

SUSTAINING FAITH: ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES IN
CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES AMIDST DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINING FAITH: ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES IN CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES AMIDST DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

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The shifting demographic landscape poses a significant challenge for Christian universities as they strive to attract and retain students with a Convictional Christian worldview while preserving their unique identity. This study investigated the experiences of five Christian universities that have successfully navigated these changes to identify effective adaptive strategies. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with senior leaders from the participating institutions through a qualitative research approach.

The data analysis revealed four central themes: 1) Unwavering commitment to Christian mission and identity, 2) Holistic personnel practices to build a mission-fit team, 3) Intentional cultivation of spiritual community, and 4) Proactive cultural engagement based on biblical convictions. The findings suggest that Convictional Christianity can be sustained and advanced in Christian higher education by focusing on these key areas, thereby resisting the pressures of secularization. The study offers recommendations to help Christian universities align their strategies to shape and empower Convictional Christian students to make a difference in the world for Christ.

Preserving a robust Christian identity in higher education relies, in part, on developing a biblical philosophy of education that establishes the purpose and practice of faith-based learning

for the university community and its constituents. The primary aim of Christian education is to foster spiritual growth and cultivate a strong sense of community rooted in shared values and beliefs. In this process, Scripture emphasizes the importance of exposing students to diverse teachers to maintain a balanced, holistic perspective and providing various educational settings to effectively carry out God's educative agenda, which is to prepare individuals to fulfill His purposes in the world through the church.

The treatment applied to the problem successfully identified four key strategies that help Christian universities maintain their distinctive identity and attract Convictional Christian students amidst demographic changes. Stated positively, this project has discovered four strategies that foster a thriving Christian higher education environment that effectively engages and forms Convictional Christian students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To: FAMILY

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” – Proverbs 27:17

To the *Oikeioi tou Theou*: my Church Family

For their heartfelt aspiration to embody God’s family
For their relentless pursuit to live as reflections of His divine love
For their unwavering faith that we stand as First Family

To the *Bet’ab*: my Immediate Family

For their steadfast loyalty and unwavering belief in me as a
son, father, grandfather, brother, cousin, and uncle

To the *Gynaika mou*: my Wife

For her boundless love and unwavering dedication to our sacred union.
For her fearless spirit that embraces life’s challenges with open arms.
For her awe-inspiring example of grace and compassion.
For her unyielding wisdom that strengthens and fortifies our bond.
For her countless acts of love and kindness, which fill our
path with warmth and devotion.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Chapter One serves as an introduction to the primary features of the thesis project. First, the rationale for the project is presented by introducing the problem and explaining why it is being addressed. The problem to be addressed is that many Evangelical Christian Universities are facing attendance decline due to demographic changes and are attempting to address this issue in ways that risk alienating their traditional target audience. Following the rationale for the project, the research question will be presented, followed by a general description of the proposed solution to mitigate the problem.

Second, the parameters of the thesis project will be delineated. The thesis project has three parameters: topic-specific terminology, assumptions, and delimitations. Key terms used in the thesis project will be clearly defined to ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the project. The study will outline the assumptions made during its organization and execution to give the reader a better comprehension of its purpose.

Delimitations listing similar but secondary interests not being pursued will be included to clarify the goals of the thesis project further.

Third, the organization and basic content are divided into six chapters. Each chapter serves a unique purpose in presenting the problem of ministry, a study of biblical theology informing the thesis, a survey of literature relating to the topic, a description of the research

project that undergirds this thesis project, and a complete analysis and treatment of the research results.

The Rationale for the Project

In the rationale for the project section of Chapter One, the nature of the problem of ministry to be addressed will be explained, including the reason this problem of ministry is being developed into a thesis project.

The Problem Addressed in the Project

The problem addressed by the thesis project originated from the researcher's experience and his deep involvement with Christian higher education institutions. Christian higher education has played a significant role in shaping his life and the lives of his family members. The researcher's parents first met and got married while attending a Christian college. He attended a Christian college for his higher education and later worked professionally at a Christian university. Two of his children have attended Christian universities, with another currently enrolled at one.

Beyond his personal and family connections, the researcher serves on the board of two Christian higher education institutions. This role has given him first-hand exposure to the issues and challenges these colleges and universities face. Notably, the Christian college he attended as a student has since shut down, primarily due to the problems this research is investigating.

The researcher, who has faced challenges in his past professional roles and current board responsibilities, is deeply invested in better understanding the forces impacting Christian higher education. The long-term sustainability and health of these institutions are important to him. He believes this research can provide valuable insights to help Christian colleges and universities

navigate future challenges, as it is a topic that has profoundly shaped his life story and one he cares about deeply.

The Academic Rational

The first reason for undertaking this project is the evolution of academic culture, which increasingly regards the idea of religious higher education as problematic and is growing at a feverish pitch. In *The Dying of the Light*, Catholic scholar James Burtchaell states that the dominant secular paradigm presumes that genuine universities are to be free from religiously informed influences. This view has become conventional wisdom, leading many to conclude that a serious academic institution cannot simultaneously be seriously religious. Faced with this pervasive skepticism, Christian colleges and universities find themselves on the defensive, needing to articulate anew the compatibility of faith and rigorous intellectual inquiry.¹

Moreover, the pressures toward secularization are not merely external. Burtchaell's case studies reveal that many faculty, administrators, and trustees have believed that academic excellence requires a diminution of religious identity, even within religious institutions. Motivated by a desire for acceptance in the mainstream academy, schools often distance themselves from their denominational heritage and mute their Christian distinctiveness. Over time, this leads to a hollowing out of the religious mission, as Burtchaell's examples poignantly illustrate.²

As noted by James Heft in his review of *The Dying of the Light*, Burtchaell's study, while flawed in certain respects, performs an important service in highlighting the pervasive challenges

¹ James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998), 4.

² Burtchaell, 825.

facing Christian colleges and universities.³ The academic rationale for this project flows directly from the need to confront these challenges - to provide a persuasive intellectual case for the enduring relevance and vitality of the Christian university.

George Marsden's seminal work, *The Soul of the American University*, further underscores the urgency of this task. Tracing the history of leading American universities from their Protestant establishment to "established non-belief,"⁴ Marsden demonstrates how a commitment to scientific objectivity and value neutrality gradually eclipsed the religious foundations on which these institutions were built. In the process, Christianity was relegated to the periphery of academic life as a private matter irrelevant to serious scholarship. Marsden argues that this secularization was not inevitable but the result of specific historical forces and decisions. Implicit in his account is a challenge to the contemporary academy to reconsider its dismissal of religious perspectives and to recover a more capacious and inclusive understanding of intellectual inquiry.

Taken together, the work of Burtchaell and Marsden provides a powerful impetus for the present project. Their historical and critical analyses demonstrate the pressing need for fresh thinking about the place of faith in higher education.

The Theological Rationale

The second reason for undertaking this project is the urgent need for a theological re-grounding of the mission and identity of Christian universities. Azusa Pacific University's recent

³ James Heft, "The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities From Their Christian Churches, by James Tunstead Burtchaell," *Journal of Catholic Education* 2, no. 4 (2013): 495–503, <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0204142013>.

⁴ George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

public drift provides a dramatic example of a Christian university sliding from its missional roots. André Villeneuve highlighted the drift in his article *A Tale of Two Christian Universities*. He documents the drift Azusa Pacific University went through,⁵ the impact on the students becoming more spiritually disengaged, and a disruption of the board of trustees; two resigned because of the drift.⁶ As parents, we should not assume that all evangelical institutions are free from secular drift. Gerald McDermott wrote in his article *Woke Theory at Evangelical Colleges* where he highlights examples of the impact of the woke theory on Christian institutions.⁷

Many institutions have lacked a sufficiently robust theological framework to engage the intellectual challenges of an increasingly pluralistic and secularized culture. In his book *Faith and Knowledge*, Douglas Sloan details how too often Christian colleges have settled for a “two realms” approach that relegates faith to the private sphere and fails to cultivate a holistic, biblically-informed worldview across all disciplines.⁸

David Dockery’s book *Christian Higher Education* highlights the role of faith in shaping the educational journey within the evangelical tradition. He underscores that Christian education goes beyond personal faith, influencing everything from teaching methods to community interactions.⁹ His book emphasizes that by integrating a Christian worldview, education prepares

⁵ André Villeneuve, “A Tale of Two Christian Universities,” *Crisis Magazine*, March 21, 2022, <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/a-tale-of-two-christian-universities>.

⁶ Samuel Smith, “2 Azusa Pacific University Trustees Resign, Cite Institution’s ‘drift’ from Christian Principles,” December 5, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/2-azusa-pacific-university-trustees-resign-cite-institutions-drift-christian-principles.html>.

⁷ Gerald McDermott, “Woke Theory at Evangelical Colleges” *First Things*, October 19, 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/10/woke-theory-at-evangelical-colleges>.

⁸ Douglas M. Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 232.

⁹ David S. Dockery and Christopher W. Morgan, eds., *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), loc. 9.6.

students for the future, equipping them with a theological framework that guides their thinking, learning, and actions in a complex world.¹⁰ This project contends that a vital Christian presence in higher education requires a renewed commitment to integrating faith and reason, anchored in the conviction that all truth is God's truth and that the Christian tradition offers unique resources for academic inquiry and moral formation.

The Demographic Rationale

The third reason for undertaking this project is the pressing challenge posed by demographic changes that threaten the long-term viability of many Christian institutions. The pool of committed Christian students and faculty is shrinking while the broader culture becomes more religiously diverse and secular.¹¹ These shifts present a daunting enrollment and financial challenge for colleges and universities historically relying on students from a particular denomination or religious tradition.¹² This project argues that Christian institutions must adapt to this new demographic landscape by developing innovative strategies to attract and enroll students and faculty who share their religious mission and values. At the same time, the project stresses the importance of maintaining a strong Christian identity and resisting the temptation to dilute or downplay religious commitments in pursuit of a broader demographic appeal. In an article he wrote for *Issue*, David Dockery stated that Christian institutions must think differently about student recruitment and retention because students are looking for shorter routes to degrees. Additionally, the demographic of the students is now multigenerational, with students

¹⁰ Dockery and Morgan, loc. 9.56.

¹¹ Gregory A. Smith, et al., "Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, January 24, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.

¹² Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 265.

ranging in age from 18–80 rather than 18–30. All the while, the pool of prospective students who are thirty and above continues to expand.¹³

Drawing on insights from *Christians in the Age of Outrage* by Ed Stetzer,¹⁴ this project underscores the urgency of responding to cultural division and secularization with a robust commitment to the gospel’s transformative power. Stetzer discusses the significant impact of secularization, particularly in the shift from nominal to non-affiliated religious identification, often referred to as the rise of the “nones.”¹⁵

However, despite significant shifts in the broader cultural and religious landscape, Stetzer contends that the proportion of Convictional Christians in the United States has remained stable over the years.¹⁶ This stability occurs even as the cultural and religious mainstream moves towards secularism, leading Convictional Christians to find themselves outside the mainstream American culture increasingly. Stetzer describes how the decline of Cultural and Congregational Christians, alongside the rise of secularism, has not diminished the presence or the faithfulness of Convictional Christians. Instead, it has highlighted the distinctiveness of their faith in a changing society.¹⁷

In sum, this project is motivated by recognizing the vital importance of Christian higher education for the church and society. Christian higher education is grounded in the realities of

¹³ David S. Dockery, “The Future of Christian Higher Education,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (blog), January 6, 2021, <https://swbts.edu/news/essay-the-future-of-christian-higher-education/>.

¹⁴ Ed Stetzer, *Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World Is at Its Worst* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2018).

¹⁵ Stetzer, loc. 9.18.

¹⁶ Stetzer, loc. 9.26.

¹⁷ Stetzer, loc. 9.27.

the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37–39) and the commission of the resurrected Christ, who calls us to disciple the nations by teaching them all that the Lord has commanded (Matthew 28:18–20).¹⁸ By examining the complex factors contributing to the secularization of many institutions, articulating a robust theological vision for Christian scholarship and formation, and proposing adaptive strategies to sustain religious identity amidst demographic change, the project seeks to contribute to the revitalization of authentically Christian higher education in service of the church’s mission.

The Methodology Used for the Project

This project aims to offer strategies to Christian universities that they can employ to attract and enroll Convictional Christians successfully. In order to accomplish this, the researcher designed a research question and devised a methodology that could execute the project. The methodology used consisted of qualitative research—the use of personal interviews with key informants from five selected Christian universities that have successfully attracted and sustained conventional Christians in their student body.

The Researchable Question

The research question is, “Will selected universities that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians exhibit common strategies?” This project seeks to demonstrate that a similar set of strategies is common to every university that has successfully dealt with this issue.

¹⁸ Dockery and Morgan, *Christian Higher Education*, loc. 9.55.

The Treatment Methodology

A comprehensive two-part methodology will test the hypothesis and answer the research question. This approach includes selecting institutions based on their engagement with the Convictional Christian market, analyzing literature and case studies, and performing in-depth interviews with selected informants. This methodology aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how selected universities have successfully engaged with their target market.

This researcher wanted to demonstrate a relationship between those institutions that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians amid the secularization of culture. For this correlation to be established, institutions now experiencing success in attracting and enrolling Convictional Christians must utilize common tactics and strategies. Therefore, this project aimed to expose and discern those strategies through qualitative research, such as personal interviews.

The personal interviews utilized key informants from five evangelical Christian universities known to have experienced success in attracting and enrolling Convictional Christians. The informants were carefully pre-selected individuals representing positions and relationships within the institution who were most knowledgeable and involved in setting and administering the vision and mission of the institution. These research participants included the President, Cabinet, selected faculty, and administrators.

To garner the information necessary to determine whether an institution successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians, an unaided quantitative survey was distributed via email to 2,532 individuals familiar with Christian higher education. To garner the information necessary to determine whether informants were qualified, they relied on the President of their delegate to provide proper direction.

The answers from the personal interviews were synthesized and organized into a format that limited each primary question to seven statistically significant responses. Responses were compared between the key informants of each institution to determine internal consistency. Likewise, responses were compared between the five institutions to determine commonality since the existence of “common strategies” answers the research question.

The researcher established several parameters for this dissertation to help the reader better understand the particulars of the content. These parameters include definitions of essential terms used in this dissertation, some of which are esoteric to this work. They also include the author’s assumptions and a list of delimitations or boundaries of what the researcher will consist of in this project.

The Parameters for the Project

The researcher established several parameters for this dissertation that expand its clarity to the reader. These parameters include definitions of important topic-specific terms used in this dissertation, the researcher’s assumptions in the design and implementation of the project, and a list of delimitations—clearer boundaries of what the researcher will include in this project.

Definitions of Terms for the Project

1. Adaptive Strategies: Systematic approaches and methodologies adopted by Christian universities to address and respond to changing external conditions, ensuring the sustainability of their mission, values, and financial health.¹⁹

¹⁹ “Strategic Adaptation in Higher Education: Navigating 2024 and Beyond,” accessed December 14, 2023, <https://changinghighered.com/strategic-adaptation-for-higher-education/>.

2. **Biblical Worldview:** A perspective on life and the world that is based on the teachings and principles found in the Bible. It encompasses understanding and interpreting all aspects of existence—including ethics, morality, science, and culture—through the lens of Scripture, guiding individuals and institutions in their decision-making and actions to reflect Christian values and beliefs.²⁰
3. **Convictional Christian:** Refers to an individual who adheres firmly and unwaveringly to the core beliefs and teachings of Christianity as outlined in the Bible. They organize their lives around a Biblical Worldview. This adherence is not merely intellectual but is deeply integrated into all aspects of life, influencing decisions, behaviors, and interactions with others. Convictional Christians commit to living out their faith through actions that reflect the moral and ethical standards of biblical teachings, including but not limited to practices of integrity, humility, servant leadership, and stewardship. They maintain a worldview that recognizes the authority of Scripture in personal and communal life and actively engage in practices that nurture their spiritual growth and deepen their understanding of God’s Word. In Christian higher education, Convictional Christians play a pivotal role in embodying and promoting the institution’s mission to fuse faith with learning, ensuring that academic and organizational practices are aligned with Christian principles.²¹
4. **Cultural Christian:** A Cultural Christian is a person who identifies as Christian due to family background, social context, or cultural heritage but may not necessarily hold to

²⁰ David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundation of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2002), 24, 278.

²¹ “Are You a Convictional Christian,” Faith Radio (blog), June 11, 2016, <https://myfaithradio.com/2016/are-you-a-Convictional-christian/>.

the core doctrines or actively practice the faith. They may participate in Christian traditions and rituals, but their beliefs and lifestyle may not align with biblical teachings. Cultural Christianity is often more concerned with social norms and expectations than personal conviction and transformation. Dean Inserra adds color to the definition in his book *The Unsaved Christian*, saying, “The Jesus of Cultural Christianity is a type of historical imaginary friend with magical powers for good luck and sentimentality. “Amazing Grace” is a song known from memory, but why that grace is amazing cannot be explained. The God of Cultural Christianity is the “big man upstairs,” and whether He is holy and people have sinned against Him is irrelevant. Words such as “hope,” “faith,” and “believe” hang on the walls of living rooms as decorations, but the actual words of God only come around when Psalm 23 is read at a loved one’s funeral.”²²

5. Cultural Shifts: Changes in societal norms, values, and behaviors that influence the expectations and preferences of students, faculty, and the broader community associated with Christian higher education.²³
6. Demographic Changes: Shifts in the characteristics of population groups over time, including age, ethnicity, gender, and religious affiliation, which impact enrollment and strategic planning in higher education.²⁴

²² Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), loc. 8.13.

²³ Philip W. Eaton, *Engaging the Culture, Changing the World: The Christian University in a Post-Christian World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 88–91.

²⁴ Nathan D. Grawe, *The Agile College: How Institutions Successfully Navigate Demographic Changes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), loc. 18.2.

7. **Evangelical Christian Universities:** These higher education institutions have a core mission centered around evangelical Christian doctrine and values, emphasizing the integration of faith and learning in their educational offerings.
8. **Financial Sustainability:** The ability of an institution to maintain financial health over the long term, balancing budgets while investing in mission-critical activities and adapting to external economic pressures.
9. **Innovative Practices:** These play a significant role in Christian universities by introducing new or creative approaches to education, administration, and mission fulfillment as a response to demographic and cultural changes.
10. **Mission Alignment:** The degree to which organizational practices, policies, and strategic decisions are consistent with the university's foundational Christian mission and values.
11. **Paradigm shift:** A fundamental change in the underlying assumptions or approaches that shape an individual's or organization's perspective and decision-making processes. This transformation often involves reevaluating and modifying the core beliefs, values, and strategies that guide actions and choices.
12. **Spiritual Priorities:** Core religious and ethical commitments that guide Christian universities' mission, values, and decision-making processes.
13. **Traditional Target Audience:** The specific demographic segment historically served by Christian universities, often characterized by shared religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and educational expectations.

Assumptions of the Project

1. Participants in surveys and interviews are presumed to offer truthful and constructive feedback, reflecting their genuine experiences and perceptions to inform the study's findings and recommendations.
2. Evangelical Christian universities are inherently committed to integrating faith into their educational and operational practices, aiming to uphold their mission and identity amidst changing demographics.
3. Demographic shifts significantly challenge Evangelical Christian universities, influencing enrollment, financial health, and mission sustainability and necessitating strategic adaptability.²⁵
4. Christian universities can evolve in response to external pressures while maintaining their core values, which are essential for their continued relevance and success.
5. Leadership within Christian universities plays a pivotal role in addressing demographic challenges through the formulation and execution of effective strategies.
6. Christian higher education is assumed to offer unique value to society, contributing to individual and communal well-being through ethical, spiritual, and service-oriented educational experiences.²⁶
7. The decision-making processes in Christian universities are guided by unwavering adherence to Biblical principles, shaping responses to contemporary challenges.

²⁵ "Church Of Christ Affiliated Universities Face Challenging Demographic Shift," Religion Unplugged, November 21, 2022, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/11/14/church-of-christ-affiliated-universities-face-challenging-demographic-shift>.

²⁶ "The Value of Christian Higher Education," CCCU, accessed September 8, 2023, <https://www.cccu.org/magazine/the-value-of-christian-higher-education/>.

8. The landscape of Christian higher education encompasses various theological, cultural, and educational perspectives, affecting approaches to adaptation.
9. Engaging stakeholder groups (faculty, students, alums, community, staff, board, and leadership) is crucial for the strategic adaptation of Christian universities, ensuring broad-based support and input.
10. Financial challenges are a significant hurdle for Christian universities, but opportunities exist for innovative, mission-aligned financial models.²⁷
11. Christian universities operate within a broader cultural and societal context, facing pressures that test their convictions while offering enrichment and outreach opportunities.
12. George Barna's framework from his book *Think Like Jesus* provides an adequate and appropriate representation of a Biblical Worldview for the analysis and discussion in this dissertation.²⁸ While acknowledging the existence of various other constructs, this researcher uses Barna's framework to understand and analyze the theological aspects of the study, particularly in Chapter Two, which focuses on the Biblical and Theological Foundation.
13. It is acknowledged that the spiritual journeys within Christianity are complex and multifaceted. The distinction between Convictional and Cultural Christians is a starting point for discussion, understanding that these categories do not fully capture the nuances of personal faith and spiritual growth. This assumption encourages more

²⁷ "Are Faith-Based Colleges in Trouble? It Depends," Higher Ed Dive, accessed February 9, 2024, <https://www.highereddive.com/news/are-faith-based-colleges-in-trouble-it-depends/690597/>.

²⁸ George Barna, *Think Like Jesus: Make The Right Decision Every Time* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

profound reflection on individual faith practice and spiritual development while considering the subjective nature of spiritual experiences influenced by context and environment.

14. NVivo, a widely recognized qualitative data analysis software, serves as a helpful tool for identifying and visualizing sentiment themes within the transcripts alongside the researcher's interpretations.²⁹

Delimitations of the Project

1. The research focuses specifically on the strategies of Evangelical Christian universities to attract and retain Convictional Christian students rather than examining the broader landscape of higher education institutions.
2. The study aims to identify common practices and approaches among the participating universities, rather than providing an exhaustive analysis of all potential strategies for engaging Convictional Christian students.
3. The data collection is limited to interviews with key informants, such as Presidents, Provosts, VP of Enrollment, VP of Marketing, and VP of Student Life, who are directly involved in shaping and implementing Convictional Christian student engagement strategies. This study does not include the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, students, and alums.
4. The research employs a qualitative methodology, relying on semi-structured interviews and content analysis to identify themes and patterns in the data.

²⁹ NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software package developed by QSR International (<https://lumivero.wpengine.com/products/nvivo/>). It helps researchers organize, analyze, and visualize qualitative data, such as interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions. In this research, NVivo is used to identify and visualize sentiment themes within the transcripts of interviews.

- Quantitative methods, such as surveys or statistical analysis, are not utilized in this study.
5. The findings of this study are based on the experiences and insights of five selected Evangelical Christian universities and may not be generalizable to all institutions within this category. These universities' unique characteristics and contexts should be considered when interpreting and applying the results.
 6. The study's scope is limited to universities that identify as Evangelical Christian, and the findings may not apply to institutions with different religious affiliations or philosophical orientations.
 7. The key informants' knowledge, experiences, and perceptions bound the data collected through interviews. The accuracy and completeness of the information shared by the participants may impact the study's findings.
 8. The researcher's ability to identify and analyze common strategies is limited by the depth and richness of the data obtained through the interviews and the effectiveness of the coding and thematic analysis process.

The Organization of the Project

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the study and the rationale for the project. This includes a discussion of the problem being addressed and an outline of the treatment applied. Additionally, the writer assists the reader in using this dissertation by establishing several parameters, including the project's definitions, assumptions, and limitations.

Chapter two will establish a biblical and theological foundation for the project. This chapter develops a biblical philosophy of a Convictional Christian, explaining why it is important and contrasting it to a Cultural Christian. The chapter addresses the seven biblical

worldview questions outlined in George Barna's book *Think Like Jesus*.³⁰ These questions cover essential aspects of the Christian faith, such as God's existence and nature, the world's creation, the purpose of humanity, the afterlife, spiritual authorities, and the nature of truth. The chapter explores each question from a Convictional and Cultural Christian perspective, highlighting the differences.

After addressing the worldview questions, the chapter discusses how Convictional Christians move from belief to behavior, drawing insights from Barna's work and Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.³¹ This section emphasizes the importance of integrating faith across all aspects of life and allowing biblical beliefs to shape one's actions and decisions.

The chapter then highlights specific traits and characteristics of a Convictional Christian, such as continuous spiritual growth, integrity, faithfulness, courage in witness and suffering, community focus, and gracious engagement with culture. These traits are grounded in the authority of Scripture, the lordship of Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of the Christian community.

This chapter aims to provide a solid biblical and theological foundation for understanding the importance of being a Convictional Christian and its implications for living out one's faith in the world.

Chapter three reviews the literature on Convictional Christianity's role in Christian universities, aligning with the thesis's focus on faith's impact on higher education. It explores the integration of biblical principles in university missions and operations, the challenges of maintaining these convictions against secular influences, and strategies for navigating these

³⁰ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*.

³¹ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994).

issues without compromising on biblical truths. Additionally, it highlights successful implementations of Convictional Christianity in Christian universities, examining leadership, stewardship, and ethical practices. This chapter shows how Convictional Christianity can enhance Christian higher education's integrity and societal impact, contributing to the thesis's exploration of faith-based organizational practices.

Chapter four presents the design of the research aspect of this thesis project and the methodology and operationalization used to answer the essential research question. The purpose of the project, the research perspective of the project, and the context of the project will then be outlined. Part of the project context will describe the selection process used to identify potential respondents. The strategy to be used by this writer to test the research question will be a quantitative study in the form of an online survey tool to provide a nuanced understanding of how Christian universities are responding to demographic changes while striving to maintain their faith-based mission. This analysis draws on the data collected from case studies, interviews, and literature review, interpreting the implications of these strategies for the institutions' sustainability and identity.

Chapter five summarizes, organizes, and evaluates the results of the project. This evaluation, in addition to a presentation of the results. This chapter will reintroduce the research question and hypothesis and assess whether the research supports the hypothesis. The writer believes that growing conservative evangelical Christian universities that target Convictional Christians will use common strategies. The desired outcome is to equip Christian universities with effective strategies and practical approaches from successful institutions for navigating financial challenges and fostering a thriving environment in the Convictional Christian market.

Chapter six summarizes the project, including a list of conclusions and recommendations for further study drawn from the project findings.

Appendices, including the research instrument used, survey contents, and other material germane to this study, will follow chapter six, along with a bibliography of all significant literature and source materials consulted.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate the logic of this project. First, there was a presentation of the rationale of the project, including a significant discussion of the problem being addressed and the methodology used in carrying out the project to answer the research question. The researcher contended that the project was born from his experience of observing struggles within Christian higher education to attract and sustain relationships with Convictional Christians. Since these struggles became debilitating to Christian institutions, the writer hypothesized that a solution existed. The methodology used to prove such a hypothesis in answer to the research question was detailed.

Second, for the sake of assisting the reader, several parameters for the project were established. These parameters included the definitions of topic-specific words and phrases throughout the dissertation. Additionally, the writer's assumptions regarding the design and implementation of the project were listed. Finally, delimitations were included to clarify to the reader what the researcher is attempting to accomplish by listing those similar but subsidiary interests he is not pursuing.

Third, the researcher summarized the organization of the thesis, including an overview of chapters two through six

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

This chapter examines the foundations of Convictional Christianity from a biblical and theological context. Although “Convictional Christian” does not occur in Scripture, this chapter will illustrate how God’s people were committed to integrating their faith across their lives and the actions described and implied throughout the Old and New Testaments.

First, this chapter will address the biblical and theological beliefs of Convictional Christians using a framework outlined in George Barna’s book *Think Like Jesus*, where he suggested that Convictional Christians must be able to answer seven biblical worldview questions.³² Each of the seven questions will address both the Convictional and cultural perspectives.

The second part of this chapter will continue leveraging Barna’s book and review how Convictional Christians move from belief to behavior. This transition from belief to behavior provides a glimpse into the spiritual journey of a Christian moving from merely believing in the teachings of the Bible to allowing these beliefs to change their behavior tangibly. Mark Knoll’s book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* underscores the critical need for Christians to engage deeply and thoughtfully with their faith, not only at the level of personal belief but also in how those beliefs are lived out in daily actions and interactions. Noll’s analysis reveals a historical and ongoing challenge within the Christian community to bridge the gap between intellectual

³² Barna, *Think Like Jesus*.

affirmation of scriptural truths and the practical application of these truths in a manner that transforms behavior.³³ The journey from belief to behavior for Christians involves embracing biblical teachings and a rigorous and reflective engagement with those teachings that prompt a meaningful change in how one lives out one's faith in the world. The purpose of this chapter is to survey and analyze the biblical record, highlighting the importance of living a life of deep personal conviction by integrating faith across lives and actions.

As I explore the distinction between Convictional and Cultural Christians, I want to offer a preface acknowledging the complexity of our spiritual journeys. While I aim to draw distinctions to illuminate differences, I am aware that the reality of our spiritual journeys is far more nuanced than simple categories might suggest. The goal here is not to set up a rigid dichotomy but to invite us to reflect more deeply on our faith practice and spiritual journey. Where can we live more intentionally, more Convictionally, in alignment with our deepest beliefs?

This movement from belief to behavior is all about obedience. As Paul writes,

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.³⁴

In his commentary on *Paul's Letters to the Philippians*, Gordon Fee expounds on the idea of “work out your salvation” from Philippians 2:12, where he points out that this process is all about “obedience” to the gospel.³⁵

³³ Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

³⁴ Phil. 2:12–13

³⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), loc. 17.504.

Thus, while this chapter seeks to clarify concepts and motivate toward more profound conviction, it is with an understanding that labels like “Cultural Christian” are shorthand for a wide array of individual experiences and beliefs. These distinctions serve as tools for academic exploration and personal reflection, not as judgments.

Seven Biblical Worldview Questions

In *Think Like Jesus* by George Barna, believers are invited to answer seven pivotal questions about embodying a Christian worldview.³⁶ These questions, ranging from the existence and nature of God to the purpose of humanity and the essence of truth, are foundational for any Convictional Christian seeking to align their life fully with biblical teachings. While acknowledging that many other questions could be explored, Barna asserts that these seven will “facilitate a practical and sufficiently comprehensive understanding of God’s truths and principles.” This journey, as outlined by Barna, is not just about acquiring knowledge but about transforming one’s life to reflect the truths of Scripture in a tangible, impactful way.³⁷ Barna states that the “ultimate objective of these questions is to provide a clear, comprehensive, and unified understanding of all reality that will enable us to live like genuine Christians, as originally envisioned by God. These questions should take us from the beginning of eternity to its end and touch on everything of significance in between those time-space bookends.”³⁸

³⁶ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*. loc. 11.23

³⁷ Barna, loc. 10.39.

³⁸ Barna, loc. 11.34.

Does God Really Exist?

Barna suggests that the most important inquiries about God revolve around His existence and His characteristics if He does exist. The issue of God's existence is crucial because it dictates whether we need to consider a supreme being. If God is not real, it significantly alters our understanding of reality, ethics, principles, meaning, conduct, and what happens after death.³⁹

In *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics*, R.C. Sproul presents a compelling argument for the rationality of Christian faith, underscoring the significance of engaging with profound questions, including the existence of God. Addressing the question of God's existence is not just an intellectual exercise but a crucial aspect of being a Convictional Christian. Sproul articulates that the foundation of Christianity is not rooted in irrational belief or blind faith but is anchored in rationality and truth. By exploring the rational underpinnings of the Christian faith, Sproul demonstrates that Christianity stands up to rigorous scrutiny and logical examination. This approach strengthens the believer's faith and equips them to defend their beliefs confidently despite skepticism and doubt. Thus, engaging with the question of God's existence is vital for anyone committed to living out their faith with conviction and integrity, offering a reasoned defense for their hope.⁴⁰

A Convictional Christian believes that the God described in the Bible exists. Their belief is rooted in faith in God and His word, as Scripture reveals. According to Ron Nash's *Life's Ultimate Questions*, a Convictional Christian's belief in the God of the Bible is grounded in a rational, experientially consistent worldview, detailed in his book, which integrates faith with

³⁹ Barna, loc. 11.36.

⁴⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).

logical and practical life application.⁴¹ As the author of Hebrews states, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see...And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”⁴² This faith comes from hearing Christ’s word; as Paul writes in Romans, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”⁴³ While it is impossible to definitively prove God’s existence, as Paul writes in Romans, “God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.”⁴⁴ Isaiah continues that it is beyond human comprehension, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”⁴⁵

Nash continues the thought, emphasizing that the universe’s astonishing complexity, beauty, and design suggest a powerful, intelligent Creator by drawing on examples of specified DNA complexity and molecular machines’ functional intricacy. He distinguishes between patterns that arise naturally and those that indicate an intelligent design, underscoring the argument for a deliberate creator behind the universe’s marvels. ⁴⁶ As the Psalmist declares, “The

⁴¹ Ronald H. Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

⁴² Heb. 11:1, 6

⁴³ Rom. 10:17

⁴⁴ 1 Tim. 6:15–16

⁴⁵ Isa. 55:8–9

⁴⁶ Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions*.

heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”⁴⁷ The apostle Paul argues that “since the world’s creation, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”⁴⁸ The intricacy is too great to have arisen by mere chance, for “How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures”⁴⁹, and “But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.”⁵⁰

Human logic reasons that the universe and life must have an ultimate cause and creator. In his book *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, Josh McDowell provides a compelling case for the existence of an ultimate cause and creator of the universe and life, utilizing a multidisciplinary approach that underscores the rationality of theistic belief within the Christian framework.⁵¹ The Bible declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”⁵² The apostle Paul further explains, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”⁵³

⁴⁷ Ps. 19:1

⁴⁸ Rom. 1:20

⁴⁹ Ps. 104:24

⁵⁰ Jer. 10:12

⁵¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Nelson, 1999).

⁵² Gen. 1:1

⁵³ Col. 1:16–17

God has revealed Himself through historical events and miracles. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground and saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore, “And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.”⁵⁴ The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus’ many signs and wonders were written down “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”⁵⁵ Moses wrote about how God had also spoken to people through dreams, visions, and prophecy, as He says in Numbers, “When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams”,⁵⁶ and as Joel prophesies, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”⁵⁷ But most significantly, God has revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ as the writer of Hebrews captured, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”⁵⁸ And John wrote that Jesus told His disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”⁵⁹

In *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, John Frame contends that the Bible itself, miraculously written and preserved, reveals who God is and how He has

⁵⁴ Exod. 14:31

⁵⁵ John 20:31

⁵⁶ Num. 12:6

⁵⁷ Joel 2:28

⁵⁸ Heb. 1:1–2

⁵⁹ John 14:9

interacted with humanity.⁶⁰ Paul reminds Timothy that “All Scripture is God-breathed,”⁶¹ and Peter affirms, “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”⁶²

A Convictional Christian believes acknowledging God’s existence should dramatically shape one’s worldview and life—submitting to His authority, as James exhorts, “Submit yourselves, then, to God,”⁶³ seeking to know Him, as God promises in Jeremiah, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart,”⁶⁴ and living in alignment with His purposes and commands, as Micah instructs, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”⁶⁵

According to Nash, alternative worldviews denying God fail due to their inability to offer a coherent, comprehensive, and satisfying account of reality that aligns with our deepest intuitions about morality, purpose, and the divine. Nash argues that this inadequacy highlights the superiority of the Christian worldview, as it addresses these existential concerns and provides a basis for objective truth, moral values, and ultimate meaning.⁶⁶ As the Psalmist asserts, “The

⁶⁰ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

⁶¹ 2 Tim. 3:16

⁶² 2 Pet. 1:21

⁶³ James 4:7

⁶⁴ Jer. 29:13

⁶⁵ Mic. 6:8

⁶⁶ Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions*.

fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’”,⁶⁷ and Paul writes, “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”⁶⁸

In contrast, a Cultural Christian, while claiming belief in the God of the Bible, tends to have a much looser and surface-level belief. They intellectually assent to God’s existence because it is culturally expected. In *Growing True Disciples*, George Barna states that Cultural Christians are distinguished from true disciples by their superficial faith versus a deep, transformative relationship with Jesus Christ.⁶⁹ Isaiah writes that the Lord says of them, “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”⁷⁰ However, this belief does not significantly inform their worldview or change how they live, showing their faith to be dead and useless, as James argues, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”⁷¹

A research report from the American Biblical Society, *The State of the Bible 2023*, supports that Cultural Christians are less rooted in Scripture and may rely more on generic philosophical “proofs” of God rather than personal faith. The report provides a nuanced view of Americans’ relationship with the Bible, illustrating that while some Americans deeply engage with Scripture and see it as central to their faith, others have a more distant or philosophical

⁶⁷ Ps. 14:1

⁶⁸ 1 Cor. 1:20

⁶⁹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, Barna Reports for Highly Effective Churches (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Isa. 29:13

⁷¹ James 2:14,26

approach to spirituality. This reflects a spectrum of beliefs where Cultural Christians fit, accommodating a wide range of secular reasoning and alternative worldviews without a deep engagement with Scripture.⁷² Their perspective accommodates secular reasoning and alternative worldviews, failing to heed Paul’s admonition, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you can test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”⁷³ Paul warns the Colossians, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.”⁷⁴ For the Cultural Christian, belief in God is more a general idea than a life-altering truth to be pursued, having “a form of godliness but denying its power.”⁷⁵

As described in *Think Like Jesus*, Barna suggests that Cultural Christians often believe in God, which fails to significantly impact their daily decisions and lifestyle due to a lack of a biblical worldview. Cultural Christians might identify with the Christian faith, yet their practices and choices remain uninfluenced by biblical teachings, highlighting a disconnect between professed belief and lived reality. The absence of a deeply integrated faith underscores the challenge Cultural Christians face in aligning their day-to-day lives with the transformative principles of the Bible.⁷⁶ They act like the Apostle Paul describes that they “claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything

⁷² Jeffery Fulks, Randy Petersen, and John Farquhar Plake, *The State of the Bible 2023: Research from The American Bible Society* (New York: The American Bible Society, 2023).

⁷³ Rom. 12:2

⁷⁴ Col. 2:8

⁷⁵ 2 Tim. 3:5

⁷⁶ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 11.35.

good.”⁷⁷ Following God’s commands is secondary to pursuing self-fulfillment; as described by Timothy, they are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”⁷⁸ As John records, Jesus unequivocally declared, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”,⁷⁹ and Peter proclaimed to the Jewish leaders, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”⁸⁰

In summary, while both claim belief in God, for a Convictional Christian, this is a core, life-defining tenet with profound implications. The research from the *State of the Bible 2023* supports the statement by illustrating a spectrum of faith engagement among Americans, showing that for Convictional Christians, belief in God is indeed a core, life-defining tenet with profound implications.⁸¹ The Convictional Christian actively orients their life around God, seeking first His kingdom and righteousness, as Matthew recorded that Jesus commanded, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”⁸²; the Cultural Christian does not, honoring God with their lips while their heart is far from Him, as Jesus quoted Isaiah, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”⁸³

⁷⁷ Titus 1:16

⁷⁸ 2 Tim. 3:4

⁷⁹ John 14:6

⁸⁰ Acts 4:12

⁸¹ Fulks, Petersen, and Plake, *The State of the Bible 2023: Research from The American Bible Society*.

⁸² Matt. 6:33

⁸³ Matt. 15:8

What Is the Character and Nature of God?

Barna suggests that God's existence and nature are the most fundamental questions in theology, as they determine the necessity of acknowledging a divine being and the implications for various aspects of life, including truth, morality, values, purpose, behavior, and the afterlife. If God exists, His nature and character become paramount, as everything under His authority must correspond to His essence, making His purposes and intentions of ultimate significance to His creations.⁸⁴

In *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer, exploring God's character and nature is not an intellectual exercise but an essential pursuit for the Convictional Christian. Tozer posits that understanding the attributes of God—His incomprehensibility, self-existence, self-sufficiency, eternity, and the unity and co-equality within the Trinity, among others—is crucial not only for the enrichment of the Christian life but also for its very foundation. This profound journey into the nature of God serves as a call to deepen one's faith and worship, rooted in a better understanding of who God is.

Tozer argues that the majesty and mystery of God's nature should draw Christians to adore and seek Him more fervently. The Convictional Christian, therefore, needs to grapple with questions about the character and nature of God because these questions touch the core of our existence and relationship with the Divine. Without attempting to comprehend God fully—which Tozer acknowledges is beyond human capability—the aim is to foster a reverence and awe that aligns with the truth of God's self-revelation through Scripture and the incarnation of Christ.

⁸⁴ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 11.38–11.40.

In today's world, where the concept of God is often diluted or misunderstood, Tozer's call to contemplate the nature of God is both timely and timeless. It serves as a counter to the prevailing trends of secularization and shallow religiosity, guiding believers to anchor their lives and faith in the unchanging nature of God. This introspection into the character of God, as outlined by Tozer, is not just a theological endeavor but a path to transforming one's life to reflect God's holiness, love, and sovereignty.⁸⁵

Barna states that for Convictional Christians, the character and nature of God are deeply rooted in the Scriptures, reflecting an understanding that God is not just a distant, supreme being but a personal, loving Creator who desires a relationship with humanity. They see God's nature as fundamentally loving, just, and holy. Convictional Christians believe in the Triune God—Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit—three persons in one essence, foundational to their understanding of God's character. God's love is exemplified in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of humanity, a core tenet of their faith.

God is also seen as omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (present everywhere), qualities that transcend human understanding but are embraced as part of the divine mystery. These attributes are not seen as abstract concepts but as integral to understanding how God interacts with the world and individuals. Convictional Christians lean on the Bible to understand God's holiness, demanding separation from sin and His righteousness, calling for justice and moral purity.

They often emphasize the relational aspects of God's nature, highlighting that God created humans in His image to establish a loving relationship. This view underscores a God who

⁸⁵ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God, Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

is actively involved in the lives of believers, guiding, providing for, and protecting them while also disciplining them out of love. Convictional Christians believe in responding to God’s love and greatness by living lives that reflect His character—pursuing holiness, loving others, and adhering to His commandments. A Convictional Christian holds the belief that the Bible accurately and precisely describes God’s character and nature.⁸⁶

As John recorded, Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”⁸⁷ The Psalmist affirms God’s eternal nature, declaring, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.”⁸⁸ Jeremiah proclaims, “But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King.”⁸⁹ The Bible opens with Moses stating, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”⁹⁰, and the Psalmist extols, “Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom...The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.”⁹¹

In His greatness, God possesses limitless knowledge; as the Psalmist marvels, “Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.”⁹² The apostle John confirms, “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”⁹³ God Himself declares, “I make

⁸⁶ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*.

⁸⁷ John 4:24

⁸⁸ Ps. 90:2

⁸⁹ Jer. 10:10a

⁹⁰ Gen. 1:1

⁹¹ Ps. 145:3, 8

⁹² Ps. 147:5

⁹³ 1 John 3:20b

known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.”⁹⁴ God’s omnipotence is seen in Job’s acknowledgment, “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”⁹⁵ Jeremiah addresses God, “Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.”⁹⁶ Jesus reminds His disciples, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”⁹⁷ God’s omnipresence is captured by the Psalmist’s rhetorical questions, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?”⁹⁸ God Himself asks, “Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” declares the Lord. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?”⁹⁹ God’s triune nature is seen in Jesus’ command to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”¹⁰⁰ and in Paul’s benediction, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”¹⁰¹

In His goodness, the seraphim proclaims God’s holiness, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”¹⁰² Peter exhorts believers, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”¹⁰³

⁹⁴ Isa. 46:10a

⁹⁵ Job 42:2

⁹⁶ Jer. 32:17

⁹⁷ Matt. 19:26b

⁹⁸ Ps. 139:7

⁹⁹ Jer. 23:24

¹⁰⁰ Matt. 28:19b

¹⁰¹ 2 Cor. 13:14

¹⁰² Isa. 6:3b

¹⁰³ 1 Pet. 1:15–16

Habakkuk affirms, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.”¹⁰⁴ God’s love is inseparable from His nature; as John writes, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”¹⁰⁵ Paul highlights the depth of God’s love: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁰⁶ When God revealed His glory to Moses, He proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”¹⁰⁷ Moses celebrates God’s faithfulness: “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.”¹⁰⁸ Jeremiah praises God’s faithful compassion: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”¹⁰⁹ Paul assures Timothy, “if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”¹¹⁰ The Psalmist extolls God’s righteousness: “The Lord is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.”¹¹¹ Jeremiah delights that God “exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth.”¹¹² Paul

¹⁰⁴ Hab. 1:13a

¹⁰⁵ 1 John 4:8

¹⁰⁶ Rom. 5:8

¹⁰⁷ Exod. 34:6–7a

¹⁰⁸ Deut. 7:9

¹⁰⁹ Lam. 3:22–23

¹¹⁰ 2 Tim. 2:13

¹¹¹ Ps. 145:17

¹¹² Jer. 9:24b

proclaims that God “will judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed.”¹¹³

Malachi declares God’s immutability: “I the Lord do not change.”¹¹⁴ James writes, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”¹¹⁵ The author of Hebrews affirms, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”¹¹⁶

A Convictional Christian believes understanding God’s attributes should profoundly shape one’s life. The author of Hebrews urges, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.”¹¹⁷ The Psalmist calls for unending gratitude: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”¹¹⁸ Paul exhorts believers to imitate God “as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”¹¹⁹ God’s holiness necessitates Christ’s atonement for us to have a relationship with Him. Peter explains, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”¹²⁰ Paul considers “everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”¹²¹

¹¹³ Acts 17:31b

¹¹⁴ Mal. 3:6a

¹¹⁵ James 1:17

¹¹⁶ Heb. 13:8

¹¹⁷ Heb. 12:28

¹¹⁸ Ps. 107:1

¹¹⁹ Eph. 5:1–2

¹²⁰ 1 Pet. 3:18a

¹²¹ Phil. 3:8a

Barna contrasts that a Cultural Christian will likely have a more limited and ambiguous view of God's attributes. They may agree in principle that God has the qualities described in the Bible but tend to emphasize aspects that are more understandable or appealing from a human perspective. Cultural Christians might adopt a more nuanced or varied view of the character and nature of God, often influenced by broader societal values, personal experiences, and philosophical reflections rather than strictly biblical interpretations. For many, the image of God may align more with a universal sense of a higher power or a divine force that is inherently good rather than the more defined, personal God of Convictional Christianity.

They may see God as a symbol of love, goodness, and moral guidance, emphasizing the ethical teachings attributed to God, such as the importance of love, compassion, and justice, without necessarily adhering to the doctrinal specifics about God's nature and existence outlined in Christian Scriptures.

Cultural Christians might appreciate the stories and teachings about God found in the Bible as important moral lessons and part of their cultural heritage without necessarily believing in the divine inspiration of these texts. The focus is often more on the practical implications of belief in God—how it influences moral behavior, promotes social justice, and provides a sense of community and belonging—rather than on theological specifics.

For some, God is seen as an impersonal force or essence that pervades the universe, guiding its natural processes and inspiring awe and wonder. This perspective might downplay the traditional Christian understanding of God as a being with whom one can have a personal

relationship in favor of a more deistic or panentheistic view that emphasizes God's presence in the world and in the beauty of creation.¹²²

Paul warns of a time when people will have "itching ears" and will "accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their desires."¹²³

A Cultural Christian may focus on God's love while downplaying His holiness and righteousness. In presuming upon God's grace, they resemble the wicked whom God rebukes: "You thought I was exactly like you."¹²⁴ They may gravitate to seeing God as generally powerful and knowledgeable but not to the extent that He is all-controlling or all-knowing. However, the Psalmist reminds us, "The Lord knows all human plans; he knows that they are futile."¹²⁵ John warns against the inconsistency of claiming "to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness," for then "we lie and do not live out the truth."¹²⁶

Cultural Christians may struggle with God's triune nature, finding it confusing or objectionable. However, this is unsurprising since "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."¹²⁷ They likely do not grasp the full extent of God's transcendence and perfection, even though God Himself declares, "As

¹²² Barna, *Think Like Jesus*.

¹²³ 2 Tim. 4:3b

¹²⁴ Ps. 50:21b

¹²⁵ Ps. 94:11

¹²⁶ 1 John 1:6

¹²⁷ 1 Cor. 2:14

the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”¹²⁸

Overall, the Cultural Christian has an incomplete understanding of God’s character that does not necessarily impact their daily mindset and lifestyle. While they may “claim to know God,” they often “deny him by their actions.”¹²⁹ They assent mentally to biblical descriptions of God but do not fully submit to Him as He reveals Himself. James warns them, “Do not merely listen to the word, and deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”¹³⁰ Like the church in Laodicea, Cultural Christians are often “lukewarm” in their devotion.¹³¹ Their conception of God is more palatable and less demanding than the awe-inspiring, perfect Being who calls for wholehearted allegiance.

In summary, while Convictional and Cultural Christians may profess belief in the biblical God, the former seeks to know and honor God in the fullness of His revealed nature. Like Hosea, their heart’s cry is, “Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him.”¹³² Cultural Christians, however, have a more surface-level view of God’s attributes, which allows them to remain unaffected by who God truly is. The Convictional Christian is progressively

¹²⁸ Isa. 55:9

¹²⁹ Titus 1:16a

¹³⁰ James 1:22

¹³¹ Rev. 3:16a

¹³² Hosea 6:3a

“transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord,”¹³³ while the Cultural Christian honors God “with their lips,” but their “heart is far from” Him.¹³⁴

How and Why Was the World Created?

Barna suggests that the question of how and why the world was created is of utmost importance, as it shapes our understanding of God’s nature, intentions, and purpose. A comprehensive worldview should address the manner of the universe’s creation, God’s power and creativity, the universe’s purpose within God’s eternal plan, and His ongoing role in sustaining and guiding His creation. By exploring these aspects, one can develop a robust understanding of God’s character, intentions, and the significance of the universe in His overarching design, providing a solid foundation for the Christian worldview and distinguishing it from alternative perspectives.¹³⁵

Understanding how and why the world was created is pivotal for a Convictional Christian for several reasons that align with the perspectives shared in Ken Ham’s book, *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*.¹³⁶ The introductory concepts presented in the book underscore the significance of Genesis as the foundation of Christian doctrine, where varying interpretations of creation, evolution, and intelligent design reflect deeper theological and philosophical standings within the Christian community. The dialogue between differing viewpoints—Young Earth Creationism, Old Earth (Progressive) Creationism, Evolutionary

¹³³ 2 Cor. 3:18b

¹³⁴ Matt. 15:8b

¹³⁵ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 11.42–11.43.

¹³⁶ Ken Ham et al., *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

Creation, and Intelligent Design—illustrated in the book is not merely an academic exercise but a vital part of understanding the character of God, His intentions for humanity, and the implications for moral and ethical living. For a Convictional Christian, navigating these perspectives is essential for engaging with the world in an intellectually robust manner and faithful to the teachings of Scripture. Engaging with how and why the world was created also equips Christians to participate meaningfully in societal dialogues, where science and faith often seem at odds. By exploring the diverse viewpoints presented in works like *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*, Christians can better articulate their faith, understand the views of others, and witness to the coherence and depth of the biblical narrative in the context of contemporary scientific understanding.¹³⁷

Barna presents the case of a Convictional Christian who believes that God created the entire universe ex nihilo (out of nothing)¹³⁸ as Moses described in the biblical account in Genesis. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”¹³⁹ “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”¹⁴⁰ This was an intentional act of God’s will and power, not a random or chance event. John wrote in the book of Revelation, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”¹⁴¹ And the Psalmist made a similar comment, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were

¹³⁷ Ham et al.

¹³⁸ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*.

¹³⁹ Gen. 1:1

¹⁴⁰ Heb. 11:3

¹⁴¹ Rev. 4:11

made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth...For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”¹⁴² God spoke creation into existence in an orderly, purposeful process that demonstrates His creative genius and good pleasure in fashioning the world as He desired it to be. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”¹⁴³ “The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be.”¹⁴⁴

While the Bible is not meant to be a scientific textbook detailing every aspect of the creation process, it provides the essential truth of God’s creative work. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”¹⁴⁵ A Convictional Christian accepts this by faith, even as mounting scientific evidence from fields like intelligent design powerfully confirms the necessarily divine origin of the universe’s intricate complexity and fine-tuning. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”¹⁴⁶ “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Ps. 33:6,9

¹⁴³ Gen. 1:31a

¹⁴⁴ Prov. 8:22–23

¹⁴⁵ 2 Tim. 3:16–17

¹⁴⁶ Ps. 19:1

¹⁴⁷ Rom. 1:20

For the Convictional Christian, the “why” of creation is just as important as the “how.” God created and populated the universe with plants, animals, and humans to display His glory, power, and goodness. “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”¹⁴⁸ In particular, He created human beings in His own image to have a special relationship with Him so that they could know, love, and worship Him. “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness’...So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”¹⁴⁹ “The people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”¹⁵⁰

Understanding creation in this way is foundational to the Convictional Christian worldview. It underscores God’s sovereignty: “Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.”¹⁵¹ It highlights the world’s purposeful design: “How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”¹⁵² It establishes humanity’s dignity and need to honor the Creator: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them

¹⁴⁸ Isa. 43:6b–7

¹⁴⁹ Gen. 1:26a,27

¹⁵⁰ Isa. 43:21

¹⁵¹ 1 Chron. 29:11a

¹⁵² Ps. 104:24

with glory and honor.”¹⁵³ It also emphasizes our responsibility to steward the earth God has entrusted to us: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’.”¹⁵⁴ “The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to mankind.”¹⁵⁵ Rightly grasping creation unlocks praise and obedience to God. “Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.”¹⁵⁶ “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”¹⁵⁷

In contrast, a Cultural Christian will likely have a more ambivalent view of the creation account. While they may nominally affirm that God created the world, they are often more persuaded by secular theories like evolution that cast doubt on the Bible’s claims. “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.”¹⁵⁸ “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive

¹⁵³ Ps. 8:3–5

¹⁵⁴ Gen. 1:28

¹⁵⁵ Ps. 115:16

¹⁵⁶ Ps. 148:1–3

¹⁵⁷ Rev. 4:11

¹⁵⁸ 1 Tim. 6:20–21a

philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.”¹⁵⁹

Cultural Christians tend to allegorize the Genesis creation story, seeing it more as symbolic mythology than literal history. “Above all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago, by God’s word, the heavens came into being, and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters, the world of that time was also deluged and destroyed. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”¹⁶⁰ They quickly accommodate evolutionary explanations for the universe’s origins, even if those theories exclude divine intervention. For them, the “how” of creation is uncertain and open to human speculation apart from Scripture. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”¹⁶¹

Additionally, Cultural Christians typically do not reflect much on why God would have created the universe. The question of creation’s purpose is secondary, if not irrelevant, to them. “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be

¹⁵⁹ Col. 2:8

¹⁶⁰ 2 Pet. 3:3–7

¹⁶¹ Prov. 3:5–6

wise, they became fools.”¹⁶² They do not necessarily draw a connection between creation and God’s glory or humanity’s special status and responsibilities before Him.

As a result, Cultural Christians fail to derive appropriate worship, wonder, and gratitude from contemplating creation. Their view of origins does not inform a God-centered perspective on stewardship: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”¹⁶³ It does not shape their approach to science: “Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them.”¹⁶⁴ Nor does it inspire heartfelt praise: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”¹⁶⁵ Focusing more on the speculative mechanics of creation than its revealed meaning, Cultural Christianity lacks the foundation for a robust biblical worldview. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.”¹⁶⁶

In summary, Convictional and Cultural Christians have significantly divergent beliefs about creation. The Convictional Christian fully embraces the Bible’s teaching on both the divine method and reasons for creation: “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”¹⁶⁷ This results in a theocentric worldview. The Cultural Christian downplays or denies core tenets of creation to accommodate secular views. They “will

¹⁶² Rom. 1:21–22

¹⁶³ Gen. 2:15

¹⁶⁴ Ps. 111:2

¹⁶⁵ Ps. 150:6a

¹⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 3:19a

¹⁶⁷ Col. 1:16

turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”¹⁶⁸ This leads to an unbiblical and man-centered worldview. One takes God at His word, and the other leans on human wisdom—with far-reaching implications for all of life. “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”¹⁶⁹

George Barna concludes the discussion with a reflection that, after recognizing God’s existence and character, alongside the reasons and methods behind the universe’s creation, we naturally progress to questioning the purpose behind humanity’s creation. He muses on what reasons God could have for adding humans to an already perfect world characterized by peace and beauty and what unique contributions humans could offer to such a harmoniously created order.¹⁷⁰

What Is the Nature and Purpose of Humanity?

Barna suggests that the existence of humanity is a fundamental aspect of creation, and understanding human life’s inherent characteristics, self-perception, meaning, and purpose is crucial to formulating a comprehensive worldview. Equally important is the process by which we derive our personal attributes and sense of significance. Humans are distinct from all other creatures on Earth due to their unique personality, capacity for reason, and connection with the Creator. Our perception of human value influences our choices concerning our relationships with

¹⁶⁸ 2 Tim. 4:4

¹⁶⁹ 1 Cor. 1:20

¹⁷⁰ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 15.55.

God, others, and the rest of creation, as well as the content of our laws, public policies, moral judgments, and our understanding of human needs and responsibilities.¹⁷¹

Anthony A. Hoekema's book, *Created in God's Image*, discusses the importance of Christians understanding humanity's nature and purpose as described in the Bible. This understanding is crucial because it shapes how Christians live out their faith, interact with others, and care for the environment. By recognizing that humans are created in God's image, Christians are guided in their daily actions and decisions, ensuring they reflect God's love and righteousness. Answering this question helps Christians fulfill their God-given roles, making it a fundamental aspect of living a life that truly honors God.¹⁷²

Barna answered this question in his book by saying that a Convictional Christian believes God created humanity to love and obey Him. Convictional Christians, guided by a deep understanding of Scripture, believe that the nature and purpose of humanity are to reflect God's image, steward His creation, and live in a relationship with Him and others according to His commandments. They see humans as inherently valuable, created with a capacity for love, moral discernment, and fellowship with the Creator. From this perspective, life's purpose is to glorify God through worship, loving service, and obedience, fulfilling the divine mandate to cultivate righteousness and justice in the world.¹⁷³

As Moses declared to Israel, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees

¹⁷¹ Barna, loc. 11.45–11.46.

¹⁷² Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹⁷³ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*.

that I am giving you today for your own good?”¹⁷⁴ Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, concluded, “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”¹⁷⁵ As revealed in Scripture, we exist to have a genuine, intimate relationship with our Creator characterized by wholehearted worship and faithful obedience to His commands. Jesus affirmed, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”¹⁷⁶ Samuel rebuked King Saul, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”¹⁷⁷

This purpose is only fulfilled through total devotion to God—seeking to love Him with all our being. When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”¹⁷⁸ Practically, this involves constant communication with God through prayer, as Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, “pray continually.”¹⁷⁹ It means enjoying His gifts and providence with gratitude: “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received

¹⁷⁴ Deut. 10:12–13

¹⁷⁵ Eccl. 12:13

¹⁷⁶ John 4:23–24

¹⁷⁷ 1 Sam. 15:22

¹⁷⁸ Mark 12:30

¹⁷⁹ 1 Thess. 5:17

with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”¹⁸⁰ Loving God is expressed through serving and sharing His love with others: “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’.”¹⁸¹ Above all, it means worshipping Him as the supreme treasure and authority in life: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”¹⁸²

At the same time, a Convictional Christian recognizes the depth of humanity’s sinful nature inherited from the fall. As David lamented, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”¹⁸³ Paul explained, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”¹⁸⁴ Left to ourselves, we are stubborn, as God told Moses, “I have seen these people, and they are a stiff-necked people.”¹⁸⁵ We are rebellious, as Isaiah proclaimed, “Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken: ‘I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me’.”¹⁸⁶ Our hearts are “deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”¹⁸⁷ In our natural state, we cannot please God, for “Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot

¹⁸⁰ 1 Tim. 4:4–5

¹⁸¹ Gal. 5:13–14

¹⁸² Rom. 12:1

¹⁸³ Ps. 51:5

¹⁸⁴ Rom. 5:12

¹⁸⁵ Exod. 32:9

¹⁸⁶ Isa. 1:2

¹⁸⁷ Jer. 17:9a

please God.”¹⁸⁸ Only by God’s transforming grace through Christ can we be renewed to love and obey Him. As Paul wrote, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”¹⁸⁹ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, a Convictional Christian understands the vital importance of the Church in God’s plan. Paul explained that through the church, “the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁹¹ As a community of believers, we are called to build each other up in faith, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”¹⁹² We are to worship and serve God together, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”¹⁹³ And we are commissioned to

¹⁸⁸ Rom. 8:8

¹⁸⁹ Eph. 2:8–10

¹⁹⁰ 2 Cor. 5:17

¹⁹¹ Eph. 3:10–11

¹⁹² Eph. 4:11–13

¹⁹³ Heb. 10:24–25

proclaim the gospel to the world, as Jesus commanded, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”¹⁹⁴ Active participation in a local church is indispensable to fulfilling our created purpose. The early church modeled this: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.”¹⁹⁵

In summary, for a Convictional Christian, humanity’s meaning is found in being worshippers of God, saved and empowered by grace to love Him and others. Peter declared, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”¹⁹⁶ John explained, “We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”¹⁹⁷ All of life is to be oriented around this God-centered purpose: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”¹⁹⁸

In contrast, a Cultural Christian will likely have a vaguer and more humanistic understanding of humanity’s nature and purpose. While giving lip service to being created by

¹⁹⁴ Matt. 28:19–20a

¹⁹⁵ Acts 2:42,46–47a

¹⁹⁶ 1 Pet. 2:9

¹⁹⁷ 1 John 4:19–20

¹⁹⁸ 1 Cor. 10:31

God, their functional belief is that humans exist primarily for their happiness and self-actualization. Paul warned Timothy, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.”¹⁹⁹

Cultural Christians affirm that we should love and obey God in general, but not with the radical God-centeredness that is called for in Scripture. Jesus rebuked the religious hypocrites, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”²⁰⁰ Worshipping God is compartmentalized into a weekly religious activity rather than being the driving purpose of all of life. God lamented of His people through Isaiah, “The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.’”²⁰¹

Regarding human nature, the Cultural Christian tends to have an overly optimistic view, downplaying the extent and consequences of sin. Through Jeremiah, the Lord declared, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind.”²⁰² They believe people are basically good and can improve themselves morally apart from the gospel, ignoring the biblical diagnosis: “There is no one

¹⁹⁹ 2 Tim. 3:1–5a

²⁰⁰ Matt. 15:8–9

²⁰¹ Isa. 29:13

²⁰² Jer. 17:9–10a

righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, and they have become worthless together; there is no one who does good, not even one.”²⁰³ Cultural Christianity lacks the biblical emphasis on our desperate need for God’s grace to transform sinful hearts. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”²⁰⁴

While Cultural Christians endorse the idea of church involvement, they treat it more as an optional add-on to faith than a vital necessity. The author of Hebrews warned against this: “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”²⁰⁵ The church is there to provide religious services and moral education, but not for all-encompassing discipleship and worship in the community. Paul warned Titus of those “who claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.”²⁰⁶ Commitment is nominal, not wholehearted, like the church in Laodicea whom Jesus rebuked: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”²⁰⁷

Overall, the Cultural Christian has absorbed many worldly assumptions about humanity’s purpose, which is individual enjoyment and fulfillment on our own terms. Like the rich fool in Jesus’ parable who planned to store up treasure for himself, “But God said to him, ‘You fool!

²⁰³ Rom. 3:10–12

²⁰⁴ John 15:5

²⁰⁵ Heb. 10:25

²⁰⁶ Titus 1:16

²⁰⁷ Rev. 3:15–16

This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”²⁰⁸ God is there to help achieve self-centered goals, not to be glorified as the supreme end in Himself, even though “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened...They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.”²⁰⁹ The Cultural Christian worldview falls far short of the biblical vision of humanity finding our identity and mission in God alone, as Paul preached to the Athenians, “For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring’.”²¹⁰

In conclusion, a Convictional Christian embraces the Bible’s teaching that we are created for the ultimate purpose of delighting in and displaying God’s glory, as Isaiah prophesied, “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”²¹¹ Meanwhile, the Cultural Christian settles for a shrunken, me-centered view of humanity that underestimates both God’s holiness and our sinfulness. Like the Laodicean church, they think they are spiritually rich when in fact they are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”²¹² One perspective leads to a radically God-oriented life, as Paul testified, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I

²⁰⁸ Luke 12:20–21

²⁰⁹ Rom. 1:21,25a

²¹⁰ Acts 17:28

²¹¹ Isa. 43:7

²¹² Rev. 3:17b

live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”²¹³ The other results in a nominally religious self-focus, “having a form of godliness but denying its power.”²¹⁴

What Happens After We Die on Earth?

Barna suggests that Christianity uniquely asserts that God desires an eternal relationship with all individuals, subject to certain governing principles. In contrast to other worldviews that deny the eternal significance of life and death, Christianity perceives earthly existence as a prelude to a meaningful future. Exploring the nature of the afterlife has profound implications for our decisions during our time on Earth, setting Christianity apart from alternative perspectives.²¹⁵

A Convictional Christian believes that every human has an immortal soul that will either spend eternity with God in Heaven or suffer everlasting separation from Him in Hell, based on one’s response to Jesus Christ during earthly life. As Jesus declared, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”²¹⁶ Paul warned that God “will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”²¹⁷

The Convictional Christian recognizes that all people are sinners by nature. Paul stated, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”²¹⁸, and David lamented, “Surely I was

²¹³ Gal. 2:20

²¹⁴ 2 Tim. 3:5a

²¹⁵ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 11.48.

²¹⁶ Matt. 25:46

²¹⁷ 2 Thess. 1:8–9

²¹⁸ Rom. 3:23

sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”²¹⁹ Satan constantly tempts us to rebel against God, as seen in the Garden of Eden²²⁰ and warned about by Peter: “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”²²¹ Sin creates an unbridgeable chasm between the holy God and sinful man, as Isaiah declared, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”²²² This incurs God’s righteous judgment, for “the wages of sin is death.”²²³

However, God in His grace, provided the way of salvation through Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross. Paul explained, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”²²⁴ Peter affirmed that Christ “bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.”²²⁵ By confessing sin, repenting, and trusting in Christ alone for forgiveness, one’s sins are atoned for, and a right relationship with God is restored. Peter exhorted, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out”,²²⁶ and Jesus promised, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish

²¹⁹ Ps. 51:5

²²⁰ Gen. 3:1–6

²²¹ 1 Pet. 5:8

²²² Isa. 59:2

²²³ Rom. 6:23a

²²⁴ Eph. 2:8–9

²²⁵ 1 Pet. 2:24a

²²⁶ Acts 3:19a

but have eternal life.”²²⁷ Paul rejoiced, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.”²²⁸ The believer is spiritually reborn, as Jesus told Nicodemus, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”²²⁹ They are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit, for “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”²³⁰ The Spirit enables a life of progressive holiness, as “we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”²³¹

After physical death, the Convictional Christian is confident of immediately being ushered into God’s presence in Heaven for all eternity. Paul declared, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”²³² He also expressed his “desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”²³³ This assurance is based on Christ’s finished work on the cross, when He declared, “It is finished.”²³⁴ In Heaven, believers “will be raised imperishable...raised in glory...raised in power...raised a spiritual body.”²³⁵ They

²²⁷ John 3:16

²²⁸ 2 Cor. 5:18–19a

²²⁹ John 3:3

²³⁰ 1 Cor. 6:19a

²³¹ 2 Cor. 3:18

²³² 2 Cor. 5:8

²³³ Phil. 1:23b

²³⁴ John 19:30a

²³⁵ 1 Cor. 15:42–44

will enjoy a perfect, blessed existence in fellowship with God and other believers forever, as promised in Revelation: “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God will be with them and their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”²³⁶

In contrast, those who reject Christ will be justly condemned for their sins, for “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”²³⁷ They will be consigned to Hell—a place of eternal conscious punishment and separation from God’s goodness. Jesus warned, “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’“,²³⁸ and Paul reiterated that they “will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”²³⁹

For the Convictional Christian, the assurance of Heaven is the believer’s ultimate hope and motivation to faithfully serve God and share the gospel with others while on earth. Peter rejoiced, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”²⁴⁰ Paul exhorted, “For we must all appear

²³⁶ Rev. 21:3–4

²³⁷ John 3:18

²³⁸ Matt. 25:41

²³⁹ 2 Thess. 1:9

²⁴⁰ 1 Pet. 1:3–4a

before the judgment seat of Christ...Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.”²⁴¹ Understanding the eternal stakes inspires a life centered on God’s purposes rather than worldly priorities; as Paul instructed, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”²⁴²

In contrast, a Cultural Christian tends to have a much more vague and sentimental view of the afterlife. While they assume that people have some form of postmortem existence, there is little clarity regarding the details. Paul warned Timothy, “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their desires, they will gather around them many teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”²⁴³

Cultural Christians believe that most people will go to a pleasant place called Heaven if they live a good life. Jesus refuted this notion, saying, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’.”²⁴⁴ There is little emphasis on humanity’s sinful nature, even though “There is no one righteous, not even one.”²⁴⁵ God’s

²⁴¹ 2 Cor. 5:10a,11a

²⁴² Col. 3:1–2

²⁴³ 2 Tim. 4:3–4

²⁴⁴ Matt. 7:21–23

²⁴⁵ Rom. 3:10

holiness and judgment are downplayed, ignoring the sobering scene in Revelation where “books were opened...The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”²⁴⁶ The necessity of personal salvation through Christ alone is neglected, despite Peter’s declaration that “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”²⁴⁷

If the concepts of divine grace and spiritual rebirth are affirmed at all, they tend to be downplayed as nice religious ideas but not essential for achieving a positive eternal destiny. Cultural Christianity often depicts Jesus more as a moral teacher and example than as the unique God-man whose sacrificial death is the only means of reconciliation with God. Paul stressed, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.”²⁴⁸

Lacking a robust biblical view of eternity, Cultural Christians are less likely to see this earthly life as preparation for the world to come. Jesus exhorted, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”²⁴⁹ The urgency of evangelism and the motivation of heavenly rewards are diminished, even though Paul encouraged, “each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ...their work will

²⁴⁶ Rev. 20:12b,15

²⁴⁷ Acts 4:12

²⁴⁸ 1 Tim. 2:5–6a

²⁴⁹ Matt. 6:19–20

be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward."²⁵⁰ Temporal matters take priority over eternal considerations, ignoring Paul's lament that "many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things."²⁵¹

Overall, the Cultural Christian has absorbed secular society's postmodern assumptions of a hazy, benevolent afterlife without the sharp contours of the biblical doctrines of saved and lost, Heaven and Hell, or the eternal significance of responding to the gospel in this life. Jesus declared unequivocally, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."²⁵² The result is a sentimental universalism that breeds spiritual complacency. Jesus warned, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."²⁵³

In summary, Convictional and Cultural Christians have radically different views of eternity. One takes seriously the Bible's clear teaching on the eternal consequences of accepting or rejecting Christ. Jesus promised, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."²⁵⁴ The other has only a shallow, indistinct "spirituality" of the afterlife, ignoring Paul's warning of a time when "people will not put up

²⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 3:10b–14

²⁵¹ Phil. 3:18b–19

²⁵² John 14:6

²⁵³ Matt. 7:13–14

²⁵⁴ Mark 16:16

with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”²⁵⁵ These contrasting views produce divergent life priorities and levels of spiritual urgency. One shapes their earthly life around eternal realities, as Paul instructed, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”²⁵⁶ The other is shortsightedly focused on the here and now, failing to heed John’s warning.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.²⁵⁷

What Spiritual Authorities Exist?

Barna suggests that the existence, nature, and authority of spiritual beings other than God are important considerations that significantly impact the human experience, particularly concerning influence, sin, and matters of spiritual judgment, reward, and punishment.²⁵⁸

Grasping the spiritual realm’s hierarchy is crucial for Convictional Christians. Barna uses biblical insights to outline the roles of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, angels, and demons, showing that God is the ultimate authority. This knowledge is key for Convictional Christians to navigate their faith and spiritual challenges. Understanding the spiritual authorities enables them to stand firm in their beliefs and deal with the spiritual aspects of life more effectively. For Cultural

²⁵⁵ 2 Tim. 4:3–4

²⁵⁶ 2 Cor. 4:18

²⁵⁷ 1 John 2:15–17

²⁵⁸ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 11.50.

Christians, recognizing these distinctions can bridge the gap between casual belief and deeper faith commitment, reminding them that God’s authority reigns supreme in all matters of life and spirituality.²⁵⁹

In *The Unseen Realm*, Dr. Michael S. Heiser presents a crucial inquiry for Convictional Christians regarding their understanding of an unseen spiritual realm inhabited by benevolent and malevolent supernatural beings engaged in a cosmic battle over human souls. He emphasizes the necessity for believers to confront and comprehend this complex reality, as delineated in Scripture, to grasp the full scope of their faith. Through his scholarly exploration, Dr. Heiser seeks to affirm and deepen the believer’s conviction in the unseen dimensions of their spiritual journey and that a Convictional Christian firmly believes in the reality of an unseen spiritual realm populated by both good and evil supernatural beings who are engaged in a cosmic battle for the souls of humanity.²⁶⁰ The Apostle Paul warned, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”²⁶¹ This warning is not an abstract mythology but the true context in which our earthly lives unfold.

The Convictional Christian affirms several key spiritual authorities’ existence and active involvement. In the realm of spiritual warfare, as outlined in Christian theology and vividly described by authors like Chip Ingram in “The Invisible War,” the spiritual entities are often categorized into two groups based on their nature and allegiance: the benevolent (those aligned

²⁵⁹ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*.

²⁶⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

²⁶¹ Eph. 6:12

with God and His purposes) and the malevolent (those aligned against God). Here is a breakdown of both collections with descriptions and Scripture references.

Benevolent Spiritual Entities

1. God:

The sovereign Creator and ruler of the universe, God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He embodies perfect holiness, justice, love, and mercy. God's plans and purposes cannot be thwarted as the ultimate authority. As the psalmist declares, "For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise."²⁶² The sovereign Creator and ruler of the universe, God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He embodies perfect holiness, justice, love, and mercy. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'"²⁶³

2. Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth as fully God and fully man. The apostle John writes, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."²⁶⁴ Through His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for humanity's sins and rose again, defeating death and Satan. As Paul explains in his letter to the Colossians, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a

²⁶² Ps. 47:7

²⁶³ Isa. 46:9–10

²⁶⁴ John 3:16

public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”²⁶⁵ By doing so, Jesus provided salvation and reconciliation with God for all who believe. The author of Hebrews elaborates on this, stating, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason, He had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”²⁶⁶

3. The Holy Spirit:

The third person of the Trinity, fully God, who indwells and empowers believers. When Ananias lied about the proceeds from a land sale, Peter confronted him: “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”²⁶⁷ Jesus promised His disciples, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.”²⁶⁸ He also declared, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”²⁶⁹ The Spirit convicts of sin, as Jesus taught, “When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the

²⁶⁵ Col. 2:15

²⁶⁶ Heb. 2:14–18

²⁶⁷ Acts 5:3–4

²⁶⁸ John 14:16–17a

²⁶⁹ Acts 1:8

wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.”²⁷⁰ The Spirit bestows spiritual gifts, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”²⁷¹ He guides into truth: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”²⁷² And He provides the strength to resist temptation and live a godly life: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”²⁷³

4. Angels:

Created spirits who serve God, worship Him, and minister to believers. The author of Hebrews explained, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”²⁷⁴ Angels act as God’s messengers, such as Gabriel’s announcement to Mary.²⁷⁵ They are agents who carry out His plans, like when an angel rescued Peter from prison.²⁷⁶ And they protect God’s people, as the Psalmist declared, “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”²⁷⁷

Malevolent Spiritual Entities

1. Satan:

²⁷⁰ John 16:8

²⁷¹ 1 Cor. 12:11

²⁷² John 16:13a

²⁷³ Gal. 5:16

²⁷⁴ Heb. 1:14

²⁷⁵ Luke 1:26–38

²⁷⁶ Acts 12:7–10

²⁷⁷ Ps. 91:11–12

The figure of Satan is known as a fallen angel who, having rebelled against God, now actively opposes Him and His followers. Isaiah described Satan's fall, "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn!...You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God'." ²⁷⁸ Peter warned, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." ²⁷⁹ Though ultimately defeated by Christ, as Paul celebrated, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross", ²⁸⁰ Satan wields temporary power to tempt, as seen when "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." ²⁸¹ He deceives, "masquerading as an angel of light", ²⁸² and afflicts people, as he did to Job when, "The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, everything he has is in your power'", ²⁸³ all with the goal of drawing people away from God.

2. Demons:

These are evil spirits who joined Satan's rebellion and assisted him in his efforts against God and humanity. John saw in a vision, "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth,

²⁷⁸ Isa. 14:12a,13a

²⁷⁹ 1 Pet. 5:8

²⁸⁰ Col. 2:15

²⁸¹ Matt. 4:1

²⁸² 2 Cor. 11:14

²⁸³ Job 1:12a

and his angels with him.”²⁸⁴ Demons can influence and even possess individuals, as seen with the Gerasene demoniac.

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”

Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.²⁸⁵

However, they can be resisted, as James instructed, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”²⁸⁶ And they can be cast out in the name of Jesus, as He commissioned His followers, “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Rev. 12:9

²⁸⁵ Mark 5:1–13

²⁸⁶ James 4:7

²⁸⁷ Mark 16:17a

The benevolent entities serve within God's divine order and purpose, upholding and promoting goodness, truth, and salvation. They operate out of love, righteousness, and the desire for all of creation to be reconciled to God. Their activities aim to protect, guide, and nurture humanity toward a relationship with God, combat evil, and proclaim the message of salvation.

In contrast, the malevolent entities work in opposition to God's will, seeking to undermine His kingdom and lead people away from the truth. Their actions are characterized by deceit, temptation, and destruction. Despite their current influence, their ultimate defeat is assured by the work of Christ, who has disarmed them and made a public spectacle of them through His death and resurrection.

Understanding these spiritual entities and their roles within the framework of spiritual warfare equips believers to engage effectively in the battle, relying on God's strength and authority and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Convictional Christian sees life as a battlefield on which this spiritual war is waged, recognizing, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."²⁸⁸ Every decision and action has eternal significance. The Christian's role is to stand firm with the spiritual resources God provides—truth, righteousness, faith, prayer, and the power of the Spirit. Paul urged, "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."²⁸⁹ He went on to detail the armor of God.²⁹⁰ Awareness of the spiritual

²⁸⁸ 2 Cor. 10:3–4

²⁸⁹ Eph. 6:13

²⁹⁰ Eph. 6:14–18

battle breeds vigilance and dependence on God. Peter exhorted, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”²⁹¹

In contrast, a Cultural Christian has a much more skeptical and rationalistic view of spiritual authorities. Clinton Arnold, in his book *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare*, outlines six common objections that are made by Cultural Christians. 1) The concept of spiritual warfare reflects a primitive, prescientific worldview. 2) Demons and evil spirits are not very prominent in the Bible. 3) Experiences with the demonic realm happen only on the mission field, especially in the non-Western world. 4) Demonic activity died out by the second century. 5) “Warfare” is not an appropriate metaphor for people who seek peace. 6) Stressing spiritual warfare might lead to an unbalanced, experience-oriented theology centering on the spectacular.²⁹²

While perhaps not completely denying their existence, the Cultural Christian sees them as more mythological than real, more figurative than literal. As Paul warned Timothy, “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”²⁹³

²⁹¹ 1 Pet. 5:8–9

²⁹² Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 3 Crucial Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 20–22.

²⁹³ 2 Tim. 4:3–4

The idea of the Holy Spirit as a personal, active presence is often reduced to an impersonal force or generalized sense of God's power. The rich biblical teaching on the Spirit's roles and ministries is minimized or ignored. Jesus taught, "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."²⁹⁴ Paul warned the Corinthians, "What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us...The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."²⁹⁵

Angels tend to be viewed as comforting storybook characters rather than spiritual warriors. Their existence and activities are doubted or sentimentalized. Yet the Psalmist declared, "Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word."²⁹⁶ When Elisha's servant was fearful of the surrounding army, "Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."²⁹⁷ Fallen angels and demons fare even worse—demythologized as primitive superstitions or outdated explanations for human evil and suffering. Jude mentioned, "the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling."²⁹⁸ The supernatural is effectively excluded from the Cultural

²⁹⁴ John 14:26

²⁹⁵ 1 Cor. 2:12,14

²⁹⁶ Ps. 103:20

²⁹⁷ 2 Kings 6:17

²⁹⁸ Jude 1:6a

Christian's everyday worldview and experience. Paul explained, "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."²⁹⁹

As for Satan, the Cultural Christian either dismisses the devil as an antiquated relic of ancient folklore, as seen in Jude's rebuke, "But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"³⁰⁰, or redefines him as a vague symbol of general evil rather than a personal spiritual being. John stated plainly, "The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."³⁰¹ The reality of an adversary opposed to God's purposes and working for our destruction is lost. Jesus declared, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him."³⁰² This is replaced by purely natural and human-centered understandings of life's challenges. Paul exposed the devil's schemes, "in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts."³⁰³

²⁹⁹ 1 Cor. 2:14

³⁰⁰ Jude 1:9

³⁰¹ 1 John 3:8

³⁰² John 8:44a

³⁰³ Eph. 2:2–3a

Lacking a biblically informed belief in the spiritual realm, Cultural Christianity has no place for spiritual warfare. The Christian life is reduced to being a good person and enjoying God's blessings rather than engaging in a life-and-death struggle against unseen forces. Paul charged Timothy, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."³⁰⁴ Reliance on prayer, the armor of God, and the Spirit's power seem unnecessary and unrelated to daily existence, ignoring Paul's admonition, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes"³⁰⁵, and his ensuing description of the armor of God.³⁰⁶

In summary, Convictional and Cultural Christians see spiritual authorities through vastly different lenses. One takes seriously the full biblical picture, recognizing the reality of both God's and Satan's agents and our place in their ongoing conflict. Paul reminded the Corinthians, "in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."³⁰⁷ The other functionally denies the supernatural realm by ignoring or reinterpreting it. Paul lamented the Corinthians' past, "You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols."³⁰⁸ The Convictional Christian is equipped to triumph in a spiritual battle, as Paul celebrated, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors

³⁰⁴ 1 Tim. 6:12

³⁰⁵ Eph. 6:10–11

³⁰⁶ Eph. 6:12–18

³⁰⁷ 2 Cor. 2:11

³⁰⁸ 1 Cor. 12:2

through him who loved us.”³⁰⁹ The Cultural Christian is unaware that the battle even exists. Paul warned, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”³¹⁰

What Is Truth?

Barna suggests that the question “What is truth?” posed by Pontius Pilate is central to every worldview, and the answer significantly shapes our behavior and beliefs. To form a comprehensive life lens, we must determine whether right and wrong exist, absolute or relative, and the foundation upon which such judgments are made.³¹¹

A Convictional Christian believes that absolute moral truth exists and is found in God Himself and His revelation in the Bible. Barna explores the belief of Convictional Christians that an absolute moral truth exists, grounded in God Himself and His revelation in the Bible. Barna elaborates on the perspectives of Christians towards moral truth and the Bible, highlighting a gap between professed belief and actual worldview alignment with biblical principles. God is the essence and standard of truth; everything He says and does aligns with His perfectly truthful and holy nature.³¹² Moses affirms in Numbers 23, “God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”³¹³ Paul wrote to Titus, “in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie,

³⁰⁹ Rom. 8:37

³¹⁰ 2 Cor. 4:4

³¹¹ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 11.52.

³¹² Barna, loc. 10.13.

³¹³ Num. 23:19

promised before the beginning of time”,³¹⁴ and the author of Hebrews declared, “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which God cannot lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged.”³¹⁵

In his book *A Peculiar Glory*, John Piper states that Convictional Christians uphold the Bible as God’s inspired, authoritative, and inerrant Word, fully reliable for knowing the truth that God wants us to live by.³¹⁶ Paul wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”³¹⁷ Peter affirmed, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”³¹⁸ Its consistency, coherence, and timeless wisdom validate its divine origin. Furthermore, Jesus affirmed the Old Testament and authorized the New Testament through His apostles, leaving no doubt about Scripture’s truthfulness. In Matthew, Jesus declared,

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.³¹⁹

³¹⁴ Titus 1:2

³¹⁵ Heb. 6:18

³¹⁶ John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 127–29.

³¹⁷ 2 Tim. 3:16–17

³¹⁸ 2 Pet. 1:20–21

³¹⁹ Matt. 5:17–18

While truthful insights can be found through reason, experience, and tradition, a Convictional Christian believes all truth comes from and must align with the Bible. Jesus prayed to the Father, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”,³²⁰ and the Psalmist extolled, “All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.”³²¹ Biblical truth is objective, absolute, and unchanging, not subject to human opinions or shifting cultural norms. The Psalmist declared, “Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens”³²², and Isaiah wrote, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”³²³ Knowing the truth is vital for a right relationship with God and living life as He intends. Jesus told His followers, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”³²⁴

Therefore, the Convictional Christian diligently studies, believes and seeks to obey biblical truth in every area of life. God commanded Joshua, “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”³²⁵ The Psalmist wrote, “How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin

³²⁰ John 17:17

³²¹ Ps. 119:160

³²² Ps. 119:89

³²³ Isa. 40:8

³²⁴ John 8:31–32

³²⁵ Josh. 1:8

against you.”³²⁶ This truth is not a restriction but the way to genuine freedom and blessing. Jesus taught, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”³²⁷, and James urged, “But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”³²⁸ Amid opposition and deception, the committed Christian upholds God’s truth, no matter the cost. Paul told the Ephesian elders, “For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God”³²⁹, and exhorted Timothy,

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.³³⁰

Loving God means loving His truth and sharing it with others, as the Psalmist affirmed, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long”³³¹, and Paul rejoiced that the Thessalonians had “chosen...to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”³³²

In contrast, a Cultural Christian tends to have a far more subjective and relativistic view of truth. While they may nominally affirm the Bible as God’s Word, they treat truth as something

³²⁶ Ps. 119:9–11

³²⁷ John 8:31–32

³²⁸ James 1:25

³²⁹ Acts 20:27

³³⁰ 2 Tim. 4:2–4

³³¹ Ps. 119:97

³³² 2 Thess. 2:13

malleable and individualistic rather than fixed and transcendent. Paul warned Timothy, “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”³³³

Cultural Christians are often more shaped by secular society’s narrative of truth being personal and situational than by the biblical worldview of truth as unified, revealed, and authoritative. They choose which parts of the Bible to believe based on what fits their preferences, rather than submitting to the Bible as the supreme standard for truth. Isaiah confronted this mindset: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”³³⁴ The proverb warns, “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”³³⁵

Instead of recognizing the Bible as the ultimate filter for determining truth, the Cultural Christian is prone to elevate their reason, experiences, and the prevailing views of the culture as the arbiters of truth. They are uncomfortable with absolute truth claims, seeing them as intolerant and outdated in a pluralistic world. Paul warned the Colossians, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ”³³⁶, and urged the Romans, “Do not

³³³ 2 Tim. 4:3–4

³³⁴ Isa. 5:20

³³⁵ Prov. 14:12

³³⁶ Col. 2:8

conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”³³⁷

As a result, Cultural Christians lack solid biblical convictions and a consistent Christian worldview. They may affirm some Christian beliefs, but their approach to truth is pragmatic and selective rather than principled and comprehensive. James rebuked this inconsistency, saying, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”³³⁸ They are more concerned with fitting in with the world than being transformed by renewing their minds according to God's truth. Paul warned, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”³³⁹

For the Cultural Christian, truth is a nice religious concept but not the defining reality for all of life. Obedience to biblical truth is optional and negotiable, not the nonnegotiable necessity the Convictional Christian recognizes it to be. Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”³⁴⁰ Cultural Christianity

³³⁷ Rom. 12:2

³³⁸ James 1:22–24

³³⁹ Rom. 12:2

³⁴⁰ Matt. 7:21–23

produces a compartmentalized and compromised life, not the integrated and uncompromising faith the Bible calls for. Paul urged, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ... Therefore, ‘Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’”³⁴¹

In summary, the Convictional Christian orders their entire life and thinks about God’s Word’s truth. The Psalmist declared, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”³⁴² Meanwhile, the Cultural Christian conforms their beliefs to the ever-shifting winds of personal preference and popular opinion. Paul warned the Ephesians, “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”³⁴³ One embraces the Bible as the source of truth; the other sees truth as self-determined. This foundational difference in understanding truth shapes every other aspect of how they live out their faith. In John, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”³⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Psalmist affirmed, “All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.”³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ 2 Cor. 6:14,17

³⁴² Ps. 119:105

³⁴³ Eph. 4:14

³⁴⁴ John 17:17

³⁴⁵ Ps. 119:160

Transitioning from Worldview Belief to Behavior

As Barna explains, understanding the foundational beliefs that shape our perspective on life is crucial, but it is only the beginning of living out a biblical worldview.³⁴⁶ The seven worldview questions provide a framework for comprehending the essence of our faith, but true spiritual maturity goes beyond mere intellectual assent. It requires consistently applying these beliefs to every aspect of our lives, influencing our choices, actions, and relationships.

Many Christians, even those who have been attending church for decades, may be able to articulate the correct answers to the seven worldview questions yet struggle to embody a genuinely biblical worldview in their daily lives. Spiritual maturity is not simply a matter of age or experience; it is the result of intentionally aligning our behavior with our beliefs.³⁴⁷

Barna moves from answering the seven Biblical worldview questions to what it means to live transformed lives as Christians, woven through the threads of habits, time, character, and fruit, each underpinned by biblical truths.³⁴⁸

In the following section, we will explore these key factors that indicate how our beliefs shape the behavior of a Convictional Christian.

Habits

Our daily habits are a powerful reflection of our worldview, demonstrating what we truly value and believe. In his book, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, James K.A. Smith, a professor of philosophy and theology at Calvin College, argues that our daily

³⁴⁶ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 23.19.

³⁴⁷ Barna, loc. 23.20.

³⁴⁸ Barna, loc. 23.21.

habits are a powerful reflection of our worldview, as they demonstrate what we truly value and believe. Smith suggests that our deepest desires shape our habits and loves, serving as tangible expressions of our innermost beliefs and values.³⁴⁹

In the Bible, Jesus lived a life characterized by consistent, purposeful habits grounded in His unwavering commitment to God's will. Christians are called to follow His example and develop habits that align with our faith. The apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of godly habits in Romans 12:2, urging believers to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind."³⁵⁰ This transformation occurs as we replace worldly habits with those that honor God. Paul further instructs, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."³⁵¹ Our habits should be a testament to our gratitude and devotion to Christ.

Biblical scholars and exegetes have long recognized the significance of habits in the Christian life. For example, Dr. D.A. Carson, a renowned New Testament scholar, writes in his book *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* that prayer is one of the most crucial habits in the life of a Christian. Carson emphasizes that spiritual growth is directly tied to the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and Bible study.³⁵²

Similarly, Dr. John Piper, a respected pastor, and theologian, argues in his book *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* that our habits play a crucial role in shaping our

³⁴⁹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), loc. 9.31.

³⁵⁰ Rom. 12:2

³⁵¹ Col. 3:17

³⁵² D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), loc. 7.64.

affections and desires. He writes, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. And the way to be satisfied in Him is to develop habits of seeing and savoring His glory in His word.”³⁵³

To better understand the connection between habits and worldview, we can look to Jesus’ life as recorded in the Gospels. His daily routines were marked by prayer, as recorded by Mark, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”³⁵⁴ As Matthew states, Jesus also consistently taught, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”³⁵⁵ Furthermore, Jesus demonstrated His love for humanity through service to others, as exemplified by John when Jesus washed His disciples’ feet. Jesus said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”³⁵⁶ By consistently engaging in these practices, Jesus demonstrated His complete surrender to the Father’s will and His love for humanity.

As we examine our own lives, we must ask ourselves whether our habits reflect a worldview centered on Christ. Do we prioritize prayer, Scripture study, and service? Do our daily routines promote spiritual growth and obedience to God? By comparing our habits to those of Jesus, we can identify areas where our worldview may be more influenced by secular culture than biblical truth.

³⁵³ John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 124.

³⁵⁴ Mark 1:35

³⁵⁵ Matt. 4:23

³⁵⁶ John 13:15

Cultivating Christ-like habits requires a daily commitment to renewing our minds and aligning our actions with our faith. As we invite God to transform our routines, we will find our worldview increasingly shaped by His love and truth, enabling us to live as faithful witnesses in a broken world.

Time

Spiritual transformation is a journey that unfolds over time. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson articulates the profound necessity of investing time in our spiritual journey to allow true transformation to unfold. He emphasizes that this transformation is not instantaneous but requires a persistent and gradual process, encapsulated in “a long obedience in the same direction.”³⁵⁷

Peterson highlights a widely agreed-upon view among Christian forebears that this long obedience is a fusion of Scripture and prayer, which requires diligent attentiveness. This approach is not overly complex but demands careful focus. However, the “fusion is accomplished by reading these Scriptures slowly, imaginatively, prayerfully, and obediently.”³⁵⁸ Understanding and following Jesus is a journey that involves gradual learning and deeper comprehension over time.

³⁵⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 130.

³⁵⁸ Peterson, 203.

Slowly.

Peterson writes, “If we move into the Scriptures too fast or move through them too fast, we will miss most of what is here.”³⁵⁹ Joshua reinforces the value of constant interaction with the Word of God to live according to His commands:

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.³⁶⁰

King Solomon provides similar guidance in Proverbs:

My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one’s whole body.³⁶¹

This passage underscores the concept of allowing God’s voice, through His Word, to impact our lives by engaging with Scripture in a dedicated, thoughtful manner, facilitating a deeper understanding and connection with His will.

Imaginatively.

Peterson then advocates for reading Scripture “imaginatively,” inviting us to immerse ourselves fully in the biblical narrative and make our own lives part of the grand story of God’s redemptive work.³⁶² This imaginative engagement demands time and presence, moving beyond a mere intellectual exercise to a lived faith experience.

³⁵⁹ Peterson, 204.

³⁶⁰ Josh. 1:8

³⁶¹ Prov. 4:20–22

³⁶² Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 204.

There is, however, the need to make sure our imaginative journeys draw us closer to the Scriptures rather than distancing us. This caution is highlighted in Stephen B. Chapman's chapter titled *Imaginative Readings of Scripture and Theological Interpretation* in the book *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, where he argues that the key question about the use of imagination is whether it brings us toward or away from the biblical text.³⁶³ As Karl Barth put it: "The biblical texts must be investigated for their own sake to the extent that the revelation which they attest does not stand or occur, and is not to be sought, behind or above them but in them."³⁶⁴ Thus, what is essential is not merely a method to regulate imagination but rather the adoption of critical practices that enhance attentiveness, allowing imagination to play a unique and constructive role.

Prayerfully

Peterson encourages us to "prayerfully" approach Scripture, recognizing it as a space for conversation with God, where reading transforms into an act of listening and responding to the divine.³⁶⁵ This behavior requires humility and openness, acknowledging that true wisdom and guidance come through a slow, deliberate communion with God in prayer. Eugene Peterson wrote specifically about prayer in his book *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, where he discusses the practice of "lectio divina," a prayerful and contemplative reading of Scripture. He argues that engaging with the Bible should be a transformative experience, where the reader listens attentively to God's voice and responds in prayer and

³⁶³ Craig G. Bartholomew and Elaine Botha, eds., *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), loc. 227.10.

³⁶⁴ Karl Barth, G. W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Doctrine of the Word of God* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), loc. 10.64.

³⁶⁵ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 205.

obedience. Peterson writes, “Lectio Divina” is a way of reading the Scriptures congruent with how the Scriptures serve the Christian community as a witness to God’s revelation of himself to us. It is the wise guidance developed through the centuries of devout Bible reading to discipline us, the readers of Scripture, into appropriate ways of understanding and receiving this text so that it is formative for how we live our lives, not merely making an impression on our minds or feelings. It intends the reading of Scripture to be a permeation of our lives by the revelation of God.”³⁶⁶ Peterson’s book supports the idea that reading Scripture should be a prayerful, contemplative experience that involves listening to God and responding with humility and obedience rather than merely an intellectual exercise or a quick, superficial reading.³⁶⁷

Obedience

As Peterson outlines, obedience is the natural response to this deep, prayerful engagement with Scripture. It is an obedience that evolves as we slowly align our lives with the teachings and example of Jesus. This alignment is not about swift compliance but a gradual transformation that unfolds as we consistently choose to follow Christ daily.³⁶⁸

Character

Barna suggested that over four dozen character qualities featured in scripture are essential to God. Peterson clusters those into thirteen characteristics.³⁶⁹ The following is a brief explanation of each and a supporting scripture reference.

³⁶⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), loc. 14.1.

³⁶⁷ Peterson, loc. 15.80.

³⁶⁸ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 205.

³⁶⁹ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 23.34.

Faith Maturity

Growing in Christlikeness by integrating faith into every aspect of life, as Paul in Colossians exemplifies, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”³⁷⁰

Trustworthiness

Being reliable and dependable, as Jesus encourages in Luke, “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”³⁷¹

Promoting Truth

Communicating in a way that reflects Christ’s character and helps others grow, as stated by Paul in Ephesians, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”³⁷²

Wisdom

Cultivating a deep relationship with God and seeking His guidance, as described by James, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Col. 3:17

³⁷¹ Luke 16:10

³⁷² Eph. 4:15

³⁷³ James 1:5

Sensitive Conscience

Being responsive to the Holy Spirit's leading and relying on Scripture for guidance, as Paul mentions in Romans, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."³⁷⁴

Virtuous Morality

Adhering to biblical standards of conduct, as instructed by Paul in 1 Thessalonians, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality." 1 Thess. 4:3

Godly Demeanor

Treating others with love, kindness, and respect, as taught by Paul in Ephesians, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."³⁷⁵

Controlled Temper

Demonstrating patience and self-control, as advised by James, "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Rom. 8:14

³⁷⁵ Eph. 4:32

³⁷⁶ James 1:19–20

Appropriate Speech

As Paul emphasized in Ephesians, speaking in a way that edifies others and avoids negativity, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”³⁷⁷

Loving Heart

Prioritizing love for God and others, as commanded by Jesus in Matthew, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”³⁷⁸

Proper Values

Aligning priorities with scriptural principles, as stated by Jesus in Matthew, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”³⁷⁹

Servanthood

Selflessly serving others and acting with fairness, as modeled by Jesus in Mark, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Eph. 4:29

³⁷⁸ Matt. 22:37–39

³⁷⁹ Matt. 6:33

³⁸⁰ Mark 10:45

Humility

Maintaining an accurate self-assessment and celebrating others' successes, as taught by Paul in Philippians, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."³⁸¹

Barna concludes this section by suggesting, "If you want to think like Jesus, then fortify your character according to the factors that God has identified for us in Scripture. The more your character reflects these elements, the more Christlike you become."³⁸² In 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul reminds us that the goal is not perfection but continuous transformation into Christ's likeness: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."³⁸³

Fruit

Barna concludes by referring to the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians, where he outlines the nine fruits of the spirit,³⁸⁴

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ Phil. 2:3

³⁸² Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 23.49.

³⁸³ 2 Cor. 3:18

³⁸⁴ Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, loc. 23.50.

³⁸⁵ Gal. 5:22–25

Gordon Fee supports the idea that the fruit of the Spirit serves as evidence of a life transformed by God and a commitment to living according to a biblical worldview in his commentary on Galatians, *God's Empowering Presence*. He argues that these qualities are evidence of God's empowering presence in the life of a Christian.³⁸⁶

However, the fruit of the Spirit should not be understood as qualities that develop effortlessly or automatically in a believer's life. Instead, cultivating these characteristics requires intentional effort and cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit. N.T. Wright, in his book *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, suggests that the fruit of the Spirit is a result of the Holy Spirit's transformative work in a believer's life; it is not automatic. It requires the active participation and effort of the individual, working in cooperation with the Spirit's guidance and power.³⁸⁷

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have explored the profound differences between Convictional and Cultural Christians in their understanding and application of foundational biblical beliefs. By examining their responses to George Barna's seven worldview questions, we have gained valuable insights into the depth and authenticity of their faith.

Convictional Christians, as demonstrated, anchor their lives in the unwavering truth of Scripture. They firmly believe in the existence of God, His divine attributes, and His purposeful creation of the universe and humanity. They recognize the reality of sin, the need for salvation through Christ, and the eternal consequences of accepting or rejecting God's grace. Moreover, they acknowledge the spiritual authorities at work and the absolute nature of biblical truth.

³⁸⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 443–44.

³⁸⁷ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1106–7.

These convictions, however, extend beyond mere intellectual assent. Convictional Christians strive to embody their beliefs through their daily habits, stewardship of time, Christ-like character, and the fruit of the Spirit evident in their lives. They understand that authentic faith is not a compartmentalized aspect of life but a transformative force that permeates every facet of their being.

In contrast, Cultural Christians, while professing a belief in God and identifying with the Christian faith, often lack the depth of conviction and the consistent application of biblical principles. Their beliefs are more heavily influenced by societal norms, personal preferences, and a desire for acceptance than by a commitment to Scripture. This results in a more superficial faith, compartmentalized, and subject to compromise.

It calls us to examine the authenticity of our faith and challenges us to align our lives more fully with the teachings of God's Word. It reminds us that genuine Christianity is not a mere cultural label but a radical, life-altering commitment to Christ.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter explores the literature on spirituality and faith's role in Christian higher educational institutions and its appeal to Convictional Christians. As the introduction to this thesis project asserts, many Evangelical Christian Universities are addressing the decline in a way that they are losing their traditional target audience. Much of this can be attributed to the pressure of secularization, where “the transformation of an institution that had once been considered religious in character into something not thought of as religious.”³⁸⁸ This chapter begins with a look at the historical foundations of Christian High Educational Institutions, emphasizing how these institutions were built on integrating faith with learning and a solid doctrinal commitment. The paper then discusses the academic and personal development offered, highlighting the holistic growth of students through spiritual and academic integration. It examines these institutions' cultural impact and engagement, including their influence on campus culture and community outreach. The focus shifts to how these elements influence Convictional Christians, particularly in reinforcing their spiritual identity and formation. Finally, the paper considers the future of faith-based education, emphasizing the importance of sustaining faith-centric principles and expanding faith-informed scholarship. Through each section, the paper underscores the unique environment Christian higher educational institutions provide for

³⁸⁸ C. J. Sommerville, *Religious Ideas for Secular Universities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 39.

nurturing Convictional Christians' intellectual and spiritual lives, preparing them for ethical leadership and service.

Foundational Overview

Contextualizing the Inquiry

In the evolving landscape of higher education, Christian institutions emerge as unique entities, deeply rooted in a philosophy that intricately weaves faith and spirituality into the very fabric of their existence. This foundational integration extends beyond the curriculum, influencing all facets of campus life, community engagement, and institutional culture. Anita Henck, in her article *Walking the Tightrope: Christian Colleges and Universities in a Time of Change* highlights the dual accountability of Christian colleges and universities to both higher education accreditation bodies and faith communities, underscoring the delicate balance these institutions must maintain between secular expectations and spiritual commitments.³⁸⁹ As Henck articulates, the challenge lies in navigating these often-competing demands while preserving the institution's missional values and adapting to societal changes. Moreover, the survivability of these institutions in an increasingly isolated environment necessitates a broader engagement with the wider higher education community. This engagement and intentional preservation of institutional values amidst change are crucial for sustaining their unique educational model.³⁹⁰ Christian higher educational institutions serve as a testament to the enduring significance of

³⁸⁹ Anita Fitzgerald Henck, "Walking the Tightrope: Christian Colleges and Universities in a Time of Change," *Christian Higher Education* 10, no. 3–4 (2011): 196–214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2011.577711>.

³⁹⁰ Henck, 212–13.

integrating faith with learning, fostering an environment where academic excellence and spiritual development are not mutually exclusive but harmoniously intertwined.³⁹¹

Study Rationale

Many important reasons exist for studying how spirituality and faith affect Christian higher educational institutions. Firstly, it acknowledges the unique contribution of these institutions to the diversity of the American higher education system, offering options that cater specifically to Convictional Christians.³⁹² This diversity benefits the students who find institutions that match their personal and spiritual convictions and contribute to the broader educational landscape by fostering various educational models and approaches.³⁹³ Secondly, faith and spirituality's role extends beyond students' personal development, impacting their academic success and engagement.³⁹⁴ Institutions that effectively integrate faith and spirituality into their educational paradigms tend to exhibit strong community ties, a clear sense of mission, and a commitment to producing academically proficient, spiritually mature, and socially responsible graduates.³⁹⁵

Moreover, the study of spirituality and faith within Christian higher educational institutions addresses the critical challenge of maintaining a distinctive Christian identity in the

³⁹¹ Henck, 197–99.

³⁹² Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 3–5.

³⁹³ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75–80.

³⁹⁴ Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer A. Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 1–20.

³⁹⁵ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 10–25.

face of societal shifts toward secularization and pluralism.³⁹⁶ Christian institutions are tasked with navigating these changes as cultural norms and values evolve while preserving their core convictions.³⁹⁷ This balancing act is crucial for sustaining their appeal to Convictional Christians, who seek an education that aligns with their beliefs and prepares them for living out those beliefs in a diverse world.³⁹⁸

In conclusion, understanding the role of faith and spirituality in Christian higher education is essential for appreciating these institutions' unique position within the broader educational landscape. It sheds light on how they contribute to the richness of educational options available to students, foster environments conducive to academic and spiritual growth, and the strategies they employ to navigate the challenges of a changing cultural milieu.³⁹⁹ Therefore, this inquiry contextualizes the distinct nature of Christian higher educational institutions and underscores its enduring relevance and vitality in shaping Convictional Christians who are prepared to meet the complexities of the contemporary world.⁴⁰⁰

Faith Integration

The integration of faith and learning is fundamental to Christian education and can be broken down into three general categories: theological foundations, pedagogical approaches, and

³⁹⁶ 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), 3–10.

³⁹⁷ Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, 5–15.

³⁹⁸ P. Jesse Rine, “Christian College Persistence in the Postmodern Turn,” in *Spirituality in College Students' Lives*, ed. Alyssa Bryant Rockenbach and Matthew J. Mayhew (New York: Routledge, 2012), 69–87.

³⁹⁹ C. John Sommerville, *The Decline of the Secular University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1–10.

⁴⁰⁰ Douglas G. Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15–30.

institutional challenges and opportunities.⁴⁰¹ Rooted in the belief that education in a Christian context aims not only at knowledge transfer but also at holistic development in line with Christian values,⁴⁰² this approach demands engaging deeply with theological principles that define the mission and identity of Christian educational institutions. It also involves developing pedagogical strategies for faith-learning integration across various disciplines and addressing the complexities of maintaining this integration amid evolving educational landscapes.⁴⁰³

Theological Foundations

Integrating faith with learning is a fundamental principle in Christian High Educational Institutions, highlighting the belief in a supernatural realm and its implications for academic disciplines. This integration is rooted in the understanding that all truth is God's truth, as God reveals Himself through Scripture, creation, and human reason. The Trinitarian God is central to every discipline, motivating teaching and learning towards a reality found in His glory and grandeur.⁴⁰⁴ As Holmes (1987) argues, "the Christian faith provides a framework within which the pursuit of all knowledge takes on new meaning and direction,"⁴⁰⁵ emphasizing the significance of faith integration in the academic setting.

David Cook and Bret Thomason's book *Integrating Faith and Learning: Case Studies from Dallas Baptist University* captures how Dallas Baptist University (DBU) has integrated

⁴⁰¹ David Smith and James K. A. Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

⁴⁰² Dockery and Thornbury, *Shaping a Christian Worldview*.

⁴⁰³ Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

⁴⁰⁴ David S. Dockery, ed., *Faith and Learning: A Handbook for Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 6.

⁴⁰⁵ Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 7.

faith and learning into its institution.⁴⁰⁶ The book is a testament to the integration of faith and learning within its educational framework, providing a holistic approach that informs and transforms. This integration is not a mere adjunct to the curriculum but the essence of the university's identity and mission.

The book begins by establishing the theological underpinnings of faith integration within the educational context. Naugle's commentary on the DBU Mission Statement emphasizes the centrality of Christian faith, describing the university's approach as a "critical-appreciative dialogue" with academic disciplines informed by Christian faith.⁴⁰⁷ This approach is deeply rooted in the belief that all truth is God's truth, whether discovered through Scripture or natural revelation, thereby asserting the importance of engaging with the world through a Christian lens.⁴⁰⁸

Pedagogical Approaches

Pedagogically, "the integration of faith and learning" is a paradigm that significantly influences curriculum development and teaching strategies within Christian higher educational institutions. This approach fosters a critical engagement where faith and learning are seen as mutually enriching spheres, allowing scholars to ask ethical, philosophical, and theological questions.⁴⁰⁹ This critical engagement underpins a foundational authority, enabling the evaluation

⁴⁰⁶ David Cook and Brett Thomason, eds., *Integrating Faith and Learning: Case Studies from Dallas Baptist University* (Nashville: Randall House Academic, 2024).

⁴⁰⁷ David Naugle, "A Commentary on the Mission Statement of Dallas Baptist University," About DBU Dallas Baptist University, accessed June 6, 2023, https://www.dbu.edu/naugle/_documents/mission-commentary.pdf.

⁴⁰⁸ Cook and Thomason, *Integrating Faith and Learning*, 13.

⁴⁰⁹ Todd C. Ream and Perry L. Glanzer, *The Idea of a Christian College: A Reexamination for Today's University* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 54.

of academic content through a filter that considers its ethical, philosophical, and theological dimensions emphasizes that this methodology enhances academic rigor and enriches the spiritual formation of students, guiding them to think critically and Christianly about the world around them.⁴¹⁰

Pedagogically, DBU adopts innovative strategies to weave faith into the fabric of learning. This includes developing courses like “Developing a Christian Mind” (DCM 2301),⁴¹¹ which aims to foster a biblical worldview among students. Faculty workshops and seminars further equip educators to integrate faith into their teaching, ensuring this integration is reflective and intentional.⁴¹² As described, the process resembles adding sugar to tea, where faith (the sugar) must be stirred to permeate every part of the education (the tea), thereby transforming it comprehensively.⁴¹³

Institutional Challenges and Opportunities

Christian High Educational Institutions face formidable challenges in upholding theological fidelity amidst external pressures. However, these challenges also allow institutions to assert their unique Christian ethos. The mission of Christian higher education transcends the mere dissemination of knowledge, aiming instead at transforming lives through the integration of faith and learning.⁴¹⁴ This mission demands a proactive reinforcement of an institution’s

⁴¹⁰ Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 129.

⁴¹¹ David Naugle, “DCM 2301 Developing a Christian Mind,” n.d., <https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Developing-a-Christian-Mind.pdf>.

⁴¹² Cook and Thomason, *Integrating Faith and Learning*, 6.

⁴¹³ Naugle, “A Commentary on the Mission Statement of Dallas Baptist University.”

⁴¹⁴ Dockery and Morgan, *Christian Higher Education*.

Christian identity, especially in an era where secular ideologies increasingly infiltrate the educational sphere. Marsden (1994) highlights that the necessity for a distinct Christian ethos for institutional survival is critical, not as a retreat from the world but as a commitment to engage the world critically and constructively from a Christ-centered viewpoint.⁴¹⁵

Institutionally, DBU faces challenges like those encountered by other Christian institutions striving to maintain their faith-based identity in a secularized society. However, DBU turns these challenges into opportunities by emphasizing the creation of a cohesive culture through faith integration in hiring, evaluation, and faculty development processes. This dedication ensures that every aspect of university life, from academic disciplines to co-curricular activities, is infused with Christian principles, shaping knowledgeable graduates and Christ-centered servant leaders.⁴¹⁶

This comprehensive approach to integrating faith and learning at DBU showcases the potential of Christian higher education to significantly impact students' lives, preparing them for leadership and service by integrating faith and learning across all areas of life and study.

Potential Drawbacks of Faith Integration

While faith-learning integration offers numerous benefits, it is essential to acknowledge and examine the challenges and potential drawbacks of this approach. Glanzer and Ream, in their book *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education*, highlight the complexities inherent in integrating faith and learning, particularly in an increasingly pluralistic society.⁴¹⁷ They argue

⁴¹⁵ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*.

⁴¹⁶ Cook and Thomason, *Integrating Faith and Learning*, 17.

⁴¹⁷ Perry L. Glanzer and Todd C. Ream, *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

that Christian higher education institutions must navigate the tension between maintaining a distinctive religious identity and engaging with diverse academic perspectives.

One potential drawback of faith-learning integration is the risk of intellectual insularity. In their study, *Secularization and National Universities: The Effect of Religious Identity on Academic Reputation*, Mixon, Lyon, and Beaty suggest that a strong emphasis on religious identity may lead to a perceived lack of academic rigor or a narrowing of intellectual horizons.⁴¹⁸ Christian universities must intentionally foster a genuine openness to diverse ideas and rigorous academic inquiry while remaining grounded in their faith commitments.

Furthermore, integrating faith and learning across all disciplines can be challenging, requiring significant time, resources, and faculty buy-in. Not all faculty members may feel equally equipped or committed to this task, leading to potential inconsistencies in implementation.⁴¹⁹ Institutions must provide ongoing support, training, and resources to enable faculty to integrate faith and learning in their specific fields effectively.

Another consideration is the potential for faith-learning integration to be perceived as indoctrination or proselytization by some students or external stakeholders.⁴²⁰ Christian universities must be clear about their mission and values while creating space for genuine dialogue, questioning, and exploration of faith.⁴²¹ Striking this balance requires sensitivity, wisdom, and a commitment to intellectual humility.

⁴¹⁸ Stephanie Litizzette Mixon, Larry Lyon, and Michael Beaty, "Secularization and National Universities: The Effect of Religious Identity on Academic Reputation," *The Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 4 (2005): 400–419, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2004.11772265>.

⁴¹⁹ Glanzer and Ream, *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education*, 78.

⁴²⁰ Douglas G. Jacobsen, Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, and Rodney Sawatsky, eds., *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 153–54.

⁴²¹ Glanzer and Ream, *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education*, 92.

Despite these challenges, many scholars and practitioners argue that the benefits of faith-learning integration far outweigh the potential drawbacks. Christian universities can equip them to think critically, live faithfully, and serve effectively in a complex world by providing a holistic education that engages students' spiritual, moral, and intellectual faculties.⁴²² However, ongoing reflection, dialogue, and adaptation are necessary to ensure that faith-learning integration remains a vital and relevant approach in evolving cultural and academic landscapes.

Spiritual Formation

Defining Spiritual Formation:

Spiritual formation within Christian higher education settings encompasses the comprehensive process through which students are shaped into the likeness of Christ. This transformative journey involves acquiring knowledge and developing the whole person—mind, heart, and spirit. Central to this concept is the Trinitarian theology of formation, which positions the life of Jesus Christ as the ultimate model for human flourishing and spiritual growth.⁴²³ The process of spiritual formation is thus deeply relational, grounded in the community's collective pursuit of embodying Christ's character and teachings.⁴²⁴

Implications for Community and Identity:

Spiritual formation practices are pivotal in building a vibrant Christian community and reinforcing the institutional identity of Christian higher educational institutions. Through shared

⁴²² Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 45.

⁴²³ Dockery and Morgan, *Christian Higher Education*, 30–31.

⁴²⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 45–46.

experiences of worship, service, and communal life, students are integrated into a living, breathing body of believers where spiritual truths are taught and lived out daily.⁴²⁵ This communal aspect of spiritual formation nurtures students' sense of belonging and identity and solidifies the institution's mission as a beacon of Christ-centered education. As such, the community's spiritual vitality serves as both a witness to the transformative power of the Gospel and a foundation for the institution's distinct Christian ethos.⁴²⁶

Impact on Student Engagement:

The role of spiritual formation in enhancing student engagement and spiritual growth cannot be overstated. Christian higher educational institutions create unique opportunities for students to explore and deepen their faith commitments by fostering an environment where faith and learning intersect seamlessly.⁴²⁷ Spiritual formation initiatives, such as chapel services, small groups, and mentorship programs, invite students to deeper engagement with their faith regarding their academic pursuits and future vocations.⁴²⁸ This holistic approach to education ensures that students are prepared for professional success and equipped to live out their faith with conviction and purpose in every aspect of their lives.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ R. Rhea, "Exploring Spiritual Formation in the Christian Academy: the Dialects of Church, Culture, and the Larger Integrative Task," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 39, no. 1 (2011): 3-15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164711103900101>.

⁴²⁶ Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan F. Alleman, and Todd C. Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 112–13.

⁴²⁷ M. H. Lee, R. R. Djita, and E. W. Price, "Spiritual Formation in College and University: Do Students in Religious Higher Education Institutions Feel More Supported in Their Faith?" *Christian Higher Education* 23, no. 5 (2024), 429-44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2024.2358035>.

⁴²⁸ David P. Setran, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 75–76.

⁴²⁹ Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 92–93.

The emphasis on spiritual formation at Dallas Baptist University (DBU) fosters profound implications for community building and the shaping of individual identities within the university setting. Several examples are featured in *Integrating Faith and Learning: Case Studies from Dallas Baptist University*.

Living-Learning Communities: DBU's Student Affairs administers four communities focusing on Christian discipleship and leadership development. These communities are designed to enhance ethical and values-based thinking among students by exposing them to various speakers and topics. An example includes Ford Village, which is uniquely established to house students from various academic pursuits who share a common purpose—developing knowledge, character, and the application of Christ-centered servant leadership principles into every professional endeavor.⁴³⁰

Faculty Mentorship and Engagement: In the Pedersen Residential College and the Gunn Hall Global Scholars Program, each housing unit is led by a faculty mentor. These mentors arrange planned activities, such as weekly and monthly Bible studies, community meals, travel study trips, guest lectureships, and guided discussions. This initiative fosters an intimate community within a larger university setting, allowing students to grow academically and spiritually alongside others with a vision to become Christian servant leaders.⁴³¹

Registration and Mentorship: Building community at DBU begins as early as the registration phase, where students are introduced to faculty who will mentor them throughout their university journey. This initial encounter lays the foundation for a mentor-mentee

⁴³⁰ Jay Harley, "Integrating Faith in Student Affairs and Student Experience," in *Integrating Faith and Learning: Case Studies from Dallas Baptist University*, ed. David Cook and Brett Thomason (Nashville: Randall House Academic, 2024), 251–71.

⁴³¹ Harley, 266.

relationship that supports academic success and fosters spiritual growth, demonstrating the university's unique approach to education.⁴³²

Foundations Class (FOUN 1101): A notable initiative to enhance community identity and worldview is the Foundations class, required for new students. This course prepares students for collegiate success while beginning the community and worldview development process. Through discussions and exercises, students explore their worldviews, particularly concerning faith, culture, and personal values. The class encourages students to develop a sense of community, fostering deep friendships among peers with similar learning experiences.⁴³³

Scientific Research Opportunities: Another unique aspect of community and identity formation at DBU is the opportunity for students to engage in scientific research. This experience advances academic and professional skills and deepens students' engagement with the community of faith and scholarship. Working closely with faculty and peers on research projects allows students to explore the intersection of science and faith, further shaping their identities as Christian scholars.⁴³⁴

These examples highlight DBU's multifaceted approach to spiritual formation, underscoring its impact on community engagement and individual identity development. DBU nurtures a campus atmosphere where spiritual growth and community involvement are paramount through mentorship, curricular innovation, and communal activities.

⁴³² David D. Cook, "Integrating Faith in the Broader Campus Environment: Concluding Thoughts" in *Integrating Faith and Learning: Case Studies from Dallas Baptist University*, ed. David Cook and Brett Thomason (Nashville: Randall House Academic, 2024), 333.

⁴³³ Jonathan M. Cooper, Drew Ivey, and Curtis Lee, "Integrating Faith in the Pre-Medical and Biological Sciences," in *Integrating Faith and Learning: Case Studies from Dallas Baptist University*, ed. David Cook and Brett Thomason (Nashville: Randall House Academic, 2024), 133.

⁴³⁴ Cooper, Ivey, and Lee, 134.

Service-Learning for Mission and Spiritual Growth

In his article, *Service-Learning in Christian Higher Education: Bringing Our Mission to Life*, Regan Schaffer asserts that service-learning plays a crucial role in achieving the faith-based objectives of Christian higher education institutions.⁴³⁵ By engaging students in service activities tied to academic learning objectives, Christian colleges and universities can foster spiritual growth, develop students' sense of social responsibility, and prepare them for lives of service. Schaffer comprehensively defines service-learning, including integrating service with course learning objectives, community involvement, reflection, and institutional support.

Moreover, Schaffer identifies best practices for service-learning in Christian higher education, including institutional support, alignment with the institution's mission, clear definitions and guidelines, academic validity, and using service-learning to integrate faith and learning. These best practices underscore the importance of intentionally designing and implementing service-learning programs to ensure their effectiveness in promoting student learning and spiritual growth.⁴³⁶

Schaffer also presents a model for designing service-learning programs in Christian colleges and universities, which consists of eight guidelines: examining the mission, enlisting others, establishing a definition, educating and training, developing community partnerships, pilot testing, reflecting and evaluating, and gaining institutional support. This model provides a

⁴³⁵ Regan Harwell Schaffer, "Service-Learning in Christian Higher Education: Bringing Our Mission to Life," *Christian Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (April 2004): 127–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363750490429417>.

⁴³⁶ Schaffer, 133–36.

practical framework for Christian higher education institutions to develop and sustain effective service-learning programs that align with their faith-based mission and values.⁴³⁷

Impact of Spiritual Formation on Student Outcomes

The impact of spiritual formation practices extends far beyond the years students spend in Christian higher education institutions. Recent studies have explored the long-term effects of these practices on student outcomes and post-graduation trajectories, highlighting the enduring significance of this aspect of Christian higher education.

In their seminal work, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm present compelling evidence for the positive impact of spiritual formation on students' lives.⁴³⁸ Their comprehensive study surveyed over 100,000 students from diverse institutions and found that spiritual growth during college was associated with increased academic engagement, leadership development, and overall satisfaction with the college experience. Moreover, they discovered that students who participated in spiritual formation practices, such as prayer, meditation, and service learning, were likelier to exhibit prosocial behaviors and report a greater sense of meaning and purpose post-graduation.

Similarly, in their book *How College Affects Students: 21st Century Evidence that Higher Education Works*, Mayhew et al. synthesize decades of research on the impact of higher education on student outcomes.⁴³⁹ They dedicate a chapter to the role of spirituality and religion in shaping students' development, noting that participation in spiritual formation practices during

⁴³⁷ Schaffer, 137–42.

⁴³⁸ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*.

⁴³⁹ Matthew J. Mayhew, *How College Affects Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2016).

college is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including increased self-awareness, empathy, and commitment to social justice. Furthermore, they highlight studies that demonstrate the long-term impact of spiritual formation on alums, with those who reported higher levels of spiritual engagement during college being more likely to be involved in community service, civic engagement, and philanthropic activities later in life.

These findings underscore the vital role that spiritual formation plays in Christian higher education, supporting students' immediate growth and development and shaping their long-term trajectories and contributions to society. By integrating spiritual formation practices throughout the educational experience, Christian universities can equip students with the inner resources, values, and commitments needed to lead lives of purpose, service, and faith-inspired leadership.

However, it is essential to recognize that the impact of spiritual formation is not uniform across all students and contexts. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm note that the effectiveness of spiritual formation practices depends on factors such as institutional culture, faculty and staff support, and students' backgrounds and receptivity.⁴⁴⁰ Christian universities must remain attentive to these diverse needs and contexts, tailoring their spiritual formation efforts to ensure that all students have the opportunity to grow and flourish.

The growing body of research on the impact of spiritual formation practices in Christian higher education highlights the long-term significance of this essential aspect of student development. By prioritizing spiritual formation, Christian universities can enhance students' college experiences and equip them to lead lives of purpose, service, and faith-inspired leadership long after graduation.

⁴⁴⁰ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 138–39.

Institutional Identity

Institutional identity is anchored in mission statements and core values, particularly for Christian higher educational institutions.⁴⁴¹ These elements articulate a clear Christian identity and serve as a beacon, guiding the institution through the complexities of the educational landscape and cultural shifts.⁴⁴² This analysis draws upon the knowledge from Christian higher education literature to explore the pivotal role of mission statements and core values, their differentiation in higher education, and strategies for responding to cultural shifts.

Mission and Values: Articulating a Clear Christian Identity

Mission statements and core values are essential for Christian higher educational institutions because they encapsulate the essence of their identity and purpose.⁴⁴³ They provide a framework within which the institution operates, influencing decision-making processes, academic curricula, and community engagement.⁴⁴⁴ By explicitly integrating Christian faith into their mission statements, these institutions set themselves apart from secular counterparts, clearly stating the centrality of faith in their educational approach and community life.⁴⁴⁵ This commitment to faith influences all aspects of the institution, from selecting faculty and staff who share these values to developing programs that reflect Christian principles.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴¹ Christopher C. Morphew and M. Hartley, "Mission Statements: A Thematic Analysis of Rhetoric across Institutional Type," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77, no. 2 (2006): 456.

⁴⁴² Robert Ableman and Amy Dalessandro, "Institutional Vision in Christian Higher Education: A Comparison of ACCU, ELCA, and CCCU Institutions in the United States," *Christian Higher Education* 18, no. 1 (2009): 61–62.

⁴⁴³ Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 25.

⁴⁴⁴ Henck, "Walking the Tightrope: Christian Colleges and Universities in a Time of Change," 196–201.

⁴⁴⁵ Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College*, 43.

⁴⁴⁶ Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 15.

Differentiation in Higher Education: Key Market Distinctions

In a competitive educational landscape, a distinct Christian mission and values offer key market distinctions that attract students, faculty, and donors seeking an education that aligns with their faith and values.⁴⁴⁷ This differentiation is not just about religious affiliation but about offering a holistic education that integrates faith with learning, encouraging students to develop intellectually, spiritually, and morally.⁴⁴⁸ Christian higher educational institutions often emphasize character formation, service, and leadership in their curricula and community life. They distinguished themselves by producing skilled professionals and committed Christians ready to contribute positively to society.⁴⁴⁹

Responding to Cultural Shifts: Maintaining a Strong Spiritual Identity

Navigating cultural and academic pressures while maintaining a solid spiritual and faith-based identity is challenging for Christian higher educational institutions.⁴⁵⁰ These pressures include the increasing secularization of society, changing demographics, and the need for

⁴⁴⁷ Michael D. Hammond, “Christian Higher Education in the United States: The Crisis of Evangelical Identity,” *Christian Higher Education* 18, nos. 1–2 (2019): 9.

⁴⁴⁸ Alex Sibley, “ESSAY: The Future of Christian Higher Education,” Southwestern (blog), January 6, 2021, <https://swbts.edu/news/essay-the-future-of-christian-higher-education/>.

⁴⁴⁹ Richard T. Hughes, *The Vocation of the Christian Scholar: How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 26.

⁴⁵⁰ Robert C. Andringa, “Keeping the Faith: Leadership Challenges Unique to Religiously Affiliated Colleges and Universities,” in *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, ed. J. Martin and J. E. Samuels (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 168–84.

inclusivity and diversity.⁴⁵¹ Responding effectively to these shifts requires a strategic approach that is faithful to the institution's mission and adaptive to the changing environment.⁴⁵²

In responding to cultural shifts, Christian higher educational institutions embodied by institutions like DBU remain steadfast in preserving a robust spiritual identity. At the heart of this commitment is the foundational concept of worldview. DBU emphasizes developing a Christian worldview that shapes academic pursuits and personal and professional lives through its curriculum and community engagement. A worldview, as presented in Ronald H. Nash's *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*, is the lens through which individuals interpret and engage with the world around them. Nash argues that a Christian worldview provides a coherent and comprehensive understanding of reality grounded in the truth of the Gospel, offering profound answers to life's ultimate questions concerning God, reality/truth, knowledge/wisdom, right/wrong, and the very idea of humanity.⁴⁵³ This perspective is critical in enabling students and faculty to confront and contribute positively to contemporary cultural debates and challenges.

Moreover, DBU's approach to integrating faith and learning involves guiding students to explore and grow their worldviews, challenging them to extend beyond the known and to discover values that will shape their lives for the better. This process is instrumental in responding to cultural shifts, as it prepares individuals to navigate a complex world with conviction and compassion rooted in Christian principles. By focusing on worldview

⁴⁵¹ Samuel Joeckel and Thomas Chesnes, "A Slippery Slope to Secularization? An Empirical Analysis of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities," *Christian Scholar's Review* 39, no. 2 (2010): 177–96.

⁴⁵² David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 6.

⁴⁵³ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub., 1992).

development, DBU underscores the necessity of maintaining a strong spiritual identity that not only withstands but engages thoughtfully with the changing cultural landscape, embodying the Christian call to be in the world but not of it.⁴⁵⁴

Relationship Between Institutional Identity and Spiritual Formation

The relationship between institutional identity and student spiritual formation is crucial for Christian higher education. Recent studies have explored the interconnections between these key themes, shedding light on how the distinctive characteristics of Christian colleges and universities shape the spiritual development of their students.

In their article *Christian Colleges and Universities as Moral Communities: The Effects of Institutional Characteristics on Student Religiosity*, Davignon and Thomson investigate the impact of institutional factors on students' religious commitment and spiritual growth.⁴⁵⁵ Drawing on data from a national survey of students at Christian colleges and universities, they find that institutions with a strong emphasis on spiritual formation, as evidenced by practices such as required chapel attendance and the integration of faith and learning, tend to have students who report higher levels of religious commitment and spiritual growth. This suggests that intentionally cultivating a Christian institutional identity through curricular and co-curricular means can significantly impact students' spiritual development.

Moreover, Davignon and Thomson argue that Christian colleges and universities serve as “moral communities” that profoundly shape students' values, beliefs, and practices. By

⁴⁵⁴ Cook and Thomason, eds., *Integrating Faith and Learning: Case Studies from Dallas Baptist University*.

⁴⁵⁵ Phil Davignon and Robert A. Thomson, “Christian Colleges and Universities as Moral Communities: The Effects of Institutional Characteristics on Student Religiosity,” *Review of Religious Research* 57, no. 4 (2015): 531–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-015-0214-5>.

immersing students in an environment permeated by a shared set of religious commitments and moral norms, these institutions foster a sense of belonging and accountability that supports spiritual growth. This highlights the importance of attending to the social and communal dimensions of spiritual formation, recognizing that students' spiritual development is deeply influenced by the relationships and contexts in which they are embedded.

Similarly, in their book *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry*, Setran and Kiesling explore the unique challenges and opportunities of nurturing spiritual growth among college students and young adults.⁴⁵⁶ They argue that Christian colleges and universities are ideally positioned to support this process because of their commitment to integrating faith and learning and creating a holistic educational environment.

Setran and Kiesling emphasize the importance of a “practical theology” of spiritual formation that attends to contemporary young adults' developmental needs and cultural contexts. They suggest that effective spiritual formation in this context requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses intellectual, moral, and relational dimensions and is attuned to emerging adults' unique struggles and aspirations. They argue that Christian colleges and universities that embody this kind of practical theology can play a vital role in nurturing the spiritual growth of their students and preparing them for lives of faith and service.

These studies underscore the significant relationship between institutional identity and student spiritual formation in Christian higher education. They suggest that colleges and universities that intentionally cultivate a robust Christian identity through both curricular and co-

⁴⁵⁶ Setran, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*.

curricular means are better positioned to support the spiritual development of their students. Moreover, they highlight the importance of attending to the social and communal dimensions of spiritual formation, recognizing that students' spiritual growth is profoundly shaped by the relationships and contexts in which they are embedded.

As such, these studies provide a valuable framework for the present investigation, which seeks to explore how Christian universities can effectively engage and retain Convictional Christian students in the face of contemporary challenges. By attending to the interconnections between institutional identity and student spiritual formation, this study aims to offer insights and recommendations that can help Christian colleges and universities fulfill their distinctive missions and support the holistic development of their students.

Strategies for Navigating Pressures

Engaging in Open Dialogue: Encouraging open and respectful dialogue on campus about faith, culture, and the challenges of integrating them, ensuring that the institution remains a welcoming place for all students, regardless of their background.⁴⁵⁷

Adapting Academic Offerings: Developing programs and curricula that reflect the realities of the modern world while being rooted in Christian perspectives, ensuring that students are prepared for the challenges of contemporary society.

Building Partnerships: Collaborating with other Christian institutions, churches, and organizations to strengthen the institution's mission and expand its reach and impact.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ Jacobsen, Jacobsen, and Sawatsky, eds., *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, 5.

⁴⁵⁸ Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, 177.

Emphasizing Service and Community Engagement: Encouraging students to engage with the broader community through service and outreach programs, demonstrating the practical application of their faith and learning.⁴⁵⁹

The approach embraced by DBU recognizes the necessity for a long-term solution rather than a quick fix. It demands a concerted effort and strategic focus, requiring everyone to work collaboratively towards a shared goal.

In order to get to the point where we are able to tackle this big worldview issue, we first start small. It is important to remember that for a student to be able to integrate faith and learning they must gain practical skills along with the academic knowledge of the classroom. The faculty plays an important role in this process and works alongside the students in order to accomplish this outcome. This process begins the first time that the student is admitted to the program. The registration process is actually the start of building community. Students are introduced to the faculty that will be helping them register for their first classes at the institution. The professors who really care about the students demonstrate faith and learning. Students see the first steps of a unique approach to education. The faculty at this first introduction start the mentor relationship, which will continue until graduation and even beyond.⁴⁶⁰

In conclusion, mission statements and core values are crucial in articulating a clear Christian identity for higher education institutions.⁴⁶¹ This identity serves as a key market distinction and guides these institutions in responding to cultural and academic pressures.⁴⁶² By staying true to their mission and values while adapting to the changing landscape, Christian

⁴⁵⁹ Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty, *Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 37–55.

⁴⁶⁰ Cooper, Ivey, and Lee, “Integrating Faith in the Pre-Medical and Biological Sciences,” 132–33.

⁴⁶¹ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 6.

⁴⁶² William Ringernberg, *Christian College, The: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 268.

higher educational institutions can maintain their distinctive spiritual and faith-based identity, offering a unique and valuable contribution to the broader educational landscape.⁴⁶³

Contemporary Challenges

Addressing the challenges and strategies within Christian higher education in the context of secularization, societal norms, postmodernism, and maintaining institutional integrity involves a multifaceted exploration of both historical trends and contemporary strategies. This comprehensive analysis draws upon insights from Christian higher education literature and current research to provide a nuanced understanding of these complex issues.^{464 465}

Secularization and Societal Norms

The historical transition of higher education from Christian to increasingly secular has profoundly impacted Christian institutions. This secularization process, particularly pronounced in the United States, has seen many formerly church-affiliated universities move away from their faith-based missions towards academic prestige and cultural respectability.⁴⁶⁶ The challenge for Christian higher education in navigating this landscape lies in retaining a distinct Christian identity amidst a broader societal shift towards secularism and pluralism. Integrating faith and learning is pivotal, countering secular drift by embedding Christian theology deeply within the educational ethos, ensuring that Christian traditions impact the university's culture

⁴⁶³ Dockery, *Faith and Learning*, 12.

⁴⁶⁴ Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*.

⁴⁶⁵ Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University*.

⁴⁶⁶ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 4.

meaningfully.⁴⁶⁷ Recent studies have highlighted the importance of faculty and staff in maintaining a strong Christian identity, emphasizing the need for intentional hiring practices and ongoing faith development.⁴⁶⁸

However, as Perry L. Glanzer points out in his article, the “sky is falling rhetoric” regarding Christian higher education is often overused.⁴⁶⁹ Glanzer argues that while Christian higher education in America does face challenges, these challenges are the same as those faced by all of American higher education, with the American student population shrinking substantially. However, comparative research reveals that enrollments are falling faster in public and for-profit private institutions than among American non-profit privates, including almost all Christian higher education.

Glanzer acknowledges that some smaller Christian higher educational institutions may not survive in their present form due to declining population, competition, and the “Walmartization” of higher education. He also highlights the importance of operationalizing Christian identity, as institutions that fail may struggle to justify their value proposition to parents and students.

Glanzer maintains that Christians should be hopeful and accurate in their empirical assessments despite these challenges. While American Christian higher education is shrinking slightly, it is not declining as much as secular higher education. Moreover, Christian higher

⁴⁶⁷ Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 45–46.

⁴⁶⁸ James A. Swezey and T. Christopher Ross, “Balancing Religious Identity and Academic Reputation at a Christian University,” *Christian Higher Education* 11, no. 2 (2012): 94–114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2012.650927>.

⁴⁶⁹ Perry L. Glanzer, “The Doomsayers Are Wrong about Christian Higher Education (and Should Correct Their Alarmist Claims),” *Christian Scholar’s Review* (blog), March 7, 2023, <https://christianscholars.com/the-radical-doomsayers-are-wrong-about-christian-higher-education-but-college-enrollments-in-general-will-decline/>.

education is growing tremendously in other countries worldwide, with African, Asian, and South American Christians likely to play a key role in the future strength of Christian higher education. This global perspective on the state of Christian higher education offers a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Christian higher education in the contemporary context. While secularization and societal norms pose significant challenges, the resilience and growth of Christian higher education worldwide suggest that faith-based institutions play a vital role in shaping the future of higher education.

Navigating Postmodernism

Postmodernism, emphasizing pluralism and skepticism towards universal truths, presents a significant challenge to Christian higher educational institutions committed to a foundational Christian worldview. The response to this challenge involves a robust engagement with Christian theology as a counterpoint to postmodern relativism. By fostering a deep understanding of the Bible and Christian intellectual tradition, institutions aim to develop a theology of Christian higher education that informs all aspects of university life, from academic programs to community engagement.⁴⁷⁰ This engagement affirms the relevance of Christian perspectives and equips students to engage with diverse worldviews critically. Recent research has explored the role of worldview formation in Christian higher education, emphasizing the importance of integrating faith and learning across disciplines.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 17–18.

⁴⁷¹ Katherine G. Schultz and James A. Swezey, “A Three-Dimensional Concept of Worldview,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 22, no. 3 (2013): 233, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10656219.2013.850612>.

Maintaining Institutional Integrity

The integrity of Christian higher educational institutions hinges on their ability to uphold core convictions and mission in an evolving cultural context. This involves a commitment to integrating faith and learning as a central enterprise, resisting the pressures of secularization, pragmatism, and the compartmentalization of faith from academic pursuits.⁴⁷² Strategies for maintaining integrity include fostering an integrative approach to education that views students as holistic beings created in the image of God and aims to cultivate intellectual and spiritual formation alongside professional development. This approach challenges the instrumentalism prevalent in modern higher education and the tendency towards secularization, advocating for a model of education deeply rooted in Christian convictions and responsive to contemporary societal needs.⁴⁷³ Current research has explored the role of spiritual formation in Christian higher education, highlighting the importance of integrating spiritual practices and community engagement into the educational experience.⁴⁷⁴

Challenging Secularization: Relevance of Christian Higher Education

While the secularization narrative has been prevalent in discussions of higher education, recent scholarship has offered important critiques of this perspective and argued for the ongoing relevance and vitality of Christian higher education. In the edited volume *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance*, Carpenter, Glanzer, and Lantinga present a compelling case for the enduring significance of faith-based institutions in the contemporary landscape of

⁴⁷² Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College*, 6.

⁴⁷³ Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 4–5.

⁴⁷⁴ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 39.

higher education.⁴⁷⁵ Drawing on examples from around the world, they demonstrate how Christian universities play a vital role in shaping intellectual discourse, moral formation, and societal engagement, even in the face of secularizing pressures.

One key argument advanced by contributors to this volume is that the secularization narrative often overlooks the resilience and adaptability of Christian higher education institutions. Rather than simply succumbing to the forces of secularization, many Christian universities have found creative ways to maintain their distinctive religious identities while still engaging with the broader academic community. This has involved a range of strategies, such as developing robust theological foundations for academic inquiry, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, and cultivating partnerships with other faith-based organizations.

Similarly, in his book *Why College Matters to God: An Introduction to the Christian College*, Ostrander challenges the assumption that Christian higher education is becoming irrelevant in an increasingly secular society.⁴⁷⁶ He argues that Christian colleges and universities are crucial in preparing students to engage with the contemporary world's complex moral and intellectual challenges precisely because of their commitment to integrating faith and learning. By providing a holistic education that attends to the spiritual, moral, and academic dimensions of students' lives, Christian institutions equip graduates to serve as agents of transformation and reconciliation in a deeply divided and hurting world.

Ostrander also highlights the unique contributions that Christian higher education makes to the broader landscape of American higher education. He notes that Christian colleges and

⁴⁷⁵ Joel A. Carpenter, Perry L. Glanzer, and Nick Lantinga, eds., *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

⁴⁷⁶ Richard Ostrander, *Why College Matters to God: An Introduction to Christian Learning*, 3rd ed. (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021).

universities often prioritize the cultivation of virtues such as compassion, humility, and service, which are essential for fostering a more just and humane society. Moreover, he argues that the emphasis on community, character formation, and spiritual growth that characterizes many Christian institutions can serve as a model for other colleges and universities seeking to provide a more holistic and integrative educational experience.

These critiques of the secularization narrative offer a powerful counterpoint to the dominant perspective that has shaped discussions of higher education in recent decades. By highlighting the ongoing relevance and vitality of Christian higher education, they invite us to reconsider the unique contributions that faith-based institutions can make to the flourishing of individuals, communities, and societies in the twenty-first century. As such, they provide an essential foundation for the present study, which seeks to explore how Christian universities can continue to thrive and fulfill their distinctive missions in the face of contemporary challenges.

Alternative Models for Christian Higher Education

As we conclude this literature review, it is important to recognize that the landscape of Christian higher education is not monolithic. While the dominant paradigms of faith-learning integration, spiritual formation, and institutional identity have shaped much of the discourse in this field, some alternative models and frameworks offer valuable insights and perspectives. By broadening the scope of our inquiry to include these alternative approaches, we can better understand the challenges and opportunities facing Christian higher education in the twenty-first century.

James K. A. Smith presents one alternative framework in his book *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*.⁴⁷⁷ Smith argues that Christian higher education's dominant paradigm of worldview formation, which emphasizes faith's cognitive and intellectual dimensions, is insufficient for shaping students' desires and habits. Instead, he proposes an education model centered on the formative power of liturgical practices, such as worship, prayer, and service.

For Smith, the goal of Christian education is not simply to impart a set of beliefs or ideas but rather to shape students' fundamental desires and loves following the kingdom of God. This requires a pedagogy that attends to faith's embodied and affective dimensions and seeks to cultivate a holistic vision of the Christian life. By reorienting Christian higher education's focus on worship and spiritual formation, Smith suggests that institutions can better prepare students to live out their faith in all aspects.⁴⁷⁸

Katherine Turpin offers another alternative framework in her article *Disrupting the Luxury of Despair: Justice and Peace Education in Contexts of Relative Privilege*.⁴⁷⁹ Turpin argues that traditional models of Christian higher education, which often focus on individual spiritual formation and personal piety, may unintentionally reinforce a privatized and individualistic understanding of faith. As an alternative, she proposes a model of education oriented towards the public work of the church in the world, fostering a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement among students.

⁴⁷⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 17.

⁴⁷⁸ Smith, 219.

⁴⁷⁹ Katherine Turpin, "Disrupting the Luxury of Despair: Justice and Peace Education in Contexts of Relative Privilege," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 11, no. 3 (2008): 141–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9647.2008.00431.x>.

For Turpin, this necessitates a pedagogy grounded in community engagement, social analysis, and prophetic witness practices. By immersing students in the lived realities of marginalized communities and equipping them with tools to analyze and respond to social injustice critically, Christian higher education can be crucial in preparing students for leadership and service in the public sphere. This educational model, she suggests, can help bridge the gap between the academy and the broader society, contributing to the transformation of both individuals and communities.

These alternative frameworks offer valuable perspectives that enrich and expand our understanding of the role and purpose of Christian higher education. By highlighting the importance of embodied practices, social engagement, and public witness, they challenge us to move beyond a narrow focus on individual spiritual formation and intellectual development and to consider the broader social and cultural implications of our educational efforts.

Moreover, these frameworks invite us to examine the assumptions and priorities that shape our institutions and ask whether they truly align with the values and mission of the Christian faith. Are we adequately preparing students to live out their faith in the complex and contested spaces of the contemporary world? Are we equipping them with the tools and capacities needed to engage in the public work of justice, reconciliation, and social transformation?

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has explored Christian higher education's complex and multifaceted landscape, focusing on the role of faith and spirituality in shaping students' educational experiences and outcomes. We have gained a deeper understanding of this field's

unique contributions and tensions by examining key themes such as faith-learning integration, spiritual formation, institutional identity, and contemporary challenges.

The literature reveals that Christian higher education institutions play a vital role in providing a holistic and integrative educational experience that attends to students' lives' intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Through faith-learning integration, spiritual formation, and cultivating a distinctive institutional identity, these institutions seek to prepare students for lives of purpose, service, and leadership in a rapidly changing world. The alternative models of Christian higher education, such as those presented by James K. A. Smith and Katherine Turpin, offer valuable insights into how institutions can attract and retain Convictional Christian students more effectively. By emphasizing the importance of embodied practices, social engagement, and public witness, these models provide a framework for creating educational experiences that resonate with the values and aspirations of Convictional Christian students, equipping them to live out their faith in all aspects of their lives.

However, the literature also highlights the significant challenges and tensions that Christian higher education institutions face in the contemporary context. The forces of secularization, pluralism, and globalization pose significant challenges to Christian higher education's traditional models and assumptions, requiring ongoing reflection, adaptation, and innovation. Moreover, the literature reveals the need for a more critical and nuanced examination of dominant paradigms' potential drawbacks and limitations, such as the risk of intellectual insularity or the reinforcement of individualistic and privatized understandings of faith.

As we look to the future of Christian higher education, it is clear that ongoing research and reflection will be essential for navigating the complex challenges and opportunities of the contemporary landscape. This literature review has highlighted the need for more empirical

studies that explore the long-term impact of spiritual formation practices on student outcomes,⁴⁸⁰ the relationship between institutional identity and student spiritual formation,⁴⁸¹ and the effectiveness of alternative pedagogical models for cultivating faith and social engagement.

Moreover, there is a need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among scholars, practitioners, and institutional leaders as we seek to discern and embody the call of the gospel in our particular contexts. By drawing on the insights of diverse perspectives and frameworks, we can continue to refine and adapt our educational practices to meet the evolving needs and aspirations of our students and our wider society.

Ultimately, the literature reviewed in this chapter underscores Christian higher education's enduring significance and vitality in the twenty-first century. Despite the challenges and tensions that characterize this field, Christian colleges and universities continue to play a vital role in shaping students' hearts, minds, and lives and preparing them for lives of faithful service and leadership in a complex and rapidly changing world. As such, the ongoing work of Christian higher education remains an essential and transformative force in our society, one that demands our sustained attention, support, and engagement.

⁴⁸⁰ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*.

⁴⁸¹ Davignon and Thomson, "Christian Colleges and Universities as Moral Communities."

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

This chapter explains the methods—the kind of research, how that research was conducted, and how the data was analyzed—used in carrying out this study.

The Purpose of the Project

This project aims to identify common strategies Christian higher education institutions employ to attract and enroll Convictional Christians. This will be achieved through qualitative research, specifically personal interviews with key informants from four selected institutions that have successfully attracted and maintained a focus on Convictional Christians. The research question is, “Will selected universities that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians exhibit common strategies?”

This project aims to establish a connection between the strategic approaches used by Evangelical Christian Universities to engage Convictional Christians and their ability to maintain and strengthen relationships with this demographic. This would indicate their success in preserving their identity and mission amidst a changing cultural landscape. Success will be measured by the qualitative assessments and perspectives of Presidents, Provosts, and Deans from each institution regarding the alignment, effectiveness, and impact of these strategies on the institution’s mission, identity, and engagement with the Convictional Christian community.

The Research Perspective of the Project

The research emphasis will utilize both qualitative and quantitative data, which can be described as qualitative primary and quantitative first.⁴⁸² The researcher begins by collecting quantitative preliminary data as a basis for collecting and interpreting the primary qualitative data.⁴⁸³ All the interviews were conducted online, primarily using the Zoom video platform. As key informants, the interviewees were carefully selected from each institution to represent the broadest, most knowledgeable set of individuals qualified to provide insight and understanding to the issue of maintaining a strategic focus on attracting and enrolling Convictional Christians within the context of evolving demographics.

The Setting of the Project

The researcher selected five Christian higher educational institutions in the US among many candidates to participate in this project. They are members of either the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU)⁴⁸⁴ or the International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE),⁴⁸⁵ have more than 1,000 undergraduates, and have an Operationalizing Christian Identity Guide (OGIS)⁴⁸⁶ score of 16 or better. These five have also been chosen because they were recommended from an unaided survey conducted by the researcher evaluating

⁴⁸² John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 291.

⁴⁸³ Randy L. Joyner et al., *Writing the Winning Thesis or Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2013), loc. 11.7.

⁴⁸⁴ "List of CCCC Institutions," CCCC, accessed February 1, 2024, https://www.cccu.org/members_and_affiliates/.

⁴⁸⁵ "International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE) Membership Overview," IACE, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://iace.education/membership-overview>.

⁴⁸⁶ Perry L. Glanzer, Theodore F. Cockle, and Jessica Martin, *Christian Higher Education: An Empirical Guide* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2023), loc. 139.

the opinions of people familiar with Christian Higher Education. The survey participants believed these schools would effectively attract and enroll Convictional Christians. Fictitious names for the institutions have been used to assure their anonymity and integrity.

Institution A, a distinguished private Christian university in the Midwestern region of the United States, was established in the early 1900s. With a thriving undergraduate program catering to approximately 1,500 students, the university has expanded its offerings to include various undergraduate and graduate degrees in traditional and emerging fields. Institution A fosters an educational environment that prioritizes intellectual growth, spiritual maturity, and the development of practical skills. The university provides on-campus dormitories and nearby housing options catering to diverse student preferences to support a vibrant student community. While Institution A upholds a Christian ethos, it welcomes students from various backgrounds and beliefs without requiring all incoming students to profess the Christian faith. Adhering to values aligned with its religious convictions, the Department of Education granted Institution A a Title IX exemption. This exemption allows the university to maintain policies and practices consistent with its religious beliefs, particularly concerning issues of gender and sexuality. Despite this exemption, the university continues to foster an inclusive academic and social environment that emphasizes service, leadership, and a commitment to positively impacting society through faith-informed excellence.

Institution B, a respected private Christian university in the United States' heartland, traces its origins to the turn of the 20th century. The university boasts a medium-sized undergraduate program with approximately 1,800 students, reflecting its commitment to personalized, faith-infused education. The campus offers a serene backdrop for diverse academic programs, ranging from liberal arts to specialized professional degrees. While deeply rooted in

evangelical Christian values, Institution B welcomes students from all backgrounds, fostering a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences. Residential life is designed to cultivate community and fellowship, with various living arrangements catering to different student needs. Institution B operates under a Title IX exemption granted due to its religious convictions, allowing it to maintain policies that align with its spiritual framework. This exemption does not detract from its dedication to an inclusive learning environment where all students are supported and valued. The university remains steadfast in its commitment to developing academically accomplished, spiritually attuned leaders prepared to contribute positively to a global society.

Institution C, a prominent private Christian university in the Southern United States's significant cultural and economic hub, was founded in the mid-20th century. With a diverse and extensive undergraduate curriculum encompassing arts, sciences, and professional studies, the university serves approximately 3,100 undergraduate students. The campus artfully combines the benefits of urban accessibility with serene academic settings, creating an environment conducive to vibrant urban engagement and focused study. Institution C welcomes students of all backgrounds and does not require a profession of Christian faith for admission, reflecting its commitment to an inclusive approach to education where faith and learning are intertwined. On-campus living arrangements are designed to cultivate a dynamic community atmosphere, supporting the institution's mission of life transformation. Following its Christian principles, Institution C holds a Title IX exemption, allowing it to maintain policies that align with its religious values. Despite this exemption, the university is dedicated to offering an educational experience that is welcoming to all, emphasizing academic excellence and equipping graduates for effective leadership and service in a diverse global society.

Institution D, a well-respected private Christian university in a central urban area of the Southern United States, was established in the latter half of the 20th century. With approximately 2,800 undergraduate students, the university offers a wide-ranging undergraduate program featuring disciplines across the arts, sciences, and professional fields. The campus benefits from its urban setting, providing students with access to city resources while maintaining a focused environment for academic pursuits and personal growth. Institution D welcomes students from all cultural and personal backgrounds and does not require a profession of Christian faith for admission. This openness reflects its commitment to an educational philosophy integrating faith with learning, enriching every student's academic journey. Institution D operates under a Title IX exemption, allowing it to align its policies with its religious convictions without compromising its inclusivity. Despite this exemption, the university strives to maintain an environment that is accessible and supportive for all students, emphasizing excellence in education and the development of leadership skills geared towards service in a diverse and interconnected world.

Institution E, a distinguished private Christian university in a tranquil area of the Midwestern United States, was founded in the late 19th century. With approximately 4,200 undergraduate students, the university has developed a comprehensive undergraduate program encompassing various academic disciplines, such as health sciences, engineering, business, and liberal arts. The rural campus provides a serene setting that fosters deep academic engagement and personal reflection, enhancing the educational experience. Institution E is committed to a Christian educational framework that integrates a Biblical worldview across all areas of study, requiring all students to engage in Bible minor courses as part of their academic curriculum. This approach is central to the university's mission of preparing students for lifelong leadership and

service through an education emphasizing comprehensive Christian character development.

While Institution E upholds conservative Christian values and requires a profession of Christian faith for admission, it is known for its adherence to traditional evangelical doctrines. These doctrines influence its campus policies and educational practices, including compliance with but not exemption from Title IX. The university aims to produce well-equipped graduates who can make significant contributions to their fields and communities, grounded in their faith and ethical integrity.

The Implementation of the Project

The implementation of this project was divided into three major components. First, several activities were undertaken to prepare to initiate the project. Second, interviews were conducted as part of the project's application. Third, the data from the project was collated, organized, and condensed to evaluate the project's success.

The Preparation for the Project

In preparation for this project, four crucial tasks needed to be completed. First, introductory pieces of correspondence needed to be generated to distribute to the key informants. Second, five institutions needed to be selected and invited to participate in the project. Third, a group of interviewees from each institution needed to be identified and secured as the key research informants. Finally, the research instrument, which consisted of the questions to be used in the personal interviews with the key research informants, needed to be developed.

The Development of Introductory Correspondence

Four key pieces of correspondence, which can be found in Appendices A-E, were developed for distribution to the key informants.

First, a letter of introduction (Appendix A) provided the researcher's background information, including their name, vocation, family, and church involvement. It also highlighted their status as a student in the D.Min. Program at Corban University and detailed the project's description and expectations for participant involvement.

Second, a "Welcome to the Project" note (Appendix B) thanked the key informants for their willingness to participate and offered the opportunity to set up an interview appointment or confirm a previously scheduled interview. This email was accompanied by an attachment featuring screening and background questions (Appendix C) to familiarize the interviewee with the subject, evaluate their level of knowledge, and streamline the interview process.

Third, a background questionnaire (Appendix D) was sent to the institution's president upon their agreement to participate in the project, focusing on the institution's demographics, culture, history, and association with the Convictional Christian market.

Lastly, a letter of appreciation (Appendix E) was sent to each informant following their interviews, primarily via email, expressing gratitude for their cooperation, affirming the value of their contributions, and offering to provide a copy of the research results upon project completion.

The Selection of Institutions

The researcher conducted a quantitative survey to identify Christian institutions effectively engaging Convictional Christian students. An unaided survey (Appendix F) was designed using open-ended questions as described in *Marketing Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁷ Mercedes Esteban-Bravo and Jose Manuel Vidal-Sanz, *Marketing Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 714.

The survey was emailed to 2,532 individuals pre-selected for their familiarity with Christian Higher Education. The source names for the survey came from 112 of the researcher's network, 1,240 carefully chosen from the researcher's LinkedIn direct-connected network⁴⁸⁸, and 1,280 from the evangelical religious press identified through Cision⁴⁸⁹.

As shown in *Figure 1*, the email campaign yielded 2,304 delivered emails, with 228 (9%) bouncing due to invalid or inactive email addresses.

Basic Activity	Emails	
	<i>n</i>	%
Emails Sent	2,532	
Bounced Bad Emails	228	9
Total Delivered	2,304	
Opened	599	26
Clicked	132	22
Started the survey	84	64
Completed the survey	72	85

Figure 1 - Survey Response and Engagement Metrics

Among the delivered emails, 599 (26%) were opened by recipients, indicating their initial engagement with the survey invitation. Of those who opened the email, 132 (22%) clicked on the survey link, demonstrating further interest in participating.

The survey provided an additional level of self-selection, as the researcher received fifty-seven direct emails from individuals who appreciated being included but admitted to lacking sufficient awareness of the market to provide a responsible recommendation. These individuals may or may not be included in the subsequent results.

⁴⁸⁸ "LinkedIn | Steve Sammons," accessed March 9, 2024, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sammons/>.

⁴⁸⁹ "Cision - Global Cloud-Based Communications and PR Solutions Leader," Cision, accessed March 9, 2024, <https://www.cision.com/about/>.

According to the metrics available from the survey platform, www.CognitoForms.com, eighty-four individuals (64% of those who clicked the email link) started the survey, and 72 (85% of those who started) completed it. This completion rate suggests an elevated level of engagement and commitment among those who chose to participate in the survey.

It is important to note that the email campaign metrics, including bounces, opens, and clicks, were tracked by MailChimp.com, which employs industry-standard definitions for these terms. A “bounce” refers to an undeliverable email due to either a permanent issue (hard bounce) or a temporary problem (soft bounce).⁴⁹⁰ An “open” is recorded when a recipient loads the images or clicks a link within the email, triggering a tracking pixel. A “click” denotes any instance of a recipient clicking on a link within the email, indicating interest and engagement with the content.⁴⁹¹

The combination of email campaign metrics and survey platform data provides a comprehensive overview of the survey’s reach and participation, highlighting the effectiveness of targeting individuals with knowledge of Christian Higher Education and the willingness of recipients to engage with the survey content. These responses collectively recommended sixty-two Christian institutions that were perceived as effectively engaging Convictional Christian students.

To refine the pool of potential participating institutions for the qualitative interview stage, the researcher applied a series of filtering criteria, as outlined in *Figure 2*. This filtering process involved several steps. First, the researcher reconciled contradictory recommendations,

⁴⁹⁰ “What Is Bounce Rate?,” Mailchimp, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/bounce-rate/>.

⁴⁹¹ “Click Rate vs Click Through Rate Guide,” Mailchimp, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://mailchimp.com/resources/click-rate-vs-click-through-rate/>.

eliminating nine institutions where survey participants provided conflicting assessments of their effectiveness in engaging Convictional Christian students. Next, seminaries and Bible colleges were removed from consideration, excluding six institutions, as the study focused primarily on comprehensive universities.

Filter Criteria	Insitutions	
	n	Diff.
Unfiltered Institutions Recommended	62	
Reconciled +/-	53	-9
Removed Seminaries, Bible College	47	-6
Removed Non-US	44	-3
Removed Undergrad <1000	33	-11
Removed OCIG Score <15	30	-3
Removed Non-Members CCCU & IACE	30	
Total Filtered Institutions	30	

Figure 2 - Filter Steps Applied to Survey Recommendations of Christian Institutions

The pool was further narrowed by excluding three non-U.S. institutions, as the scope of the research was limited to institutions located within the United States.

To ensure that the selected institutions had a sufficient student population and were not facing financial challenges unrelated to demographic shifts (such as excessive debt or aging infrastructure), the researcher excluded 11 institutions with fewer than 1,000 undergraduate students, a threshold identified in higher education research as a key milestone for institutional stability.⁴⁹² An additional three institutions were removed due to OCIG scores below 16, based on a comprehensive assessment of Christian universities published in 2023.⁴⁹³ Finally, the researcher confirmed that all remaining institutions were affiliated with the Council for Christian

⁴⁹² “The Perilous Predicament of the Very Small College,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 17, 2022, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-perilous-predicament-of-the-very-small-college>.

⁴⁹³ Glanzer, Cockle, and Martin, *Christian Higher Education: An Empirical Guide*.

Colleges & Universities (CCCU) or the International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE), two leading organizations in the field.

Applying these filtering criteria resulted in a final pool of thirty institutions, representing a significant reduction of more than 50% from the initial sixty-two institutions recommended by survey respondents. These thirty institutions, characterized by their diversity in denominational affiliation, age, size, and geographic location, formed the basis for selecting the five institutions that participated in the qualitative interview stage of the study. This carefully curated sample provided a rich and representative cross-section of the Christian higher education landscape, enabling the researcher to explore the strategies and practices employed by institutions that have demonstrated success in attracting and retaining Convictional Christian students.

Once a group of potential institutions had been selected, the researcher directly contacted each institution or a representative of the cooperating organization. The institution's president was targeted as the recipient of the initial contact since their permission was necessary to include the institution and its faculty and staff in this project. This initial conversation involved a brief description of the researcher, including their name and professional background, and a general overview of the Doctor of Ministry project they were undertaking. In doing so, the contact person sought a consensus from the presidents to participate in the study, subject to further consideration following a more detailed discussion with the researcher. Permission was requested to share the president's name, phone number, and email address with the researcher. This process continued until five institutions had been secured.

Characteristics of Institutions

In this section, we provide a more detailed qualitative analysis of the characteristics of the institutions identified through the survey. There are two groups of institutions: first, the pool of thirty institutions, and second, the selected five institutions.

Denomination Breakdown

As illustrated in *Figure 3*, out of the thirty institutions, 60% are represented by Baptist and non-denominational affiliations.

Denomination	Count	
	<i>n</i>	%
Baptist	9	30
Non-denominational	9	30
Assemblies of God	3	10
Presbyterian	2	7
Wesleyan	2	7
Brethren	1	3
Charismatic	1	3
Church of God	1	3
Church of the Nazarene	1	3
Methodist	1	3
Total Institutions	30	

Figure 3 - Denomination Breakdown of Pool of Thirty Institutions

While these two denominations are noticeable, many other denominations are also represented. Among the five selected institutions, 40% are neither Baptist nor non-denominational, indicating that the chosen institutions represent the diverse range of denominations within the thirty-person pool.

Age of Institutions

As illustrated in *Figure 5*, most of the selected five institutions have an established history, four being over one hundred years old.

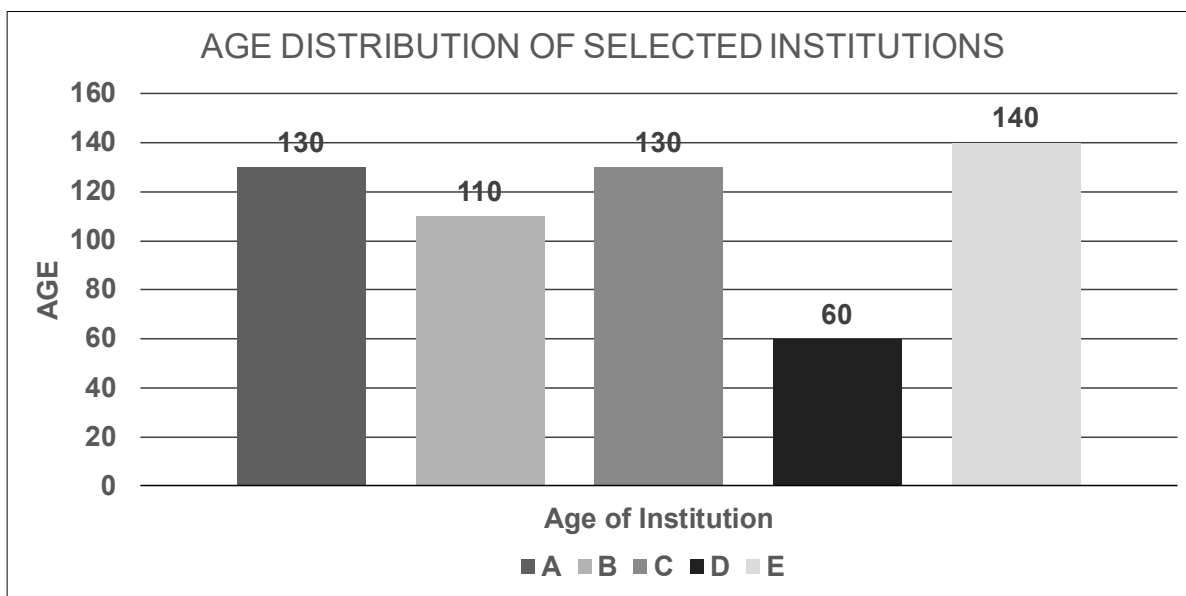


Figure 5 - Age Distribution of Selected Institutions

Only Institution D is younger, having operated for 60 years. This mix of institutions with varying ages suggests that the selected sample encompasses both long-standing and more recently founded universities, providing a balanced representation.

Undergraduate Enrollment

As illustrated in *Figure 6*, the five selected institutions show a wide range of undergraduate enrollment numbers, from 1,500 students at Institution A to 4,200 at Institution E.

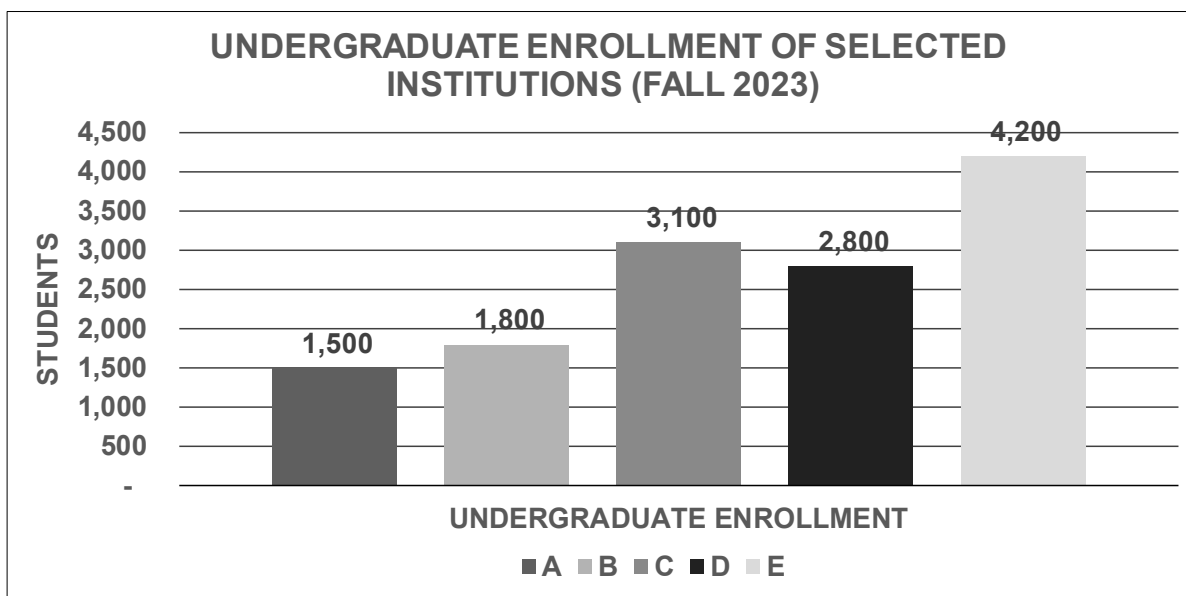


Figure 6 - Undergraduate Enrollment of Selected Institutions

The figures have been rounded to the nearest one hundred to maintain privacy for the institutions. This variation in enrollment size demonstrates that the sample is diverse and not solely focused on institutions of a specific size or capacity.

Bible Classes Requirement

As illustrated in *Figure 7*, the selected institutions strongly emphasize biblical studies, as all of them require their undergraduate students to complete multiple Bible courses.



Figure 7 - Required Bible Courses for Selected Institutions

On average, students are expected to complete approximately three Bible courses, which cover a range of essential subjects in Christian education. These courses typically encompass core elements of Christian faith and thought, such as Old Testament studies, New Testament studies, and Christian theology. Other course offerings may delve into additional areas, including Christian formation, evangelical theology, and examining Christian tradition with the Bible.

While the specific course requirements vary among the institutions, the shared focus on providing students with a comprehensive understanding of biblical studies demonstrates the commitment of these universities to equipping their students with a solid foundation in Christian knowledge and values.

Christian Affiliation Requirements

As shown in Figure 8, all five institutions require their staff, faculty, presidents, and board members to be Christians. However, only Institution E extends this requirement to its student body.

Institution	Student	Staff	Faculty	President	Board
	<i>y/n</i>	<i>y/n</i>	<i>y/n</i>	<i>y/n</i>	<i>y/n</i>
A	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
B	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
C	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
D	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
E	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Figure 8 - Christian Affiliation Requirements

While each institution is committed to Christian values and principles, its policies regarding students' religious affiliation vary. This diversity in admission practices allows for examining potential differences in approaches to fostering a Convictional Christian environment among institutions with varying student body compositions.

Title IX Exemption Status

In examining the selected five institutions, it is essential to note that four currently have Title IX exemptions, while the remaining institution has applied for the exemption and is in the process of obtaining it. A Title IX exemption, as outlined by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), allows educational institutions controlled by religious organizations to be exempt from specific Title IX provisions that conflict with their

religious tenets.⁴⁹⁴ This exemption permits these institutions to maintain sex-segregated facilities and programs and, in some cases, discriminate based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status. The presence of Title IX exemptions among these institutions highlights the importance of considering the intersection of religious beliefs and educational policies in the context of this study.

Demography of the Participants

This section provides an overview of the demographics of the twelve participants in the qualitative interviews. The participants represent diverse leadership roles within their respective institutions, including Presidents, Provosts, Deans, Vice Presidents of Marketing, and Vice Presidents of Student Life.

The average age of the participants is 48, ranging from 38 to 64. The group consists of 70% male and 30% female participants, aligning with women's representation in leadership roles within Christian Higher Education.⁴⁹⁵

The participants possess high levels of education, with 92% holding doctoral degrees and one participant holding an MBA. All participants are employed full-time at their respective institutions.

The average length of service among participants is 16 years, with a range of 9 to 28 years. This extensive experience and deep understanding of their institutions provided valuable

⁴⁹⁴ "Exemptions from Title IX," U. S. Department of Education, last modified March 8, 2021, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/t9-rel-exempt/index.html>.

⁴⁹⁵ Karen A. Longman and Patricia S. Anderson, "Women in Leadership: The Future of Christian Higher Education," *Christian Higher Education* 15 (2016): 24–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2016.1107339>.

insights into the strategies, practices, and challenges of attracting and retaining Convictional Christian students.

In summary, the demographics of the twelve participants demonstrate a diverse and experienced group of leaders in Christian Higher Education, lending credibility and depth to the qualitative data collected through the interviews.

The Selection of Research Informants

In the five research contexts, key informants were purposefully selected based on their intimate knowledge of and experience with the institution's dynamics.

Careful consideration was given to achieving a balance between individuals responsible for executing marketing tactics and those aware of marketing strategies.

Exact representation was not required, as it would be impossible to achieve, and the value of the interviews primarily depends on the discussed issues and subsequent actions.

Key informants for this study held the following positions, with approximate titles: President, Provost, Vice President (VP) of Enrollment, VP of Marketing, and VP of Student Life. The President of each institution was chosen as a key informant for several reasons. As the institution's senior executive, they possess comprehensive knowledge of the overall mission and vision. Additionally, they can speak authoritatively and candidly about the nature of the situation and have access to crucial information and people for this study.

The Provost was selected as the second key informant due to their role in overseeing academic integrity and curriculum alignment with the institution's mission and evangelical values. Their insights contribute to understanding how educational content supports spiritual growth. The VP of Enrollment provided essential perspectives on strategies and criteria to attract

Convictional Christians, shedding light on outreach and admission practices for engaging the target demographic.

The VP of Marketing was chosen for their expertise in branding and communication strategies that resonate with Convictional Christians, highlighting how the institution's values are presented externally. Lastly, the VP of Student Life offered valuable perspectives on campus culture and spiritual life, emphasizing how students' faith journeys are supported beyond the classroom.

The President or their delegate contacted the key informants via email or phone, extending a personal invitation to participate and providing a general description of their involvement in the project.

The Development of a Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a formal interview questionnaire, which included a learning tool and a brief survey sheet to explore "Convictional Christians Through Common Strategies and Tactics." This instrument was presented as separate handouts, and a copy is included in Appendix G.

The qualitative interview questions were carefully woven into the conversation and followed a semi-structured approach as outlined by Steinar Kvale in his book *Doing Interviews*.⁴⁹⁶ This method allowed for a balanced exploration of the predetermined themes, such as Strategy Development, Recruitment and Admissions Practices, Challenges and Adaptations, and Student Impact and Feedback, while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to the unique experiences and perspectives of each institution's interviewees.

⁴⁹⁶ Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, The Sage Qualitative Research Kit (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 51–66.

In line with Kvale's guidance, establishing a comfortable and engaging social interaction during the interview was crucial in fostering the interviewees' willingness to provide valuable insights relevant to the research objectives. The researcher paid careful attention to setting the interview stage by briefing participants on the study's purpose and expectations before the interview and conducting a debriefing session afterward. This approach ensured that participants felt informed and comfortable throughout the process, enhancing the quality of the information shared about their respective institutions' strategies.

The preparation of the interview guide involved the development of two sets of questions. The first list consisted of the leading research questions in academic language, while the second translated these questions into the vernacular, making them more accessible and conversational for participants. This dual approach facilitated a more engaging and effective interview process by bridging the gap between academic and everyday language, enabling participants to express their thoughts and experiences more efficiently.

During the interviews, the researcher actively shaped the quality of the interaction by responding appropriately to participants' answers. This included allowing for pauses to encourage further elaboration on the challenges faced in retaining Convictional Christian students, probing for more information about successful practices in maintaining institutional identity, and verifying the answers' accuracy. These techniques helped to elicit more in-depth and nuanced responses, contributing to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the various strategies employed by Christian universities.

Overall, the semi-structured approach to qualitative interviews provided a robust framework for gathering valuable insights from participating institutions while ensuring a respectful, engaging, and informative experience for all involved.

The formulation of the interview questions was a multi-phase process, drawing from various resources and expert feedback. Initially, the questions were developed as part of a Doctor of Ministry assignment for the course Thesis Project Seminar I (CM891), adhering to the guidelines provided in Floyd Fowler's *Survey Research Methods* and Tim Sensing's *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*.⁴⁹⁷ The course instructor, Dr. Leroy Goertzen, evaluated the questions, and they were subsequently refined and resubmitted as a post-residency assignment for the subsequent course, Thesis Project Seminar II (CM892). During this phase, further modifications were made following the principles outlined in Sudman, Seymour, and Bradburn's *Asking Questions*.⁴⁹⁸

In the next phase, an informal focus group of three individuals familiar with Christian Higher educational organizations assessed the research tool and provided valuable suggestions for new questions and wording changes. Lastly, Dr. Chuck Coker, Chief Executive Officer of LifeThrive, offered additional recommendations regarding the interview's arrangement and flow, including the use of screening and background questions that could be sent before the interview.

This comprehensive and iterative process ensured that the final set of interview questions was well-structured, contextually relevant, and effective in achieving the study's objectives.

The Application of the Project

In this section, the researcher outlines the project implementation process upon completing the four preparatory tasks. Twelve interviews were conducted over 30 days, from

⁴⁹⁷ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Thesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011).

⁴⁹⁸ Seymour Sudman and Norman M. Bradburn, *Asking Questions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982), 89, 207–08, 230–31, 262–63.

March 14, 2024, to April 10, 2024. This date was selected to avoid scheduling conflicts with spring break and graduation. The interviews at Institution A took place on April 10, 2024, involving two key administrators. Institution B interviews were held on March 21, 2024, and March 26, 2024, engaging two key administrators. For Institution C, interviews occurred on March 13, 2024, and March 15, 2024, with participation from two key administrators. Institution D interviews were conducted on April 2, 2024, involving two key administrators and one faculty member. Lastly, interviews at Institution E were scheduled for March 14, 2024, March 19, 2024, and March 25, 2024, engaging three key administrators.

Some challenges were encountered during the project's application, such as scheduling conflicts and technical issues. However, these obstacles were overcome through the participants' flexibility.

Participants across all institutions expressed enthusiasm for the project and its potential impact. This positive response further underscores the relevance and importance of addressing the challenges faced by Christian universities in engaging and retaining Convictional Christian students while upholding their institutional identity.

Setting Up the Interviews

The interviews were scheduled as a follow-up to the correspondence mentioned in the previous section, "The Selection of Research Informants." Upon finalizing the selection of research informants, the researcher sent a "welcome to the project" letter to each informant, outlining the purpose and direction of the interview, along with a copy of the introductory questions. As part of the standard pre-interview protocol, the researcher contacted the informant via email or phone a day before the interview to confirm the appointment.

The interviewer suggested arranging a Zoom call with the key informants at a convenient time and allowing them to schedule a phone call if they preferred.

To ensure the smooth operation and effectiveness of Zoom interviews, the researcher implemented a series of strategies outlined in the report, *Expanding Qualitative Research Interviewing Strategies: Zoom Video Communications*.⁴⁹⁹ To facilitate seamless communication, specific technical instructions were emailed to participants prior to the interview (Appendix H), providing details on suitable devices for the interview, audio/visual requirements, and the recommendation of using headsets.

A clear backup plan was established to handle any unforeseen technical disruptions, including alternative communication methods in case of Internet instability. Recognizing potential distractions within the participants' environments, the researcher planned the interview timeline accordingly. Direct links to Zoom meetings were provided for easy access, and careful consideration was given to storage needs for recorded interviews based on anticipated data sizes. The researcher ensured a stable Internet connection by connecting their computer directly to the Internet and disconnecting other devices during the interviews.

Combining on-screen and verbal notifications ensured participants were fully informed about the recording and transcription process during Zoom interviews. During each Zoom meeting, an explicit on-screen notification informed participants that the session was being recorded and transcribed by read.ai. This visual alert served as an initial indication that their responses would be captured for research purposes.

⁴⁹⁹ Lisa Gray et al., "Expanding Qualitative Research Interviewing Strategies: Zoom Video Communications," *The Qualitative Report* 25, no. 5 (2020): 1292–1301, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4212>.

Moreover, the researcher utilized a teleprompter to maintain direct eye contact with the camera and, thereby, with the participant. This setup significantly enhanced the perceived mutual gaze, effectively mimicking the natural dynamics of in-person conversations.⁵⁰⁰ By aligning the researcher's gaze with that of the participant, this approach overcame traditional limitations of video conferencing equipment, where the disparity between the camera's position and the participant's image on the screen can impede the natural flow of gaze cues.⁵⁰¹

In summary, the multi-faceted approach to the interview setup process facilitated a comprehensive and engaging data collection experience. By addressing various aspects, such as pre-interview protocols, scheduling, technology integration, and backup planning, the researcher effectively optimized the quality and reliability of the collected data for the dissertation.

Conducting the Interviews

This section will outline the general approach to conducting the interviews, focusing on the similarities across the twelve sessions, each lasting approximately one hour, though each interview was as unique as the informant's perspective and the institution they represented.

The interviews commenced with a few introductory minutes dedicated to bringing the participant up to speed on the purpose of the dissertation and the problem it aimed to address. Most participants had not thoroughly reviewed the material they received before the meeting. The researcher took this opportunity to explain the term "Convictional Christian" and its context

⁵⁰⁰ Matthias Gamer and Heiko Hecht, "Are You Looking at Me? Measuring the Cone of Gaze," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 33, no. 3 (2007): 705–15, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-1523.33.3.705>.

⁵⁰¹ Anastasia Kuzminykh and Sean Rintel, "Classification of Functional Attention in Video Meetings," in *CHI '20: Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2020), 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376546>.

and how their institution was selected through an unaided qualitative survey of individuals familiar with Christian Higher Education.

Each interview began with a discussion confirming that the session was being recorded and assuring participants that their identities and institutions would not be disclosed in the dissertation. This fostered an atmosphere of openness and encouraged candid responses throughout the conversation.

The interviews were semi-formal discussion-oriented, enabling the dialogue to extract the most information from any question. The researcher utilized a teleprompter during the interview to maintain eye contact, providing a more intimate and natural setting that facilitated the flow of the conversation.

The 18 qualitative interview questions were carefully woven into the discussion, following a semi-structured approach that allowed for a balanced exploration of predetermined themes, such as Strategy Development, Recruitment and Admissions Practices, Challenges and Adaptations, and Student Impact and Feedback, while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to the unique experiences and perspectives shared by interviewees from each institution.

The questions were designed to elicit insights into the significance of Convictional Christian students within the university community, the core values guiding efforts to attract these students, specific initiatives and programs that have proven successful, and the methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. Participants were also asked to reflect on the challenges encountered in engaging Convictional Christian students, instances where approaches needed significant revision, and the role of leadership and stakeholder collaboration in refining strategies.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher actively shaped the quality of the interaction by responding appropriately to participants' answers, allowing for pauses to encourage further elaboration, probing for more information about successful practices, and verifying the answers' accuracy. These techniques helped elicit more in-depth and nuanced responses, contributing to a richer understanding of the various strategies the participating Christian universities employ.

All Zoom calls were recorded using technology provided by www.read.ai, a transcription service that recognizes voices and creates an easily editable file. This enabled the researcher to focus on actively engaging with the participants during the interviews while ensuring that the valuable insights shared were accurately captured for later analysis.

Following each interview, the researcher reviewed the session, reading the notes and adding pertinent notations to ensure the integrity of what was communicated. Additional questions that might be used for follow-up were also recorded. Within a few days of the interview, a personal letter of appreciation was sent to each informant, thanking them for their cooperation, assuring them of their anonymity, and highlighting a central idea expressed in the interview as a point of connection and reminder of the previous discussion.

Overall, the semi-structured approach to the qualitative interviews provided a robust framework for gathering valuable insights from the five participating institutions while ensuring a respectful, engaging, and informative experience for all involved. The combination of careful preparation, active listening, and thoughtful follow-up enabled the researcher to understand the common strategies these Christian universities employ to attract and retain Convictional Christian students.

The Analysis of the Project

This section details the comprehensive process to analyze the data collected from the interviews, highlighting the key steps in transforming raw information into meaningful insights.

The Reduction of Interview Data:

Reducing the qualitative data from the twelve one-hour interviews required a systematic approach to transform the raw information into manageable and meaningful insights. This process involved transcribing, organizing, and condensing the interview data using a combination of applications.

The first step in the data reduction process was to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews verbatim. This was done by utilizing an online tool from www.read.ai to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data for analysis. The transcripts were then imported into an NVivo project as individual sources, allowing for efficient organization and management of the data within the software.⁵⁰²

NVivo played a crucial role in facilitating the analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts. The software's coding capabilities were used to develop pre-defined sentiment categories or themes relevant to the research objectives.⁵⁰³ These categories were based on the key concepts and ideas from the literature review and the research questions.

The sentiment categories were then applied to the interview data using NVivo's coding features. Relevant segments of the transcripts were highlighted and assigned to the appropriate

⁵⁰² Nicholas H. Woolf and Christina Silver, *Qualitative Analysis Using NVivo: The Five-Level QDA Method* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 69.

⁵⁰³ Woolf and Silver, 86.

sentiment category, allowing for the identification of patterns and relationships within the data.⁵⁰⁴

This process was iterative, with the categories refined and adjusted as new insights emerged from the data.

NVivo's query and visualization tools were employed to quantify the sentiment analysis results. Matrix coding queries were used to identify the co-occurrence of sentiment categories within and across the interview transcripts.⁵⁰⁵ This allowed for identifying the most prevalent sentiment categories and their relationships. The query results were then exported and transformed into measurable data for further analysis and interpretation.

The data reduction process enabled a more in-depth understanding of the underlying patterns, sentiments, and relationships within the interview data. By systematically organizing, coding, and quantifying the data, it was possible to identify the key themes and insights that addressed the research questions and contributed to the overall objectives of the study.

In summary, reducing interview data using NVivo and sentiment analysis techniques efficiently and effectively transformed the raw qualitative data into meaningful and actionable insights. This process demonstrated the rigor and transparency of the research approach and highlighted the significance of data reduction in qualitative research.

The Interpretation of Interview Data:

In analyzing the interview data, the researcher focused on key aspects of the interpretation process, which included identifying patterns, themes, and discrepancies within participants' responses to questions related to the study's hypotheses. Particular attention was

⁵⁰⁴ Woolf and Silver, 91.

⁵⁰⁵ Woolf and Silver, 92.

given to areas of agreement and disagreement among participants, providing valuable insights into the strategies employed by Christian universities to engage and retain Convictional Christian students.

One crucial aspect of the interpretation process involved examining common points of tension, both real and perceived, experienced by participants with engaging and retaining Convictional Christian students. This entailed analyzing their understanding of this context's barriers and potential solutions.

Another essential component of the interpretation process included exploring participants' assessments of the universities' role in accommodating and supporting Convictional Christian students. This involved understanding their views on maintaining institutional identity while addressing students' needs and expectations.

The researcher also investigated common and diverse ideas regarding successful practices and initiatives implemented by Christian universities to engage and retain Convictional Christian students. This analysis provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches and highlighted potential areas for improvement.

During the interpretation process, participants also examined their opinions on the influence and impact of Convictional Christian students within their institutions. This included investigating these students' unique perspectives, skills, and contributions to the university community.

Additionally, the study analyzed shared views on general guidelines and approaches to fostering collaboration and communication between Christian universities and Convictional Christian students. This provided valuable insights into the foundations for successful partnerships and mutual understanding.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, the researcher triangulated the interview data with other sources, such as relevant literature, institutional reports, and survey results. Moreover, the researcher utilized sentiment analysis of the interview transcripts generated by NVivo, in conjunction with their interpretations, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by Christian universities to engage and retain Convictional Christian students. This multi-faceted approach facilitated the identification of best practices and informed recommendations for enhancing the universities' capacity to support this student population effectively.

The Reporting of Interview Data:

The categorized results will be prepared so that each page represents all the research responses to one survey statement, available in the appendix. Tables and graphs will be generated in Microsoft Excel to display the results of the survey statements that are most important to this project's thesis. Their significance to the project and the interpretation of the data will be explained in Chapter Five.

Limitations of the Study

Every research study has limitations, and the present study is no exception. The researcher encountered several limitations during this project. First, the study was limited to only five Evangelical Christian universities, which may not represent the full spectrum of institutions within this category, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other universities.

Second, the universities were selected based on their reputation for successfully attracting and enrolling Convictional Christian students, as determined by an unaided qualitative survey. This non-random selection process may have introduced bias into the sample, as the selected

institutions may share specific characteristics or practices that are not prevalent among other Evangelical Christian universities.

Third, the study heavily relies on the information provided by the key informants during the interviews. The accuracy and completeness of this self-reported data may be influenced by factors such as the participants' personal biases, memory limitations, and willingness to disclose sensitive information.

Fourth, while the study includes interviews with multiple informants from each institution, the data is not triangulated with other sources, such as surveys, observations, or document analysis. This lack of triangulation may limit the validity and reliability of the findings.

Fifth, the researcher's background, experiences, and preconceptions may have influenced the design of the study, the conduct of the interviews, and the interpretation of the data. Despite efforts to minimize researcher bias, such as using a semi-structured interview protocol and engaging in reflexivity, the potential impact cannot be eliminated.

Sixth, the study provides a snapshot of the strategies employed by the participating universities at a single point in time. It does not capture changes or developments in these strategies over an extended period, which may limit understanding of their long-term effectiveness.

Seventh, this study's findings may not be generalizable to other types of higher education institutions, such as secular universities or those with different religious affiliations. Evangelical Christian universities' unique characteristics and contexts should be considered when applying the findings to other settings.

Eighth, the key informants may have been inclined to present their institutions positively, emphasizing successful strategies and downplaying challenges or failures. This potential response bias may have influenced the data collected and the subsequent analysis.

Ninth, while the study focuses on the internal strategies and practices of the participating universities, it may not fully account for the impact of external factors, such as changes in the religious landscape, societal attitudes towards higher education, or economic conditions, on the effectiveness of these strategies.

Finally, the interviews were conducted within a limited timeframe, which may have restricted the depth and breadth of the discussions. Additional time for follow-up questions or further exploration of emerging themes could have enriched the data collected.

The Measurement Design of the Project

This project employed a two-part measurement approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative components. The initial qualitative phase involved identifying institutions that fit the criteria for the study. Following this, a quantitative approach was employed through interviews with key informants from the participating institutions, utilizing key questions from a qualitative survey questionnaire as a guideline. These questions were designed to evaluate the strategies used by each institution, with a particular focus on common strategies implemented to attract and enroll Convictional Christian students. This section provides an overview of the purpose and design of the project's measurement methodology.

The Purpose of the Measurement

The researchable question was, "Will Evangelical Christian Universities that consistently attract and enroll Convictional Christians use common strategies?" The following hypothesis

was developed to test this question: “Evangelical Christian Universities that consistently attract and enroll Convictional Christians will use common strategies.” The researcher conducted personal interviews with key informants representing five institutions selected from the unaided opinion survey that successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians. These interviews aimed to identify common strategies employed by these institutions and determine if there is a relationship between an institution’s ability to successfully attract and enroll Convictional Christians and the strategies it has implemented.

The Design of the Measurement

The research tool is designed to discover and measure four primary aspects crucial to validating the hypothesis, as depicted in *Figure 9*.

CATEGORIES	A	B	C	D
Strategy Development	CCV	TVS	LCS	FSD
Recruitment and Admissions Practices	APS	SIC	APH	RFI
Challenges and Adaptations	ACC	BRV	SRA	PDS
Student Impact and Feedback	ICS	UOC	CCI	ISF

Figure 9 - Four Key Categories and Sixteen Acronyms

These aspects focus on the key informants’ awareness of strategies used by institutions to attract and enroll Convictional Christians and the identification of common practices in recruitment and admissions processes. Additionally, the challenges these institutions encounter, their subsequent adaptations, the impact of these strategies on students, and the role of student feedback in shaping future initiatives are also examined. Each acronym will be thoroughly explained in the following sections, and the results derived from this analysis will be presented and discussed in Chapter Five.

Strategy Development

Strategy Development refers to the process through which institutions actively design and execute plans of action to engage and enroll Convictional Christian students. This includes identifying the most effective approaches, allocating resources, and establishing clear objectives in line with the institution's mission and core values.

Clarity of Core Values (CCV)

This subcategory assesses how clearly and effectively an institution communicates its Christian identity, mission, and core values. It focuses on the clarity with which these elements are articulated and shared with prospective students, particularly those identifying as Convictional Christians.

Translation of Values into Strategies (TVS)

TVS evaluates an institution's ability to convert its core Christian values into tangible initiatives and programs. This encompasses the development of targeted outreach efforts and specialized services tailored to the needs and expectations of Convictional Christian students.

Leadership Collaboration in Strategy Refinement (LCS)

LCS examines the extent to which an institution's leadership collaborates to refine and improve its engagement strategies continuously. This involves establishing feedback mechanisms, cross-departmental cooperation, and regular reviews of existing policies to ensure their effectiveness in attracting and retaining Convictional Christian students.

Future Strategy Development (FSD)

FSD assesses an institution's capacity for forward-thinking and proactive planning to develop innovative ways to connect with Convictional Christian students. This may include anticipating emerging trends in higher education, fostering strategic partnerships with faith-based organizations, and leveraging technology to enhance engagement efforts.

The researcher thoroughly examines these subcategories and emphasizes the significance of strategic planning and evolution in institutional engagement tactics. This comprehensive approach not only contributes to the compelling attraction and retention of Convictional Christian students but also deepens our understanding of the strategies employed by institutions and their long-term implications.

Recruitment and Admissions Practices:

Recruitment and Admissions Practices refer to Christian universities' various strategies and initiatives to identify, attract, and enroll students who align with their core values and mission.⁵⁰⁶ These practices involve targeted outreach efforts, tailored programs, and a commitment to maintaining a faith-based environment that nurtures spiritual growth among students. The effectiveness of these practices can be evaluated through the following four subcategories:

Alignment of Prospective Students with Core Values (APS):

This subcategory measures how effectively the institution identifies and attracts students who share and align with its Christian mission and values. It focuses on the institution's ability to target and engage individuals whose personal convictions resonate with its core principles.

⁵⁰⁶ Glanzer, Cockle, and Martin, *Christian Higher Education: An Empirical Guide*.

Successful Initiatives Attracting Convictional Christians (SIC):

SIC assesses the effectiveness of specific initiatives or strategies that successfully draw Convictional Christian students to the institution. This involves analyzing programs, events, or partnerships that have successfully attracted this demographic.

Admissions Practices Highlighting Christian Commitment (APH):

APH evaluates how thoroughly the admissions process incorporates elements that emphasize the institution's Christian identity. This includes analyzing application requirements, marketing materials, and communication strategies that underscore the institution's commitment to its faith-based values.

Recruitment Focus on Christian Identity and Environment (RFI):

RFI examines how prominently the institution's Christian distinctiveness and spiritual formation opportunities are featured in recruitment messaging and practices. This subcategory explores how the institution positions itself as a nurturing environment for students seeking to grow in their faith.

These subcategories serve as a framework to identify potential areas for further exploration and deepen our understanding of the strategies employed by institutions to engage and enroll Convictional Christian students. Christian universities can refine their approaches by examining these practices and developing new ways to connect with this important demographic.

Challenges and Adaptations

Challenges and Adaptations refer to the various obstacles Christian universities encounter in attracting Convictional Christians and the subsequent changes implemented to address these challenges. These adaptations aim to enhance engagement strategies while

maintaining the institution's core values and mission. In evaluating these challenges and adaptations, institutions were assessed based on the following four subcategories:

Addressing Challenges in Attracting Convictional Christians (ACC):

This subcategory measures how proactively an institution identifies and responds to obstacles in attracting students who align with their Christian mission. It examines the institution's ability to recognize and address this demographic's specific needs and concerns.

Balancing Religious Values with Changing Culture (BRV):

BRV assesses an institution's ability to uphold its Christian convictions while engaging with cultural pressures and fostering respectful dialogue. This involves balancing preserving core religious values with adapting and evolving in response to shifting societal norms and expectations.

Significant Revisions to Attract/Retain Students (SRA):

SRA evaluates the extent of significant policy or strategic changes an institution makes to serve better and retain Convictional Christian students. This includes assessing revisions to admissions criteria, student support services, and curricular offerings to meet the needs of this unique student population.

Preparing for Long-Term Demographic Shifts (PDS):

PDS examines an institution's readiness to adapt to student demographics and spiritual background changes. This involves forward-thinking and proactive planning to anticipate and address potential shifts in the makeup and engagement levels of future Convictional Christian students.

By considering these four subcategories, the researcher emphasizes the importance of identifying challenges and implementing effective adaptations to serve Convictional Christian students' needs better. This comprehensive approach enables institutions to refine their strategies and remain responsive to the ever-evolving cultural and demographic landscape, ensuring their continued success in attracting and engaging this important demographic.

Student Impact and Feedback

Student Impact and Feedback focus on the role and influence of Convictional Christian students within the institution's community and how their feedback shapes the development of outreach and engagement strategies. This concept was evaluated by posing three essential questions to interview informants, focusing on the importance of Convictional Christian students to the university's identity and mission, assessing engagement strategy effectiveness, and incorporating student and alums feedback. The following four subcategories emerged within this framework:

Importance of Convictional Christian Students (ICS):

This subcategory measures the centrality of Convictional Christian students to the university's identity and mission. It emphasizes their significance within the institution's community and highlights their impact on shaping the overall character of the university.

Unique Opportunities for Convictional Christian Students (UOC):

UOC assesses the range and quality of programs and experiences specifically designed to support the spiritual growth of Convictional Christian students. It evaluates the availability and effectiveness of tailored initiatives catering to this demographic's unique needs and expectations.

Clarity of Christian Identity (CCI):

CCI evaluates how effectively a university communicates its Christian distinctiveness and students' expected spiritual formation experience. This includes examining how the institution conveys its core values, mission, and commitment to fostering a faith-based environment.

Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback (ISF):

ISF examines the extent to which an institution utilizes feedback from current students and alums to inform and evolve its outreach and engagement strategies. It highlights the importance of integrating student perspectives and experiences into the development and refinement of institutional approaches.

The researcher underscores the importance of considering student impact and feedback in shaping institutional identity and strategy by examining these subcategories. This holistic approach ensures that Convictional Christian students' needs are met and their voices are heard, ultimately contributing to the institution's success in attracting and engaging this vital demographic.

The significance of strategic planning, adaptability, and stakeholder input is evident throughout this examination of Strategy Development, Recruitment and Admissions Practices, Challenges and Adaptations, and Student Impact and Feedback. By assessing various strategies, institutions can refine their approaches to meet the unique needs of Convictional Christian students. These insights will contribute to our understanding of successful engagement methods and the ongoing improvement of higher education for this crucial demographic.

The Strategy of the Project

The researcher's strategy for addressing the research question involved interviewing key informants from each of the five institutions due to their proven success in attracting and enrolling Convictional Christians. The key informants included the President, Provost, VP of Marketing, and Deans. The interviews were directed by eighteen questions divided into four categories for communicative and content purposes. Central to the interview's purpose was to discern the common strategies among the selected institutions in their ability to attract and enroll Convictional Christians.

The Summary of Methods of the Project

This chapter describes the project's design and methodology to answer the research question. The research question was stated along with the project's purpose. The project's setting was outlined, followed by a description of its implementation. The strategy, which involved personal interviews, was described in detail. The interviews were moderately chronicled, focusing on key questions and primary answers. The collation, organization, condensation, and evaluation of research data were then explained. Lastly, a discussion on the measurement of the project, including its purpose and design, was presented, along with a synopsis of the central elements of the implementation strategy.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter will report and analyze the research project's results, including a description of the researcher's goals, strategy, and means of measurement. It will also include a summary of the results and a discussion of their importance to this study.

General Description

The impetus behind this project was the researcher's experience within four levels of Christian higher education: as an administrator, a parent of students, an alum, and a board member. These experiences revealed a pattern of Christian colleges and universities gradually disengaging from their founding religious traditions and losing their distinctive Christian identity as they attempt to grow their enrollment and pursue academic excellence and cultural relevance. The researcher's conviction is that this trend poses an existential threat to the future of authentically Christian higher education in a post-Christian society if left unchecked.

The research question was, "Will selected universities that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians exhibit common strategies?" This project was designed to demonstrate a relationship between Evangelical Christian Universities' strategic approaches to engage Convictional Christians and their ability to maintain and strengthen their relationships with this demographic, reflecting their success in preserving their identity and mission amidst a changing cultural landscape.

Strategy

The strategy used by the researcher to test the research question was interviewing key informants from five Christian higher educational institutions, which were effective in attracting and retaining Convictional Christians. The key informants included Presidents, Provosts, the VP of Enrollment, the VP of Marketing, and the VP of Student Life. Twelve interviews were conducted over thirty days between January 23, 2024, and March 20, 2024. The interviews were directed by eighteen questions divided into four categories of discussion for communicative and content purposes. Central to the purpose of the interview was to discern the common strategies among the selected institutions in their ability to attract and retain Convictional Christians.

Means of Measurement

Three items of measurement require discussion here: the key informant's awareness of the strategies used to attract and enroll Convictional Christians, the identification of common practices in recruitment and admissions, and the key informant's appraisal of the challenges faced and adaptations made by the institutions to engage effectively with Convictional Christian students.

The Level of Awareness of Convictional Christian Strategies

The researcher sought to establish the presence of specific strategies used by institutions to attract and enroll Convictional Christians by measuring the key informant's awareness of these strategies. This was determined in four ways: 1) the key informant's response to direct questions about their knowledge of the institution's strategies, 2) the key informant's ability to provide specific examples of these strategies in action, 3) by evaluating the depth and breadth of the strategies described, and 4) by demonstrating the ability to articulate the rationale behind the

institution's choice of strategies. Institutions whose interview informants demonstrated awareness of Convictional Christian strategies, as evidenced by their responses to these four evaluations, were considered to have actively developed and implemented such strategies.

The Repeated Identification of Successful Recruitment and Admissions Practices

The method for establishing the relationship between the informant interviews and the successful attraction and enrollment of Convictional Christians was the repeated testimony of recruitment and admissions practices common to all the institutions. These practices were procured by informants' responses to three questions designed to uncover the qualities and behaviors sought in prospective students, specific initiatives or programs used to attract Convictional Christians, and the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the institution's commitment to Convictional Christian values. Practices that occurred repeatedly among the institutions were considered successful strategies that could be offered as transferable principles for attracting and enrolling Convictional Christians.

Summary of Results

In this section of Chapter Five, the researcher will outline the findings from the personal interviews conducted with twelve key informants from the five participating institutions. The interview questions were designed to explore the four primary issues pivotal to testing the hypothesis: Strategy Development, Recruitment and Admissions Practices, Challenges and Adaptations, and Student Impact and Feedback. The results of these questions will be discussed under the following subheadings: Awareness of How Institutions Plan and Evaluate Engagement Tactics, Identification of Common Practices in Recruitment and Admissions, Challenges Faced and Adaptations Made by Institutions, and The Impact on and Feedback from Convictional

Christian Students. A comparative bar graph will be provided for each subheading to visualize data collected from the five selected institutions.

Awareness of How Institutions Plan and Evaluate Engagement Tactics

The interviewed institutions demonstrate a clear commitment to planning and evaluating their strategies for engaging Convictional Christian students. A common theme is the importance of clearly communicating the university's Christian identity, mission, and values across all levels of the organization. This involves ensuring consistency in messaging from the board of trustees to student life policies, hiring practices, and marketing communications.

Core values such as faithfulness to historic Christian beliefs, integrating faith and learning, disciplining students in their spiritual growth, and equipping them for kingdom impact guide the universities' engagement efforts. These values are translated into concrete initiatives like required Bible and theology courses, robust chapel programming, exclusively hiring committed Christian faculty and staff, establishing student covenants, and permeating a biblical worldview throughout academics and student life.

Leadership at these institutions collaborates closely to refine engagement strategies. This includes revising the core curriculum to incorporate a Christian worldview, enhancing chapel services to align more explicitly with spiritual formation objectives, developing vision and identity documents, equipping faculty in faith integration, and partnering with key stakeholders. Some specific examples of new strategies under development are expanding online programs, dual enrollment partnerships with Christian high schools, and redesigning the curriculum to underscore the university's Christian distinctiveness.

When reflecting on growth opportunities, the universities desire to ensure that every facet of the student experience thoughtfully integrates faith and learning. They see potential in core

curriculum revisions, co-curricular programs, and ongoing faculty development. Other areas noted for improvement include accountability systems and standardizing successful practices.

However, most institutions interviewed did not detail sophisticated methods for measuring the effectiveness of their specific engagement strategies. Some evaluation seems to occur through anecdotal observation, such as increased enrollment from specific Christian audiences after implementing targeted initiatives. A few universities track quantitative metrics like student retention rates in discipleship programs. Developing more robust evaluation frameworks to gauge the impact of engagement tactics appears to be an area for future focus.

Overall, the universities exhibit intentionality in their planning processes, focusing on deepening Christian distinctiveness and adapting delivery methods to shifting student needs. They view close collaboration between academic and student life leadership as vital for effective engagement. While measurement strategies are still evolving, the institutions remain anchored in Christian convictions while seeking innovative ways to connect with and serve their Convictional Christian students.

Comparative Visualization: How Institutions Plan and Evaluate Engagement Tactics

To further analyze the institutions' approaches to planning and evaluating engagement tactics, a graphical representation was developed based on four key dimensions: Clarity of Core Values (CCV), Translation of Values into Strategies (TVS), Leadership Collaboration in Strategy Refinement (LCS), and Future Strategy Development (FSD). The researcher used the

Nvivo sentiment analysis to assess in scoring each dimension on a scale of 1 to 10, with higher scores indicating greater strength in that area.

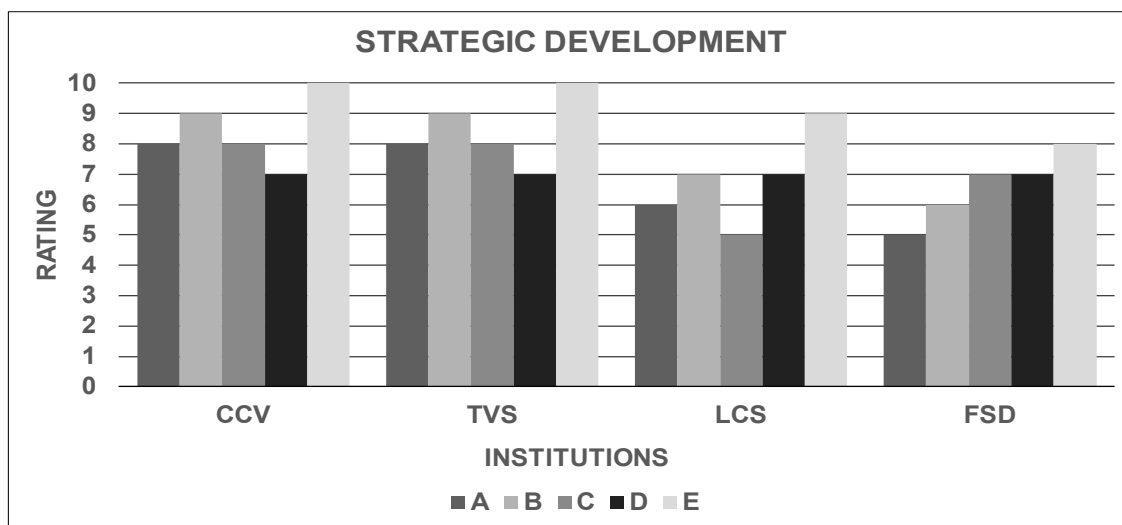


Figure 10 - Evaluating Engagement Tactics for Convictional Christian Students

Clarity of Core Values refers to how well the institution articulates and communicates its Christian identity, mission, and values. Translation of Values into Strategies assesses the effectiveness of translating those core values into concrete initiatives and programs. Leadership Collaboration in Strategy Refinement looks at how closely leadership works together to improve engagement strategies continually. Future Strategy Development evaluates the institution's proactive planning for new and innovative ways to connect with Convictional Christian students.

The graphical analysis reveals that Institution E demonstrates the highest scores across all four dimensions, with particularly strong performance in Clarity of Core Values (10) and Translation of Values into Strategies (10). This suggests that Institution E excels at clearly communicating its Christian distinctiveness and effectively implementing initiatives that align with those values.

Institutions A, B, and C also show high scores in Clarity of Core Values and Translation of Values into Strategies, indicating a solid foundation in articulating and applying their

Christian identity. However, their slightly lower scores in Leadership Collaboration in Strategy Refinement and Future Strategy Development may point to opportunities for enhancing cross-functional teamwork and proactive planning.

Institution D presents the most balanced scores across the four dimensions, with consistent ratings of seven. While this reflects a good overall approach, it also suggests room for growth in further strengthening each area.

Notably, all five institutions scored lowest in Future Strategy Development compared to the other dimensions. This aligns with the qualitative findings suggesting a need for more robust evaluation frameworks and innovative thinking to engage the next generation of Convictional Christian students effectively.

In conclusion, the graphical analysis provides a helpful snapshot of each institution's relative strengths and areas for improvement in planning and evaluating engagement tactics. By considering both the qualitative themes and quantitative ratings, institutions can gain valuable insights into how to enhance their strategies for attracting, retaining, and spiritually forming Convictional Christian students in an ever-changing landscape.

Identification of Common Practices in Recruitment and Admissions

The universities interviewed share several common practices in their recruitment and admissions processes aimed at identifying and enrolling students aligned with their Christian mission and values. A foundational element is clearly communicating the institution's faith commitments and the expectations for students throughout the admissions journey.

Many universities look for prospective students who demonstrate an active, personal faith commitment and show evidence of seeking to live out their beliefs. As one admissions director explained, they desire applicants who have a "personal relationship with Jesus, understands that

he took the penalty for our sins... And has some evidence that they are living it out.” The application often includes questions about the students’ testimony of faith and how it impacts their daily lives. Some require a Christian character reference or pastor recommendation. However, the universities acknowledge the challenge of thoroughly assessing the authenticity of a student’s faith profession in the admissions process.

Faculty and staff hiring emerged as a critical area for reinforcing alignment with the university’s Christian mission. The universities emphasized the extensive vetting of candidates to ensure they affirm the institution’s statement of faith and will model the integration of faith in and out of the classroom. One provost shared, “We have theologians and Bible professors on that [interview] committee... However, they understand their role and whether this person has the academic credentials, knowledge, and pedagogical skills to be a faculty member. Are they someone truly aligned with the institution?” This practice extended beyond faculty to staff roles as well, with a dean noting, “If I want to hire a photographer in my department, my vice president has an hour-long interview with them and goes through the statement of faith and our employee expectations and talks through it, make sure that they are aligned.”

The interviews revealed some distinct approaches to the role of a faith statement in the admissions process. Some universities require all applicants to sign a statement of faith and identify as Christians. They view their educational model as primarily focused on the discipleship of committed believers. Other institutions have students sign a community covenant committing to living by Christian values but do not mandate a profession of faith. They embrace a mix of non-Christians and Christians, seeing themselves as both a mission field and a place of spiritual development. Regardless of the specific approach, all the universities strive to be transparent about their Christian identity and the environment students will experience.

Other concrete examples of weaving Christian criteria into recruitment and admissions include tying scholarships to faith-based qualifications like a testimony and pastor recommendation, integrating discussions of personal faith into student and faculty interview protocols, and highlighting ministry involvement and spiritual growth opportunities in marketing messaging.

By consistently applying these practices, the universities aim to enroll a core group of Convictional Christian students who resonate with their mission. As one president articulated, “We want to be crystal clear about who we are and what we’re trying to do so that those who do not want it can say, yeah, I am out. I do not want to be there. I do not have anything to do with that. Great. Because those that do want it, then I want to serve them, and I want to serve them with excellence.”

Comparative Visualization: Common Practices in Recruitment and Admissions

To further analyze the common practices in recruitment and admissions, a graphical representation was developed based on four key dimensions: Alignment of Prospective Students with Core Values (APS), Successful Initiatives Attracting Convictional Christians (SIC), Admissions Practices Highlighting Christian Commitment (APH), and Recruitment Focus on Christian Identity and Environment (RFI). The researcher scored each dimension on a scale of 1

to 10 with the assistance of Nvivo's sentiment analysis, with higher scores indicating greater strength in that area.

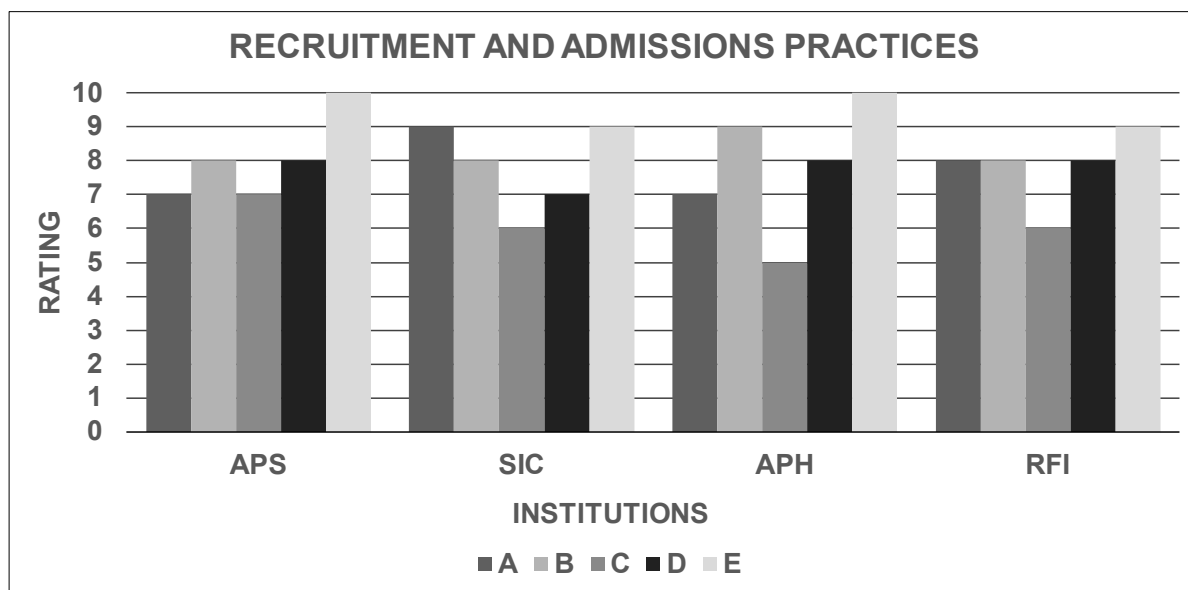


Figure 11 - Strategic Dimensions in Recruiting Convictional Christians

Alignment of Prospective Students with Core Values (APS) refers to how well the institution identifies and attracts students who align with their Christian mission and values. Successful Initiatives Attracting Convictional Christians (SIC) assesses the effectiveness of specific programs or strategies in drawing Convictional Christian students. Admissions Practices Highlighting Christian Commitment (APH) evaluates how thoroughly the admissions process incorporates elements that emphasize the university's Christian identity. Recruitment Focus on Christian Identity and Environment (RFI) looks at how strongly the institution's recruitment messaging and practices communicate its Christian distinctives and the spiritual formation students will experience.

The graphical analysis shows that Institution E excels across all four dimensions, with perfect or near-perfect scores in Alignment of Prospective Students with Core Values (10), Admissions Practices Highlighting Christian Commitment (10), and Recruitment Focus on

Christian Identity and Environment (9). This indicates that Institution E has developed highly effective strategies for attracting and enrolling Convictional Christian students who resonate with their mission.

Institution A and Institution B also demonstrate relatively strong performance, particularly in Successful Initiatives Attracting Convictional Christians (9 and 8, respectively) and Recruitment Focus on Christian Identity and Environment (both 8). This suggests that these institutions have implemented targeted programs and messaging that effectively reach Convictional Christian students.

Institution D presents a balanced approach, with scores of 7 or 8 across all four dimensions. While this reflects a solid overall strategy, there may be opportunities to refine practices in each area further to achieve even more significant alignment and impact.

Institution C shows the most room for improvement, with lower scores in Successful Initiatives Attracting Convictional Christians (6), Admissions Practices Highlighting Christian Commitment (5), and Recruitment Focus on Christian Identity and Environment (6). This indicates a need to evaluate and strengthen specific programs, admissions protocols, and messaging to better resonate with Convictional Christian students.

In conclusion, the graphical analysis highlights each institution's relative strengths and growth areas in their recruitment and admissions practices. By strategically focusing on these four key dimensions - aligning prospective students with core values, implementing successful initiatives, emphasizing Christian commitment in admissions, and centering recruitment on Christian identity - universities can more effectively attract and enroll students who will thrive in their Christ-centered educational environment.

Challenges Faced and Adaptations Made by Institutions

The universities acknowledged several common challenges in attracting and serving Convictional Christian students amidst a shifting cultural and demographic landscape. A primary concern is the increasing secularization of society and the corresponding decline in biblical literacy and spiritual maturity among incoming students. One vice provost observed, “A key challenge is serving a student body with a wide spectrum of spiritual maturity and backgrounds. Scott noted even many professing Christian students have less Biblical literacy than in the past.” This requires offering an accessible, compelling vision for Christian higher education that meets students where they are in their faith journey.

Another significant challenge is the growing public skepticism regarding the value and relevance of Christian liberal arts education. Many students and parents are more focused on career preparation and are drawn to specialized technical training. The rising cost of higher education and student debt concerns can deter students from choosing a Christian university. As one dean noted, “[We] need to figure out how to avoid continually raising tuition costs, as that could price [us] out of the market for the Convictional Christian students [we] want to serve.”

In response to these challenges, the institutions employ various adaptive strategies. To navigate cultural pressure points like LGBTQ+ issues, racial justice, and political polarization, the universities emphasize holding firm to orthodox Christian teaching while fostering respectful dialogue and encouraging compassionate engagement. As one president shared, “We’re going to be bringing in speakers who are going to address these issues head-on because our students have to be equipped because that is the world they’re entering.” The universities strive to cultivate a learning environment where students can wrestle with difficult questions, disagree charitably, and develop a winsome and compelling Christian witness.

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of articulating the university's Christian convictions and values to protect institutional religious liberty and clarify for prospective students. One dean explained, "[We are] concerned about future challenges to the religious liberty of Christian colleges and have been working to clearly delineate their faith commitment and convictions in policies and accreditation to protect against potential legal challenges." This proactive approach allows students to make informed decisions about institutional fit.

Some universities shared examples of needing to revise student life policies, such as prohibiting same-sex dating in addition to same-sex marriage, to align with their religious convictions on human sexuality. Others added language to faculty contracts requiring affirmation of the university's Christian identity and mission, leading some faculty to resign proactively. While challenging, these decisions were deemed necessary for upholding institutional faithfulness.

Looking ahead, the universities are exploring ways to expand their reach and sustainability. This includes investing in online program offerings, dual enrollment partnerships with Christian high schools, and international student recruitment. Many are focusing on ensuring that the entire educational experience, from the core curriculum to co-curricular activities, thoroughly incorporates a Christian worldview. As one president cast vision, "The goal is for the entire educational enterprise to compellingly reflect a Christian worldview, even as student demographics and spiritual backgrounds continue to diversify. Ongoing evaluation and innovation will be key."

The institutions view these challenges as opportunities to reaffirm their Christ-centered mission and develop a more resilient model for faith-integrated learning. One leader summed up this perspective: "To adapt long-term, the university is focusing on clearly defining and

consistently applying its Christian convictions and identity across the institution... Staying anchored in timeless Christian truth while innovating delivery methods seems vital for thriving long-term.”

Comparative Visualization: Challenges Faced and Adaptations Made by Institutions

To further analyze how the institutions address challenges and adapt to change, a graphical representation was developed based on four key dimensions: Addressing Challenges in Attracting Convictional Christians (ACC), Balancing Religious Values with Changing Culture (BRV), Significant Revisions to Attract/Retain Students (SRA), and Preparing for Long-Term Demographic Shifts (PDS). As illustrated in *Figure 12*, the researcher scored each dimension on a scale of 1 to 10 with the assistance of the Nvivo sentiment analysis, with higher scores indicating greater strength in that area.

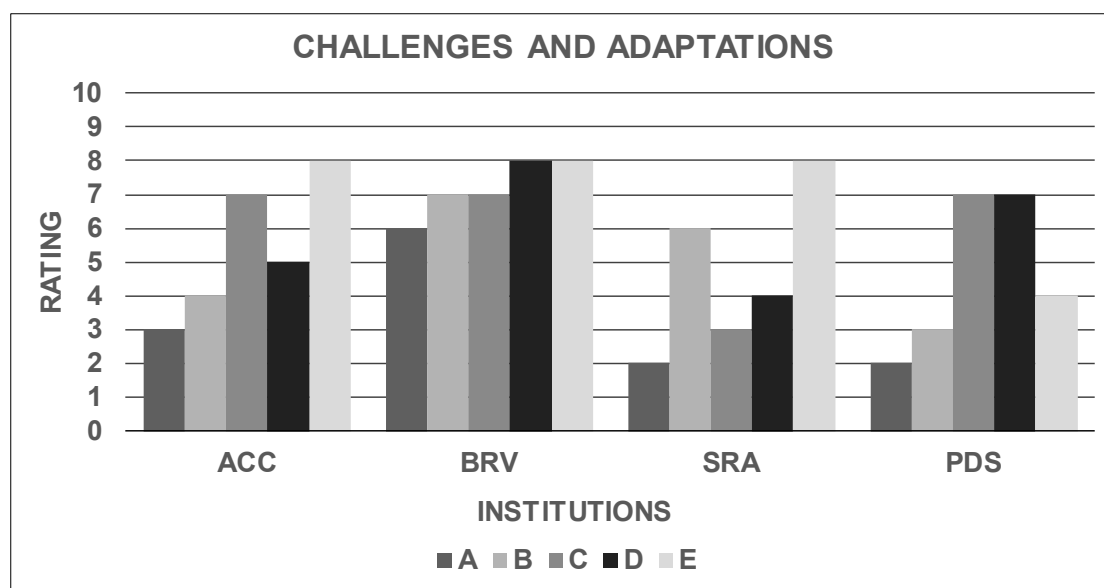


Figure 12 - Comparative Analysis of Institutional Responses to Cultural Shifts

Addressing Challenges in Attracting Convictional Christians (ACC) refers to how proactively the institution identifies and responds to obstacles in drawing students who align

with their Christian mission. Balancing Religious Values with Changing Culture (BRV) assesses the institution's ability to uphold its Christian convictions while navigating cultural pressures and fostering respectful engagement. Significant Revisions to Attract/Retain Students (SRA) evaluates how the university has substantially changed policies or strategies to serve Convictional Christian students better. Preparing for Long-Term Demographic Shifts (PDS) examines the institution's readiness to adapt to evolving student demographics and spiritual backgrounds.

The graphical analysis reveals that Institution E exhibits the highest scores across all four dimensions, with standout performance in Addressing Challenges in Attracting Convictional Christians (8), Balancing Religious Values with Changing Culture (8), and Significant Revisions to Attract/Retain Students (8). This suggests that Institution E has developed a robust, multifaceted approach to tackling challenges and implementing adaptive strategies.

Institutions C and D also show relative strengths in Balancing Religious Values with Changing Culture (7) and Preparing for Long-Term Demographic Shifts (7). This indicates a proactive stance in upholding Christian identity while engaging cultural issues and planning for future student needs. However, their lower scores in Addressing Challenges in Attracting Convictional Christians (7 and 5, respectively) and Significant Revisions to Attract/Retain Students (3 and 4, respectively) point to potential areas for improvement in directly confronting obstacles and enacting substantial changes.

Institution B presents a more balanced profile, with moderate scores across all dimensions. While this reflects a general preparedness to address challenges and adapt, there is room for growth, particularly in Addressing Challenges in Attracting Convictional Christians (4) and Preparing for Long-Term Demographic Shifts (3).

Institution A demonstrates the most opportunity for development, with lower scores in all four areas. The notably low ratings in Addressing Challenges in Attracting Convictional Christians (3), Significant Revisions to Attract/Retain Students (2), and Preparing for Long-Term Demographic Shifts (2) suggest a need for more concerted efforts to identify and respond to obstacles, implement meaningful changes, and plan for future student composition.

In conclusion, the graphical analysis underscores the varied approaches and levels of preparedness among the institutions in addressing challenges and adapting to change. While all universities demonstrate some commitment to balancing religious values with cultural engagement, there are clear differences in their proactivity and thoroughness in attracting and retaining Convictional Christian students amidst a shifting landscape. Institution E emerges as a model for its comprehensive and effective strategies, while the other institutions exhibit a range of strengths and areas for growth. By focusing on these four key dimensions, universities can enhance their resilience and long-term success in serving Convictional Christian students.

The Impact on and Feedback from Convictional Christian Students.

The universities consistently affirmed the vital role of Convictional Christian students within their campus communities and institutional identities. One president passionately expressed, “We only accept students who have a profession of faith because we want to be a discipleship-based organization, not an evangelistic or apologetic-based organization. And so that changes the entire culture of what we are trying to accomplish here.” The presence of Convictional Christians is seen as the core of creating an environment where faith is taught and caught through peer relationships and faculty/staff mentoring.

Even for universities that enroll a mix of Convictional and non-Convictional Christians, there is a strong desire to provide a spiritually formative experience for all students. A president

shared, “[Our institution] attracts Convictional Christians and wants to make sure they are adding Christlike value to students regardless of how they come in so that they leave as Convictional Christians even if they didn’t arrive that way. They want students to belong, become, and be set apart through deep thought, effective service-ordered love, and holistic practice.” The goal is to educate and equip students to engage culture with a vibrant faith thoughtfully.

The universities offer various tailored academic and extracurricular opportunities to support the spiritual growth of Convictional Christian students. These include intentional discipleship and mentoring programs, required Bible and theology coursework, worship and ministry experiences, overseas missions, and service opportunities. As one leader described, “Daily chapel, discipleship groups, mission trips, and ministry opportunities are all designed to help Convictional Christian students grow. The athletic department also has initiatives like praying for opposing teams.” The integration of faith discussions within the classroom and the involvement of faculty and staff in spiritually pouring into students’ lives outside of class emerged as powerful means of deepening students’ faith.

However, most universities did not detail formal methods for systematically gathering and utilizing student and alums feedback to shape their engagement strategies. Some referenced anecdotal input, such as hearing alums reflect on the most impactful aspects of their college experience. Others noted pushback from alums regarding decisions like changing the institution’s name to be more inclusive of a broader Christian audience. However, there seemed to be an opportunity to develop more robust feedback loops to harness insights from current students and graduates.

One promising practice for leveraging alum influence was inviting spiritually mature graduates to serve as admissions counselors. A president explained, “If we do our jobs well, the

students will have transformed lives while they are here... They have a Bible minor; they have listened to five hundred sermons. They have gone through classes with a biblical worldview, and so their lives are changed. So that's who we hire to go tell our story." Having alums whom the university's spiritual formation efforts have personally impacted share their experiences can be a powerful recruiting tool.

The universities see their success in spiritually shaping Convictional Christian students as central to their long-term impact and witness. As a president cast vision, "Imagine if Christian universities across the nation embrace that vision, the difference that it could make in our country... We need Christian institutions that help students be able to [integrate their faith and work], who are graduating students that don't just have some basic head knowledge but really want to live it out in their workplace." Equipping committed disciples is viewed as a sacred trust and the most important measure of institutional effectiveness, even more so than academic or career outcomes.

Comparative Visualization: Engagement and Impact on Convictional Christian Students

To further analyze the impact on and feedback from Convictional Christian students, a graphical representation in *Figure 13* was developed based on four key dimensions: Importance of Convictional Christian Students (ICS), Unique Opportunities for Convictional Christian Students (UOC), Clarity of Christian Identity (CCI), and Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback (ISF).

The researcher scored each dimension on a scale of 1 to 10, with the assistance of Nvivo, with higher scores indicating greater strength in that area.

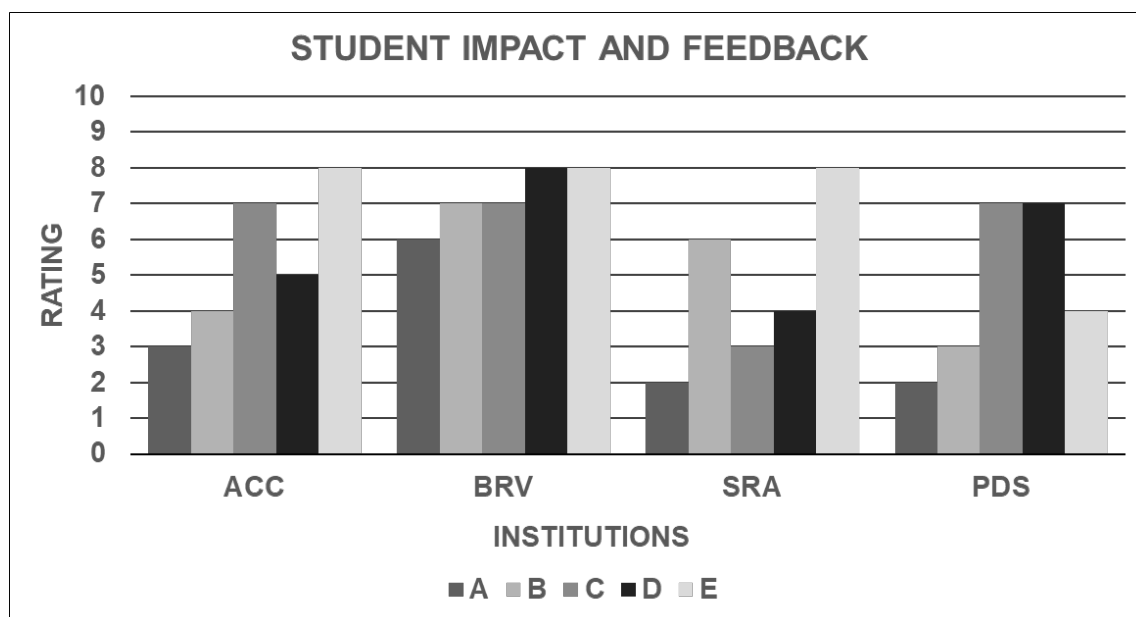


Figure 13 - Comparative Analysis -Student Impact & Feedback

The importance of Convictional Christian Students (ICS) refers to the centrality of Convictional Christians in the university's identity and mission. Unique Opportunities for Convictional Christian Students (UOC) assesses the extent to which the institution offers programs and experiences tailored to their spiritual growth. Clarity of Christian Identity (CCI) evaluates how effectively the university communicates its Christian distinctives and the spiritual formation students will experience. Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback (ISF) looks at the degree to which insights from current students and graduates shape the evolution of outreach and engagement strategies.

The graphical analysis reveals that Institution E excels in the Importance of Convictional Christian Students (10), Unique Opportunities for Convictional Christian Students (9), and Clarity of Christian Identity (10). This suggests that Institution E prioritizes serving Convictional

Christians, provides a robust array of spiritually formative experiences, and clearly articulates its Christian identity. However, like most other institutions, Institution E scores low on the Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback (2), indicating an opportunity to strengthen feedback loops.

Institution A and Institution C also strongly emphasize the Importance of Convictional Christian Students (both 9) and offer a range of Unique Opportunities for Convictional Christian Students (8 and 6, respectively). Institution A edges out Institution C in Clarity of Christian Identity (8 vs. 7), suggesting a slightly more effective communication of its Christian distinctives. Both institutions show room for growth in the Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback (2 and 4, respectively).

Institution B presents a balanced profile, with solid scores in the Importance of Convictional Christian Students (8), Unique Opportunities for Convictional Christian Students (7), and Clarity of Christian Identity (9). The higher Clarity of Christian Identity score indicates a particular strength in articulating the university's Christian identity. Like the other institutions, Institution B has a lower score in the Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback (3), highlighting potential improvement areas.

Institution D scores lowest among the group in the Importance of Convictional Christian Students (6) and the Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback (2). While it offers some Unique Opportunities for Convictional Christian Students (7) and maintains Clarity of Christian Identity (7), there seems to be a comparatively lower emphasis on Convictional Christians as central to the university's identity and mission.

In conclusion, the graphical analysis underscores the high priority most institutions place on Convictional Christian students and the provision of unique opportunities for their spiritual

growth. The clarity of Christian identity is also a strength for many universities. However, the consistently low scores in the Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback suggest a significant area for development across all institutions. By strengthening mechanisms to gather and apply insights from current students and alums, universities can enhance the effectiveness and relevance of their outreach and engagement strategies to serve Convictional Christian students better.

Discussion

The researchable question was, “Will selected universities that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians exhibit common strategies?” In order to test this question, the researcher developed one hypothesis: “Evangelical Christian Universities that are able to attract and retain Convictional Christians successfully will utilize common strategies.” This hypothesis was falsifiable under at least two conditions: First if the universities interviewed were attracting and retaining Convictional Christians without holding any strategies in common, and second, if there had been disagreement among the key informants over whether Convictional Christians were being successfully engaged through the strategies employed.

The researcher offers two crucial pieces of data from the interviews that provide evidence that the hypothesis is correct and should be accepted. First, the data presented in the previous section demonstrates that the five institutions share commonalities in how they attract and retain Convictional Christians, despite the anomaly of Institution E requiring all students to be Christians, which skewed their data higher in comparison. The shared focus on fostering spiritual growth emerged as a unifying mission among the diverse institutions.

Second, while the institutions varied in their admission requirements, enrolling students at different points in their spiritual journey, they exhibited a unified commitment to discipling

students toward a deeper faith. This “Diverse Entry, Unified Journey” approach highlights the common goal of spiritual formation, even as the starting points differ. The universities’ ability to meet students where they are and guide them toward spiritual maturity stands out as a key success factor.

Moreover, the interviews revealed a strong emphasis across all institutions on attracting and hiring faculty dedicated to integrating faith and learning. This emerged as the single most critical factor in creating an environment conducive to the growth and retention of Convictional Christians. By ensuring that faculty are aligned with the university’s Christian mission and are actively incorporating biblical principles into their teaching, the institutions foster a holistic educational experience that deepens students’ faith.

Several additional findings support the conclusion that the hypothesis is valid. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the universities exhibit intentionality in planning and evaluating engagement tactics, with Institution E setting the bar for clarity of core values and translating those values into effective strategies. Figure 2 highlights the common practices in recruitment and admissions, such as articulating faith commitments, seeking evidence of personal faith in applicants, and emphasizing Christian identity in marketing messaging. While Figure 3 shows variation in the institutions’ preparedness to address challenges and adapt to change, it also underscores their shared commitment to upholding Christian convictions amidst cultural pressures.

Furthermore, the graphical analysis in Figure 5 reveals that most institutions prioritize Convictional Christian students and providing unique, spiritually formative opportunities. The clarity of Christian identity also emerges as a common strength. Though the low scores in the Influence of Student/Alumni Feedback point to an area for improvement, the overall impact on

Convictional Christians is evident in the institutions' unwavering focus on equipping committed disciples.

In conclusion, the evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that Evangelical Christian Universities successfully attract and retain Convictional Christians and exhibit common strategies. Despite differing admission criteria, the institutions demonstrate a shared commitment to fostering spiritual growth, hiring faith-oriented faculty, and maintaining a clear Christian identity. Their "Diverse Entry, Unified Journey" approach, combined with intentional engagement tactics and a supportive campus environment, enables them to guide students towards deeper faith and a biblical worldview effectively. While challenges persist and adaptation is ongoing, these universities stand out as models of purposeful, mission-driven education that successfully serves Convictional Christians in an ever-changing landscape.

Conclusion

This study investigated the research question, "Will selected universities that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians exhibit common strategies?" The hypothesis tested was, "Evangelical Christian Universities that can attract and enroll Convictional Christians successfully will utilize common strategies." Through in-depth interviews with key informants from five Christian higher educational institutions, the researcher aimed to identify shared practices and approaches in engaging this specific student demographic.

The findings of this study strongly support the hypothesis, revealing two overarching strategies the institutions employ: Integrity and Faculty Focus. These strategies serve as the foundation for the universities' success in attracting and retaining Convictional Christians.

Integrity emerged as a central theme, with the institutions collectively emphasizing that their strategies for attracting Convictional Christians are deeply rooted in their institutional

identity and core values rather than relying on surface-level marketing tactics. They prioritize faithfulness to their mission, integrating faith and learning and embodying Christian values throughout the educational experience. This common strategy of authentically living out their faith-based mission is a powerful magnet for Convictional Christian students seeking an education that aligns with their beliefs.

Faculty Focus was identified as another practice shared among institutions, highlighting the pivotal role of faculty in representing the university's brand and attracting the right students. The institutions consistently emphasized that genuine lived experiences and demonstrations of faith by faculty are more influential than any promotional materials. Faculty members' personal character, integrity, and commitment to the institution's Christian ethos are central to the recruitment process. The universities focus on hiring faculty who understand and exemplify the integration of Biblical worldview across all disciplines.

These findings are significant because they have the potential to guide other Christian higher education institutions seeking to serve Convictional Christians effectively. By prioritizing integrity and faculty focus, universities can create an environment that nurtures and strengthens students' faith. The common strategies identified in this study provide a framework for institutions looking to attract, retain, and disciple Convictional Christians.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, such as the small sample size and the reliance on key informant perspectives. Future research could expand the scope of this study by including a larger sample of universities, incorporating the perspectives of students and alums, and exploring the long-term impact of these strategies on the faith and lives of graduates.

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the common strategies employed by Evangelical Christian Universities to attract and enroll Convictional Christians successfully. The overarching strategies of Integrity and Faculty Focus emerge as key factors in their success. By authentically living out their faith-based mission and prioritizing the role of faculty in embodying Christian values, these institutions serve as models of excellence in Christian education. As Christian higher education institutions navigate the challenges of an increasingly complex world, the lessons learned from this study can inform their efforts to nurture the faith and flourishing of Convictional Christians, equipping them to lead and serve with conviction and purpose.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the project and draw together the various elements to come to a conclusion. First, the writer will review the problem of the ministry addressed in this project and then describe the methodology employed to propose a solution. Second, the writer will briefly review the six chapters forming this dissertation, recalling each purpose and highlights. Third, the writer will offer his observations about the project and recommend further study in this field.

Review of the Problem and the Applied Treatment

The problem addressed in this thesis project originated from the researcher's personal experience within four levels: as an administrator at a Christian higher educational institution, as a father of three children who attended different Christian universities, as an alumnus of a Christian university, and as a board member of a Christian university in Canada and a separate seminary located in the Midwest. These first-hand experiences reveal a pattern of Christian colleges and universities gradually disengaging from their founding religious traditions and losing their distinctive Christian identity as they attempt to grow their enrollment and pursue academic excellence and cultural relevance. The researcher's interest in this project stems from a conviction that if left unchecked, this trend poses an existential threat to the future of authentically Christian higher education in a post-Christian society.

The problem addressed in this thesis project encompasses three key issues: academic, theological, and demographic. Academically, it is crucial to examine how Christian universities can uphold their distinct identity while pursuing academic excellence in a secular environment. This involves maintaining their Christian character, navigating the influence of secular paradigms, avoiding a defensive posture, and resisting the temptation to seek mainstream acceptance at the expense of their faith commitment. There is a need to explore ways for Christian universities to build a robust theological foundation to confront cultural challenges, equipping them to engage with intellectual questions and moral issues from a biblically informed perspective. Demographically, Christian universities face the challenge of fewer committed Christian students and faculty as more people are leaving religion altogether. This creates problems for Christian universities regarding enrollment, finances, and staying true to their mission in an increasingly pluralistic society. Contemporary Christian universities must navigate the timeless challenges of integrating faith and learning in a relevant and compelling way to their target audience (Convictional Christians). Effective Christian higher education happens when an attempt is made to assist students in developing a biblical worldview that shapes their personal and professional lives, even as the institution adapts its strategies to sustain its mission amidst demographic changes.

Review of the Problem

The problem addressed in this thesis project encompasses three key issues: academic, theological, and demographic. The researcher has observed these challenges through personal experience as an administrator at a Christian university, conversations with colleagues in Christian higher education, and engagement with recent research on the changing religious landscape and its impact on faith-based institutions.

The academic rationale for this project stems from the urgent need to examine how Christian universities can uphold their distinct identity while pursuing academic excellence in an increasingly secular environment. This involves navigating complex challenges such as maintaining a strong Christian character, resisting the influence of secular paradigms, avoiding a defensive posture, and resisting the temptation to seek mainstream acceptance at the expense of their faith commitment. As the dominant secular narrative increasingly regards religious commitments as incompatible with serious scholarship, Christian universities must articulate a compelling vision for integrating faith and learning that demonstrates the enduring relevance and vitality of the Christian intellectual tradition.

The theological rationale for this project flows from the recognition that many Christian universities have lacked a sufficiently robust theological framework to engage the intellectual and moral challenges posed by an increasingly pluralistic and secularized culture. In the face of these challenges, there is a pressing need to explore ways for Christian universities to build a strong theological foundation that equips them to address complex issues from a biblically informed perspective. This requires moving beyond a compartmentalized approach to faith and learning and cultivating a holistic, theologically grounded vision of education that permeates all aspects of the institution's life and mission.

The demographic rationale for this project arises from the significant shifts in the religious landscape that are reshaping the context of Christian higher education. As fewer young people identify with Christianity and more people disaffiliate from religion altogether, Christian universities face the challenge of declining enrollment, financial pressures, and difficulty in attracting committed Christian students and faculty. This demographic reality underscores the urgent need for Christian universities to develop innovative strategies for engaging and serving

the Convictional Christian community while also adapting to the changing cultural context in ways that preserve their core religious identity and mission.

Collectively, these three rationales, when considered together, highlight the timeliness and importance of this thesis project. By exploring the academic, theological, and demographic dimensions of Christian higher education's challenges, this project seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the future of Christian universities and their vital role in serving the church and society in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. The insights and strategies emerging from this research aim to equip Christian universities with the conceptual and practical tools to navigate these challenges faithfully and effectively, ensuring their ongoing vitality and impact for future generations.

Review of the Treatment

This project aims to provide strategies that Christian universities can employ to successfully attract and enroll Convictional Christians. The researcher developed a research question and devised a suitable methodology to carry out the project successfully. The methodology employed qualitative research involving personal interviews with key informants from five selected Christian universities. These universities were chosen based on their success in attracting and enrolling students who identify as Convictional Christians within their student body.

The Researchable Question

The research question is, "Will selected universities that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians exhibit common strategies?" This project seeks to demonstrate

that a similar set of strategies is common to every university that has successfully dealt with this issue.

The Treatment Methodology

A comprehensive two-part methodology will be used to test the hypothesis and answer the research question. This approach includes selecting institutions based on their engagement with the Convictional Christian market, analyzing literature and case studies, and performing in-depth interviews with selected informants. This methodology aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how selected universities have successfully engaged with their target market.

The researcher wanted to demonstrate a relationship between institutions that have successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians amid the secularization of culture. For this correlation to be established, institutions now experiencing success in attracting and enrolling Convictional Christians will have to utilize common tactics and strategies. Therefore, this project aimed to expose and discern those strategies through qualitative research in the use of personal interviews.

The personal interviews utilized key informants from five evangelical Christian universities known to have experienced success in attracting and enrolling Convictional Christians. The informants were carefully pre-selected individuals representing positions and relationships within the institution who were most knowledgeable and involved in setting and administering the vision and mission of the institution. These research participants included the President, Cabinet, selected faculty, and administrators.

To gather the information necessary to determine whether an institution successfully attracted and enrolled Convictional Christians, an unaided quantitative survey was distributed via email to 2,532 individuals familiar with Christian higher education. To ensure that informants

were qualified, the President or their delegate provided proper guidance and assistance in the process.

The answers from the personal interviews were synthesized and organized into a format that limited each primary question to seven statistically significant responses. Responses were compared between the key informants of each institution to determine internal consistency. Likewise, responses were compared between the five institutions to determine commonality since the existence of “common strategies” answers the research question.

Summary of Thesis Chapters

This thesis project consists of six chapters. Chapter One introduces the study and provides the rationale, which includes the problem addressed and the methodology used for the research. The parameters for the project are also outlined, including definitions of key terms, assumptions, and delimitations. Finally, the organization of the dissertation chapters is described.

Chapter Two established the biblical and theological foundation for the project. The chapter addressed the seven biblical worldview questions outlined in George Barna’s book *Think Like Jesus*, exploring each question from a Convictional and Cultural Christian perspective. The chapter then discussed how Convictional Christians move from belief to behavior, drawing insights from Barna’s work and Mark Noll’s *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

Chapter Three reviews the literature on Convictional Christianity’s role in Christian universities, aligning with the thesis’s focus on faith’s impact on higher education. It explores the integration of biblical principles in university missions and operations, the challenges of maintaining these convictions against secular influences, and strategies for navigating these issues without compromising on biblical truths. This chapter shows how Convictional Christianity can enhance Christian higher education’s integrity and societal impact.

Chapter Four explains the research methods used in this thesis project, including the purpose, research perspective, setting, and project implementation. The chapter also describes the research data's preparation, application, and analysis. The measurement design, including its purpose and the content of each phase of the theoretical model, is presented, along with the project strategy.

Chapter Five reports and analyzes the project's results in detail. It includes a general description of the project, the data analysis strategy, and the creation and comparison of change communication method models for each participating institution. The results are evaluated to determine how well they answer the research question and support the hypothesis.

Chapter Six summarizes the project, discussing the conclusions and ramifications of the findings and their contribution to successful change implementation in Christian higher education. The chapter also includes recommendations for further study based on the project's findings. Appendices include the theoretical communication model template, interview questions, and charts illustrating the degree of similarity between each institution's communication model and the theoretical model.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Completing the research described in this dissertation enables this researcher to provide the following conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions from the Project

The researcher believes that the project's findings have validated the research question and underlying hypothesis. The project aimed to demonstrate the importance of Convictional Christian identity within Christian higher education institutions. The research question was,

“How do Christian universities effectively engage and retain Convictional Christian students while maintaining their distinctive Christian identity and mission?” Based on the research results presented in Chapter Five, the project successfully accomplished its purpose. In summary, the data provided by both qualitative and quantitative research methods, along with supporting literature, leads the researcher to offer four conclusions that represent the findings of this project.

Conclusion #1: Unwavering Mission Alignment Must Be Maintained to Attract and Enroll Convictional Christian Students

The research conducted in this thesis project demonstrates that successful Christian universities maintain an uncompromising commitment to aligning every aspect of their operations with their core Christian mission. This unwavering dedication to the institution’s founding principles is crucial in attracting and enrolling Convictional Christian students who seek an educational experience deeply rooted in faith.

One university leader remarked, “... now that you lead the place, does the reality match the brochure?” This poignant question highlights the importance of ensuring that the institution’s day-to-day reality consistently reflects the Christian values and principles it proclaims. Prospective students and their families are discerning and can quickly identify any discrepancies between an institution’s stated mission and its actual practices.

Maintaining mission alignment requires consistent effort and intentionality. Strategies such as “honor calls” and “letter writing” campaigns serve to reinforce the university’s commitment to its Christian ethos and engage Convictional Christian students on a personal level. By demonstrating an authentic and unwavering dedication to its mission, a Christian university can effectively attract students who share its values and desire to grow in their faith throughout their educational journey.

Conclusion #2: Intentional Personnel Strategy Requires a Holistic Approach to Building a Team Aligned with the Institution's Christian Ethos

Creating an intentional personnel strategy is crucial for Christian universities seeking to build a team that embodies and advances the institution's Christian ethos. This holistic approach involves carefully recruiting and nurturing faculty and staff whose personal and professional values align with the university's mission.

The research highlighted several effective practices in this area. For instance, one institution benefited from a donor who provided "faculty relief," allowing the university to invest in its faculty and ensure their alignment with the Christian mission. Another university mentioned that "the president is involved in every faculty hire," emphasizing the significance of leadership's direct involvement in building a mission-aligned team.

Moreover, implementing a "year-long faculty training" program demonstrates a commitment to equipping and empowering faculty to integrate faith and learning effectively. By adopting a comprehensive approach to personnel development, Christian universities can foster a team that excels academically while consistently modeling Christian principles in their interactions with students and colleagues.

Conclusion #3: Authentic Community Engagement Must Be Cultivated to Foster a Supportive Faith-Based Environment

Cultivating authentic community engagement is essential for Christian universities aiming to create a supportive, faith-based environment that promotes spiritual growth alongside academic development. This involves fostering genuine connections and relationships among students, faculty, and staff, rooted in shared values and commitments to living out one's faith.

One powerful example of fostering authentic community engagement was shared by a university leader who “wrote a book” on the topic, addressing key aspects such as engagement, legal protection, and passing on the institution’s Christian heritage. This proactive approach to community building demonstrates a deep understanding of the importance of creating an environment where faith can flourish.

Christian universities can establish a supportive network that encourages students to explore and deepen their faith by intentionally cultivating authentic relationships and providing meaningful engagement. This sense of genuine community is a significant factor in attracting and retaining Convictional Christian students who seek an educational experience that nurtures both their intellectual and spiritual growth.

Conclusion #4: Principled Cultural Stance Requires Steadfast Adherence to Biblical Worldview in Shaping Cultural Engagement and Influence

Maintaining a principled cultural stance is essential for Christian universities navigating an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving cultural landscape, requiring a steadfast adherence to a biblical worldview. This worldview serves as the foundation for the institution’s engagement with and influence on the broader culture.

One university leader observed that there are four outcomes when a Christian institution engages with the culture. This recognition underscores the importance of being proactive and strategic in shaping the university’s cultural engagement. Rather than merely reacting to external pressures or trends, a principled cultural stance involves consistently filtering decisions and actions through Christian values and beliefs.

Christian universities can navigate cultural challenges and opportunities by remaining grounded in a biblical worldview while maintaining their distinct identity and mission. This

principled approach enables institutions to engage meaningfully with the world, offering a compelling and transformative alternative to prevailing cultural norms. By standing firm in their convictions, Christian universities can attract Convictional Christian students who seek an educational experience that equips them to impact the world for Christ.

Recommendations

Based on the research project and his further study, this researcher offers several recommendations for improvements to this study, continued study in this field, and recommendations for individuals and organizations that would be impacted by additional development of this topic.

Recommendation of Changes for this Project

The researcher offers two recommendations for changes to this project. First, the researcher recommends increasing the sample size of both the institutions selected and the participants interviewed. This research limited the institutions to five from a pool of thirty. Expanding the number of participating institutions would provide a more comprehensive and representative sample, allowing for a broader range of perspectives and experiences to be examined. A larger institutional sample would also enhance the generalizability of the findings, making the conclusions more applicable to the wider landscape of Christian higher education.

Second, the researcher recommends increasing the quantitative initial survey sample set. This research garnered seventy-two survey results to help identify the pool of thirty institutions. It would have been preferable that these results had been tripled to over two hundred in the

sample set.⁵⁰⁷ A more extensive survey sample would provide a more robust foundation for selecting the institutions to be studied in-depth. It would also increase the reliability and validity of the initial survey data, ensuring that the institutions chosen for further research are genuinely representative of the broader trends and patterns within the Christian higher education community.

Recommendation for Researchers of Similar Projects

Based on the experiences and insights gained from this project, the researcher offers two recommendations for researchers undertaking similar projects. First, it would be valuable to compare institutions that have not successfully attracted Convictional Christians alongside those that have not. By examining the strategies, practices, and challenges of institutions struggling to engage this demographic, researchers could gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to success or failure in this area. This comparative approach would provide valuable insights into institutions' distinctive characteristics and approaches that effectively attract Convictional Christians.

Second, researchers should consider comparing sample groups of institutions that do and do not require their students to be Christians. Because the issue of whether the institution required the students to be Christian became a topic that skewed the research (it was a sensitive topic), I would recommend a 50/50 balance between those who do and those who do not require their students to be Christian to attend. Their mission is the same, but one group is picking up students further along their spiritual journey. This balanced approach would allow researchers to explore the implications of these differing admissions policies on the strategies and outcomes

⁵⁰⁷ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), 159.

related to attracting Convictional Christians, providing a more nuanced understanding of the role of student faith requirements in shaping institutional practices and culture.

Recommendation for Additional Research in this Field of Study

The researcher offers three recommendations for additional research in Christian higher education and its engagement with Convictional Christians. First, conducting longitudinal studies that compare the impact of specific tactics over time would provide valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness of different strategies. For example, researching the outcomes of publishing a book or establishing training programs designed to attract and support Convictional Christians could shed light on the sustainability and scalability of these approaches. Longitudinal studies would allow researchers to track the evolution of these tactics and assess their ongoing relevance and impact in a changing cultural and demographic landscape.

Second, comparing the outcomes of the Centers for Christian Thought (CCT) and Christian Universities could offer a fresh perspective on the role of different institutional models in engaging Convictional Christians. CCTs, which often focus on integrating faith and scholarship at a high level, may have distinct strategies and impacts compared to traditional Christian Universities. Examining the strengths, challenges, and outcomes of these two institutional types could provide valuable insights into the diverse ways in which Christian higher education can effectively serve and support Convictional Christians.

Third, studying the outcomes of being a Convictional Christian could provide a rich avenue for further research. By examining the personal, professional, and spiritual trajectories of individuals who identify as Convictional Christians, researchers could gain a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of Christian higher education on this demographic. This research could explore how Convictional Christians navigate their faith in various sectors of

society, how they contribute to their communities and churches, and how their educational experiences shape their ongoing spiritual growth and commitment. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the broader significance of Christian higher education in forming and equipping Convictional Christians for faithful engagement with the world.

APPENDIX A: Letter of Introduction

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Steve Sammons, and I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project that I am conducting as part of my Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) program at Corban University. Before I explain the project, let me share a bit about myself.

I am a marketing executive with over 25 years of experience in the field. I am married to my wonderful wife, Suzy, and together we have been blessed with six adult children and two adorable grandchildren. We are actively involved in our local church, Church of the City, in Nashville, Tennessee.

As part of my D.Min. program at Corban University, I am conducting a research project titled "Sustaining Faith: Adaptive Strategies in Christian Universities Amidst Demographic Changes." The purpose of this project is to explore how Christian universities can effectively attract, engage, and retain students who are committed to their faith (Convictional Christians) in the face of changing demographics and cultural trends.

Your participation in this project would involve a one-hour interview, during which I will ask you questions about your institution's strategies, practices, and experiences related to engaging Convictional Christian students. Your insights and perspectives will be invaluable in helping me understand the challenges and opportunities faced by Christian universities in this area.

Please be assured that your participation in this project is completely voluntary, and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. The findings of this study will be presented in aggregate form, and no individual or institution will be identified in the reporting of the results.

Your participation in this project would not only be a tremendous help to me personally as I work towards completing my D.Min. degree, but it would also contribute to the broader understanding of how Christian higher education can remain vibrant and effective in an ever-changing world. The insights gained from this study have the potential to benefit Christian universities across the country as they seek to fulfill their mission of educating and discipling the next generation of Christian leaders.

If you are willing to participate in this project or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [cell phone]. I would be more than happy to provide you with additional details and to schedule a time for the interview at your convenience.

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to the possibility of learning from your experiences and perspectives.

Sincerely,

Steve Sammons
Doctoral Candidate, Corban University

APPENDIX B: Welcome Letter

Subject: Welcome to the "Sustaining Faith" Research Project

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the "Sustaining Faith: Adaptive Strategies in Christian Universities Amidst Demographic Changes" research project. Your willingness to share your knowledge and experiences is greatly appreciated and will be invaluable to the success of this study.

As a reminder, your participation will involve a one-hour interview, during which I will ask you questions about your institution's strategies, practices, and experiences related to engaging Convictional Christian students. To make the most of our time together, I have attached a brief set of screening and background questions for you to review and consider prior to our interview. These questions will help familiarize you with the topics we'll be discussing and will provide me with some context about your level of knowledge and experience in this area. Please take a few moments to look over these questions before our scheduled interview.

[Option 1: If the interview is not yet scheduled]

To schedule your interview, please click on the following link [insert scheduling link] and select a time that is most convenient for you. If you have any difficulty with the scheduling process or need to arrange a time outside of the available options, please feel free to contact me directly, and I will be happy to assist you.

[Option 2: If the interview is already scheduled]

As a reminder, your interview is scheduled for [insert date and time] at [insert location or video conferencing details]. If you need to reschedule or have any questions before our meeting, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Once again, thank you for your participation in this project. I am excited to learn from your experiences and insights, and I believe that your contribution will help advance our understanding of how Christian universities can effectively engage and support Convictional Christian students.

Best regards,

Steve Sammons
Doctoral Candidate, Corban University

Attachment: Screening and Background Questions

APPENDIX C: Screening Questions

Screening Questions for Research on Attracting and Enrolling Convictional Christian Students at Evangelical Christian Universities

The following ten questions are essential screening tools for selecting participants in this research study. These questions will help identify individuals with the necessary experience and knowledge to contribute to our understanding of how Evangelical Christian Universities attract, enroll, and support Convictional Christian students. The answers will also provide insights into the challenges and opportunities these universities face in engaging students within a changing cultural landscape. By gathering input from key informants, we can ensure our research yields valuable data, enabling us to draw valid conclusions and offer practical recommendations for maintaining a strong Christian identity at these institutions.

1. How long have you been associated with [Institution Name], and what roles have you held during your tenure?
2. In your current position, how closely are you involved in the development and implementation of strategies related to attracting and enrolling Convictional Christian students?
3. How familiar are you with the institution's mission, values, and strategic goals, particularly as they relate to maintaining a strong Christian identity?
4. Can you describe some of the key initiatives or programs your institution has implemented to engage Convictional Christian students effectively?
5. In your opinion, what are the most significant challenges your institution faces in attracting and retaining Convictional Christian students amidst changing demographics and cultural trends?
6. How does your institution assess the effectiveness of its strategies in enrolling and supporting Convictional Christian students?
7. Can you share an example of how your institution has adapted its approach to engaging Convictional Christian students in response to evolving student needs or preferences?
8. How does your institution balance the need to maintain its Christian mission and values with the desire to remain relevant and attractive to prospective students?
9. In what ways does your institution incorporate feedback from current Convictional Christian students and alumni to inform its strategies and practices?
10. How confident are you in your ability to speak to the institution's overall approach to attracting, enrolling, and supporting Convictional Christian students, as well as the challenges and opportunities it faces in this area?

APPENDIX D: Background Questions

Subject: Background Questionnaire for Participating Institution

Dear President [Last Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our research project, "Sustaining Faith: Adaptive Strategies in Christian Universities Amidst Demographic Changes." The purpose of this email is to provide you with a background questionnaire that will help us gain insight into your institution's demographics, culture, history, and association with the Convictional Christian market.

Please find the questions below:

1. What is the institution's current undergraduate and graduate student enrollment?
2. How has the institution's student enrollment evolved over the past decade?
3. Can you provide a brief overview of the institution's history and its connection to the Convictional Christian market?
4. What key cultural, religious, or social factors make your institution attractive to Convictional Christian students?
5. How does the institution measure and evaluate the strength of its Convictional Christian identity?
6. Can you describe any initiatives or programs specifically designed to attract and retain Convictional Christian students?

Please feel free to provide additional information you believe will contribute to our understanding of your institution's engagement with Convictional Christian students. You may email your responses directly to [Researcher's Email Address].

Thank you again for your participation and valuable insights.

Sincerely,

Steve Sammons
Doctoral Candidate, Corban University

APPENDIX E: Letter of Appreciation

Subject: Appreciation for Your Valuable Contribution

Dear [Participant's Name],

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for your participation in our research project, "Sustaining Faith: Adaptive Strategies in Christian Universities Amidst Demographic Changes." Your insights and contribution have been invaluable in helping us gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by institutions like yours in engaging Convictional Christian students.

Your willingness to share your knowledge, experiences, and perspectives has enriched our study and will ultimately contribute to developing practical recommendations for maintaining a strong Christian identity at Evangelical Christian Universities. Please be assured that your comments and the identity of your institution will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and your institution will not be mentioned by name in our findings.

As a token of our appreciation, we would be more than happy to share a copy of the research results with you upon project completion. If you would like to receive a copy, please let us know, and we will ensure it is sent to you.

Once again, thank you for your cooperation and support throughout this research endeavor. Your valuable input will undoubtedly make a positive impact.

Sincerely,

Steve Sammons
Doctoral Candidate, Corban University

APPENDIX F: Zoom Setup Reminder

Subject: Friendly Reminder for Our Upcoming Interview

Dear [Participant Name],

I hope this email finds you well. I am looking forward to our upcoming interview on Zoom, and I'm confident it will be a great conversation. As we are both likely experienced in virtual meetings, I thought it might still be helpful to share a few quick reminders to ensure the best possible experience for both of us.

- Sound quality: To make sure we can hear each other clearly, please find a quiet location and consider using headphones or a headset with a built-in microphone.
- Lighting: Positioning yourself facing a light source, such as a window or lamp, will help ensure your face is well-lit and avoid any harsh shadows.
- Composition: I'm sure you've already thought of this, but maintaining a professional and clean background, sitting at an appropriate distance from the camera, and positioning the camera at eye level will contribute to a visually appealing frame.

I apologize if these suggestions are things you've already considered. I just wanted to ensure our interview goes as smoothly as possible. Thank you for your participation, and I'm looking forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Steve Sammons
Doctoral Candidate, Corban University

APPENDIX G: Qualitative Survey

Christian Colleges & Universities that Flourish

As part of my doctoral dissertation, I, Steve Sammons, am conducting a comprehensive analysis to discern the operational strategies of Christian Universities, focusing on those that thrive versus those that struggle. My hypothesis posits that growing conservative Evangelical Christian Universities, which specifically cater to Convictional Christians, share a set of common strategies and tactics. The primary objective of this study is to provide Christian universities with effective, evidence-based strategies and practical solutions drawn from the experiences of successful institutions. These strategies aim to help these universities navigate financial challenges and cultivate a flourishing environment tailored to the Convictional Christian demographic. The initial phase of this research involves pinpointing the universities that exemplify success in engaging and attracting Convictional Christians for in-depth examination. This project is meticulously structured to select four universities that not only continue to thrive but also excel in appealing to and retaining Convictional Christians.

I wrote a short blog answering the question "[What is a Convictional Christian?](#)"

INSTRUCTIONS: List as many Christian Colleges or Universities you feel have either maintained or lost their overall focus on Convictional Christians.. This can include institutions that have gone out of business or merged.

Maintained Focus

Institutions who have maintained the focus to attract Convictional Christians.

Lost Focus

Institutions who have changed or do not maintain a focus of attracting Convictional Christians.

Affiliated with an institution of Higher Ed?

☒ Yes ☐ No

Are you currently employed or on the board of a college or university?

What is your role within the institution?

Would you like a copy of the completed dissertation?

☒ Yes ☐ No

Email

Comments

Let me know any additional thoughts you may have. I would be interested.

Submit

APPENDIX H: Qualitative Questions

Convictional Christians Through Common Strategies and Tactics

- 1 Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?
- 2 In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?
- 3 What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?
- 4 What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?
- 5 How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?
- 6 Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?
- 7 Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?
- 8 How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?
- 9 Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?
- 10 What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?
- 11 How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?
- 12 In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?
- 13 Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.
- 14 How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?
- 15 Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?
- 16 Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?
- 17 Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?
- 18 Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?

APPENDIX J.1: Institution A Participants 1 & 2

INSTITUTION A - PARTICIPANT 1 & 2

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Participant] noted that [Institution] seeks to be very clear about its beliefs and the kind of environment students can expect, which attracts students who align with that vision. While [Institution] doesn't require students to sign a statement of faith, there are community standards they must abide by. This clarity serves as a "signaling effect" that draws convictional Christian students.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	[Participant] emphasized that [Institution]'s values are rooted in getting as close to Christ as possible rather than aligning with political perspectives. The goal is faithfulness to Jesus Christ, which should transcend any moment and challenge the community to better represent the faith.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	[Participant] shared that [Institution] seeks to reinforce its values through deliberate community-building efforts for faculty and staff, such as integrated faculty/staff chapel services, onboarding processes that communicate institutional identity, and regular prayer groups.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	[Participant] noted the importance of [Institution]'s cabinet and board in collaborating to refine strategies. These groups challenge ideas out of genuine love for the school and a desire for it to succeed. Their willingness to test assumptions and force validation of new directions is appreciated.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	No new plans or strategies for further appealing to convictional Christian students were discussed in detail.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	[Participant] acknowledged that [Institution] could improve its systems and standardize behaviors that advance the institution, rather than over-relying on goodwill and motivation. Developing clearer policies, procedures, and systems to "look more like a university" was identified as an area for refinement.

RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Participant] highlighted that [Institution] looks for faculty candidates who not only possess the necessary academic credentials and accomplishments but are also genuinely committed to Christ in a way that aligns with the institution's faith statement. This commitment should be integral to their lifestyle and practices.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	[Participant] highlighted the "set apart" retreats, which are all-expenses-paid weekend retreats for incoming students within their first four semesters. These retreats focus on the basics of Christian life and feature faculty/staff involvement and guest speakers, providing a formative experience for new students.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	[Participant] noted that [Institution] is very clear about its faith statement during the hiring process for faculty. Candidates sign the statement, and it's discussed at multiple levels of interviews. This clarity at the point of hiring is crucial for maintaining mission alignment.

PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	No specific methods for evaluating the effectiveness of recruitment practices were mentioned in the conversation.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	No specific methods for evaluating the effectiveness of engagement strategies were detailed in the conversation.

CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	[Participant] acknowledged that a challenge for Christian higher education is being better at addition than subtraction, meaning it's easier to add new things than to remove what's no longer effective. [Institution] could also improve accountability and avoid over-relying on goodwill and motivation over systems.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Participant] emphasized that [Institution] isn't trying to be palatable to the larger world but rather relevant to the Christian tradition. The focus is on eternal things and a Christ-centered approach, even if it makes the institution look a bit strange. Kindness is expressed through clarity about institutional identity, allowing students to make informed decisions.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	The conversation did not include a specific example of [Institution] significantly revising its approach to attracting or retaining convictional Christian students.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	The conversation did not directly address how [Institution] is preparing to adapt to potential long-term shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement of future convictional Christian students.

STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Participant] emphasized that while [Institution] attracts Christians and convictional Christians, the goal is to add value so that regardless of how a student enters, they graduate as a convictional Christian. [Institution] wants to be the kind of place that, even if a student doesn't arrive as a convictional Christian, they leave that way through deliberate student-centric practices that reinforce Christian values.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	[Participant] described several academic and extracurricular opportunities designed for convictional Christian students, including mandatory chapel services, a 12-hour Bible/theology/philosophy requirement, faculty involvement in mentoring and hosting students, sophomore-freshman mentorship programs, [Denomination] band programs, and student-led worship and testimony events.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	The conversation did not directly address how student and alumni feedback influences the evolution of outreach and engagement strategies.

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.2 Institution B Participant 1

INSTITUTION B - PARTICIPANT 1

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Institution] focuses on discipleship rather than an evangelistic model. They work with local churches, especially minority churches, to reach out to prospective students. The importance of a Christian education during these formative years is conveyed in their marketing efforts.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	Transparency is a key value, with leaders being open about decision-making and budgets. [Institution] strives to be clear about who they are and their beliefs, even on controversial topics like human sexuality, diversity, and politics.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	Every faculty candidate is interviewed by the president, who focuses on alignment with [Institution]'s identity and expectations. Non-faculty hires have a similar interview with their vice president. Detailed institutional commitments have been drafted to provide further clarity.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	The president and senior leadership set the tone for spiritual vitality. The president personally interviews every faculty candidate and regularly speaks in chapel. Cabinet-level discussions have explored ideas like staff chapel attendance requirements.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	[Institution] is working on growing its minority student population to better reflect the surrounding community. The Cresciendo Juntos program and outreach to local minority churches are part of this effort.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	[Participant] sees an opportunity in encouraging more faculty and staff engagement in chapel and spiritual life on campus, possibly through attendance requirements or blocked-off meeting times.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Institution] does not require students to be Christians or sign a statement of faith, but they must agree to the community covenant which outlines the institution's beliefs and rules based on scripture.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	[Participant] highlighted the Cresciendo Juntos program geared towards Hispanic American students, working with local minority churches and pastors to develop relationships and community. Chapel and spiritual life on campus are emphasized.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	The statement of faith and employee expectations are central in the hiring process for all positions. Candidates must affirm their alignment and are asked about their church involvement. This is seen as crucial for maintaining [Institution]'s identity.
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	[Participant] did not directly address how they evaluate the effectiveness of these methods in the conversation.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	While not directly addressed, [Participant] noted that even with [Institution] not requiring a faith statement, they have seen students come to Christ through chapel, small groups, and other campus ministries.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	[Participant] mentioned the challenge of clearly communicating student behavioral expectations, especially around LGBTQ issues. The student handbook and community covenant have been revised to provide more specific guidance.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution] has drafted institutional commitments to clarify their positions on issues like human sexuality, diversity, and politics. They aim to teach civil discourse and engagement with differing viewpoints from a Christian perspective.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	In recent years, [Institution] has had to be more specific in student guidelines, such as prohibiting same-sex dating, to maintain alignment with their beliefs on marriage and sexuality.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	Growing enrollment is putting pressure on chapel space and programming. [Institution] is exploring options like splitting chapel services to adapt to a growing student body while maintaining this central aspect of campus spiritual life.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Participant] believes that clarity in who [Institution] is and what they believe is crucial. They have a statement of faith and employee expectations that all faculty and staff must sign and agree with annually. Chapel plays an important role for students, being held three times a week.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	Faith integration in the classroom is a priority, with discussions of ethics and Christian perspectives across various disciplines. [Institution] has centers that host events and speakers to engage students on issues of faith and culture.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	This was not directly addressed in the conversation.

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.3 Institution B Participant 2

INSTITUTION B - PARTICIPANT 2

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Institution] focuses on being highly intentional in all aspects of the university experience to engage and attract convictional Christian students. This intentionality permeates from hiring practices to discipleship and even the stories and vision shared within the community.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	The core values guiding [Institution]'s efforts to attract convictional Christians include a commitment to integrating faith and learning, not just superficially but in a deep, authentic way. There is also a strong emphasis on discipleship and spiritual formation.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	These values are translated into action through very intentional hiring practices, training for faculty and coaches in discipleship, and fostering a culture where the Christian faith is actively lived out and discussed.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	Collaboration seems to happen through constant communication and a shared commitment to the university's Christian mission among all levels of leadership and faculty.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	[Participant] did not mention any specific new plans, but emphasized the ongoing commitment to intentionality in all aspects of the university experience.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	The most significant opportunity seems to be in continuing to foster a robustly Christian community that deeply integrates faith and learning, and supports students in their spiritual formation.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Participant] stressed the importance of vetting potential students, faculty, and staff to ensure they have the convictions and capacities aligned with the university's mission. He gave an example of interviewing a potential custodian and asking deep questions about their faith journey.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	[Participant] shared the example of the rugby team he coaches, where he is very intentional about the selection of team leaders and the discipleship and accountability within the team culture.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	In recruitment and admissions, [Institution] explicitly asks faith journey questions to all potential students, faculty and staff. There is a clear communication of the university's mission and values.
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	The effectiveness of these methods is evaluated by looking at the spiritual maturity and growth of students over time. [Participant] shared an example of a student who struggled as a freshman but grew significantly in his faith by his junior year.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	[Participant] did not directly address how they measure effectiveness, but alluded to tracking students' spiritual growth and maturity during their time at the university.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	The main challenge seems to be the cultural pressure that can pull students away from their faith. [Institution] seeks to counter this through a very intentional, immersive Christian environment.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution] remains committed to its core Christian values even as culture shifts. [Participant] emphasized the importance of clearly communicating these values so students can self-select if it aligns with their beliefs.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	[Participant] did not share a specific instance of revising their approach, but emphasized the constant need for intentionality and not drifting from their core mission.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	[Institution] seems to be preparing for the future by maintaining a strong commitment to its Christian identity and mission, and not wavering from this even as cultural pressures shift. The focus is on attracting students who resonate with this identity.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Participant] emphasized that the convictional Christian students, or the "remnant", have remained consistent in size over the last 20 years at [Institution]. This group is central to the identity and mission of the university.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	[Institution] offers discipleship groups, missions trips (like the rugby team trip to Ireland), and integrates faith into all aspects of academic and extracurricular life.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	[Participant] did not directly address how student and alumni feedback influences strategies.

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.4 Institution C Participant 1

Institution C - Participant 1

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Institution C] holds a tension of wanting to attract strong Christian students while also seeing the university as a mission field for non-Christian students. They communicate clearly about [Institution C] being a Christian environment in their messaging and branding to prospective students.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	The core values are [Institution C]'s Christian mission of transforming lives and preparing student leaders, as well as providing a Christian environment with integration of faith and learning.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	One key way is tying a major scholarship (the Christian Leadership Scholarship) to a Christian testimony and pastor recommendation. Students must get this scholarship to be eligible for several others. This helps attract a core group of strong Christian students.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	([Participant] did not discuss the collaboration between leadership and stakeholders to refine strategies.)
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	([Participant] did not mention any new plans or strategies in development.)
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	([Participant] did not identify specific areas of current strategies that present the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement.)
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	They look for students who will align with and represent [Institution C]'s mission well, at least from a character standpoint, even if they are not yet Christians. For Christian students, they look for those actively seeking God, not just ones whose parents are Christians.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	([Participant] did not provide specific examples of initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students.)
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	([Participant] did not detail specific recruitment and admissions practices that highlight [Institution C]'s Christian commitment, beyond the general messaging and tying scholarships to Christian criteria.)
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	([Participant] did not mention how they evaluate the effectiveness of these methods.)
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	([Participant] did not explain how [Institution C] measures the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students.)
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	A major challenge is that many Christian parents pour into their kids spiritually until age 18 but then think their job is done and the students are ready for the secular world. [Institution C] believes age 18 is too young for most to face the full brokenness of the world without a few more years of development in a Christian university environment.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution C] has tried to be a place welcoming to students across the spectrum of [Denomination] beliefs, from conservative to liberal, without getting entangled in [Denomination] political divisions. They take stands on core convictions regarding cultural issues but avoid overt political stances.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	([Participant] did not share a specific instance of [Institution C] needing to significantly revise its approach to attract or retain convictional Christian students better.)
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	[Institution C] is concerned about future challenges to the religious liberty of Christian colleges and has been working to clearly delineate their faith commitment and convictions in policies and accreditation to protect against potential legal challenges. The book project documenting how faith is integrated across [Institution C] is part of this effort.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Institution C] sees attracting and engaging convictional Christian students as core to their mission and identity. Their hope is that the majority of their students are strong Christ followers, even as part of their mission is to attract some non-Christian students as well.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	([Participant] did not highlight unique academic or extracurricular opportunities designed for convictional Christian students.)
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	([Participant] did not explain how student and alumni feedback influences the evolution of outreach and engagement strategies.)

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.5 Institution C Participant 2

INSTITUTION C - PARTICIPANT 2

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Institution] is opening up its campus more to hosting different debate groups from homeschool groups and co-ops, where there would historically be very convictional Christian homes. Anecdotally, more of those students are coming to [Institution] later as undergraduates.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	The core values are the historic Christian beliefs that will appeal to a broad range of people on the spectrum of Christianity. While [Institution] is a [Denomination]-founded and funded school, it ministers to a wider Christian population.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	These values are translated into having designated courses on developing the Christian mind and thinking "Christianly." The faculty is moving to add more such courses to solidify a wholly Christian framework in students.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	[Participant] did not directly address how leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies for engaging convictional Christian students.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	A new plan is to use the book showcasing how faith is integrated across disciplines as part of onboarding new faculty, giving them a resource and point of contact for further conversation.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	The most significant opportunity is in continuing to tap into the growing homeschool and private school market, promoting greater visibility to that group.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Institution] looks at the character and trajectory of prospective students, rather than requiring them to sign a statement of faith upon admission. However, students must adhere to a code of conduct and the university's view on human sexuality while enrolled.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	Specific initiatives include the Developing the Christian Mind class, which has existed for over 20 years, and a new general education course being added to teach students to think "Christianly."
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	At special Preview days, the president will make comments like "we are unapologetically a Christian institution." This message resonates with parents who want to send their children to [Institution].
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	The effectiveness is evaluated based on anecdotal evidence of more homeschool and private school students enrolling, and positive reactions from parents at preview days. However, the long-term impact remains to be seen.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	[Participant] did not provide a specific answer on how [Institution] evaluates the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	The main challenge is the potential of getting priced out of the market due to rising tuition costs. Jobs are also becoming replaceable with technology, so employers may favor specialized certifications over holistic liberal arts degrees.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution] is not trying to pander to casual Christianity or changing its core beliefs, but rather doubling down on its convictions and attracting those who are drawn to that stance.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	[Participant] did not share a specific instance of [Institution] significantly revising its approach to attract or retain convictional Christian students better.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	[Institution] recognizes the challenge of a potential liberal arts degree becoming less valuable to employers compared to specialized certifications. They see their students becoming holistic leaders and managers rather than specialized technicians to adapt to this shift.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Participant] affirms the comment that the size of the convictional Christian market hasn't changed over the last 30 years, despite nominalism becoming more prevalent. [Institution] wants to double down on convictional Christians and become as relevant to that market as possible.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	Unique opportunities include the Christian Service Scholarship, which requires recipients to serve in a community service project each week. There are also spiritual life groups, mentoring, and mission trips integrated with athletics.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	[Institution] has a weak alumni base and is attempting to build stronger connections. As such, there is no significant pressure or influence from alumni on outreach and engagement strategies currently.

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.6 Institution D Participant 1

INSTITUTION D - PARTICANT 1

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Participant] does not have direct insight into [Institution]'s macro strategies for recruiting convictional Christian students, as this falls under the purview of the enrollment management team.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	While not explicitly stated, [Participant] implies that [Institution]'s core values include providing a Christian education accessible to a diverse student body, including those from various faith backgrounds or at different stages of their spiritual journey.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	[Institution] translates its values into strategies such as offering required Bible and theology courses, weekly worship gatherings, and a student discipleship program. It also strives to create a campus culture where faith integration is openly discussed and supported.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	Collaboration between leadership and stakeholders is evident in the development of the 10 Pillars document, which was drafted by the president and approved by the Board of Trustees. This document serves as a foundational guide for [Institution]'s Christian identity and mission.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	New plans include developing a multi-year scope and sequence of learning aims for the weekly worship gatherings, as well as reviewing and renewing the core curriculum to more explicitly integrate Christian convictions.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	[Participant] sees significant opportunities for growth in intentionally designing the weekly worship gatherings and the core curriculum to better serve students at various stages of their spiritual journey.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Participant] did not directly address the specific qualities or behaviors [Institution] looks for in prospective students to indicate alignment with its core values.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	Successful initiatives include the CALEO program, which pairs faculty and staff with students for one-on-one discipleship, and tuition remission for faculty members pursuing master's degrees in [Institution]'s School of Christian Thought.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	[Participant] did not provide specific examples of recruitment and admissions practices that highlight [Institution]'s commitment to convictional Christian values, as this is not his area of direct involvement.
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	[Participant] did not address how [Institution] evaluates the effectiveness of its recruitment methods for convictional Christian students.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	[Participant] did not specifically address how [Institution] measures the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	A key challenge is serving a diverse student body with varying levels of biblical literacy and spiritual maturity. [Institution] aims to overcome this by providing accessible and engaging opportunities for spiritual growth, such as the weekly worship gatherings and the CALEO discipleship program.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution] strives to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural landscape by clearly articulating its Christian philosophy of education, while still remaining accessible to students from diverse backgrounds. This is exemplified in the 10 Pillars document and the integration of faith into the university's policies and curriculum.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	[Participant] did not share a specific instance where [Institution] needed to significantly revise its approach to attract or retain convictional Christian students.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	To adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile of future convictional Christian students, [Institution] is employing both defensive and missional strategies. Defensive strategies involve proactively articulating the university's Christian convictions and philosophy of education, while missional strategies focus on strengthening the university's Christian identity and intentionally integrating faith into all aspects of the educational experience.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Participant] believes that a third of the students in his Intro to Bible class could be considered convictional Christians, but acknowledges the challenge of serving students at various stages of their spiritual journey within [Institution]'s diverse urban environment.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	Unique opportunities for convictional Christian students include the weekly worship gatherings, the CALEO discipleship program, and the ability for students to learn from faculty members who are actively growing in their faith through further theological education.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	[Participant] did not directly address how student and alumni feedback influences the evolution of [Institution]'s outreach and engagement strategies.

Source: NVivo Sentement Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.7 Institution D Participants 2 & 3

INSTITUTION D - PARTICANT 2 & 3

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Institution] collaborates with churches, Christian schools, and faith-based organizations to identify prospective students. The admissions team attends Christian college fairs, hosts recruitment events, and leverages alumni networks to connect with students who share the university's values.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	[Institution]'s core values of faith, learning, and service guide efforts to attract convictional Christian students, emphasizing the integration of Christian principles into all aspects of university life and the importance of serving others.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	Initiatives and programs, such as chapel services, Bible studies, discipleship groups, and faith integration in the classroom, are designed to attract and support convictional Christian students.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	Collaboration between leadership, including the board of trustees, faculty, staff, and input from students and alumni, is essential to the success of efforts to engage convictional Christian students.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	New initiatives include a center for faith and innovation, exploring the intersection of faith and entrepreneurship, and a mentoring program pairing students with experienced Christian professionals.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	Opportunities for growth include expanding online and distance education to reach a wider range of students and partnerships with other faith-based institutions.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Institution] seeks students who demonstrate a strong faith commitment, desire for spiritual growth, and willingness to engage in the Christian community, as evidenced by their involvement in church, mission trips, service, or leadership roles in faith-based organizations.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	Successful initiatives include a scholarship program for convictional Christian students and a summer leadership institute for high school students, which have effectively attracted high-caliber students and introduced them to the campus culture.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	Admissions counselors discuss the faith-based mission, and materials, websites, and social media consistently emphasize the Christian identity and opportunities for spiritual growth.
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	The effectiveness of these methods is evaluated by tracking the number of convictional Christian students who apply, enroll, and persist, as well as through surveys, focus groups, and assessments of the spiritual climate on campus.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	Key performance indicators, such as enrollment and retention rates, participation in faith-based programs, student satisfaction, and post-graduation outcomes, are used to measure the effectiveness of engagement strategies.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	To overcome the perception that faith-based institutions may lack academic rigor, [Institution] highlights faculty and alumni achievements and emphasizes the value of integrating faith and learning.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution] adapts to the changing cultural and demographic landscape by emphasizing the relevance of Christian faith to contemporary issues and partnering with diverse churches and organizations.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	When traditional chapel services were not effectively engaging students, [Institution] implemented a new model with diverse speakers, interactive formats, and student-led worship, resulting in increased attendance and positive feedback.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	To prepare for potential shifts in demographics and religious engagement, [Institution] conducts market research, studies the changing religious landscape, and develops programs that appeal to a wider range of students while remaining true to its core values. Investments in technology and infrastructure ensure a high-quality educational experience in the face of changing trends.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	Convictional Christian students are crucial to maintaining [Institution]'s commitment to integrating faith and learning, and their presence contributes to the spiritual vitality of the campus community.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	Unique extracurricular opportunities include a ministry leadership program, study abroad programs with mission work, and a student-led worship arts community.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	Student and alumni feedback, gathered through surveys, focus groups, and conversations, informs the refinement of programs and initiatives, such as the expansion of service-learning opportunities.

Source: NVivo Sentement Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.8 Institution E Participant 1

INSTITUTION E - PARTICIPANT 1

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Institution] focuses on being faithful to every student God sends them, rather than chasing numbers as a marketing strategy. They strive to provide academic excellence and intentional discipleship in submission to biblical authority. Transformed student lives are their most compelling recruitment tool.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	The core values guiding [Institution]'s efforts are love for God, love for others, integrity in conduct, and excellence in effort. Their vision is for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	These values are translated into a Bible minor for every student, daily chapel with text-driven sermons, discipleship groups, mission trips, and an expectation for a biblical worldview in every academic discipline.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	The transcript emphasized the importance of having the right trustees committed to the religious mission, who will select a president willing to uphold it. The president must then hire faculty aligned with the mission.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	The transcript did not outline specific new strategies, but expressed a continued desire to be more affordable and accessible.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	The most significant opportunity seems to be increasing affordability so more students who desire a biblical foundation can access it.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Institution] looks for students with a profession of faith who desire to grow in Christ and understand how a biblical worldview applies to everything. They want students who will serve the local church and use their gifts for God's glory in all fields.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	Specific examples include over 350 students sent on mission trips over spring break, sports teams doing prayer and outreach, and discipleship groups led by coaches for busy athletes.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	In admissions, [Institution] uses their own alumni to share personal stories of spiritual transformation and close relationships with faculty. They are crystal clear about who they are to attract mission-fit students.
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	The effectiveness of these methods seems to be evaluated qualitatively through the changed lives and compelling testimonies of students and alumni.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	The transcript did not directly address formal evaluation measures. The focus seems to be on individual student transformation.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	The main challenges seem to be cost and accessibility. [Participant] wishes they could be more affordable so more students could access their biblical foundation.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution] strives to be faithful to biblical authority rather than conforming to cultural trends. They maintain standards like annual doctrinal statements for faculty and church membership for accountability.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	The transcript did not mention a specific instance of significantly revising their approach.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	Maintaining mission alignment as long-serving faculty retire is a key focus. [Participant] is having older faculty impart their wisdom to the next generation to sustain [Institution]'s legacy of life-changing impact.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Participant] emphasized that [Institution] is a discipleship-based organization rather than an evangelistic or apologetic one. They only accept students who have a profession of faith, which allows them to teach every class from a biblical worldview since the students are there for that purpose.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	The Bible minor, daily chapel, discipleship groups, and integration of faith in every discipline are designed for convictional Christian students.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	The powerful stories and testimonies of transformed lives from students and alumni affirm [Institution]'s strategies and influence their continuation.

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.9 Institution E Participant 2

INSTITUTION E - PARTICIPANT 2

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	[Participant] explained that [Institution] begins by having clarity on its mission and doctrinal statement. They ensure consistency across all levels of the organization, from hiring practices to student life policies, admissions processes, and communication. The institution also requires a statement of faith for admission across both undergraduate and graduate programs.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	[Institution]'s core values are love for God, love for others, excellence in effort, and integrity in conduct. These values guide their efforts to attract convictional Christian students and permeate all aspects of the institution, from athletics to academics.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	[Institution] ensures that its core values are applied consistently across the institution, from hiring decisions to student life policies, communication, and admissions processes. They make hard choices based on their priorities and mission, even if it means foregoing certain opportunities or adjusting graduate-level requirements.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	[Participant] emphasized the importance of buy-in from leadership and stakeholders, who must be willing to protect the institution's mission and make difficult choices. The board of trustees and cabinet work together to guard the university's core values and ensure consistency across all areas.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	Looking forward, [Institution] is exploring new programs like a master's in public health, a PA program, and a biblical counseling program to equip students to enter challenging fields. They are also considering expanding into online undergraduate programs to reach students who cannot afford or relocate to attend the institution.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	[Participant] sees significant opportunities in partnering with Christian high schools to offer dual enrollment courses from a biblical worldview. This not only serves the schools but also creates a recruitment funnel for the institution. She believes this model has the potential for exponential growth.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	[Institution] looks for students who have a personal relationship with Jesus, understand that He took the penalty for their sins, and have evidence that they are living out their faith. The admissions process includes a Christian leader reference to gauge if the student is interested in spiritual things and generally living out their faith.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	Specific initiatives that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students include the institution's daily chapel services, a division focused on student life and Christian ministries, mission trips, discipleship groups, and ministry teams. Athletic teams also engage in prayer and outreach to opposing teams.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	[Institution]'s admissions process includes questions about the student's testimony and how their personal relationship with Jesus is evident in their everyday life. They also require a Christian leader reference. The institution is transparent about its mission and values throughout the recruitment process.
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	[Participant] did not directly address how they evaluate the effectiveness of these methods. However, she mentioned that the institution has seen growth and strong retention among students who engage in discipleship groups, suggesting they track participation and outcomes.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	[Participant] did not directly address how [Institution] measures the effectiveness of its engagement strategies. However, she mentioned tracking retention rates among students involved in discipleship groups, suggesting they use participation and student outcomes as indicators of effectiveness.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	[Participant] mentioned that [Institution] faced some challenges when it clarified its mission and doctrinal statement, losing some faculty members in the process. However, despite concerns, they did not lose students. The institution had to make difficult choices to remain true to its convictions.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	[Institution] strives to equip students to engage with cultural challenges while remaining true to biblical values. They address topics like LGBTQ issues, abortion, and end-of-life decisions through academic programs, chapel speakers, and intentional conversations, preparing students to navigate these issues with compassion and conviction.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	[Participant] shared that [Institution] had a period in the mid-2000s where they were discussing appealing to a broader audience by foregoing some distinctive aspects. However, the trustees decided to reaffirm the institution's mission and doctrinal statement, hiring a president who brought clarity and consistency to these areas.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	[Participant] emphasized the need for Christian institutions to equip students to live out their faith in an increasingly hostile environment. She believes that if more Christian universities embraced the vision of preparing students to have a gospel impact in their workplaces and communities, it could make a profound difference in the country, even as cultural trends move away from biblical values.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	[Participant] emphasized that [Institution] has had clarity on its mission and doctrinal statement over the decades, focusing on excellent academics and faithfulness to scripture. While the institution may have drifted slightly in the mid-2000s, the trustees and current president brought clear direction, ensuring consistency in hiring practices, policies, and communication.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	[Institution] offers daily chapel services, discipleship groups, mission trips, and ministry teams. These opportunities are voluntary but see high participation rates. The institution also integrates faith into its academic programs, preparing students to enter challenging fields with a biblical worldview.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	[Participant] did not directly address how student and alumni feedback influences outreach and engagement strategies. However, she mentioned that the institution's "1,000 days" marketing campaign has resonated with students, who have internalized the message and see it as part of the university's culture.

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

APPENDIX J.10 Institution E Participant 3

INSTITUTION E - PARTICIPANT 3

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT		
2	In broad terms, how does your university approach identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students?	At [Institution], we take a multi-faceted approach to identifying and engaging prospective convictional Christian students. This includes targeted marketing to Christian high schools and homeschool networks, building relationships with church youth groups and Christian organizations, and leveraging the networks of our current students, alumni, and faculty who share our values.
4	What core values guide your university's efforts to attract convictional Christian students?	The core values that guide our efforts to attract convictional Christian students are a steadfast commitment to biblical truth, a dedication to spiritual growth and discipleship, a pursuit of academic excellence, and a focus on preparing students to serve Christ in their careers and communities.
5	How are these values translated into actionable strategies or initiatives?	We translate these values into action in several ways. All our faculty and staff affirm our doctrinal statement, integrating biblical principles into their teaching and mentoring. Our chapel program and discipleship groups foster spiritual growth, while our emphasis on Christian worldview integration ensures faith is not compartmentalized but permeates all aspects of education.
14	How do leadership and stakeholders collaborate to refine strategies to engage convictional Christian students more effectively?	Our leadership team, including the president, board, and key administrators, meets regularly to discuss the effectiveness of our strategies and consider refinements. We also involve faculty, who are on the frontlines of student engagement, in these discussions. Consultative meetings with student leaders and alumni provide additional insight. The goal is to ensure everyone is aligned and working together to fulfill our mission.
16	Looking forward, are there new plans or strategies in development to further appeal to convictional Christian students?	Looking forward, we are exploring new ways to reach prospective convictional Christian students, especially in the digital space. This includes enhancing our online presence, developing targeted social media campaigns, and creating engaging video content that showcases the [Institution] experience. We are also partnering with more churches and Christian schools to host events and build relationships.
17	Reflecting on your current strategies, where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth or refinement?	One area of opportunity is expanding our reach to convictional Christian students from diverse backgrounds. We are focusing on building relationships with churches and schools in urban contexts and developing scholarship programs to make a [Institution] education more accessible. We are also enhancing our support services to ensure all students thrive in our community.
RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES		
3	What qualities or behaviors do you look for that indicate a prospective student's alignment with your university's core values?	When interacting with prospective students, we look for evidence of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a desire to grow in their faith, and a commitment to living out biblical principles. This could manifest in their involvement in church and ministry activities, their personal testimony, or their eagerness to be part of a vibrant Christian community.
6	Could you provide examples of specific initiatives or programs that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students?	Some specific initiatives that have successfully attracted convictional Christian students include our annual high school summer leadership conference, which brings together young Christian leaders for a week of spiritual growth and leadership development, and our scholarship competitions that reward academic excellence and Christian character. These programs introduce students to [Institution]'s unique blend of rigorous academics and vibrant Christian community.
7	Could you detail the methods or practices in recruitment and admissions that explicitly highlight the university's commitment to convictional Christian values?	Throughout the recruitment and admissions process, we are intentional about highlighting [Institution]'s commitment to biblical truth and spiritual growth. Our admissions counselors openly share their faith journeys and how [Institution] has impacted them. We invite prospective students to sit in on classes and experience how our professors integrate faith and learning. Our promotional materials feature students and alumni living out their faith in various contexts.
PROGRAM EVALUATION		
8	How do you evaluate these methods for their effectiveness?	We evaluate the effectiveness of these methods through a combination of quantitative metrics, such as enrollment numbers and retention rates, and qualitative feedback from students and families. We regularly survey our incoming students to understand what factors influenced their decision to choose [Institution] and use this data to refine our strategies.
11	How specifically does your university evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its engagement strategies for convictional Christian students?	We closely monitor enrollment trends, both overall and within specific demographics, to gauge the effectiveness of our engagement strategies. We also track spiritual growth indicators, such as participation in discipleship groups and missions trips, to ensure we're not just attracting students but nurturing their faith. Feedback from alumni on how [Institution] prepared them to live out their faith in their careers and communities also provides valuable insight.
CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS		
10	What general challenges have you encountered in attracting convictional Christian students, and what strategies have you employed to overcome them?	One of the challenges we've faced is the perception that a Christian education may not be as academically rigorous or prepare students as well for their careers. We've addressed this by highlighting the accomplishments of our faculty, many of whom are top scholars in their fields, and showcasing the success of our alumni in diverse industries. We emphasize how a Christian worldview enhances, rather than detracts from, academic excellence and professional preparation.
12	In what ways does your university strive to balance its core religious values with the changing cultural and demographic landscape?	Balancing our core religious values with the changing cultural landscape is an ongoing challenge, but one we meet by staying anchored in biblical truth. We don't waver on our convictions, even when they are countercultural. At the same time, we strive to equip our students to engage culture with grace and truth, preparing them to be winsome witnesses in an increasingly secular world.
13	Please share a specific instance where your university needed to significantly revise its approach to attract better or retain convictional Christian students.	About two decades ago, we faced a critical moment when there was a push to move [Institution] in a more liberal direction. This caused significant concern among our constituents. The board responded by hiring a president who reaffirmed our conservative biblical values. While this decision wasn't easy, it was necessary to maintain our integrity and stay true to our mission.
18	Considering long-term trends, how is your university preparing to adapt to potential shifts in the demographic profile or religious engagement among future convictional Christian students?	As we look to the future, we recognize that the ways in which students engage with their faith and express their Christian commitment may evolve. We are staying attuned to these changes through research, conversations with youth leaders, and feedback from our own students. At the same time, we remain committed to the timeless truths of Scripture and the transformative power of Christian higher education. Our goal is to adapt our methods while staying true to our mission, ensuring [Institution] remains a beacon of Christ-centered education for generations to come.
STUDENT IMPACT AND FEEDBACK		
1	Could you describe the significance of convictional Christian students within your university's community and identity?	Convictional Christian students are at the very core of [Institution]'s identity and community. Our mission is to provide an exceptional education grounded in biblical truth to these students, equipping them to impact the world for Christ. We believe staying true to this mission is essential, even when cultural pressures tempt us to compromise.
9	Could you highlight any academic or extracurricular opportunities uniquely designed for convictional Christian students?	In addition to our core Bible minor that all students complete, we offer unique academic programs like our Worship degree, which prepares students to lead worship and ministry in the local church, and our Industrial and Innovative Design program, which equips students to create God-honoring solutions to real-world problems. Outside the classroom, our Global Outreach program provides opportunities for missions trips and evangelism training, while our Discipleship Councils foster intentional spiritual growth.
15	Could you explain how feedback from current students and alumni directly influences the evolution of your outreach and engagement strategies?	Feedback from current students and alumni is invaluable in shaping our strategies. We have regular focus groups and surveys where students can share their experiences and suggest improvements. Our alumni office actively seeks input on how [Institution] prepared them and where we could strengthen our programs. This feedback has led to enhancements in our academic offerings, campus life initiatives, and spiritual growth programs.

Source: NVivo Sentiment Analysis of Transcript

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