his heart to questions that he will continue to ask for the rest of his life, like "What will I do with what I know?" Robin talked about the significance of seeing faithfulness in action during the Fellows

year. She said it was critical for her to learn to be "pouring out and not just passively taking in;" otherwise, it just grows "stagnant and disgusting."

Understanding Calling

A significant theme that one of the alumni stated was the importance of understanding vocational calling as two things. Greg said:

> One, it's understanding God's heart in the world. What does God love? And how can I pursue the things God loves through this vocation? But it's also understanding yourself. Vocation is "How has God made me? What are my strengths? How am I wired?" No job is ever the perfect fit, but if you can find places where you know this is who God has made you to be, and you can use those things, that's where you're going to thrive.

Greg makes an important point that vocational calling includes both God's heart – what he loves; as well as how God has made and wired people to serve the world. He said the Fellows Program gifted him with this perspective. Yet, he also pointed out that whereas the program does a great job with a deep theology of how great and important vocation is, there needs to be more conversation about how difficult vocational pursuits can be in the real world.

Cultural Liturgies

Another significant feature that one alumni mentioned was how the Fellows Program helped him to better understand how cultural liturgies shape the participants. Greg said his understanding of how cultural liturgies shape the participants has "profoundly changed the way I'm trying to teach and has allowed me to bring leadership to some of that here at the school." He explained that biblical worldview is not "predominately formed" in Bible class, but "It's going to be formed in the environment, in the rhythms and the routines of the school day and the school culture."

Personal Liturgies

One of the alumni said that the Fellows Program helped him to think in terms of the personal liturgies in his life. Mike said he began to think about the patterns and disciplines of his life, "because you realize it happens slowly, it's not just something that happens overnight, but it's day after day of reading a certain way or living in a certain way that just creates that posture." He said this idea of liturgies and forming habits was a new idea for many of the Fellows at the beginning of the program. They began to understand that their little everyday habits were shaping and changing them. He mentioned that some of the Fellows would go on "liturgical runs" where the idea was to recognize that they were not "just doing a run but we're embodying something that God has enabled us to do." Whereas Mike felt that the Fellows Program did a wonderful job with group habits like Roundtable, he believed that they could have done a better job of shaping individual habits and disciplines.

"It's Not About Me"

One critique that emerged from a few of the alumni was the desire for the program to foster greater humility. Robin felt frustrated that "So much of it is 'Oh you are a Fellow, we're into you, you are going to do so great in life.' It becomes so much like 'Oh it is all about me, like I must be the most amazing person in the world.'" She added that it was beneficial to do service projects to remind them that "This is just not about us. This is about a much larger community." Mike also said he wished there was "a greater emphasis on humility as an attitude in the program." He admitted:

> I just felt very cool during the program, people liked me, people thought I was doing thoughtful things… it's a beautiful thing to be kind of held up in a congregation and for people to get behind you and support you – it means a lot. But I think in some ways it can also create a little bit of fluff in your mind and

> heart in terms of like, you're not going to come out of this and do everything all at once. It's a slow, often painful process…

Mike recognized the potential for prideful "fluff" in his heart and mind based on being in a program where so many people were investing in him. But he also recognized, "If it doesn't translate into greater charity, into greater love, then it doesn't mean anything."

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover how Fellows alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Program. The Fellows Program is a nine-month incubator with very intentional design for fellows to experience various aspects of vocation. It is a season of intense discovery and substantial growth in their knowledge of God and self in the context of deep community. Through daily interaction with various teachers, mentors and the other fellows, along with intentional experiences, there is constant exposure to what it means to live a cohesive life of faith. The Fellows are constantly challenged to wrestle with the question of how to pursue their various vocations in light of God's heart and what he loves.

A nine-month Fellows Program is a relatively short time period, yet deep habits of the heart were formed through the intentional community and experiences. The fellows grew in the habit of pursuing big questions and deep conversations, which led to deeper roots of conviction. They learned to live in the tension of wrestling with convictions and contradictions and the reality that there is not always an easy answer. It became clear that though the program's classroom teaching was excellent, it was insufficient. They needed space to work out the content of their lives in the context of community. They grew in their ability to prioritize commitments in light of their time constraints, responsibilities, and personal limitations. They learned that failure was inevitable, and that it was a great

tool for growth. They also grew in their commitment to love and serve the local church.

Most of the alumni expressed a perspective change on church. Whereas the church was

peripheral to their college experience, it is now the anchor on which they center their

lives. They grew in a depth of understanding of what a rooted life looks like.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to discover how Fellows alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Programs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Fellows alumni describe the formative practices of their Fellows Program?

2. How do Fellows alumni describe the impact of their Fellows Program?

3. How do Fellows alumni describe the role of local congregations in their Fellows Program?

Summary of the Study

This study reviewed relevant literature in four areas of emerging adult moral formation and analyzed interview data from seven Fellows Program alumni. In chapter two, the literature review began with a focused study on the parable of the sower, which addresses the reality that there will be various responses to the gospel in every generation and culture. After the parable of the sower was considered, three areas of literature were reviewed to provide the groundwork for the qualitative research. The three areas included religious faith and practice in the broader emerging adult culture, moral formation at secular universities, and the role of the local church.

The research on the religious faith and practice in the broader emerging adult culture highlighted the challenges of religious instability, moral individualism, and moral

relativism. The literature revealed that many emerging adults claim that they are "spiritual but not religious," and approximately twenty-five percent of them attend religious services regularly. However, contrary to popular belief that most emerging adults lose their faith in college, levels of religiousness remain quite stable from the teenage years through the emerging adult years.

The research on moral formation in the modern secular university demonstrated that college does not inherently corrode faith, yet the secular university, from courses to extracurricular activities, has marginalized the role of moral development. The literature also pointed out that moral formation takes place among emerging adults' peers, and that the process rarely involves adult mentors. The research on moral formation in congregational life indicated that many emerging adults disengage from church at this time in their life. The literature emphasized the importance of local congregations in the lives of emerging adults for worldview formation, liturgical formation, and true community.

In chapter four, the data from the interview participants were presented in relationship to the research questions. The data emphasized the significance of intentional community, classroom content, and retreats. The data also addressed the importance of being rooted in and serving the local congregation. Finally, the data highlighted the impact of the Fellows Program with respect to deep community, habits of conversation and commitments, and a rich understanding of vocation.

In this final chapter, the researcher will compare and contrast the data from chapter two on emerging adult formation with the data from chapter four on the formative

experiences of Fellows Program alumni in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Discussion of Findings

What's Really Going on with Emerging Adult Moral Formation?

My hope throughout this study was to learn more about moral formation in the lives of emerging adults, specifically with respect to the broader culture and the modern secular university. Also, I hoped to learn about the formative experiences of Fellows Programs in order to apply various principles and programs to undergraduate ministry at a secular university. The motivation behind this study was to discover fruitful ways for the local church to produce deep and lasting moral formation in the lives of emerging adults during their college years.

It is important to assess the deep realities with respect to the faith and practice of emerging adults. One popular narrative in the broader evangelical culture is that college students are losing their faith in droves when they set foot on secular college campuses. According to the research, this is simply not true. There is no need to be overly pessimistic or overly optimistic. Instead, we need to be realistic in our outlook and expectations. So, what is the realistic picture of the faith and practice of emerging adults?

Faith and Practice of Emerging Adults

The research suggests that there is not an overall decline in the religious faith and practice of emerging adults. Rather than lumping all emerging adults together, it is important to take into account their various denominational traditions and religious backgrounds. For instance, Evangelical Protestants fare much better than Mainline Protestants and Catholics with respect to faith and practice during the emerging adult

years.[365] If we compare the findings of Arnett, Astin, Wuthnow, and C. Smith and Snell, approximately twenty-five to thirty one percent of emerging adults regularly attend religious services (at least two or three times a month). Roughly forty-five percent of emerging adults claim that their religious faith is "extremely important" or "very important" to them, whereas fifty-five percent are not actively interested in faith and practice at this point in their lives. For those who do claim that their religious faith is important, this does not necessarily mean they regularly attend religious services.[366]

C. Smith and Snell classify these emerging adults as "Committed Traditionalists" (fifteen percent) and "Selective Adherents" (thirty percent).[367] Most of the Fellows Program alumni stated that their Christian faith was very important to them during their college years, yet for various reasons their church attendance was sporadic. Two of the alumni mentioned that they did not really participate in Christian community and practice until their Fellows Program. There is no denying that there is a waning of religious faith and practice during the emerging adult years, yet the research suggests that this is true of every generation of youth prior to "settling down" into the responsibilities of marriage and family. This is dangerous because the majority of emerging adults increasingly delay marriage and family until their late twenties and beyond. This creates more distance from the practice of Christian community, and it may lead to more regrettable decisions with lasting impact.

According to the research, rather than an overall decline of religious faith and practice, emerging adults remain quite stable in their levels of religious commitment from

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[365] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 102.

[366] Ibid., 112-113.

[367] Ibid., 166-167.

the teenage years through the emerging adult years. Those who demonstrate high, moderate, or low religious commitments as teens will typically maintain high, moderate, or low commitment during their emerging adult years. Some researchers note that drastic changes in religious commitment are rare.

"Spiritual But Not Religious"

Regarding the cultural mantra of "spiritual but not religious," a few things must be noted. First, the concept of "spiritual" is often used uncritically in our culture. In the literature, many researchers use the term "spiritual" to represent a much broader concept, including the notion of being more accepting of others' beliefs and lifestyles, a stance which will often conflict with the scriptures. Whereas for the Christian, "spiritual" is synonymous with "holy spiritual" and accounts for the person and work of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life, which guides them according to the scriptures. Second, there can be a waning of spiritual practice during the emerging adult years (i.e. church attendance) even though emerging adults claim that their internal faith remains strong. However, if this is the case, we must question whether their internal faith really can remain strong. Research suggests that those who have a strong commitment to external religious practice will also have a strong internal faith. As C. Smith and Snell reason, emerging adults who "sustain strong subjective religion in their lives, it turns out, are those who also maintain strong external expressions of faith."[368] Finally, we must be aware that those who promote the notion of "spiritual but not religious" may have an axe to grind against organized religion, especially the Christian church.

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[368] Ibid., 252.

Factors for Faithfulness

Another important piece of the emerging adult puzzle is what causes faith and practice to increase or decrease. Research shows that factors such as the importance of parents' faith, relationships with adults in the church, personal prayer, and scripture reading as teenagers carries over into their emerging adult years.[369] Again, rather than the faith of emerging adults being "up for grabs" as they step on the college campus, research points to much more stability with respect to faith and practice from the teen years into the emerging adult years. It is significant and encouraging for faithful Christian churches and families to recognize that their labor in the hearts of emerging adults before they leave home is not in vain. Along these lines, more than half of the alumni came from strong Christian families and churches, which modeled a Christian faith that they came to claim as their own during the emerging adult years.

Parable of the Sower as a Key Framework

Rather than becoming overly pessimistic or overly optimistic with respect to the faith and practice of emerging adults, the parable of the sower provides a realistic framework for ministering to emerging adults. In the parable, Jesus explains to his disciples that there are various soils (hearts) and various responses to the good news of the kingdom. The first soil represents a hard heart, where the gospel never takes root. The second soil represents a shallow heart, where the gospel withers. The third soil represents a divided heart, where the gospel gets choked by the "cares and riches and pleasures of

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[369] Ibid., 220.

life."[370] The fourth soil represents a faithful heart, where the gospel takes root, grows, and bears much fruit.

It is important to note that contrary to pessimistic opinions, not all of the emerging adults who step onto a college campus represent the first three soils. More to the point, as I speak with parents who are fearful to send their children to a secular university, the underlying fear is often that the university culture will choke out their son's or daughter's faith. It is important not that the literature reveals, "…going to college no longer seems to corrode the religious faith and practice of students as it did in decades past."[371] More importantly, it is incredibly encouraging to note that God, as the powerful Sower, will cultivate fruitful lives. Jesus says the "secret" of this kingdom is in the power of the gospel that is sown. It will land on the right soil, grow, and produce fruit. In God's providence, he will take care to place many emerging adults in the right cultural soil for their growth – even in the cultural soil of secular campuses. God is not limited; he causes many to have "ears to hear," and we should expect emerging adults to live lives of faithfulness and fruitfulness.

Yet, it is always critical to keep in mind that the threats of the third soil are also present in the fourth soil. Though the fourth soil remains faithful and produces fruit, this soil is not exempt from the temptations towards the cares, riches, and pleasures of the world that seek to choke out fruitfulness. This includes emerging adults who were reared in faithful Christian families and churches. Those who minister to emerging adults must take care to identify the temptations that seek to choke out faithfulness and fruitfulness.

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[370] Luke 8:14.

[371] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 256.

As Setran and Keisling wisely explained, emerging adults may wander a bit during these years, but they will "return as people irrevocably shaped by some of the most critical decisions of life."[372] Thus, we can be encouraged that God will produce fruitful lives, yet we must help our emerging adults to avoid the perils of the cultural soil and to deepen their roots in Christ.

There is no doubt that all four soils are represented on secular university campuses. In particular, the literature on emerging adult morality stressed the potential seedbed for moral individualism and moral relativism, which C. Smith called the darker side of emerging adulthood.[373] Often among emerging adults' morality is based on what one feels is good and right, what makes one happy, and where there is no actual basis for judgments except the sovereign self. According to Sundene and Dunn, emerging adults simultaneously prize their own stylized spirituality (moral individualism) while embracing diversity and the broad acceptance of different lifestyles and values (moral relativism).[374] These beliefs flow into what C. Smith coined "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (MTD), which he believes is the prevailing religion of the day. I agree with Richardson's assessment that most emerging adults move from MTD in their teens to tinkerers in their twenties, joining various beliefs and practices until the result "works" for them.[375] Setran and Kiesling summarize, "We must develop a posture of formation that attends to both the external challenges posed by cultural shifts and the internal

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[372] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 85.

[373] C. Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 60.

[374] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 36.

[375] Richardson, "Emerging Adults and the Future of Missions," 83.

theological challenges posed by false gospels and the imposter of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."[376]

The answer to the challenges of moral individualism, moral relativism, and MTD is a community where the gospel is put on display through its beliefs and practices – a community which makes a more compelling argument for the "good life" than what is often caught and taught on a secular university campus. Both the literature and the Fellows Program alumni stressed how the local church stands in a unique position to cultivate right loves in the lives of emerging adults.

Cultivation of Right Loves

In the parable of the sower, Jesus warns against those who hear the word of God, yet as they "go on their way,"[377] they are choked by the "cares and riches and pleasures of life" so that their fruit does not mature.[378] This soil is contrasted with the fourth soil, which hears the word, holds it, and bears much fruit with patience.[379] Those who minister to emerging adults during the college years must seek to cultivate loves which fight against the popular notion that college is about social life and economic returns. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm point out that since the 1970s, annual surveys of freshmen show that the personal goal of "being well off financially" has grown dramatically more popular than "developing a meaningful philosophy of life."[380] Yet in Garber's words, the college diploma is not a "passport to privilege," but rather a call to kingdom responsibility in the

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[376] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 27.

[377] Luke 8:14.

[378] Ibid.

[379] Luke 8:15

[380] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 2-3.

world. To this point, one of the alumni mentioned with regret, "I thought college was for something else." She regretted not connecting her college experience to a church community.

It is also crucial that we minister to emerging adults with long term implications in mind. Our interest in their lives must not be limited to their evangelism and discipleship efforts during their college years. Rather, we must help them to think about the various vocational spheres that they will occupy for the rest of their lives. This includes instilling a deep understanding and love for church, family, work, and neighbors. In various ways, the alumni expressed gratitude that the Fellows Program allowed them to "bump into" different aspects of vocation and challenged them to think deeply about the entire Christian life.

The parable of the sower teaches that not all hearts are receptive to the gospel, and for the hearts that are receptive to the gospel, there is always the threat of withering away. There is a need for campus ministries to pursue and cater to those who would be best characterized as the first, second, and third soil. Their faith in Christ is either non-existent or fragile. They need nurture. But we must also provide space for those of the fourth soil who are ready to be challenged with the deep truth of the gospel and its far-reaching implications in their current and future vocations. For example, how do we nurture the "Committed Traditionalists" (fifteen percent of emerging adults) during their college years so that rather than holding a privatized faith, they pursue a deep call to kingdom responsibility in the world?[381]

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[381] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 166-167.

The Fellows Program provides a great model of programs and principles that can and should be applied to undergraduate ministry. Just as Greg said his Fellows Program gave him the space to wrestle with the knowledge of God and self so that he was ready for the next step, it is equally important that we cultivate the right space for undergraduates to wrestle with the knowledge of God and self so that they are ready to step out into the world with a proper vision of kingdom responsibility. We must help emerging adults cultivate the right loves which foster habits of kingdom formation. According to J. Smith, "One of the most important questions we need to ask is: Just what kind of person is this habit or practice trying to produce, and to what end is such a practice aimed?"[382] Similarly, decades ago Parks insisted, "If we are to mentor the next generations well, it has become a matter of considerable urgency that we more adequately understand the formation of the young adult imagination and its implications for forming meaning, purpose, and faith."[383] Building on this, Garber spoke of the need to cultivate deep convictions, character, and community in the lives of emerging adults. Through deep and thoughtful convictions, character, and community, formative practices will emerge.

Convictions

According to Garber, one aspect of cultivating right loves is to teach a worldview which is "sufficient for the questions and crises of the next twenty years…"[384] Sadly, the literature points to the instability of moral truth and the "juvenilization" of American

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[382] J. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 83.

[383] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, xii.

[384] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 37.

Christianity which has, for many emerging adults, led to an immature faith.[385] C. Smith's

research makes the compelling case that emerging adults are swimming in the immature

waters of MTD. With respect to faith and practice, some of the troubling themes of MTD

include an uncritical acceptance of pluralism, moral individualism, and moral relativism.

What is needed is Garber's vision of emerging adults establishing deep convictions,

character, and community, which can stand against the shallow faith of MTD.

It is important to note that in a modern secular university, the conviction of a

"unity of truth" is lost. Reuben points out that around the turn of the twentieth century,

the notion of a "unity of truth" – which encompassed the good, the true, and the beautiful,

was forsaken and fragmented.[386] A distinction was made between empirically verifiable

"facts" and subjective "values."[387] During this process, moral formation was moved from

the course of study to extracurricular activities.[388] Setran and Kiesling point out that prior

to the early twentieth century, many relied on higher education institutions to teach and

model morality.[389] Now that morality has been marginalized on secular university

campuses, it is imperative for the church to come alongside the university to teach and

model a unity of truth that encompasses the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Decades ago, Schaeffer and Newbigin were among the few influential voices that

represented the urgent need for the church to teach and practice theological truth. In that

same vein today, Setran and Kiesling call for local churches to teach deep truth,

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[385] Bergler, "Taming the Juvenilization of American Christianity," 7-34.

[386] Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 267.

[387] Ibid., 268.

[388] Ibid., 267-269.

[389] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 33.

lamenting that many emerging adults describe church teaching as "shallow and irrelevant."[390] Along these lines, many of the Fellows alumni commented that their classroom theological training was important and meaningful. Many of them stated that they were thankful for the intellectual stimulation. It is clear that not all learning takes place in the classroom. However, we must create space to engage emerging adults with good theological and worldview training, especially since the research on emerging adults points to an increasing degree of biblical illiteracy. Further, the research suggests that many emerging adults "approach religion pragmatically, nondoctrinally, and moralistically."[391]

One of the classroom subjects that impacted the alumni was redemptive history through the framework of the four story gospel of creation-fall-redemption-consummation. Some of the alumni articulated that the four story gospel now shapes how they understand issues and frames the way they look at life. Arguing against the notion of the autonomous self, Garber wrote, "To be 'obligated' requires that one know the reality of one's situation, of one's moment in time, in relation to God, to others, to the world."[392] Through the biblical framework of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, we are able to better understand our cultural moment in God's redemptive plan, which should "obligate" us to bear witness to the world through our various vocations.

Also, a strong understanding of redemptive history mitigates the shallow theology of MTD in the lives of emerging adults as they recognize the need for forgiveness of sins (not moralism), the central goal of holiness rather than happiness (not therapy), and that

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[390] Ibid., 96.

[391] Sundene, and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 127.

[392] Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 95.

God is a personal Father who adopts us into the family of God (not deism). This reality is what made Kathy want to "cromit" (cry and vomit) – the conviction that she sought to live her life in non-reality apart from God's story. But in the biblical study of redemptive history, we find a powerful God who brought salvation through Christ, and who calls us to live this truth out as individuals and as a community of God's people. Garber emphasizes that "to have knowledge *of* means to have responsibility *to* means to have care *for*."[393] The proper understanding of redemptive history should move emerging adults to have a proper understanding of God, themselves, and the world around them, which leads to responsibility and care for their neighbors. The alumni overwhelmingly held this conviction in their hearts. Whereas, according to C. Smith and Snell, in the emerging adult culture, "any notion of the responsibility of a common humanity, a transcendent call to protect the life and dignity of one's neighbor, or a moral responsibility to seek the common good was almost entirely absent among the respondents."[394]

A deep understanding of redemptive history should ground emerging adults in their primary calling as God's people, but then move them to a secondary calling of vocation in the world. Whereas the literature suggests that for many emerging adults, "religious beliefs do not seem to be important, action driving commitments," the Fellows came away with a richer understanding that beliefs and commitments must go hand in hand.[395] Proper education always connects belief with behavior.[396] Many of the alumni

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[393] Ibid., 100.

[394] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 68.

[395] Ibid., 286.

[396] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 43.

spoke of being "implicated" in the world as a result of their Fellows year. This echoes Garber's question, "Knowing what you know about yourself and the world, what are you going to do?"[397] Newbigin concluded, "The preaching and teaching of the local church has to be such that it enables members to think out the problems that face them in their secular work in the light of their Christian faith."[398] Overwhelmingly, the alumni felt that the Fellows Program prepared them well. Yet Kinnaman and Hawkins lament that most emerging adults "receive little guidance from their church communities for how to connect these vocational dreams deeply with their faith in Christ."[399] Along these lines of "vocational dreams," Greg wisely pointed out that we must help emerging adults recognize that vocational calling is about two things. First, it is about understanding God's heart – what does God love? Second, it is also about discovering how God has wired us to pursue the things that God loves. This contradicts the moral individualistic perspective that life is all about our desires and passions.

Another aspect that surfaced from this study is the necessity for emerging adults to live in theological tension. Some of the alumni mentioned how it was actually beneficial to them that their teachers sometimes contradicted one another. One alumnus concluded that it was necessary to have some classes that were more "free thinking" versus "strait forward." This caused the alumni to live in the tension of figuring out what they believe and why it matters. This is especially important in light of the research that claims, "Very many emerging adults simply don't know how to think about things, what

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[397] Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 51.

[398] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 230.

[399] Kinnaman, and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 29.

is right, or what is deserving for them to devote their lives to."[400] I am struck with how

important it is to foster critical thinking skills among emerging adults. This can be

accomplished by doing justice to presenting the other side of the theological coin and

inviting emerging adults to wrestle with what they believe and why. Also it can be

beneficial to expose students to a wider array of views, both inside and outside the

church, which will challenge their assumptions and convictions.

Character

        Another key theme in this study is the importance of exposing emerging adults to

various mentors who cultivate character through their beliefs and behaviors. According to

Garber, powerful character formation can take place in the lives of emerging adults when

they are exposed to a teacher "who incarnated the worldview which they were coming to

consciously identify as their own…"[401] Garber explains that because the incarnation of

God is at the heart of the Christian faith, "…*come and see* is profoundly instructive. We

do not learn the deepest lessons any other way. Moral meaning is always learned in

apprenticeship, in seeing over-the-shoulder and through-the-heart of those who have gone

before us, of those who have something to teach us."[402] Garber's point is that teaching

which is embodied is deeply impactful.

        This is not to diminish the role of classroom teaching, but it does emphasize the

need for intentionality beyond the classroom. Some of the alumni pointed out that it was

crucial for them to have space for informal conversations with mentors and teachers.

Most of the alumni mentioned the benefits of deep conversations after class with teachers

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[400] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 293.

[401] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 38.

[402] Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 121.

and mentors. In particular, Kathy reflected that exposure to a multitude of mentors during her Fellows year was incredibly important, allowing her to see those with a "robust and a full and vigorous life of faith." Other alumni spoke of the importance of hearing and seeing the "cohesive lives" of teachers and mentors, which gave them a deeper vision of being in the world but not of the world.

As emerging adults move away from their families and religious routines to the college campus, there is a great need for mentors who can lead them towards Christian maturity. I agree with Parks that "At its best, higher education is distinctive in its capacity to serve as a mentoring environment in the formation of critical adult faith."[403] Reuben points out that in previous generations, "College authorities saw themselves as surrogate parents, responsible for students' moral and spiritual welfare."[404] Whereas college authorities have abdicated their responsibility for student's moral and spiritual welfare, this concept of "in loco parentis" is an important task for members of the local church. Within the surrounding community of a university, emerging adults have access to Christians who are university faculty, individuals, families and pastors within the church, and often practitioners in their fields of study. The local church has a unique opportunity to expose emerging adults to a matrix of mentors who incarnate the Christian worldview.

The importance of good family community was another finding in this study. Research shows that family significantly shapes the faith and character of teens. Many of the alumni spoke of how their host families shaped their vision of a godly family. Even the alumni who had bad experiences with host families learned how not to do family.

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[403] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 159.

[404] Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 22.

Though it may not be realistic for college students to live with host families, it is very

realistic for church families to invite students into their homes for meals. This is

especially important for emerging adults who come from broken homes and who have

been raised around dysfunctional marriages. There is much room for church families and

emerging adults to experience the beauty of hospitality.

Community

Both the literature and the alumni stressed the important role of the local church

community in the lives of emerging adults. Deep godly convictions and character flourish

in a community that cultivates right loves. Garber insightfully points out that those who

cultivate deep faith well beyond the college years "…made choices over the years to live

out their worldview in the company of mutually committed folk who provided a network

of stimulation and support which showed that the ideas could be coherent across the

whole of life."[405] Along these lines, Greg said that what made the Fellows Program

effective was being challenged to live out what they were learning in the context of

community. Specifically, we need to help emerging adults form a deeper ecclesiological

vision for the local church as the anchor in their lives for its teaching, its community, and

its liturgies.

<u>Local church as the anchor</u>

With respect to the challenges of living in a pluralistic culture, which is the reality

on college campuses across the nation, Newbigin's conclusion was that the church is the

"only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel."[406] By this, he meant that a

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[405] Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 38.

[406] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

congregation of men and women who believe and live by the gospel show its credibility

to a pluralistic world.[407] Hunter referred to the church as a strategic gift because it is a

community and institution of formation against "destructive influences and pressures."[408]

Setran and Kiesling wrote of the church as a powerful community "countering many of

the deforming beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors endemic to this stage" of emerging

adulthood.[409]

Many of the alumni voiced a change in perspective with respect to the importance

of the local church. Whereas church attendance was sporadic during the college years for

many of the alumni, all of them walked away from the Fellows Program with a deep

determination to love and serve the church. Kathy referred to the local church as the

anchor around which she and her husband have oriented their whole lives. This image of

the church as an anchor is significant in light of the literature regarding the instability that

emerging adults face in this stage of life. At the heart of the instability is a sense of

"Where's home?" and "Who will be there for me?" For Lauren, church felt like "home"

due to her involvement during the Fellows Year.

Serving the local church

Through weekly worship, service, and exposure to various church members, the

alumni felt rooted in their congregations. It is important that emerging adults feel rooted

in a local church "home" during the college years, especially in light of this season of

transition away from family. According to the alumni, one of the keys to a sense of

rootedness is through service to the church. Some of the alumni stressed that serving the

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[407] Ibid.

[408] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 282.

[409] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 95.

church on a weekly basis reinforced the notion of commitment versus consumerism. For

undergraduates, service to the local church can combat a church-consumer mentality,

instilling the message that "It's not about me." Likewise, serving the church allowed

them to get to know more members of the church. Whereas the college campus can be a

peer-bubble, the church offers an important multi-generational community. Also, through

service to the local church, emerging adults will inevitably rub shoulders with adult

members who can be there for them as needed. It may not be realistic to expect college

freshmen to jump in and serve the church wholeheartedly, but it is important that

throughout their college years they learn that serving the church is a significant step of

Christian maturity.

<u>Liturgy of the local church</u>

The church is a place where deep convictions and character are formed, but it is

also a place for deep liturgical formation. Though only a few of the alumni directly

addressed the importance of liturgical formation, some of the literature focused on deep

formation through church liturgy. J. Smith urges us to "take seriously the central role of

formative practices" in our worship services.[410] Setran and Kiesling agree and insist that

the church must "call emerging adults to participate in practices that counter the

destructive patterns that can evolve at this time of life."[411] They speak specifically of the

weekly rhythm of confession, repentance, thanksgiving, and praise as "perhaps the best

means" of countering the destructive patterns and influences that corrupt the soul.[412]

Anderson makes the important point that liturgical worship "schools" our minds and

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[410] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24.

[411] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 104.

[412] Ibid., 105.

bodies, and conditions "our way of being in the world, in our communities, and in our families."[413] In other words, liturgical worship prepares us for various vocations in the world. With respect to emerging adults, Kinnaman and Hawkins lament the missing rituals of historic Christian practice.[414] They state that after countless conversations with emerging adults, they are "…convinced that historic and traditional practices… are what the next generation really needs."[415]

Some of the alumni voiced the importance of liturgy in shaping their lives. Greg's eyes were opened to the significant shaping force of cultural liturgy, which has profoundly changed the way he teaches students. Mike referred to his love of the church calendar because "It implicates us in a story bigger than ourselves." Deep Christian formation is both taught and caught, so it is important for the church to foster a healthy view of liturgical practices among emerging adults.

Formative Practices

Parks referred to the commons in ancient societies as a crossroads where people gathered to work out how they would live together, and where there was "always a mix of sins and grace." Writing about this generation's new global commons, she concludes, "There is an enormous need for an understanding and practice of human development that prepares people to become citizen-leaders in this new commons, able to engage the great questions of our time and to participate in discovering and creating responses to challenge both new and ancient."[416] Parks stressed the importance of mentoring

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[413] Anderson, "Worship: Schooling in the Tradition of Jesus," 21-32.

[414] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 31, 121, 202.

[415] Ibid., 202.

[416] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 10.

communities, including the formative practices of the commons, the hearth, and the table as places where there is "a sense of the shared life."[417] These are places of imagination and places where emerging adults can linger and engage in the big questions of their lives. In many ways, the Fellows Program acts as a commons where emerging adults are prepared to be citizen leaders. In particular, the alumni spoke of the significant formative practices of Roundtable and retreats, both of which impacted them during their Fellows year.

Roundtable

Without exception, all of the alumni pointed to Roundtable as a significant feature of the Fellows Program. This weekly gathering over a meal provided a meaningful time for discussion, learning, and investing in one another's lives. As Greg put it, "There's something to be said about learning how to do leisure well, and food, and talk intentionally in relationships." Also, according to Parks, the table is where "we learn delayed gratification, belonging, commitment, and ritual."[418]

Retreats

Retreats provided another formative experience for the alumni. Specifically, the alumni spoke of the value of setting aside time to rest and reflect. Conversely, according to Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, major time constraints in college make it difficult for "thoughtful explorations of life's so-called big questions."[419] In the midst of hectic schedules, the retreats provided space to pull away from distractions and enjoy a "rich time of friendship." Specifically, the Knowing and Doing retreat provided the

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[417] Ibid.

[418] Ibid., 156.

[419] Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 44.

opportunity for the alumni to explore their vocational gifts and callings. Further,

according to the literature, religious experiences play an important part of faith

development, and retreats provide an ideal setting for impactful experiences.[420] Setran

and Kiesling assert that experiences like retreats "serve an important purpose of opening

the mind and soul to new ways of being."[421]

Recommendations for Practice

In this section, the literature and research will interact, and the researcher will

make several recommendations to those working with emerging adults in a secular

university setting through the local church. The church has the unique calling to walk

alongside emerging adults in the university in a much-needed way. There is a place for

parachurch ministries, but not at the expense of the strategic gift of the local church.

Specifically, local congregations have gifts that emerging adults desperately need -

theological training, liturgy, and mentors.

Curriculum of Coherence

In a higher education setting, we need to challenge emerging adults with the rich

truths and implications of the gospel. The Fellows alumni commented on how much they

needed the intellectual training during the year. In light of that need, it would be wise to

develop a curriculum for emerging adults. This curriculum would include discussion of

various vocational responsibilities and relationships in the world and how that fits into a

coherent life of faith. Also, this curriculum must take into account the different stages of

growth from the freshmen year through the senior year of college. According to

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[420] Smith, and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 217-219.

[421] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 66.

Clydesdale, freshmen are primarily focused on the daily life management of their

personal relationships, personal gratifications, and economic lives.[422] It is essential to

expose them to mentors who can help them through these issues and big questions at this

phase of their lives.

Yet at the same time, we need to cultivate a love for the church and theology

which prepares their hearts and minds for deeper worldview training as they mature

through college. With sophomores, juniors, and seniors, we need to teach such things as

worldview and apologetics, systematic theology, and redemptive history in a way that

prepares them for their various vocations. In other words, we need to help them connect

their local church and college education to their various callings in the world beyond their

university experience. According to J. Smith, the church needs to facilitate "the formation

of a peculiar people – a people who desire the kingdom of God and thus undertake their

vocations as an expression of that desire."[423] Setran and Kiesling spoke of the need for "a

community of truth – that forms them to see themselves and the world in a uniquely

Christian way."[424] The church is in a unique position to foster this "community of truth,"

and it must not be missed that a huge impact from the Fellows Program was the habit of

intentional conversation. The Fellows Program nurtured an environment where it was

normal to engage in big questions and deep conversations in the context of a community.

Liturgical Living

According to J. Smith, "We need to adopt a paradigm of cultural critique and

discernment that thinks even deeper than beliefs or worldviews and takes seriously the

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[422] Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, 2.

[423] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 34.

[424] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 75.

central role of formative practices – or what I'll describe in this book as liturgies."[425] I

believe that the power of liturgies must be taught and caught. The local church has the

unique opportunity to foster spiritual maturity through the weekly liturgy on Sunday

mornings. Through songs, confessions, creeds, sacraments, sermons, and benedictions

(just to name a few elements of a Christian worship service), emerging adults learn what

it means to live the Christian life.

Further, the Sunday morning liturgy can shape all of life. Setran and Kiesling

make the point that emerging adults "must begin to understand the power of every

mundane moment in shaping their future destinies."[426] The research findings and my

personal experience indicate that it is rare for emerging adults to connect the liturgy on a

Sunday morning to the rest of the week. But what if we were more intentional to help

emerging adults live the liturgy throughout the week? Christian discipleship could

reinforce the fact that every mundane minute is lived before the face of God. The

morning alarm becomes the call to worship, a call to recognize that every day is the

Lord's day. Rather than asking, "What do I need to do today?" the first question is "Who

am I becoming today?" Next is the prayer of invocation, taking a moment to

acknowledge the presence of God and praying for strength and wisdom to serve him in

all vocational endeavors of the day. Then comes the prayer of confession and assurance

of pardon, confessing sins and acknowledging God's grace. For the time of praise,

instead of singing songs, we recognize that we worship God through our work. The

sermon is the good news of the gospel to which we bear witness through our words and

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[425] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24.

[426] Setran, and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 43.

deeds. And finally, after a full day, the benediction is a time to reflect on the words, "well done, good and faithful servant."

<center>*Space to Process*</center>

Similar to Park's notion of the commons, the hearth, and the table, it is important for emerging adults to have the space and people they need to process their faith and their lives. According to Parks, "As faith is the place of experience and the imagination, the lived practice of hearth, table, and commons is a threefold gift by which a mentoring environment may nourish the young adult imagination of faith in a challenging, complex, and diverse world."[427] So what could it look like to recover the commons, the hearth, and the table?

It is important to create space for undergraduates to process the big questions of life with a matrix of mentors. As mentioned above, these mentors can include pastors and ministry leaders, faculty and practitioners in their field of study, and individuals and families who are members of their churches. Exposure to potential mentors fosters an environment where meaningful conversations and relationships can develop over time.

There are various ways to create meaningful commons, hearths, and tables. One such space is the classroom. Leaving time during and after class for lingering discussions can be significant for emerging adults who are wrestling through the implications of the course content. A few of the Fellows alumni mentioned the impactful conversations that took place right after class. I am convinced that we cannot assume that because we have taught it, emerging adults have caught it. We must be willing to not merely teach in front of them, but also to create space to walk alongside them as they wrestle with their

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[427] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 157.

convictions. Further, I believe that there is a place for large group teaching, but this study has reinforced the need to also foster small groups where emerging adults will be challenged to grow in their commitment to one another as they seek to live what they are learning.

Another space is the family table. Most local congregations have an abundance of good homes with family tables that can provide meaningful conversations. Through meals with these families, emerging adults can learn the beauty of hospitality, watch a healthy family interact, and gain wisdom from couples who are a decade or more ahead of them. This could be especially powerful for the emerging adults from broken and dysfunctional homes. It would also be beneficial for students with the same vocational interest to gather and host a meal for a professor or practitioner in that particular field. College can be a great season to train emerging adults to be very intentional as they gather around a table.

Another such space is retreats during the year. A retreat is a great opportunity for emerging adults to pull away from distractions to enjoy extended time in personal reflection and with mentors as they process and grow in their vocational callings. These retreats can take into account the different stages of growth, from the freshman year through the senior year.

I have become convinced through this study that although it is more logistically difficult, there could be much wisdom in developing a "gap" year (between high school and college) for emerging adults, especially in light of the instability of this time of life. Similar to those who participate in a Fellows Program, students could work a part time job, take Christian formation classes, serve the local church, and receive mentoring in

order to prepare them for a faithful and fruitful college experience. Also, I am convinced that developing a Fellows Program through the local church is incredibly beneficial to emerging adults.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on how Fellows Program alumni describe the formative experiences of their Fellows Program. The goal was to gain wisdom regarding helpful practices and principles which can be applied to undergraduate college ministry. As with any study, there are limitations to the research. Future research in this area could include how the liturgical practices of a local congregation conditions emerging adults to be faithful and fruitful throughout the week in their various vocational endeavors. Along these lines, further research could include various tried and true practices for corporate and individual liturgical practices which shape habits of the heart.

Another area of research could be churches and ministries who are developing good curricula for holistic emerging adult Christian formation during the college years. These curricula could take into account the different stages of growth, from the freshman year through the senior year of college. Also, this type of curriculum could take into account the various vocational spheres of work, family, citizenship, and church. An important consideration in the curriculum would be the typical time constraints of a busy college student.

A final area of research could be how an emerging adult's participation with a parachurch campus ministry positively and negatively affects their perception of and involvement in the local church both during and after their college years.

Conclusion

This study has examined literature on spiritual formation in the broader emerging adult culture, in the modern secular universities, and through the local church. The research has explored formative experiences of seven emerging adults in Fellows Programs with respect to formative practices, impact, and the role of a local congregation. This data allowed the researcher to compare what the literature presented with real-life experiences of Fellows Program alumni, further enhancing the understanding of emerging adult spiritual formation. The researcher concluded by offering a number of suggestions toward the cultivation of right loves in the lives of emerging adults.

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