

THE SUCCESS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN RELATION TO RELIGION IN A  
PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Joseph Franklin Johnson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## **ABSTRACT**

Joseph Franklin Johnson. THE SUCCESS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN RELATION TO RELIGION IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT. (Under the direction of Clarence Holland, EdD, Professor, School of Education, ret.). November 2014. The history of the United States demonstrates a complicated relationship between civil or national religion and the formation of the common schools. This dissertation uses purposive sampling, survey methodology and description research of a local, public school district with noted high scores on character education. The research uses a Likert scale to document educators' perception of success or failure of character education in relation to religion. In the school district, four schools were chosen for their high scores in character education implementation. A purposive sample of 100 participants was provided an email link to a secure, anonymous, online survey. The ten-question survey included a comment section enabling the participant to elaborate on each question. The minimal twenty responses returned from participants indicated an overall perception of the success of character education pedagogy to be minimal. While most participants affirmed the source of ethics to be biological evolution, they strongly believed character should be taught. However, there was no consensus on character education curriculum, pedagogy or methodology. The majority of participants indicated character education would be better served in conjunction with an emphasis upon comparative religion as a means of teaching character.

*Keywords:* character, ethics, natural law, morality, evolution, religion, colonialism

[N.B.: For the purposes of this dissertation, schools and faculty have been changed to protect anonymity].

### **Dedication**

This project would not be possible were it not for the support and affection of my best friend Toby M. H. Johnson. She has been with me every step of this process and encouraging me to move forward. She is a wonderful wife, mother and an excellent teacher. Her prayers and encouragement through this project have been invaluable and have been a source of strength through many challenges.

### **Acknowledgments**

I want to acknowledge my parents, Benjamin and Doris Johnson whose love, support and nurture afforded me the desire to pursue my dreams under God's Providence. "A man's mind plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" (Prov. 16.9, RSV). Equally, I want to thank my wife's parents, the Revs. Richard and Martha Hall for their support and encouragement in my studies.

This has been a long journey in many respects and I am grateful for my educational mentor, Dr. Clarence Holland for his insights, patience and friendship since I began this process in 2005. Dr. James Fyock has been a close friend in my earlier teaching career and in this journey. While he won the doctoral race before me, he stood by me and encouraged me to the end (and thankfully reviewed my APA formatting). Equally, I would like to thank my theological mentor Dr. R. J. Gore, my friend of 18 years, who has given ample advice, wisdom and direction over most of my adult life since we met during my graduate studies in seminary. Special thanks to Dr. Roger Schultz, who agreed to be on my committee, despite the fact that we had never met. His advice and insight have been proven invaluable.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Center for Disease Control (CDC)

Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

*Summa Theologica* (ST)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Parents, educators, as well as politicians are concerned about the problem of school violence, which has increased in recent decades, underscoring a perceived need for character education. Lewis, Robinson, and Hayes, (2011, p. 211) observe, “A growing body of research points to the need for character education in schools as observed by rising rates of juvenile crime (Britzman, 2005) and increased reports of bullying in schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).” The 2012 Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) fact sheet entitled, “Understanding Youth Violence,” defines school violence in these terms:

Youth violence refers to harmful behaviors that can start early and continue into young adulthood. The young person can be a victim, an offender, or a witness to the violence.

Youth violence includes various behaviors. Some violent acts—such as bullying, slapping, or hitting—can cause more emotional harm than physical harm. Others, such as robbery and assault (with or without weapons), can lead to serious injury or even death (p. 1).

The CDC (2012) reported, “Among homicide victims 10 to 24 years old in 2010, 86% (4,171) were male and 14% (657) were female.” These numbers continue to escalate (see Table 1 on the following page). While it is true that young boys are the major aggravators in crime, “[t]oday, girls account for 28 percent of the juvenile arrests for violent crimes” (Prothrow-Stith and Spivak, 2005, p. 44).

**Table 1***Statistics for School Violence of Young Adults Age 10-24*

Statistics	Description
ca. 33%	High school students reported being in a physical fight in the 12 months before the survey.
ca. 5%	High school students reported taking a weapon to school in the 30 days before the survey
20%	High school students reported being bullied on school property.
16%	High school students reported being bullied electronically.

*Note.* 707,000 + physical assault injuries treated in U.S. emergency departments an average of 1,938 each day. The above statistics are taken from a national survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2011.

Prothrow-Stith and Spivak (2005) noted that female violence was one in five in 1975, but in 2003, it was one in three. Considering that in 1900, female violence was one in fifty, these statistics are alarming. Such violence was often the study of psychology textbooks and the perpetrators usually dismissed as deviants or social misfits, whose behavior was often explained as aberrant or the result of poor upbringing. To add to the many challenges that face state education, “. . . Johnny still can’t read, [and] we are now faced with the more serious problem that he can’t tell right from wrong” (Kilpatrick, 1992, p. 87).

**The Culture War**

Character education as understood by previous generations has been significantly affected by the increased pluralism of the American landscape, the various challenges to the traditional family unit, an expanding emphasis on individualism, as well as the legal decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court regarding religion in public education. Many continue to blame the ills of our society on a perceived loss of Christian influence. Some advocate the reinstatement of

prayer and Bible reading in public schools, while some argue for a *Christian* abandonment of the public schools altogether.

The state is unsure how to encourage moral education in a way that is not unconstitutional, nor offensive to cultural and religious sensibilities. In light of perceived moral decline since the 1960s, national and state educators began a “new values clarification” (Raths, Hermin and Simon, 1966) agenda in the hopes of instilling into students proper behavior. Educational theorists and teachers alike want students to be good, ethical citizens. They should be respectful, honest, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent and exhibit other “boy scout values.” Wilhelm and Firmin (2007) note the following:

The word character comes from [καρὰκτηρ], which means [an engraving]. O’Sullivan (2004), therefore, defines character in this way: ‘Literally, then, character traits are those markings engraved upon us that lead us to behave in specific ways.’ (p. 98). These impressed values are those that have been reinforced, imprinted, and upheld in the education and experience of the individual (p. 185).

Educational theorist and culture critic William J. Bennett (1993) observes,

. . . the formation of character in young people is educationally a different task from, and a prior task to, the discussion of the great, difficult, ethical controversies of the day. First things first [sic]. And planting the ideas of virtue, of good traits in the young, comes first. In the moral life, as in life itself, we take one step at a time. Every field has its complexities and controversies. And so does ethics. And every field has its basics. So too with values (p. 12f).

### **Problem Statement**

Recent research has demonstrated the need for feedback among educators regarding various perceptions of character education (Brown, 2008; Davis, 2012; Yandles, 2008 and Burton, 2008). Considering the increasing controversy over the place of religion in American history and society, little has been written regarding perceptions of success or failure of character education in relation to religion.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this descriptive research is to contribute to the further study of character education curriculum and pedagogy by surveying educators in a local, public school district and document their perception of the success or failure of character education in relation to religion.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is much research regarding the methods and means, ethical considerations, constitutional considerations as well as the appropriate curricula to implement character education. There has been research into the self-perceptions of educators in various areas, including their role as teacher and specifically teaching character. However, there is a deficit in the literature regarding the perceptions of educators who teach character with regard to its success or failure considering the role of religion.

### **Research Questions**

A purposive sample of 100 educators from four participating schools in a local school district will be given a survey. The survey questions develop around four concerns, which are interrelated and inseparable:

1. What is the perception of the educator regarding the success or failure of character education?

2. Are there specific values that should be taught in character education?
3. Is religion in conflict or congruence with morality and science?
4. What is the perception of the educator on the role of religion in character education?

### **Definitions**

The following is a list of specific terms used throughout this dissertation:

1. *Character*: “. . . character traits are those markings engraved upon us that lead us to behave in specific ways” (Wilhelm and Firmin, 2007).
2. *Law of Non-contradiction*: “It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, [Gottlieb, 2011, para. 4]).
3. *Postmodernism*: “. . . a denial of the real world, or at least of any knowable, objective truth about the world. This denial automatically is a denial of all objective truth— that is, truth that exists apart from my own thought processes” (McCallum, 1996).

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Natural Law Theory**

This researcher assumes a normative view of ethics and morality that is demonstrable and discernible from natural law as opposed to ethical relativism or postmodernist views of human behavior. This is the traditional view of morality in western civilization. Equally, the framework for discussing character education assumes an essentialist and foundationalist perspective in contrast to constructivism. Essentialism is a view of metaphysics that posits all things have a basic and unique essence or substance that allows the human mind to distinguish individual things from other things through the five senses. These unique characteristics are observable (via empiricism) or logically deduced (rationalism). Essentialism has its origins in the Socratic tradition of Plato and Aristotle.

Foundationalism is a view of epistemology that posits certain beliefs are basic to human reasoning and are without verification for they are self-authenticating. These basic beliefs form the structures for other non-basic beliefs. These assumptions are part of the Western philosophical tradition and find their Christian expression in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (Thomism) as will be discussed below.

Regarding the phenomenon of human experience, reason dictates by nature the law of non-contradiction (i.e. something cannot be what is not) to be self-authenticating. It is the first undeniable principle (as both Aristotle and Aquinas observe) and even those that deplore its assumption must employ its use (e.g., deconstructionism, constructivism, linguistic skepticism, philosophical relativism, etc.). The existence of the law of non-contradiction is defended and demonstrated by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and the consequent competing distinctions



between rationalism and empiricism, Scottish realism, the common sense realism of C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton and the objectivism of Ayn Rand. Further, essentialism posits, as evident in nature, a universal and objective moral ethic common to all cultures and accessible to human reason (cf. Romans 1-2; Psalm 19). Plato, in the *Republic* identifies the ideal political community as that which most corresponds to nature.

Considering the moral and religious metanarrative of the American educational system in its earliest era, it appears that philosophical humanism is a modern novelty. Real nonetheless is its presence in the early history of the United States as a proto-secularism emerging and coexisting with religious cultural structures. This competition continues in the present era, most noticeable in competing philosophies of education, interpretations of history, conflicts over the First Amendment, public expressions of religion, etc. This conflict is evident from the formative years of the American educational system.

### **A City on a Hill**

The American Experiment was forged in the new world; the product of independence from old world civilization and the steady expansion of nascent Protestantism, in its many forms. Hence, the educational enterprise was itself an experiment in largely Protestant catechesis as the emerging nation forged a new identity distinct from Mother England. Algera and Sink (2002) observed that not long ago in the American educational context, “The Bible served as the primary textbook for reading and the daily lessons reinforced a commitment to moral codes of behavior based upon the Scriptures” (p. 163). Moral education and conscience formation have been at the heart of the American educational enterprise. Noting the historical relationship of religion and society early in the Anglo-European context of American education, Walker, Kozma and Green (1989) write: “As it was in traditional English society, education in colonial society

was centered in the family, the community, and the church” (p. 48).

Large colonial families, particularly extended families, merged with evolving communities, so much that they were indistinguishable. The interplay of community and family extended the values of the family unit into the public sphere, “. . . and its instruction in the world of work and conduct of life” (p. 49). It was the church and home that provided the moral framework for the education of children, through both catechesis and modeling.

**Education for moral stability.** In areas of largely Puritan influence, to aid in the stabilizing of families and society in the new world, laws were established in New England that attempted to secure the inculcation of both moral and religious values. As society’s vocational demands increased upon families, education was delegated to the community and the public schools emerged, supported by wealthy benefactors. “. . . public schooling has developed as an institution controlled by the people that can be used to address problems perceived by the people; that is, the school has been perceived as an instrument for the implementation of public policy” (Walker, Kozma and Green, 1989, p. 50). Though they were the policies of the religious majority, “Religious instruction was believed to foster virtue, a characteristic many of the founding fathers emphasized as necessary to the citizenry of a republic” (Walker, Kozma and Green, 1989, p. 50). Harvard’s *General Education in a Free Society* (1945) made it clear the purpose of education was to train the Christian citizen: “Nor was there doubt how this training was to be accomplished. The student’s logical powers were to be formed by mathematics, his taste by the Greek and Latin classics, his speech by rhetoric and his ideals by Christian ethics [sic]” (Mattox, 1948, p. 9).

While this general sentiment was prevalent in the early colonies, among the Puritans it was rigorously employed as noted in the *New England Primer* (1690, a revision of the *Protestant*

*Tutor*), Noah Webster's *Blue Back Speller* (1790) and later Jonathan Fischer's *Youth Primer* (ca. 1817). However, not long after the War of Independence with Great Britain, American society began to look to the public schools not simply to support a virtuous citizenry, but to prepare and train children for social and economic advancement (p. 53). The narrow Puritan vision was not shared by all.

**Education for self-government.** Benjamin Franklin voiced concerns for a secularized education. Inspired by Puritan Cotton Mather's *Essays to Do Good*, Franklin, like most Americans and many political philosophers, was only nominally religious. Walker, Kozma and Green (1989) point out that Franklin publicly supported self-education and noted that higher education only appeared to be useful to train clergy. Students of lower economic and social classes were minimally educated for the working class. "For Franklin, the most useful studies were those that gave the student mastery over his own language: the ability to read and understand, write clearly and speak effectively" (Walker, Kozma and Green, 1989, p. 54). A pragmatist, Franklin's educational theory would not be realized or implemented until the later nineteenth century.

Regarding the sentiments of Franklin (and other pragmatists), Gutek (1995) notes that early American education

exhibited residues of the earlier colonial denominational and Latin grammar schools, American intellectuals sought to devise an educational system that would serve the cause of nation-building . . . [o]ld loyalties had to be transformed into new values and commitments based on the republican concepts of self-government (p. 175).

Hunt and Maxson (1981) observe,

Originally based on the premises of revealed religion, the foundation for moral education in the public schools started to evolve to natural bases (the South generally excepted [sic]) in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Democratic citizenship, rather than mainstream Protestantism, came to embody the moorings of moral/ethical education (v).

Like Benjamin Rush and Robert Coram, Franklin (as well as Jefferson) contributed toward a vision of American education away from its formative sectarianism to an educational experience that “reflects the middle class’ demands for vernacular and utilitarian schooling as opposed to classical humanist studies” (Guttek, 1995, p. 177). Yet even while decrying formal religious training in public education, Franklin respected the historic connection between religion (“Christianity”) and moral education. Upon reading the manuscript of *The Age of Reason*, he scolded Thomas Paine for abandoning religion altogether (Mattox, 1948).

**Education in transition.** The early days of the Republic saw the emergence of a unique American educational theory; however, it was a product of the times of revolution, enlightenment and individualism. Religious foundations were laid in American soil in a time of reformation and immigration to the new world. However, there was no universal or state religion or denomination that carried the force of unity among the many state churches. As the new nation took form, the foundations of Puritanism crumbled in New England within a generation. While Jefferson and Madison gave a nod to nature’s God in the Constitution, they . . . gave clear evidence of the coming dethronement of religious education and values from the curriculum. Although denominational forces were to control formal education . . . throughout much of the nineteenth century, the republican theorists clearly stated what would become the secularized education of the twentieth century (Guttek, 1995, p. 182)

With the swell of immigration in the 1800s, “The revolution in industry brought a factory system

to the cities, new machinery to the factories, and new workers to run the machines” (Walker, Kozma and Green, 1989, p. 56). Jefferson’s and Franklin’s efforts at common public schools for common folk unfortunately produced a dual citizenry: those rich and well-educated could enjoy higher and broader learning in private, denominational (Latin or classical/humanist) schools. The poor however, were educated just enough to be productive citizens.

**Education for social change.** In 1837, Horace Mann had become the first executive secretary of the newly created state board of education in Massachusetts. In the midst of the deteriorated school system in the state, Mann sought to eliminate the “public schools for the poor and private schools for the wealthy . . . a state board, functioning in an advisory capacity, would foster renewed interest in public schooling” (Walker, Kozma and Green, 1989, p. 57). Mann viewed the public school as a place not only for the poor to be trained for a stable society (a Colonial and Puritan concern), but also as a place of opportunity for the poor to rise above their poverty through education. “By the Civil War era, common schools were widespread in the northern and western states, and the South had made progress toward abolishing pauper schools and establishing free public school systems” (p. 59). Though independent, America was still influenced by intellectual ideas and learning from the Mother country. In particular, the experimentalism of Rousseau’s child-centered curriculum (as adapted by Pestalozzi) made its way to America’s common schools through the influence of Bronson Alcott in Boston.

A characteristic of the growing liberalism is the disunity of the various educational ideologies and philosophies emerging at that era of history.

Advocates of conservatism held that the proper role of education is to preserve language and tradition by transmitting the cultural heritage to the young so that they can assume their predetermined roles. Education, both formal and informal, should provide class

skills and values to the immature so that they can fit into the social order of the state. In short, the basic objective of education should be to preserve the status quo and maintain cultural continuity (Guttek, 1995, p. 206).

Further, Guttek (1995) notes the conservatives were joined with the established Christian orthodoxies of the time period. Education was best expressed as *religious* education toward a stable family life. If public education was supported, it was best implemented by the dominant religious authority.

In contrast to growing progressivism in the United States, theology professor Robert Louis Dabney published a work, *On Secular Education* (circa 1870). Dabney recognized the strength of the Roman Catholic system as an educational stronghold. They had the means to offer traditional learning with the support and underpinnings of Catholic theology and moral philosophy. Hence, while children are given the *Politics* and logic of Aristotle, and the rhetoric of Cicero, they are also given an interpretation of Christianity as a system of thought. In America, Protestantism established its educational identity through the common schools. In essence, Dabney's text details the struggle to define American education.

Secondly, he battled growing progressivism. They "insist on secularizing the State, their idea of a free education is of one devoid of religion. They separate mental from spiritual culture. Thus, they conclude that education must be godless in order to be free [sic]" (Dabney, 1996, p. 7). Darwin offered biological evolution to explain human origins so that only the fittest survive. Nietzsche humiliated Christian morality in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and demonstrated that only those with the will to power will conquer. As these forces began to influence education, Dabney (1996) spoke out.

Every line of true knowledge must find its completeness as it converges on God, just as every beam of daylight leads the eye to the sun. If religion is excluded from our study, every process of thought will be arrested before it reaches its proper goal (p. 17).

His bold claim predicted not just the erosion of Protestantism in the United States, but the erosion of learning. As God is the author of truth, to deny him in the education of children is to lead to falsehood; he believed it impossible for a largely Protestant country to have a truly secular education:

Shall secular education leave the young citizen totally ignorant of his own ancestry? How shall he learn the story of those struggles, through which Englishmen achieved those liberties which the colonies inherited, without understanding the fiery persecutions of the Protestants under 'Bloody Mary?' How shall the sons of the Huguenots in New York, Virginia or Carolina know why their fathers left beautiful France, to hide themselves in the Northern snows or the malicious woods of the South? Shall they read nothing of the violation of the 'Edict of Nantes' or the 'Dragonnades,' and the wholesale massacre of St. Bartholomew's day in honor of which an 'infallible' predecessor of the Popes and Te Deums [sic] and struck medals? If the physicist attempts to go back farther into man's history, can he give the genesis of earth and man, without indicating whether Moses or Huxley is his prophet? Can the science of moral obligation be established without reference to God? Do we not need to ask whether or not His will defines all human duty? (p. 17f)

**A secular education.** Troubled by the disintegration of community and family through industrialization, John Dewey (1859-1952) believed the public schools needed to be the new communities to replace and reconstruct positive community systems in the country. "Thus, the

school trained ‘each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction’ (quoted in Walker, Kozma and Green, p. 76). Dewey, the leading proponent of experimental naturalism in education, wrote in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* that Darwin’s “influence upon philosophy resides in his having conquered the phenomena of life for the principle of transition, and thereby freed the new logic for application to mind and morals and life . . .” (Mattox, 1948, p. 34).

Breaking with the historic relationship of the educational system and religion (particularly the Christian tradition), the United States Supreme Court settled definitively against the Christian presence in public education (e.g. the public reading of the Bible and the use of public prayer) in June 1963. Molnar (1997) following Dewey, casts the current vision in terms of an irreligious character education:

I believe that if the virtues of humility, faith, self-denial, and charity are to have any functional utility in secular educational institutions, and in a democratic society, then they have to be ‘decoupled’ from their religious roots and secularized (p. 166).

The climate changed from colonial denominationalism to religious pluralism (including secularism).

The issue of moral education continues to be discussed with competing visions of its implementation, the question of the relevance and role of religion, and perceptions of its successes and/or failures. It is worth noting by F. W. Mattox:

The wisdom of the secularization of public schools in the United States is questioned by many individuals. They believe that a decline in religious interest and an increase in crime can be traced to the removal of religion from the public school curriculum. They



advocate that the teaching of religion be restored to the program of public school education (p. 1).

Ironically, Dr. Mattox writes in 1948 and notes the tendency for both religious and secularists to blame each other for the ills of society. “. . . [N]either religious instruction nor claims of religious affiliation have any important effect upon conduct. The non-religious prove to be about as free from deceit and dishonesty as the religious” (p. 30). He is important for this discussion precisely because he demonstrates the pendulum swing of opinions over the course of American history. Mattox reports statistics (Table 2) by V. T. Thayer that resemble cue cards for current debates in the place of religion in public schools for character education.

**Table 2**

*Statistics for Incarcerated Youth in 1948*

- 
- Dr. N.W. Tetters reported 71.8% in seven prisons and nineteen reform schools were affiliated with some religion (cf. 46.6% of the US population were affiliated with any religion).
  - Franklin Steiner in an independent study reported 80% of religious inmates in prison affiliated with the Christian religion; only 150 considered themselves agnostic/atheist.
  - Professor Hightower (University of Iowa) tested 3,000 children for lying, cheating and deception concluding, “. . . mere knowledge of the Bible is not in itself sufficient to ensure character growth.”
- 

*Note.* Reported by V.T. Thayer in *Religion and Public Education* (1947)

Davis (2006) quotes Justice Tom Clark in *Abington v. Schempp* (1963), what has now become standard regarding the instruction of religion in American education:

One’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization . . . Study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education [does not violate] the First Amendment (p. 3).

While it is true that the causal relationship between an absence of religion in education and juvenile violence is not absolute or definitive, ironically the campuses of American universities reveal many young adults either consciously or unconsciously do not accept the concept of universal, objective, moral, or epistemological norms. Universities seem to underscore the common opinion that the nature and understanding of truth in general is subjective, personal and relative; equally, one's morality and religion have become little more than personal opinion or preference. However,

[t]he vast array of European peoples who settled the American colonies brought with them both an extraordinary commitment to moral education and a rich variety of approaches to the task. The common commitment was rooted in the predominant Christian faith of the settlers; the variety was the product of both their diverse ecclesiastical and national backgrounds and the particular circumstances of their settlements. (McClellan, 1999, p. 1)

How did the Western educational tradition arrive in this condition of moral imbalance?

Religious sociologist H. Richard Niebuhr (1956) warned,

Let education and training lapse for one generation and the whole grand structure of past achievements falls into ruin. Culture is social tradition which must be conserved by painful struggle not so much against nonhuman natural forces as against revolutionary and critical powers in life and reason (p. 32).

When many argue that the public presence of religion is unconstitutional, historical reference alone is demonstrable of the presence of religion in the early colonies and emerging schools. It is worth noting, however, that the voices of religion in the founding of this country were not uniform in their beliefs regarding the implementation of religion to public life, nor the

education of its citizenry; hence, there is no constitutional state religion on the federal level, thus guaranteeing even the freedom of unbelief. Perhaps it is not surprising in the absence of a unified voice of moral authority that we find moral and ethical confusion (Table 3):

**Table 3**

*Statistics of Changing Moral Trends In American Culture in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

Statistic	Year	Description
560%	1900 – 1960	Violent crime
400%	1960 – 1990	Illegitimate births <sup>a</sup>
300%	1960 – 1990	Teenage suicide
200%	1960 – 1990	Divorce <sup>b</sup>
1000%	1960 – 1998	Cohabitation <sup>c</sup>
64%	1991	Americans believed in “few” absolutes
43%	1991	Americans believed personal experience was the only source of moral absolutes
30%	Before 1993	Americans identified as irreligious
29%	Before 1993	Americans identified as “barely religious” (attend church occasionally)
22%	Before 1993	Americans identified as “remotely religious” (attend church at holiday time)
19%	Before 1993	Americans identified as “practicing Christians.”
	1995	Eighth grade drug abuse doubled since 1992; the average age of drug usage was thirteen
50%	1995	Twelfth grade drug abuse

*Note.* Statistics are taken from “The Family in Crisis,” (2001, p. 2) by James Dobson, PhD.

<sup>a</sup> 33% of all babies were born to unmarried women (cf. only 3.8% in 1940).

<sup>b</sup> The statistic is actually higher among professing Christians compared to non-Christians.

<sup>c</sup> Since 1990, unmarried parents living together have increased 72%.

## The Consequences of Ideas

**The Classical metanarrative.** As noted earlier, the architects of the western view of reality, ethics and human behavior were of the Socratic school. As we will see, this classical metanarrative was adopted by the emerging Christian philosophical tradition. Philosopher Bertrand Russell (1946) observes,

In all history, nothing is so surprising or so difficult to account for as the sudden rise of civilization in Greece . . . What they achieved in art and literature is familiar to everybody, but what they did in the purely intellectual realm is even more exceptional. They invented mathematics and science and philosophy; they first wrote history as opposed to mere annals; they speculated freely about the nature of the world and the ends of life . . . [men were so astonished they] . . . were content to gape and talk about the Greek genius (p. 15).

**Metaphysics.** Both Plato and Aristotle wrestled with how to articulate a “real” or authentic understanding of things experienced in the world. Behind the sense of the transcendent, Greek philosophers struggled with the metaphysical assumptions of polytheism. The universe was governed and guided by a pantheon of deities. These deities they inherited by the influence of the cultures of former conquered and subjugated empires, e.g., the Babylonians, Persians, Medes, Assyrians and Egyptians (Russell, 1945). Equally, as Greece and her world were subjugated by the Romans, they too adopted the former pantheon, and like Greece, the Babylonian Ba’al, known to the Greeks as Zeus became Jupiter.

The ancient world also functioned with a sense of mystery: that the origin of the world around them was beyond the senses, transcending experience. Plato, in the *Republic* called this mystery,  $\eta$  του αγαθου, “the idea of the good,” from which all things are derivative. Cicero

later called this concept the *Summum Bonum* and Paul the Apostle in an Athenian public debate identified this “idea” as God (cf. Acts 17). John the Apostle co-opted Philo Judæus and referred to Jesus as the λογος, the uncreated Word (cf. John 1.1, 14, 18). Paul also imported Philo’s idea of the *logos* as that which holds all things together (Hebrews 1:1-4), but unlike Philo, this “principle” was God himself; the man Jesus is termed the *character* of God’s ineffable substance (not a created demiurge).

***Axiology/ ethics.*** In terms of ethical obligations in the ancient world, “the gods also became associated with morality . . . a breach of the law became an impiety” (Russell, 1945, p.5). Russell observes that the Code of Hammurabi was “asserted by the king to have been delivered to him by Marduk” (p. 5). In classical Greek culture, the answer to the ethical problem stems from a polytheistic mythology, which resulted in the ethical dilemma in Socrates’ *Dialogue With Euthyphro*: is [a thing] right because the gods command it or do they command it because it is right? Both Plato and Aristotle rejected the popular metaphysical explanations of the culture in favor of a naïve objective realism (Aristotle) or idealism (Plato). For Plato, the Good is what is demonstrably harmonious and orderly in nature, the arts and human behavior. For Aristotle, the Good is objectively virtuous and leads to consequent human happiness (ευδαιμονια, *eudaimonia*).

***Epistemological assumptions.*** In the classical world, Aristotle observed a fundamental law of non-contradiction at work in the human reasoning process and this law was a necessary pre-condition for intelligibility. In other words, in order to communicate consistently without nonsense, one has to employ this law. Aristotle asserts in chapter four of his *Metaphysics*, “It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and

in the same respect” (Gottlieb, 2011, para. 4). Expressed another way in Algebra is the Law of Identity:  $A \neq \text{non-}A$ . Gottlieb (2011) summarizes Aristotle thus:

Aristotle says that [the principle of non-contradiction] is one of the common axioms, axioms common to all the special sciences. It has no specific subject matter, but applies to everything that is. It is a first principle and the firmest principle. Like *modus ponens*, as Lewis Carroll memorably showed, [the principle of non-contradiction] does not function as a premise in any argument. Unlike *modus ponens*, [the principle of non-contradiction] is not a rule of inference. Aristotle says that it is a principle which ‘is necessary for anyone to have who knows any of the things that are’ . . . it is no mere hypothesis (para. 12).

Aristotle grounds the existence of this principle in the nature of being; “. . . *in things themselves*, [sic] i.e., *in re* as their *form* from which the mind (intellect) abstracts them in getting to know things . . .” (Hunnex, 1986, p. 9). Aristotle argues in book three of the *Metaphysics*, that it is the business of the philosopher to investigate the first principles or axioms of math or science; things about “being” which the mathematician or the scientist assume exist in nature. It is in being, discernible by the senses of experience, that the law of non-contradiction shows itself: as is.

**The Christian metanarrative.** Prior to the 1500s, the Western world, e.g., Christendom, inherited from her philosophical forebears a view of reality based upon a transcendent and objective metaphysic and consequent objective, normative ethic. The Christian tradition is often viewed as a synthesis of classical philosophy (Greek and Roman) and Israelite/ Jewish theology. Arguably, however, Paul the Apostle states quite clearly (Acts 17; Romans 1-2) that God has made himself known to all people and cultures. This is called “natural revelation.” In the Hebrew Bible, the Psalmist makes a similar claim,

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world (Psalm 19, RSV).

German phenomenologist Edith Stein observes, “Whoever seeks the truth is seeking God, whether consciously or unconsciously” (Scaperlanda, 2001, p. 59) or in the words of Augustine of Hippo, “All truth is God’s truth.”

***Metaphysics: The transcendent Trinity.*** The Hebrew monotheistic and ethical tradition was unique in the ancient world and their answer to pagan religions was equally unique: one Deity created the world *ex nihilo* and everything in it (Genesis 1:1). This Deity revealed himself to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David and others and gave them an ethical code on the crest of Mt. Sinai of which, according to the editor of Deuteronomy, all nations would be envious (cf. Deut. 4:6-8). Out of this roughly 2000 year-old narrative, and generations of prophetic longings, arise the dawn of John the Baptizer and the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 BC).

The Christian movement answered the pagan search for meaning beyond the stars and revealed the God who brought the children of Israel out of the house of Pharaoh by their baptism in the Red Sea (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-2). The Christian narrative reveals that this God has come to us personally in the man Jesus Christ (John 1:18), revealing the Mystery of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. Colossians 2:9; John 14:9; Hebrews 1:1-4) and answering the problems/ tensions in pagan philosophy when he says he is “the way [metaphysics] the truth [epistemology] and the life [axiology]” (John 14:6). The definitive answer to the “what” of Aristotle’s metaphysic is a “who,” that is, a person, whose identity is canonized in the Creed of Nicaea (325 AD).

***Ethics: The way of wisdom.*** In the Hebrew Bible, the Patriarch Job uttered, “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28.28, RSV). King David understood the “fear of the Lord” as something taught to children (Psalm 34.11). What is good and evil (righteous or wicked) stems from a concrete source: the *Torah* or “law”. *Torah* as originally understood is the covenant God gave through Moses to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. The covenant marks the parameters for maintaining their presence in the Land that God promised to Abraham (Genesis 12). David summarizes the covenant by saying, “What man is there who desires life, and covets many days, that he may enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” (Psalm 34.12-14, RSV).

What defines evil and good are not abstract relativities, but specifics, i.e., principles found in the *Torah*. Later, David connects the fear of the Lord with the “beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111.10). The editor of the Proverbs says similar things and adds that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1.7); moreover, he associates “the fear of the Lord” with wisdom, as a way of life that avoids evil. This evil is defined by breaking God’s commands (cf. 1 John 3.4). Those commands outline or protect the “Blessed Life.” Consequently, habitual breaking of God’s commands defines the unhappy and short life (See Psalm 1, 19; cf. 1 Timothy 1.8). Micah the Prophet summarizes the *Torah* when he says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6.8, RSV). This standard of morality is based upon God’s Person and nature as he has revealed his divine will in the canon of Sacred Scripture.

Rabbi Hillel, the grandfather of Gamaliel I (rabbi to Paul the Apostle, cf. Acts 5.34; 22.3) taught in the Mishnah, “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor [sic]: that is the whole



Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it” (*Shabbath* 31a). When asked which *mitzvah* (command) is the greatest, Jesus of Nazareth connects the love of God demonstrably to love of neighbor; the abstract is seen in specific acts of charity. He replies (Mark 12:29-31, RSV):

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind [Deut. 6.4f] and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself [Lev. 19.18].’ There is no other commandment greater than these (cf. Matt. 19.19; 22.39; Luke 10.27).

This same conventional wisdom is found in Paul’s letters (Gal. 5.14; Rom. 13.9) and the Letter of James (2.8).

It would be centuries of debate, growth and development of doctrine as the infant Church, resting on the foundation of Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 4), grew and matured into a visible institution, which spread throughout the known world of the Roman Empire. After nearly 1000 years of councils and difficult organization, perhaps no greater mind arose to successfully articulate the Christian answer to philosophy than Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD).

**Thomas Aquinas.** He was the architect of the Western Christian philosophical tradition. In agreement with Aristotle, he said the law of non-contradiction is discernible by the senses and from the perspective of naked philosophy, has its origin in being (Hunnex, 1986). In *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate* (Question one), he quotes Augustine, who said, “‘The true is that which is.’ But that which is, is simply being. The true, therefore, means exactly the same as being.” In *de Veritate*, Aquinas notes, “Things in the same state are the same. But the true and being are in the same state. Therefore, they are the same. For Aristotle wrote: ‘The state of a thing in its act of

existence is the same as its state in truth.’ Therefore, the true and being are entirely the same” (para. 5).

Fennis (2011) observes that the weakness in Aristotle’s position is his inability to ground his epistemology in ontology. He observes that non-contradiction is at work in human reasoning and connects it with being; it is the first principle and assumption that being “is.” In other words, Aristotle is correct in his observation but oblivious to its origin, for he rejects the pantheon of deities as superstition.

However, Aquinas accepted on authority from Sacred Revelation that *beatitudo*, that is, the uninterrupted, perpetual, felicitous vision of God is the goal of all things human; indeed, it is philosophy’s *summum bonum*. The foundation of all things, particularly those axioms Aristotle assumed *a priori*, Aquinas understood to have their origin in God. However, philosophy cannot say this. Neither Plato nor Aristotle could say this. Aquinas notes by practical reason, that while philosophy is a dumb idol on the ultimate question of Being, “. . . the only ultimate end and *beatitudo* (fulfillment) for human beings is living in a completely reasonable, morally excellent (*virtuosus*) way” (Fennis, 2011, para. 13).

Hence, the law of non-contradiction serves as a rational means by which human beings live what Socrates called the “best possible life.” The irrational life therefore is the immoral life. Fennis (2011) summarizes Aquinas’ view of the functional association between morality and reason, from the perspective of practical reason or what has become in common parlance, “natural law,” which is a function of natural theology:

The ultimate end of human life is *felicitas* or *beatitudo*... So the main concern of law [including the natural (moral) law] must be with directing towards *beatitudo*. Again, since every part stands to the whole as incomplete stands to complete, and individual

human beings are each parts of a complete community, law's appropriate concern is necessarily with directing towards common *felicitas* . . . that is, to *common* good. (*ST* I-II q. 90 a. 2.) . . . The ‘complete community’ mentioned here is the political community, with its laws, but the proposition implicitly refers also to the community of all rational creatures, to whose common good morality (the moral law) directs us (para. 16).

For the Greeks and emergent Christian civilization, the law of non-contradiction was self-evident as much as the truth of being. This prevalent explanation of the world (called “pre-modernity”) was in innocence or malice put into question by the dawn of the Renaissance.

**The Cartesian revolution.** Rationalist philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is considered by most to be the “Father of Modern Philosophy” (Russell, 1942, p. 557). Russell observes that with Descartes, the history of philosophy and Western civilization encounter the first authentic (*de novo*) turn in philosophy since Aristotle and he associates this with the progress of science. “He was a timid man, a practicing Catholic, but he shared Galileo’s heresies . . . the earth’s rotation around the sun and the infinity of the universe” (p. 559).

Descartes sought to discover the first principle in philosophy, which in the realism of Aristotle and Aquinas had belonged to the naked assumption of Being (Aristotle) and derivative being in God (Aquinas). “In order to have a firm basis for his philosophy, he resolves to make himself doubt everything that he can manage to doubt” (Russell, 1942, p. 563). This is very similar to the method of medieval philosopher William of Ockham (1287-1347), who wrote in “*Sent.* I, dist. 30, q. 1: ‘ . . . nothing ought to be posited without a reason given, unless it is self-evident (literally, known through itself) or known by experience or proved by the authority of Sacred Scripture’” (Spade and Pinaccio, 2011, para. 4.1). Russell (1942) quotes Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* (1637):

While I wanted to think everything false, it must necessarily be that I who thought was something; and remarking that this truth, *I think, therefore I am*, was so solid and so certain that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were incapable of upsetting it, I judged that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of philosophy that I sought (p. 564, emphasis his).

Breaking with the realism of Aristotle and Aquinas, Descartes brought his own Copernican Revolution. He implied that the epistemological verification for what is true and real is humanity's experience of things-as-they-appear, creating a subject-object dichotomy or dialectic. Individual humans are the knowing subjects distinct from the world; while God, people, etc., are objects-to-be-known. *Cogito ergo sum*, ("I think therefore I am") "makes mind more certain than matter and my mind (for me) more certain than the minds of others" (Russell, 1942, p. 564). Hence, in Descartes, subjectivism trumped objectivism.

***The end of metaphysics.*** Descartes, like Ockham would cut away all contingencies except self-evident and necessary entities. "For Ockham, the only truly necessary entity is God; everything else, the whole of creation, is radically contingent through and through" (Spade and Pinaccio, 2011, para. 4.1). God's existence is necessary for Descartes because God links the Self (Soul/ Mind) with the external world of matter. God, the Logos, is the uncreated mind/ logic in which all human beings participate and derive their intelligence; a position very similar to the medieval philosopher Averroes (Russell, 1942) and Philo.

Philosophers after Descartes found in his emerging philosophy a system that presupposed human autonomy and the naked power of reason. Hence, they gladly sloughed off the mirage of the authority of religion. Descartes had eliminated Aristotle's guesswork on *anima*/ souls (as what constitutes growth in organisms) and established them as *automata*, ". . . why not say the

same of man and simplify the system by making it a consistent materialism” and eliminate the need for metaphysics altogether? (Russell, 1942, p. 568).

The consequence of this renaissance in Western philosophy is the concept that at the center of things, humanity (and one’s own autonomy) would now govern how a person understands reality (metaphysics), knowledge (epistemology) and ethics (axiology). The dictum of Protagoras regarding humanity as the measure of all things was tantamount. The Renaissance would lay the groundwork for further cultural development that would continue to separate science, philosophy and God in the medieval worldview; an era called the *Aufklärung* (“Enlightenment”).

**Modernity.** The West not only began to contemplate humanity as the measure of all things, but also as the subjective reference point (as noted above). Thus, the modern era can be understood initially as a new way of reckoning history—and that without God. A naked secularism was conceived. Calinescu notes (1987), “the idea of modernity could be conceived only within the framework of specific time awareness, namely, that of historical time, linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards” (p. 13).

As Gregory (2012) argues, Luther’s Reformation allowed for the flourishing of individual, autonomous thought. Russell (1942) heartily agrees:

The Thirty Year’s War persuaded everybody that neither Protestants nor Catholics could be completely victorious; it became necessary to abandon the medieval hope of doctrinal unity, and this increased men’s freedom to think for themselves, even about fundamentals. The diversity of creeds in different countries made it possible to escape persecution by living abroad. Disgust with theological warfare turned the attention of able men increasingly to secular learning, especially mathematics and science. These are

among the reasons for the fact that, while the sixteenth century, after the rise of Luther, is philosophically barren, the seventeenth century . . . marks the most notable advance since Greek times (p. 525).

***Immanuel Kant.*** Kant was born to Lutheran parents in Germany (1724-1804). He observed that what was understood to be real in the world, the “thing-in-itself” (*ding an sich*) . . . is unknowable” (Hunnex, 1986, p. 43). Kant called the external world outside of the mind *noumena*, which is grasped or perceived by the senses (in agreement with Aristotle). The intellect of every human makes sense of this data that one experiences. Kant called this appropriation of data *phenomena*. “Phenomena are possible only because mind is capable of ordering them in space and time. Mind knows only what it orders in space and time according to the principle of causality as phenomena or experience” (Hunnex, 1986, p. 43). Through pure reason, Kant believed religious concepts were unknowable, thus they remained noumena, but like human freedom and the conscious self, Kant maintained their necessary existence. Using pure reason, however, according to Kant’s contemporaries (e.g. Rousseau, Voltaire), there is no justification for religion; hence, whatever is “true” was realized by pure reason.

***Metaphysical skepticism.*** Science established the limits and boundaries of reason alone in empirical observation and comparison. The modern mind did not question science with its devotion to empiricism. Equally a product of the autonomous quest is rationalism: an outlook that did not look to science but to reason/ logic for timeless truths. The two autonomous approaches to knowledge and truth were common in their undercutting of the transcendent, that is, metaphysics. For Kant and others, the God of the Biblical tradition was a product ultimately of speculation and mythology, similar to the pantheon rejected by Aristotle and Plato. After all,

science could not study an angel's wing (as noted above about the limits of pure reason) and ethics would soon be a casualty in the conquest of philosophy.

This Age of Reason (“Modernism”) with man at the center, eventually gave way to a change that is opposed to the ideas of modernity. This change came in the wake of two world wars, producing skepticism and pessimism regarding institutions and places of power or authority; the West is currently experiencing the effects of such prevailing skepticism. Aging modernity was dying and leaving the West in a state of “post-modernity” as people began to live out the philosophies of previous generations.

**Existentialism.** In Christian philosophy, essence or being (το τι εστι, the “what it is” of Aristotle), has its origin in God. This is a fundamental assumption in the philosophy of Aquinas. Paul the Apostle Christianizes Epimenides’ poem *Creatia* when he tells the philosophers in Athens, “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:26-27, RSV). Hence, the axiom in Christian scholasticism: “essence precedes existence.” Existentialism is a philosophy which focuses upon the choices and decisions of the individual. It is a conscious reversal of Aristotelian essentialism, especially the Christian essentialism of Aquinas (cf. *ST*, Question 1) as Jean-Paul Sartre stated categorically “*l'existence précède l'essence*” (Sartre, 2007, p. 20). Martin Heidegger observes in *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time, 1962, p. 67), “*Das 'Wesen' des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz [sic]*” (“The 'essence' of Being lies in its existence.”).

For the existentialists, existence is “naked.” It has no *telos* or goal; it is not a “stuff” to be examined. It has no οὐσία, or *substantia*. The single, “Riders on the Storm” by the Doors (1971) captures the heart of existential nihilism: “Into this house we’re born; into this world we’re thrown. Like a dog without a bone; an actor all alone. Riders on the storm.” Essence is what the existent chooses to become and must bear the responsibility for it.

In each case, Dasein [Being] *is* its possibility, and it ‘has’ this possibility but not just as a property, as something present-at-hand would. And because Dasein is in each essentially its own possibility, it *can* in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only ‘seem’ to do so. But only insofar as it is essentially something which can be *authentic* [sic] . . . (Heidegger, 1962, p. 68, emphasizes his).

Existentialism assumes humanity’s untainted freedom of the will and emphasizes intense responsibility characterized by despair and the angst that accompanies not only the problem of decision-making, but the agony of the consequences caused by bad decisions. Existentialism is highly individualistic and asserts that our choices are products of the present act of the will alone; they are not affected by anything past, present, or future. Every choice is a risk and a leap of faith.

**Søren Kierkegaard.** The themes of existentialism can be found in Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Psalms, as well as Augustine, Pascal and Milton. As a maturing philosophy, existentialism arguably has its origin in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Lutheran philosopher (Erickson, 2001). Kierkegaard emphasized the limited freedom of the individual in relation to God:

The most tremendous thing which has been granted to man is: the choice, freedom. And if you desire to save it and preserve it there is only one way: in the very same second unconditionally and in complete resignation to give it back to God, and yourself with it. If the sight of what is granted to you tempts you, and if you give way to the temptation and look with egoistic desire upon the freedom of choice, then you lose your freedom. And your punishment is: to go on in a kind of confusion priding yourself on having—freedom of choice, but woe upon you, that is your judgment: you have freedom of choice



you say and still you have not chosen God. Then you will grow ill, freedom of choice will become your *idée fixe*, till at last you will be like the rich man who imagines that he is poor, and will die of want: you sigh that you have lost your freedom of choice—and your fault is only that you do not grieve deeply enough or you would find it again . . .

(Bretall, 1973, p. 428).

For all existentialists, what is central is the will of humanity, even believing in God is a blind leap of irrational faith. “This ‘leap’ brings a reciprocal movement of the unconditioned—God—into human existence and is what is meant by living by faith” (Hunnex, 1986, p. 43). For Kierkegaard, this means primarily holding on tight to the paradox of the uncertain certainty; the transcendent God made known by the incarnation -- two mutually exclusive concepts, held in dialectical tension—that God became man, the infinite bound by the finite. This is the one saving contradiction of faith.

**Postmodernism.** Ironically, during the time of Kierkegaard, an atheistic brand of existentialism emerged through the influence of another Lutheran, who abandoned his faith: Friedrich W. Nietzsche (1844-1900). Christian philosopher Stanley Grenz (1997) observes

The term *postmodern* may have first been coined in the 1930s to refer to a major historical transition already under way and as the designation for certain developments in the arts. But postmodernism did not gain widespread attention until the 1970s. First, it denoted a new style of architecture. Then it invaded academic circles, originally as a label for theories expounded in university English and philosophy departments. Eventually, it surfaced as the description for a broader cultural phenomenon (p. 2).

The pessimistic mood of postmodernity was popularized in the literature of Jean-Paul Sartre, Jack Kerouac, Albert Camus, but especially Nietzsche. Based upon atheistic presuppositions,

postmodernism concludes that since there is no God, all values are meaningless. Alluding to an idea discussed in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Sartre writes (2007), "Since God does not exist and we all must die, everything is permissible" (p. 78). The origin of morality and values lies within the self. Whatever the self does is good as long as one is true to oneself and does not live hypocritically, which Sartre called "bad faith." Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* suggests when humanity evolves beyond the morals that psychologically imprison us, we will truly be free to be ourselves, our authentically human being, the *übermensch* or "superman."

The results of postmodernism are the serious decline in a sense of moral responsibility in our culture and the birth of a genuinely self-absorbed and nihilistic culture. Grenz (1997) noted

The postmodern consciousness has abandoned the Enlightenment belief in inevitable progress. Postmoderns have not sustained the optimism that characterized previous generations. To the contrary, they evidence a gnawing pessimism. For the first time in recent history, the emerging generation does not share the conviction of their parents that the world is becoming a better place in which to live. From widening holes in the ozone layer to teen-on-teen violence, they see our problems mounting. And they are no longer convinced that human ingenuity will solve these enormous problems or that their living standard will be higher than their parents (p. 13).

Dennis McCallum (1996) in *The Death of Truth* observes

At its heart, postmodernism rests on a belief not just in a cultural bias, but in culturally constructed reality. At the heart of postmodernism is a denial of the real world, or at least of any knowable, objective truth about the world. This denial automatically is a denial of all objective truth—that is, truth that exists apart from my own thought processes. The existence of the one, unique God and the person and work of Christ are examples of

crucial objective truths postmodernists deny as objective or knowable. Indeed, Christianity is the sort of ‘metanarrative’ . . . that postmodernists fight against (p. 244). Thus, any attempt to construct theories of Truth necessarily depends upon the interpretation of the one giving them. This is the postmodern observation. The answer to the question of Truth is that everyone’s interpretation is true: a hopeless contradiction.

***The arts deconstructed.*** Veith (1994) traces the movement from modernism to postmodernism (including the loss of reason) in the performing arts. He says, “Modernism, for all its rebellion against the past, did not reject absolutes; rather it attempted to arrive at absolutes—pure form, disembodied beauty, the truth of human experience—through art” (p. 58). This vision of the hyper-subjectivity of the performing and visual arts is hailed in the literature of Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, and other deconstructionists, who believe authorial intent or purpose is impossible to determine. Due to the emphasis upon the self as interpreter, whatever meaning is brought to literature or the arts is from the subjective observer/knower. This irrationalism is the substance of postmodernity. In the subjective art of Dali, the disconnected music of Pink Floyd, and the comedy of Seinfeld (a show about “nothing”), the viewer never has to process or think but merely be entertained. Postman (1992) predicted this devolution of culture in the title of his popular text: *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

**Post-Christian.** In popular parlance, sociologists term American culture post-Christian, (suggesting the primary influence in American culture was Christian) because it has ceased to be the dominant influence. The Christian experience in America is now as it was in the Roman Empire: a religion among religions. However, in the words of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, who resided in Maryland and a signer of the Declaration of Independence,

Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime & pure, [and] which denounces against the wicked eternal misery, and [which] insured to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments (Steiner, 1907, p. 475).

Equally, Jedidiah Morse (1799), who was a patriot and Father of American Geography said,

To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoys. . . . Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all blessings which flow from them, must fall with them (p. 9).

These sentiments express the special place the Christian religion once enjoyed in colonial and post-colonial America. As the influence of Christianity has waned in the public and private spheres, it has been supplanted by anything and everything. Noah Webster said, “The education of youth, an employment of more consequence than making laws and preaching the gospel, because it lays the foundation on which both the law and the gospel rest for success . . . ” (Milson, 2004, p. 102).

## **Related Literature**

### **Obvious Absurdities**

In 1944, Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis wrote a volume called *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis was a specialist in medieval literature and subtitled this work “Reflections on education with special reference to teaching English in the upper forms of schools.” Lewis had encountered several books and began noticing a trend in English education that parallels the erosion in America. He recognized what is now called deconstructionism in a book he called *The Green*

*Book*. He interacted with the authors of this text throughout the volume. Lewis observed that the authors were suggesting—as modern constructivism does—that the meaning in a text is subjective; that there is no meaning to anything other than that which the self gives—a feeling, an impression, but certainly there is no meaning in the thing itself (Lewis, 1944).

He notes, “If the view held by [the authors] were consistently applied it would lead to obvious absurdities” (Lewis, 1944, p. 3). Further he says, “The schoolboy who reads this passage in *The Green Book* will believe two propositions: firstly, that all sentences containing a predicate of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker, and secondly, that all such statements are unimportant” (p. 4). Lewis’ concern is not so much what the authors intended in their book, but with the effects it will have in generations. The effects are subconscious, not obvious. The authors do not state, “This is our motive and our worldview,” but that is what comes out. It is fallacious to say that a statement means nothing. Sentences in formal logic are not statements; statements have truth value, sentences do not: e.g., a command is not a sentence. “What color is middle C?” is not only a question, but it is nonsense. The authors of *The Green Book* (similar to deconstructionists) wrote that there was no meaning in printed text. Lewis exposes the fallacy and demonstrates that they really do not believe that, for they write as if their book had meaning. The statement, “There is no meaning in this text,” is similar to saying “There are round squares.” Lewis’ book was a clarion call regarding the erosion of culture by the abandonment to subjectivity. Much like Aquinas, Lewis emphasized without the proper place of reason, the foundations for truth, meaning and ethics would be indiscernible. He feared the growing trend and the publication of more such books as *The Green Book* (Lewis 1944).

In terms of human behavior, Lewis sought to explicate what he (borrowing from

Confucianism) dubbed the *Tao*, the way of moderation, values common to most cultures-- what Aquinas and the Western moral tradition have identified as “natural law.” In the appendix, he lists selections from cultures all over the world that share this natural outlook regarding human behavior. Lewis (1944) ends the first chapter of the book with a casual warning of the consequence of the subjectivity of morality.

And all the time—such is the tragic-comedy of our situation—we continue to clamour [sic] for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more ‘drive’ or dynamism or self-sacrifice or ‘creativity.’ In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour [sic] and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful (p. 26).

### **Golden Era?**

F.W. Mattox wrote *The Teaching of Religion in the Public Schools* in 1948. The value of the text for this present study is monumental. Mattox tackles the issue of the relationship of religion and public schools at the beginning of religious resurgence in American culture. The United States had just finished the Second World War and nationalism was in the bloodstream of the “greatest generation.” Civil religion and church-going stable families were visible in the media on the new televisions. The presentation of the arguments for and against the comingling of religion and the common schools is relevant for this study for it exposes the myth of a Christian golden era in the collective memory of many Americans.

Mattox (1948) notes by the 1930s and 40s the common schools were virtually secular, but as of his writing, this idea was being challenged by the likes of J. Edgar Hoover among

others. Mattox quotes Hoover's article from the *Christian Statesman*, "What we need is an inculcation of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount in the hearts and minds of all Americans. This is the surest antidote to stem the rising tide of lawlessness . . ." (p. 28).

Arguing contrary to absolute moral norms that transcend the human species, the John Dewey Society's seventh yearbook entitled, *The Public Schools and Spiritual Values* (1944), made clear, ". . . we propose to maintain both the logical possibility and the practical potential adequacy of the public school to teach such spiritual values . . . on the basis of human reason and experience and without necessary recourse to religious authority" (Mattox, 1948, p. 38f).

Ironically the experimentalists (via Dewey) recognize that without an objective source of morality and rationally, it is difficult to deduce moral standards from human experience. Mattox (1948) quotes Norman Woelfel who noted:

The personality and character growth of children were managed with satisfying success by the home and the church. In the modern era, these larger functions of education have more and more been pushed into the circle of the school. But the school has had no adequate philosophy and psychology with which to handle them. It is not surprising, therefore, that the measure of the school's actual functioning in matters of character and personality is found largely in the few pages of introductory rhetoric in textbooks and curricula and in convention oratory. We literally don't know what to do about these things . . . (p. 36).

### **Evangelical Education**

Publishing the same year as Mattox's volume at the George Peabody College for Teachers, Lois LeBar (1948) entered the cultural fray with a distinctly evangelical interpretation to education. LeBar observes, "A chief reason for the lack of life and power and reality in our

evangelical teaching is that we have been content to borrow man-made systems of education instead discovering God's system" (p. 19). She specifically assaults the philosophical presuppositions of Herbart, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Dewey. These have largely centered on the learning process of the learner, that is, the experience of the student as primary in contrast to an educational system that begins in God's revealed Truth.

LeBar (1948) stated while theology has advanced along with preaching in churches, education has floundered. In an attempt to be relevant, it has compromised its biblical presuppositions with those of the popular trends as mentioned above. She continues, "Why should we not derive from God's revelation our own philosophy, God's own ways of working that are inherent in the very structures of the universe" (p. 20). She proposes a Puritan hermeneutic that Christians should derive educational theory from the biblical text itself, citing chapter and verse to allow one's "mind to be renewed" and one's philosophy shaped by it (cf. Romans 12.1-2). This is similar to the way French Reformer John Calvin described Holy Scripture as the "lenses" or spectacles through which we understand the world that God has made (Calvin, 1960, Institutes, 1.6.1). Apparently then, if one is to develop a biblical theology of Christian education, one begins not with *human* experience but with Scripture. In contrast to secular education, LeBar (1948) informs us that one uses the Bible as a transcendent source of "God-given revelation" (p. 5). "The education that the Lord God gave the Jewish people whom He chose for His own purposes was theocentric and practical, with a salutary balance between inner and outer factors" (p. 17). This theocentric education, according to LeBar (1948), provides not only the foundational content of teaching, but godly principles for the process as well. By observing Jesus, one sees the Master Teacher.

LeBar (1948) speaks of the three parts of education, the teacher, learner, and the content.



The relationship between them is her Christian philosophy of education. For Christian education, the necessary presupposition is Holy Scripture. The Scriptures provide the metanarrative for understanding one's experience as it really is. LeBar argues, apart from the Christian metanarrative, there is no certainty in education or anything; there is no objective criterion for determining the validity of truth claims or the factuality of data. LeBar (1948) argues that Holy Scripture provides the basis for interpreting the world aright, as well as the legitimate use of logic, the sciences, values, etc. A Christian philosophy of education must be necessarily grounded in the revealed Word of God, which transcends all cultures and experiences.

### **Covenant Education**

Writing in the mid-1960s, Rousas John Rushdoony perceived an agenda in public education of revising history to eliminate the influence of the Christian faith from public life. He founded the *Chalcedon Foundation* in 1965, which has served as a think-tank for conservative Christians. According to Rushdoony's son-in-law Gary North (2001), though never a public figure,

Rushdoony's writings are considered the source of many of the core ideas of the new "Christian Right" . . . two-weeks after Reagan was inaugurated, *Newsweek* (2/2/82) accurately but briefly identified Rushdoony's *Chalcedon Foundation* as the think tank of the Religious Right (para. 2).

Rushdoony (considered by many to be the father of the modern Christian school and homeschool movements) was critical about the origins of public education:

At present humanism has brought all things, including most churches, under the sway of man the lord. The purpose of state schools, as laid down by Horace Mann, James G.

Carter, and others, was twofold: to establish centralism, the priority of the state over every area of life and second, to eliminate biblical faith. The founders of statist education were Unitarians. They rightly believed that control over the child through the schools is the key to controlling society (Rushdoony, 2001, p. 172)

Further he said (1978),

The ‘public’ or statist schools which began their history as a subversive movement, aimed at subverting the old order, now cast the implication of subversion on the family! It should be remembered that the family was once the primary educational institution. As late as 1833, a parental guidebook faced with the threat of state schools urged, ‘Parents will do so wisely whenever possible, to carry on the work of elementary education at home’ . . . Statist and secular education was not part of the American system for the first two centuries of its history, including the first forty years under the Constitution and even then was viewed for some time as a radical and dangerous innovation (p. 20f).

This is precisely why he saw the need for the creation of uniquely Christian (“Covenant”) schools to train Christian students in the academic disciplines. Christian students should be taught from the perspective of a uniquely Christian frame of reference or worldview. For Rushdoony, this means the specifically the Calvinist/Puritan vision of a Christian commonwealth of the redeemed (the elect), whose values and philosophy are directly derived from the pages of the Scriptures. Rushdoony (2001) charged the emerging Christian schools: “The Christian school must, thus, teach every subject from a God-centered perspective, or else it will be teaching humanism” (p. 173). Rushdoony’s monumental critique of public education was the publication of *The Messianic Character of American Education* (1968). Gary North (2001) writes,

[This book] became the academic touchstone for leaders in the independent (non-parochial) Christian school movement, which was just beginning to accelerate in 1963. It provided them with both the theological foundation and the historical ammunition for making their case against compulsory, tax-funded education (para. 9).

### **Whither Curriculum?**

Marsh and Willis (1999) believe that there is no correct theory of curriculum or education. This is important for this study of character education. They quote Portelli saying, “Those who look for the definition of curriculum are like a sincere but misguided centaur hunter who, even with a fully provisioned safari and a gun kept always at the ready, nonetheless will never require the services of a taxidermist” (Marsh and Willis, 1999, p. 7). Marsh and Willis (1999) admit that this is a conscious departure from the Western tradition. As noted earlier, it seems that with the decline of religion in education and public life, many educational theorists resisted and rejected perennial education with its framework for communicating ethical norms as part of the curriculum. As the concept of truth was lost in the Enlightenment/ post-Enlightenment period and gave way to existential epistemological skepticism, it appears that educators are unarmed and without any framework for speaking meaningfully to real educational concerns.

### **Millennials Floating**

Mosier (2001) observes that the current generation of millennial teens and twenties has not responded well to their parents’ moral values. They have often sought to construct meaning and sense of truth in terms of relationships and relational experiences. Truth does not appear to be something that is concrete or propositional. She quotes an author from the *Atlantic* saying that there is a loss of the “tragic sense of life,” which she calls “an Augustinian perspective.” The

author of the *Atlantic*, while believing this generation to be fairly moral and decent people, “worried about the sort of soul that emerges from an upbringing so disconnected from traditions of moral education.” Mosier (2001) continues:

[These young people] live in a country that has lost, in its frenetic seeking after happiness and success, the language of sin and character-building through combat with sin . . . All this ambition and aspiration is looking for new tests to ace, new clubs to be president of, new services to perform, but finding that none of these challenges is the ultimate challenge, and none of the rewards is the ultimate reward (p. 19).

### **Multiple Truth-claims?**

Said and Funk (2002) write with a sense of urgency that religion is both productive and a problem for conflict resolution. The authors are opposed to so-called fundamentalism in both the Western and Eastern religious traditions and ironically spend a lot of energy devoted to demonstrating the assumed superiority of the Muslim worldview in the process of conflict resolution. The article is an attempt to discuss the problem of overcoming conflicts in cultures through common faith-based themes, i.e., peace and human worth inherent in all religions.

The assumptions by the authors are that there are no universal absolute norms for religions, only cultural manifestations of truth which are all uniquely valid. The authors set up a straw man when they are critical of so-called “Western” (i.e., Christian) religious assumptions that all religions non-Western are “evil” or “deficient.” The authors spend a great deal of space devoted to the first assumption and are especially interested in the last point, perhaps due to one author’s special interest as a Muslim (Said and Funk, 2002).

What is alarming is the latent assumption of epistemological skepticism, while claiming to speak meaningfully to the truthfulness of the claim that there is no universal truth. In essence,

they are certain that there is no certainty in knowledge. The authors assume the validity of multiple truth claims, while denouncing the exclusive truth claims of the Western tradition (Said and Funk, 2002).

### **Teacher Behavior**

Spaulding (2005) addresses the issue of aggressive student behaviors. The intention of the research given in this article is intended to analyze the hypothesis that teacher behaviors may or may not influence aggressive student behavior in the classroom. In this research, she intended to discover how teachers may not only seek to be more self-critical and more sensitive to their own attitudes and responses in the classrooms, but also to seek to consciously discover ways in which they can be proactive and create positive environments for learning in the hopes of suppressing aggression in students.

Spaulding (2005) focuses on maintaining several important emphases in the day to day outworking of the classroom ethos: a positive classroom experience, attitudinally in both instructor and in student, and in the overall learning environment. Secondly, she emphasizes diminishing the power struggle that may take place between student and teacher. The latter can be maintained by the consistent application of high expectations for students. There should be standards for the classroom experience that apply to all students and these standards, if broken, need to be addressed. In addition, the teacher can find creative means of providing a positive atmosphere in the classroom that would be beneficial be conducive to a lowering of potential school violence.

### **No Child Left Behind**

While the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law has much strength, a number of statistical contradictions are generated from surveys on random schools. However, Azzam, Perkins-

Gough, and Thiers (2005) present data that suggests NCLB is doing exactly what it is supposed to do: (a) teaching and learning are changing, (b) scores on state achievement tests are rising, (c) the effects of NCLB are holding steady, and (d) NCLB is having the greatest effects on urban school districts. In addition to the positive reports, the authors present some information that suggests “many states are manipulating the system to make their schools look better than they really are” (para. 5). Many states are requiring teachers to take additional course work in their fields and in some instances to get additional degrees in their field. This appears to be a good idea; however, the authors present an aside to the positive trends of higher educational standards for teachers. After presenting the positive data, the authors inform the readers, “Most district officials surveyed expressed skepticism that these requirements are improving teacher quality” (para. 3). It appears that the authors are themselves skeptical of the requirements placed upon them by the government.

Azzam, Perkins-Gough, and Thiers (2005) mention a press release entitled *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act*, in which they make several recommendations for helping NCLB to succeed such as adequate funding for the program and enable school districts to reverse the order of school choice, etc. It appears that the local school districts want more control over how the law is to be implemented; moreover, it appears that the local districts want more funding to do what they wish to aid in their appearance of success.

### **Christian Discrimination?**

Riley (2006) writes about the near-recent events surrounding a case filed against the University of Southern California by the Association of Christian Schools International. The lawsuit concerned the discrimination practices of the university against Christian schools in the region, particularly the Calvary Chapel school in Murrieta, CA. Several students' applications

were rejected because the curriculum of the Christian school was called into question by the review board. In essence, the university questioned the validity and the quality of the coursework of several high school students precisely because they were taught within a religious context.

She reports the odd discrimination of students' textbooks and curriculum that while promoting a religious worldview, presented all sides and views of matter, particularly in the science curriculum. This however was unacceptable to the application review board. She examines several outstanding schools that are accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) in the country and reports not only their excellent approach to education, the involvement and success of minority students, but the overall excellence of test scores: “. . . juniors at ACSI schools performed between 8 and 27 percentage points above average on the Stanford 10 subject tests in the 2004–05 school year” (Riley, 2006, p. 53).

### **Non-Sectarian Values Education**

Davis (2006) observes,

The need for instruction in ethics and morals in our nation's schools is acknowledged by virtually everyone. Yet there is a great deal of confusion and disagreement about how to do this, especially in the public schools. Many educators want to teach morals from a religious perspective, and are frustrated by U.S. Supreme Court decisions that make advancing a particular religious worldview inappropriate in the public schools (p. 1).

While agreeing with the decisions of the Supreme Court that religious training is left up to parents and non-governmental agencies, he acknowledges as does the State that religion can be taught in public school. However, religion must be taught in a non-sectarian way such as comparative religion or history of religions or some form of world civilizations often found in

history or social studies texts. On a formal level, he criticizes textbook choices that are often over the heads of students. Working within a framework of postmodernity, he believes older philosophical frameworks are no longer effective for student apprehension or comprehension (Davis, 2006).

While these approaches are not without merit, most students are not particularly impressed or won over by such elaborate and arduous systems of thought. At the very least, these theoretical materials should be supplemented by texts that illustrate in practical ways how one can become a moral person (p. 1).

While deploring natural law and other systems, he makes a sweeping statement:

No matter what one's philosophical or theological basis is for moral behavior, most agree on what a moral person should look like. Everyone agrees that a moral person should be marked by honesty, self-control, friendliness, decency, selflessness, fairness, respect, responsibility, compassion, loyalty, empathy and a cooperative spirit. In short, students who are moral should be good people (p. 1).

Davis (2006) acknowledges the overtly Christian underpinnings to the early culture of the American experiment and its influence on education. He writes (p. 2),

In virtually all of these schools, sectarian as well as non-sectarian, moral formation, to one degree or another, was deemed essential and was usually approached from a religion-based strategy. Consequently, in a thoroughly Christian culture, it was not unusual for the Bible to be used as a regular text.

Like many historians of education, however, he hails the increased secularization of the public schools as a positive move away from religious denominationalism. He observes that the common schools were never intended to replace the sectarian religious systems, but were meant



to stand alongside them as free educational opportunities for the poor. Religious infighting eventually erupted in public debate over the content of the religious element in public education between Protestants, Jews, and Catholics. Due to these conflicts of interests, men like Dewey and Mann led the early twentieth century move to secular public education (Davis, 2006). Davis proceeds to discuss the various court cases in the twentieth century that cemented the wall of separation between church and state, noting their motive was not the elimination of religion, but the right of minority faiths to exist by the exclusion of the sectarian majority. The response by conservative and fundamentalist Christians was the creation of the Moral Majority and the Religious Right, to affront perceived discrimination. He concludes his article by discussing four particular methods of teaching morals in public education; values clarification, cognitive developmentalism, a feminist ethic of caring, and character education (Davis, 2006).

### **Standardization**

Hirsch (2007) believes the neoliberal education philosophy has produced the popular understanding that education is about getting good jobs and helping the economy. In essence, the standardization of education as such has reduced American education to economic free-market, globalization philosophy. The essential idea is that American education is failing and jobs are going overseas, so in order to stabilize the economy, we must standardize education in order to keep jobs local and our economy strong. The author believes a shaping of education along the lines of traditional FDR liberalism is still the best line of reasoning. He quotes Dewey, Polanyi, and others regarding education being about human beings and about making society a better place of mutual appreciation and tolerance. He blames the administration of George W. Bush for ruining American education as he seeks painfully to demonstrate that No Child Left

Behind (NCLB) is impractical and it reduces education to a bare minimum instead of raising the standard (Hursch, 2007).

### **A Teacher's Beliefs**

Slater (2007) argues that the teachers of America while more liberal than their uneducated counterparts, appear to be more conservative than those with more advanced degrees. The prevalent assumption is that the more educated people are the more liberal they are. The article appears to be an objective account of data regarding the conservative ethos of America's teachers. While it is true that "more than half of Americans" (p. 49) are admittedly religious, the teachers of America are overwhelmingly religious. The author begins his discussion by asking whether education can be accomplished without values. If the primary schools have conservative teachers, what does this mean for secondary and graduate education which is overwhelmingly liberal? He says,

Teaching is as much a moral effort as it is an intellectual enterprise; teachers not only educate our children how to think and solve problems, they also inform children's beliefs about what is right, good, and important in life, shaping their values in the process (Slater, 2007, p. 47).

### **The Dayton Agenda**

Wilhelm and Firmin (2007) offer a critique of the character education program from an Evangelical Protestant perspective. While acknowledging the value of character education in both the Christian and non-Christian school settings, the authors propose that apart from the Judeo-Christian metanarrative, all views of character education are reduced to values clarification, situation ethics and other subjective dilemmas of postmodernity.

The authors note that education in general acknowledges an educational benchmark or

outcome of moral growth and development. Christian educators particularly must acknowledge spiritual and moral formation of children as an important element of the educational vocation. They quote Revel (2002) saying, “[The proponents of Character Education] seek to transform the beliefs and behavior of a generation not merely because they think it is desirable, but because they hold that the health of democracy depends upon their success” (Wilhelm and Firmin, 2007, p. 430). The authors accuse the educational establishment of dropping the ball of moral education in favor multiculturalism; hence the moral stability of the American democracy is in the hands of her educators.

However, they observe the task of character education is to develop in students a desire for the good and for them to will to pursue it. Here, the authors clearly draw a line of distinction between a Christian understanding of human nature and a modernist view of human nature. They note, “Although a Biblical understanding of the fallen state of mankind interferes with this line of thought, the recognition that a child is more capable of adopting moral standards early in life is universally recognized” (Wilhelm and Firmin 2007, p. 186). Modernists claimed that the human mind is a *tabula rasa*. Thus, there is in self-conscious Christian educational philosophy a marked difference of human nature.

Wilhelm and Firmin (2007) observe that it is in the classroom where the theories of character education are forged into behavioral laboratories. They note however, that the idea that students should behave in a certain way for the common good of society assumes a transcendent standard of right and wrong that is universal—not simply an ideal; that students should behave in a particular way. And yet, humanists that prefer a materialist or experimentalist view of morality are faced with a problem of moral authority when communicating the exact traits or virtues that should be emulated.

This quandary is echoed by those theorists who lament the fact that the theoretical basis for the current secular character education movement is somewhat loosely defined and subjective in its approach. Schultz, Barr, and Selman (2001) note that a purely secular perspective toward character education becomes an eclectic compilation of ideologies that makes intuitive sense and seem to work. There are no shared values or common practices in the secular character education paradigm (Wilhelm and Firmin, 2007, p. 188).

### **No Consistencies**

Lewis, et al, (2011) view character education as a means to curtail juvenile violence. Citing various studies that seem to demonstrate the rate and intensity of juvenile violence, the authors admit that there is no consistent approach or program that has achieved success. “One limitation is the lack of a consistent definition for character education” (p. 228). Equally is the lack of appropriate tools to measure achievement.

The central question these authors ask is “What is the most effective program(s) to use with a particular community of learners?” Limitations to success include unclear guidelines for curriculum decisions, unclear expectations of teachers, and unclear community standards. The authors note success in character education is prohibited by inappropriate benchmarks such as grades and attendance that seem more like the cart before the horse. Table 4 (on the following page) identifies the four areas that fall under the umbrella of character education.

**Table 4***Current Trends in Character Education*

Categories of Character Education	Approaches/ Pedagogy to Character Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drug and alcohol prevention programs.</li> <li>• Service learning programs</li> <li>• Social emotional learning programs</li> <li>• Violence prevention programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral reasoning/ cognitive development programs that discuss moral dilemmas</li> <li>• Service learning programs that use authentic experiences to discuss values</li> <li>• Conflict resolution with peer mediation</li> <li>• Virtue programs that use stories to convey values</li> <li>• Civics education</li> <li>• Life skills programs</li> <li>• Ethics programs using direct instruction</li> <li>• “Caring Community” programs that encourage relationship building between schools</li> <li>• Health education</li> <li>• Comparative Religion (stories, myths and parables)</li> </ul>

The absence of evidence-based outcomes makes it impossible to review the effectiveness of individually or school-based and –designed [sic] character education programs and reiterates the necessity of incorporating measurable outcomes into the design of character education programs (Lewis, et al, 2011, p. 229).

The authors mention several stepping stones to provide a foundation for the development of a character education program and then mention that across the country, there were thirty-three programs that demonstrated success with measurable outcomes. These standards as this research shows are a consensus built upon a constructivist approach to moral education: what is common to the community’s interests. In the classroom, real life situations are suggested that are

interactive in nature demonstrating a cooperative approach to learning that uses multicultural elements. Also, the authors suggest bringing in community leaders as living examples of people who make a difference in the community for the common good (Lewis, et al, 2011, p. 230).

### **Summary**

There has been a tension historically in the American educational experiment that reflects the struggle of religious sectarianism and the common good of the American society. The research here demonstrates this tension and the way the pendulum has swung in American society with regard to the place of religion in the common schools, from colonial, religious denominationalism to a sociological study of religions that is currently the norm. Equally, there are a wide variety of opinions regarding what character education is, what are its goals, what are its standards, how it should be taught and implemented and why? What is lacking in the published literature is research regarding the perspective of educators themselves, with regard to their own successes or failures, and whether or not religion has anything to do with it.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

“Descriptive research is used to describe the characteristics of a population by directly examining samples of the population. Descriptive studies make primary use of surveys, interviews and observations. . .” (Glatthorn and Joyner, 2005, p. 101). Descriptive research is chosen intentionally targeting not a random sample but a particular group. In this case, a small school district. Ary, et al (2006), write

In many research situations, the enumeration of the population elements—a basic requirement in probability sampling—is difficult, if not impossible. In these instances, the researcher may use nonprobability sampling, which involves nonrandom procedures for selecting the members of the sample (p. 174).

In this research, the population was small, which necessitated purposive sampling. “In Purposive sampling . . . sample elements judged to be typical, or representative, are chosen from the population” (Ary, 2006, p. 174). The design is utilizes a survey methodology in which a Likert scale was given to a purposive sample of 100 educators of a local, public school district. A Likert scale

. . . assesses attitudes toward a topic by presenting s set of statements about the topic and asking respondents to indicate for each whether they strongly agree, agree, are undecided, disagree or strongly disagree. The various agree-disagree responses are assigned a numeric value, and the total score is found by summing the numeric responses given to each item. This total score represents the individual’s attitude toward the topic” (Ary, 2006, p. 227).

#### Design

In descriptive research, the goal is not about proving, solving problems, or making

judgments but identifying the actual and particular phenomena occurring in a real historical period. The survey instrument provides an anonymous opportunity for educators to assess the successes or failures of character education in their district. According to Ary, et al, (2006), web-based or internet surveys offer several advantages (p. 415):

1. . . . the potential of reaching a large number of people.
2. . . . the possibility of collecting a large amount of information.
3. . . . they can be conducted fairly quickly and easily and are less expensive.
4. . . . data analysis can be faster through the ease of information processing.

However, they also note that these survey procedures have limitations as well:

1. Samples are restricted to those with technological prowess and access.
2. “Samples are dominated by relatively affluent, well-educated, urban, white-collar, technically sophisticated young males” (p. 415).
3. The web survey equally suffers from sampling error due to a failure of reaching full representation.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the perception of the educator regarding the success or failure of character education?
2. Are there specific values that should be taught in character education?
3. Is religion in conflict or congruence with morality and science?
4. What is the perception of the educator on the role of religion in character education?

### **Participants**

The nearby school district was selected for its 2012 report cards that indicate high performance in character education. The report cards are available on the school district website.



Table 5 (following page) delineates the character education legal standard in the state of South Carolina given in the code of law (59-17-135), which was finalized in 2009.

### **Setting**

The following is a brief summary of the local school district for 2012: Dr. John Smith, superintendent; Dr. Darrell Hayes, board chair. Enrollment for the 2011-2012 academic year was 3,150 for the district with a student-teacher ratio of 22.3 to 1. The district has nearly twenty schools all accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the South Carolina Department of Education. [N.B.: names of schools and faculty have been changed to protect anonymity].

#### **Springvalley Grammar School.**

As a primary school, it offers kindergarten (K-4) to second grade with an enrollment of 439 (according to the 2012 report card). The principal is Dr. William H. Carroll and Barbara Lovvorn is the school's counselor. There are two K-4 teachers, five K-5 teachers, and seven first and second grade teachers. Springvalley has one instructor each for related disciplines including physical education, media/library, music, and art. In addition, they are staffed with eighteen teacher assistants. Though only a grammar school, Springvalley was chosen because of its persistent use of character words on their marquee and a consistent "excellent" rating for their character development program.

#### **Freshstart Elementary School**

Ringling a positive civic tone, the mission of Freshstart, per the school's website is "... come alongside students to aid and support them to achieve their goals while serving their community." Freshstart offers K-4 to seventh grade classes with an enrollment of 418 for the

**Table 5***The South Carolina Code for Character Education*

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**(A) The General Assembly finds:**

- (1) the schools of South Carolina must provide the safest environment possible for students to learn;
- (2) teaching positive character traits is essential to improving the learning environment, promoting student achievement, reducing disciplinary problems, and developing civic-minded students;
- (3) schools must be encouraged to instill the highest character and academic excellence in each student, in close cooperation with the student's parents; and
- (4) elected officials, community and civic leaders, business leaders, religious institutions, youth organizations, government, media, and citizens-at-large must be encouraged to become actively involved in creating an atmosphere which encourages positive character development through every sector of the community.

**(B)** Each local school board of trustees of the State must develop a policy addressing character education. Any character education program implemented by a district as a result of an adopted policy must, to the extent possible, incorporate character traits including, but not limited to, the following: respect for authority and respect for others, honesty, self-control, cleanliness, courtesy, good manners, cooperation, citizenship, patriotism, courage, fairness, kindness, self-respect, compassion, diligence, good work ethics, sound educational habits, generosity, punctuality, cheerfulness, patience, sportsmanship, loyalty, and virtue. Local school boards must include all sectors of the community, as referenced in subsection (A, 4), in the development of a policy and in the development of any program implemented as a result of the policy. As part of any policy and program developed by the local school board, an evaluation component must be included.

**(C)** Beginning with the 2000-2001 school year, each school district board of trustees is encouraged to require students in the public schools under the jurisdiction of the board to exhibit appropriate conduct, as required in subsection (D) of this section.

**(D)** When a public school student is speaking with a public school employee while on school property or at a school sponsored event, the student may be encouraged to address and respond to the public school employee by using terms indicative of or reflecting courtesy and respect for a public school's employees position of authority including, but not limited to, sir, ma'am, thank you, and please.

**(E)** Each school district board of trustees is encouraged to provide for incorporation of the requirements of subsections (C) and (D) into any existing discipline policy or policies or any code of conduct of the school district or of each school within its jurisdiction.

**(F)** No school board may provide suspension or expulsion from school as an appropriate punishment for violation of subsection (D).

**(G)** Upon request, the State Department of Education must provide to the school districts of the State information on currently available programs, curriculums, and resources. In addition, the State Department of Education must provide to the school districts of the State information on best practices and successful programs currently being implemented.

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*Note.* South Carolina Code 59-17-135, Character Education (2009). [Data file]. Available from LawServer Web site, [http://www.lawserver.com/law/state/south-carolina/sc-code/south\\_carolina\\_code\\_59-17-135](http://www.lawserver.com/law/state/south-carolina/sc-code/south_carolina_code_59-17-135).

2012 school year. According to their 2012 report card, Freshstart scored “excellent” on character development. The principal is Mr. Sam Longstreet and the counselor is Mrs. Bernice Trowell.

According to their website, there are three K-4 teachers, five K-5 teachers, four first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, three third grade teachers, three fourth grade teachers, two fifth, sixth and seventh grade teachers. Freshstart has one instructor each for related disciplines including physical education, media/library, music (as well as a band instructor) and art.

### **Clover Middle School**

Located in a nearby community, Clover offers sixth through eighth grades. John Pedigrew is the principal and James Cantrell is the assistant principal. Yolanda Miller is the school guidance counselor. Clover has teachers for all their grade levels, with differentiated classes for math, science, social studies, music/ chorus, band, art, physical education/ health and computer. According to the 2012 report card, Clover had an enrollment of 520. In contrast to similar schools that scored “good” for character development, Clover scored “excellent.”

### **Fairview High School**

Fairview is located in a nearby small town. According to their website, the mission of Fairview is “. . . to secure the bedrock for joyous education by enabling the best opportunities in a safe community.” Fairview offers grades eight through twelve. Marie Johnson is the school principal. Paul Westmont is the assistant principal and Rashan Harrison is the guidance counselor. Fairview has a diversified curriculum offering opportunities in chorus, art, band, Spanish, and health/physical education, as well as educational opportunities in agriculture, culinary arts, and business. According to the 2012 report card, Fairview improved from the 2011 character development rating of “below average” to “excellent.”

### **Procedures**

Once the proposal has been accepted, the researcher secures approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research on human subjects and secure confidentiality and anonymity for those being surveyed. Once permission has been granted by the Superintendent (Appendix D and E), initial contact will be made by email (“Recruitment Letter,” Appendix B). A hyperlink to the secure and anonymous survey will be provided in an email (including a statement of informed consent, Appendix C) to faculty at each institution.

### **Data Collection**

The survey (Appendix A) is the primary means of data collection. It allows the participant anonymity to reflect on the various questions that are drawn from the research in the review of literature (chapter 2). These questions emerge as benchmarks, summarized in the research questions. They allow the participant to formulate her experience in the various educational environments (e.g., the classroom, media center, playground, field trip, cafeteria, and whatever other environments) that have afforded her opportunities both formally or informally to discuss life lessons with the students to practically teach character development.

The questions derive from the experience of the educator, honing and fine-tuning the sense of accomplishment or failure either existentially as an educator, or as an observer of behavior in students themselves, e.g., a sense that the paradigm or curriculum does not work or is not “sinking in.” Wilhelm and Firmin (2007) would suggest that any sense of failure on the part of educators with regard to the curriculum is due to a lack of appropriate paradigm or metanarrative. If the lesson “doesn’t stick” it’s because the system lacks moral authority to compel the students to act appropriately.

The questions target the relationship between religion, morality and science. As noted in

the literature, there is significant pendulum swing of the religious element and a nascent secularism in the history of moral education in the public sector. Particularly in the South, where strict morality, public decorum, and biblical literalism are part of the fabric of the culture, these particular questions raise concerns and emotions with regard to evolution, creationism, religion, secularism, school prayer, etc.

The participants will be notified by email (Appendix B) and invited to take the survey online at a secure site (hosted on [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). Provisions have been made to ensure anonymity and prevent multiple survey attempts. The participant will be notified by an automatic response email generated by the website.

**The Survey Instrument.** The sliding scale provides an empirical tool to account for degrees in perception by the educators, who respond between absolute disagreement (1) and absolute agreement (5). The survey instrument provides a construct for the participants to think about the general idea of success or failure, and whether or not religion has or should play a significant role. The first and last questions provide “bookends” to the issue being researched. The first question asks directly about the success of character education and the last question asks poignantly the role of religion in providing the content of character education. Table 6 (on the following page) is illustrative of the relationship between the research questions and the survey questions. “Because survey data consists of peoples’ responses to individual questions, it is essential to start with good questions” (Ary, 2006, p. 421). While the Likert model was chosen for the survey instrument, comment boxes will be available for additional comments to be made by the participant to elaborate further; hence the comments box provides a space for free response.

**Table 6***The Relationship of the Research Questions to the Survey Questions*

Research Questions	Survey Questions
1. What is the perception of the educator regarding the success or failure of character education?	1. The current character education curriculum has been successful in this school. 2. Character education has been consistently taught in this school 3. The current character education curriculum should be changed
2. Are there specific values that should be taught in character education?	4. There are no specific values that must be taught in character curricula
3. Is religion in conflict or congruence with morality and science?	5. Religion is relative to culture and personal beliefs 6. There is no conflict between Religion/ Faith and Science 7. Human moral norms have evolved with the species 8. Moral norms are true for all times, peoples, places and cultures
4. What is the perception of the educator on the role of religion in character education?	9. Religion can inform the content and teaching of character education 10. Religion should inform the content and teaching of character education

Ary, et al, (p. 425f) provide some guidelines for constructing questions in a survey methodology:

1. Questions should be short, simple and direct.
2. Phrase questions so that they can be understood by every respondent.
3. Phrase questions so as to illicit unambiguous answers.
4. Phrase questions so as to avoid bias that may predetermine a respondent's answer.
5. Avoid questions that might mislead because of unstated assumptions.
6. Avoid leading questions which imply a desired response.
7. Avoid questions that may illicit embarrassment, or hostility in the respondent.

8. Avoid “double-barreled” questions, which attempt to ask two questions in one.
9. Make sure the alternatives to each questionnaire item are exhaustive—that they express all the possible alternatives on the issue.
10. Keep the questionnaire as brief as possible so that it requires a minimum of the respondents’ time.
11. Make sure the respondents have the information necessary to answer the questions.

**Validity.** The questionnaire for this research was generated by the researcher and was peer reviewed by six educators (friends, former colleagues, etc.).

The most obvious type of scientific validity evidence is based on content, which may be gathered by having some competent colleagues who are familiar with the purpose of the survey examine the items to judge whether they are appropriate to measure what they are supposed to measure and whether they are a representative sample of the behavior domain under investigation (Ary, 2006, p. 440).

Each educator serves in differing capacities and different disciplines: three in private school environments (an administrator of a classical, Christian school, a history and religion high school teacher in a local, private Christian school, and a French and religion high school teacher in another local, private Christian school) and three educators in public school environments (an elementary teacher in a local school district in South Carolina who has a special interest in character education, a local high school Spanish teacher, and a local middle school math teacher). Several changes were recommended by the reviewers and were implemented by the researcher. To maintain consistency in this research, the writer has ensured that the survey/questionnaire is peer-reviewed and critiqued.

Ary, et al, (2006) note that two important factors in the validity of a questionnaire are the

degree of importance of the topic to the respondent (hence a greater return on response rate) and the secure anonymity of the questionnaire. “It is reasonable to assume that greater truthfulness will be obtained if the respondents can remain anonymous, especially when sensitive or personal questions are asked” (p. 440).

**Reliability.** “Internal consistency may be checked by building some redundancy into the instrument – items of the same topic may be paraphrased and repeated in the questionnaire” (Ary, 2006, p. 440). With similar questions or themes, participants should score attitudinally roughly the same percentage. In this research, the survey questions follow logically from one another, hence, the researcher should notice a similar response from the participant to the related question. In addition, Reliability would only come under question if two different researchers came to contradictory conclusions.

### **Data Analysis**

Each question has a comment section that provides space for thoughtful reflection on each question. “Surveys do not require complex statistical analyses. Data analysis may simply consist of determining frequencies and percentages of responses for the questions of the study” (Ary, 2006, p. 440). The Likert scale provides immediate percentages to identify attitudes. “It is useful to convert numbers to percentages in order to be able to talk about the proportion responding a certain way and to be able to make comparisons” (p. 441).



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

As presented in chapter one of this study, the purpose of this descriptive research is to survey educators in a local, public school district in which character education is actively implemented and document their perception of whether character education has been a success or failure. In addition, this research delves deeper into the issue of character education with the correlation of the question of religion. Chapter two provides a historical and philosophical framework for discussing this phenomenon including a review of pertinent literature. The evolution of the common schools in what has become the public or state education system has a long-standing history and tension with the role of religion in the education of children.

The survey was posted on surevymonkey.com on September 21, 2013. Dialog with the school district was slow, but after permission was granted to the researcher by the district superintendant, the email of recruitment (Appendix B) was sent out on November 14, 2013 to a population of 100 faculty members. There were five responses given in the first day of contact and nine response requests were received to not be included in the study. On the second business day, there were three responses received.

The following Monday, an automated reminder was sent to those who had not responded and by the end of the day, five more responses were received. The next day, two more responses were received and a final reminder was sent out Wednesday. By the end of the day Wednesday, November 20, 2013, the goal of twenty responses was received.

### **First Research Question**

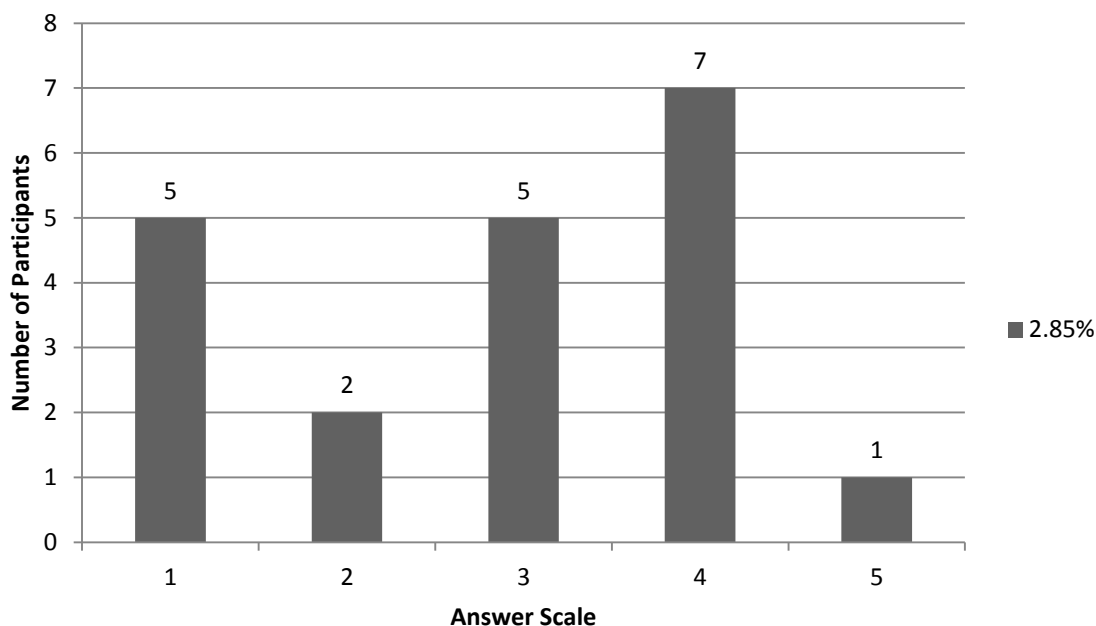
#### **The First Survey Question**

The first survey question (Figure 1) inquires about an overall opinion on the success of

character education. Five participants (25%) noted character education a complete failure. Two

**Figure 1.** Question 1 Responses

“The current character education curriculum has been successful in this school.”

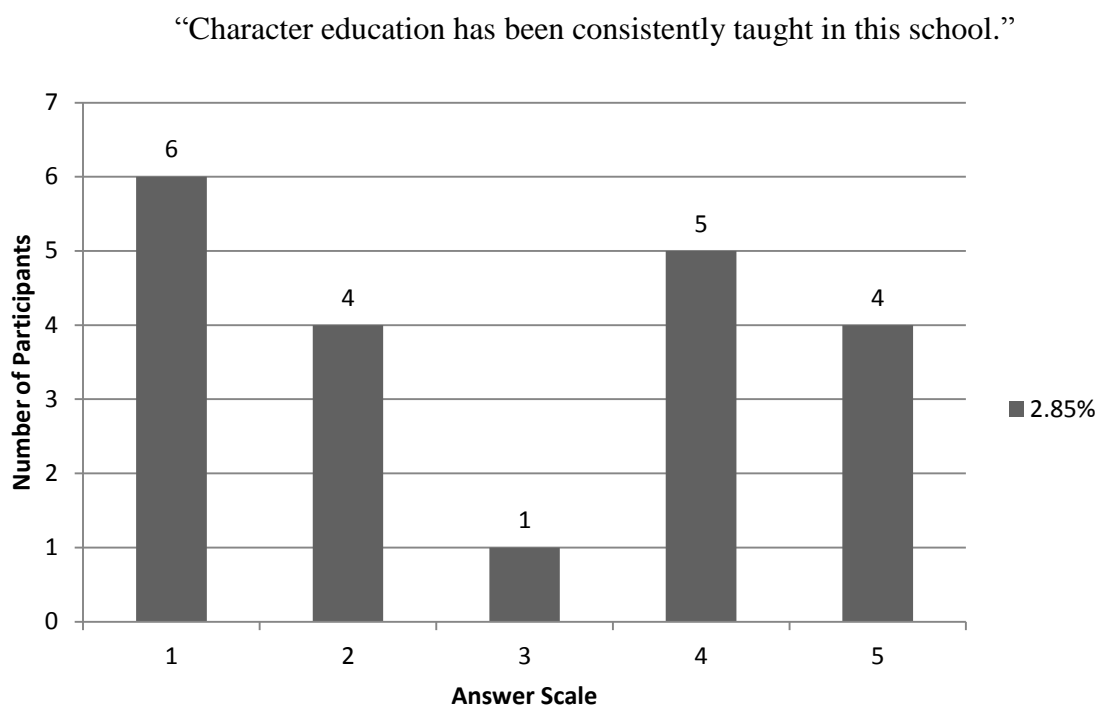


participants (10%) mildly disagreed. Five participants (25%) responded at the median of indifference. Seven participants (35%) mildly agreed that the current curriculum is successful and only one participant (5%) expressed full agreement. Though the largest group mildly agreed to the success of the curriculum, the total average was 2.85%.

On November 18, one participant commented that the character education curriculum pedagogy was essentially a monthly character word given in conjunction with “guidance instruction” but “no consistency.” The same day, another participant noted that no formal character curriculum implemented. Two other participants responded the same on November 20.

### **The Second Survey Question**

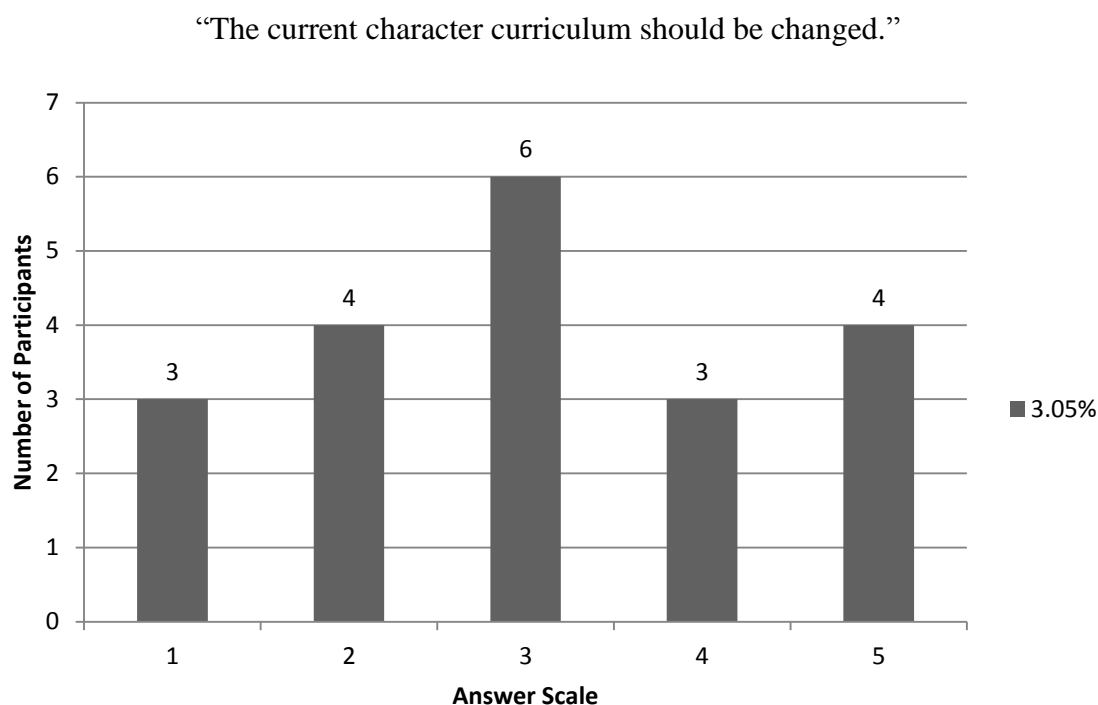
The second question (Figure 2) is broad enough for the participant to existentially place herself within the process of education and consider the curriculum as a whole in her school. Six

**Figure 2. Question 2 Responses**

participants (30%) did not agree at all that the curriculum was consistently taught. Four participants (20%) mildly disagreed. One participant (5%) responded in indifference. Five participants (25%) mostly agreed and four participants (20%) completely agreed that the curriculum was consistently taught, but one participant commented on November 14 that “much” of the character instruction was only voluntary, “which produces skewed results.” Most (50%) do not believe the character education occurred consistently; the average was 2.85%.

### **The Third Survey Question**

The third survey question (Figure 3 on following page) is an afterthought regarding the two previous concerns. Depending on how the participant answers (positively or negatively), she may or may not see the answer to the problem as a change in curriculum. Three participants (15%) did not believe the curriculum ought to change. Four participants (20%) were mildly opposed to making a change.

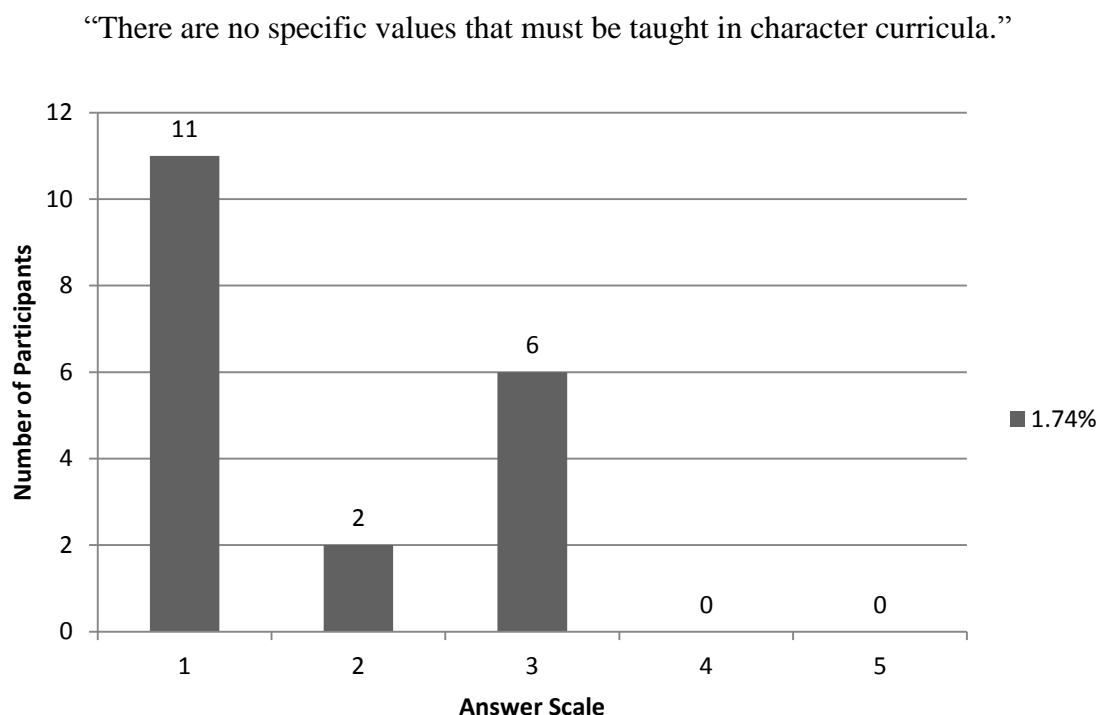
**Figure 3. Question 3 Responses**

Most participants (6/30%) did not seem to be concerned about the issue at all. Three participants (15%) mildly agreed that the curriculum ought to change and four participants (20%) responded in full agreement. The average here is 3.05%.

## Second Research Question

### The Fourth Survey Question

The fourth survey question (Figure 4 on the following page) -- a negative restatement of the second research question -- is derived from the literature (chapter 2) concerning the tension and struggle in the implementation of moral education between religious and irreligious factions. Many educational theorists believe that religion can and/or should inform the content of moral education. However, those who espouse naturalistic evolution (and its consequent materialism) provide a “survivalist” explanation for the development of the moral impulse: moral behavioral traits have evolved with the species because these traits have preserved us to this point in history.

**Figure 4. Question 4 Responses**

Only nineteen of twenty participants responded. Eleven participants (57.89%) sharply disagreed that there is “no” particular values to be taught. Two participants (10.53%) mildly disagreed. Six participants (31.58%) were appeared to be undecided. Overall, 1.74% did not agree that there was nothing specific that should be taught in character education. On November 18, one responder stated, “There are no specific values that **MUST** be taught, but values should be taught.” Another noted, “I think there are some expectations for ethical and personal behavior that should be emphasized as long as they do not contradict religious teachings.”

### Third Research Question

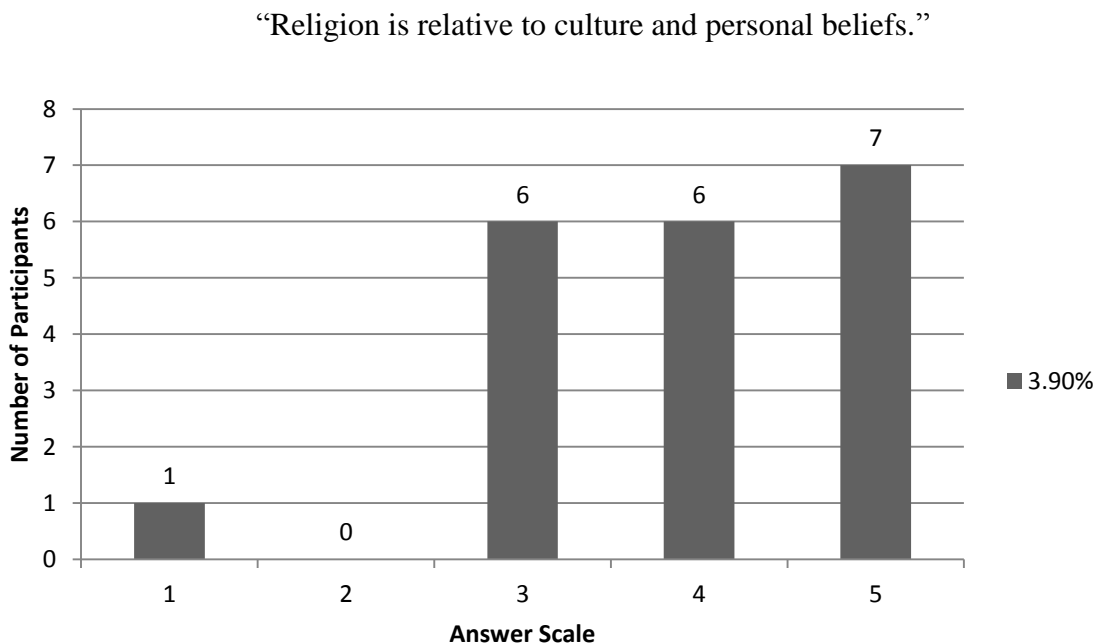
The next four survey questions develop the third research question. This follows the question about the content of character education precisely because of the historical relationship in America between ethics/morality and the *Christian* religion. In the colonies, the purpose of education was spiritual formation that provided the student knowledge of the world and of God;

hence, to be able to understand the physical and spiritual facets of reality. Knowledge of God's expectations would inform the student's conscience in how to live in the world God had made.

### The Fifth Survey Question

The fifth survey question (Figure 5) is related to the previous question and inquires

**Figure 5.** Question 5 Responses



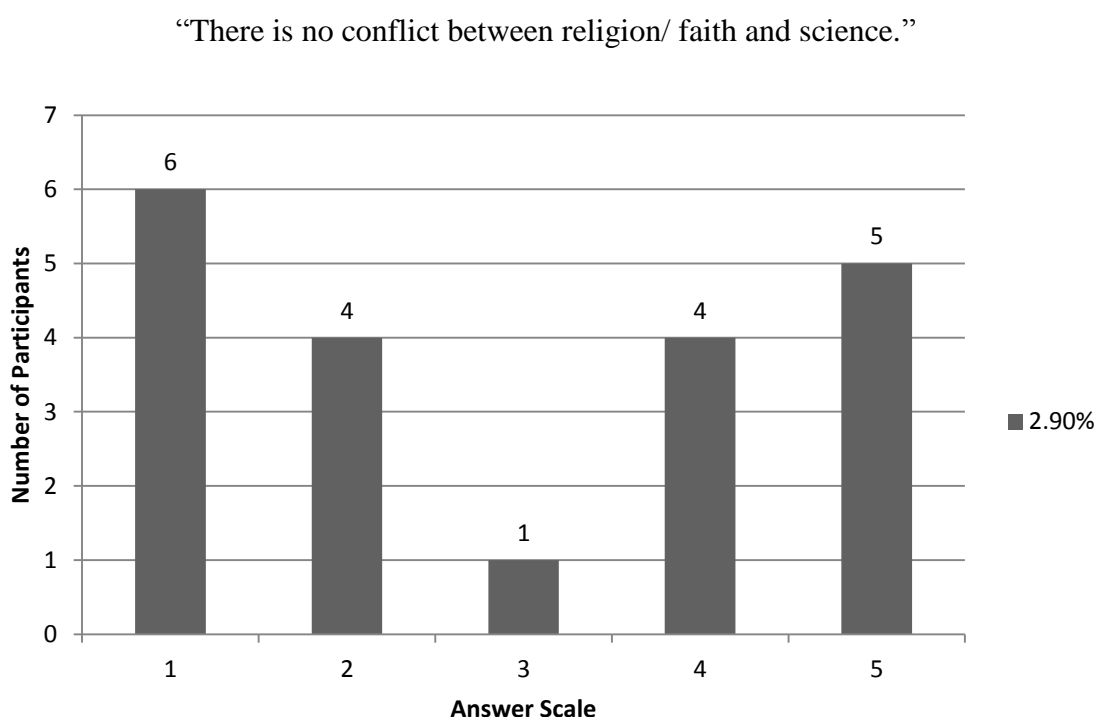
whether the participant believes religion is purely subjective – this is what Kant said could not objectively be known with certainty. The previous question asked whether there were specific values that must be taught. The participant's view of the fifth question provides insight to the concern of the fourth question.

One participant (5%) disagreed that religion is relative and subjective. Six participants (30%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Equally, six participants (30%), mildly agreed with the sentiment and seven participants (35%) agreed completely that there is no objective character to religion. The average (3.90%) was the highest average on the survey.

### The Sixth Survey Question

For people of faith, religion provides the “who” and “why” of material existence. For materialists, the physical world is all there is; moral values are subjective and theoretical. Certain qualities or characteristics of behavior are demonstrable and desirable since they have preserved the species from extinction. Guesswork prevails as to which values they may be or should be. In the sixth survey question (Figure 6), the participant is offered the opportunity to

**Figure 6.** Question 6 Responses



inquire regarding their own perception (consciously or unconsciously) of the relationship between science and religion, and how it may play out practically in how they communicate the content of character education. In addition, in light of such reflection, whether or not they believe the pedagogy to be a success or a failure.

Six participants (30%) believed that there is a conflict between science and religion. Four participants (20%) mildly disagreed. One participant (5%) remained neutral. Four

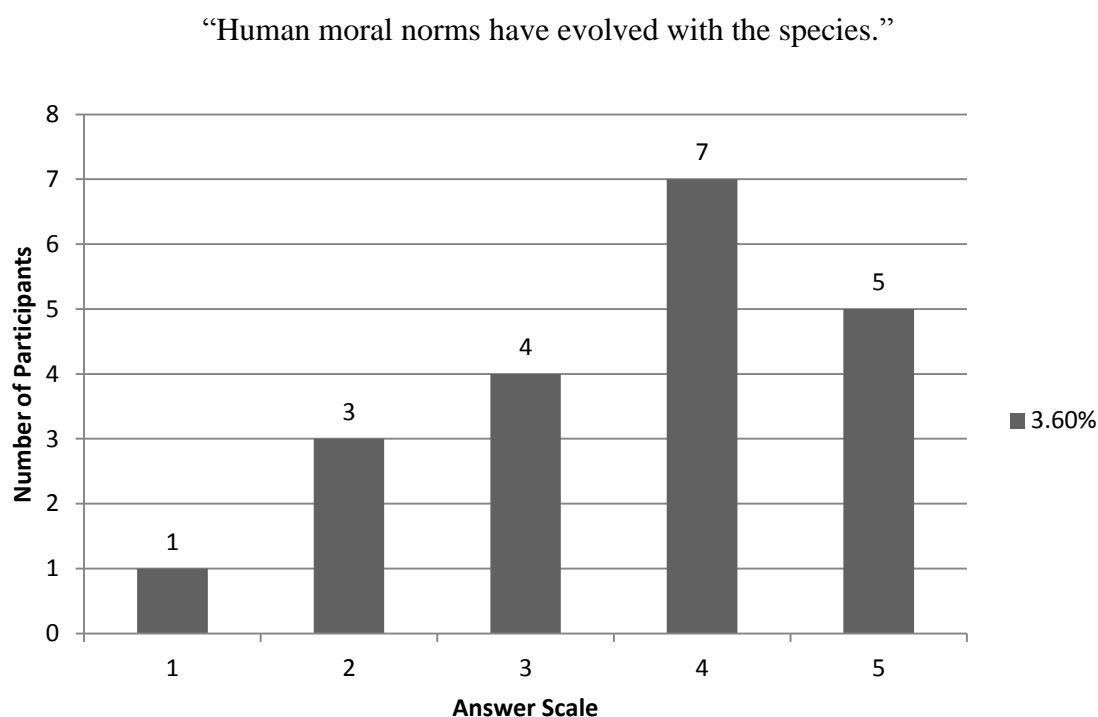
participants (20%) mildly agreed there was no conflict and five participants (20%) believed there was absolutely no conflict.

On November 18, one participant stated that there will always be conflicts between religion and science but that toleration is the rule for handling conversations regarding a person's beliefs. The average was 2.9%.

### The Seventh Survey Question

Survey question seven (Figure 7) provides a direct opportunity for participants to think through what may be implied in the previous question. It is the affirmative assumption of

**Figure 7.** Question 7 Responses



materialists that human moral norms have evolved with the species. Thus, the bearing or influence of religion is not only minimal but should be so. One participant (5%) disagreed with this statement. Three participants (15%) mildly disagreed. Four participants (20%) were



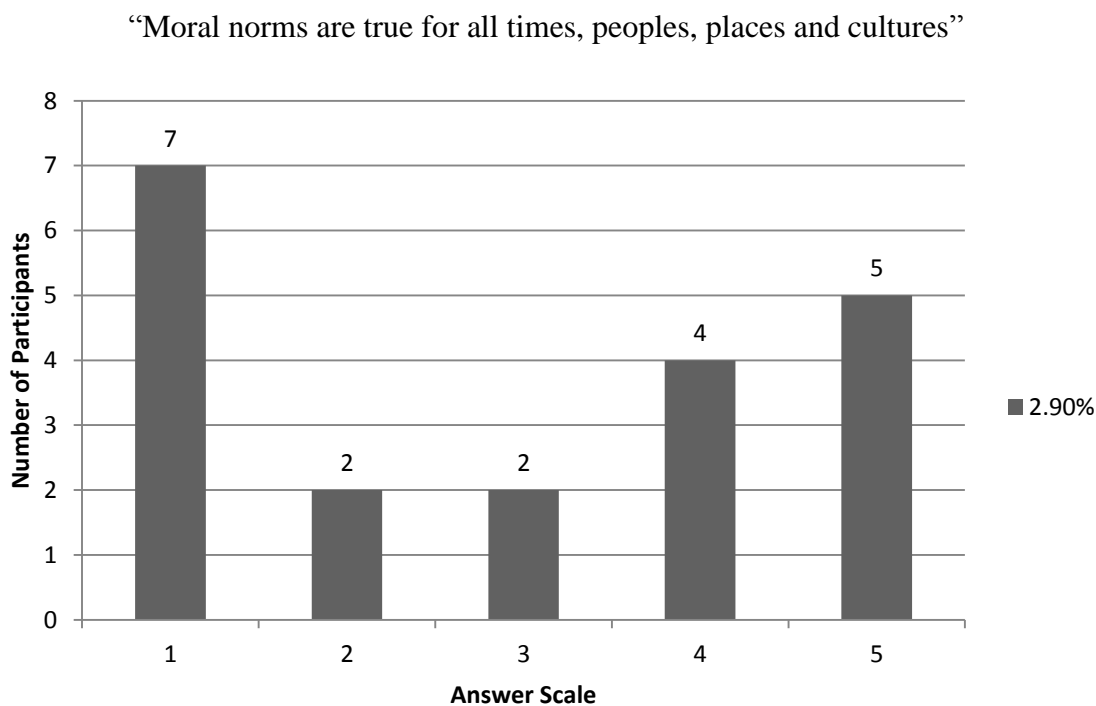
indifferent. However, seven participants (35%) expressed mild agreement and five participants (25%) expressed complete agreement.

The majority (60%) believe moral norms are the product of material evolution; an average of 3.60%. One commented November 18, “To this I would say yes, but also the family structure has a direct relationship on the moral development of the child. Morals have a tendency to digress when the basic needs are not being met.”

### The Eighth Survey Question

Survey question eight (Figure 8) is in direct contrast to the former. The former suggests that moral norms are simply the product of evolution; the later states that moral norms are

**Figure 8.** Question 8 Responses



universally true for all people. Are values simply culturally conditioned chemical stimuli and relative to the places and people who espouse them or are they true and universally binding and hence, should be taught to all people? Seven participants (35%) completely disagreed with the

idea and two participants (10%) mildly disagreed. Two participants (10%) were indifferent or unsure, while four participants (20%) mildly agreed and five participants (25%) completely agreed. Ironically, 45% agree and 45% disagree with the notion with an average of 2.90%.

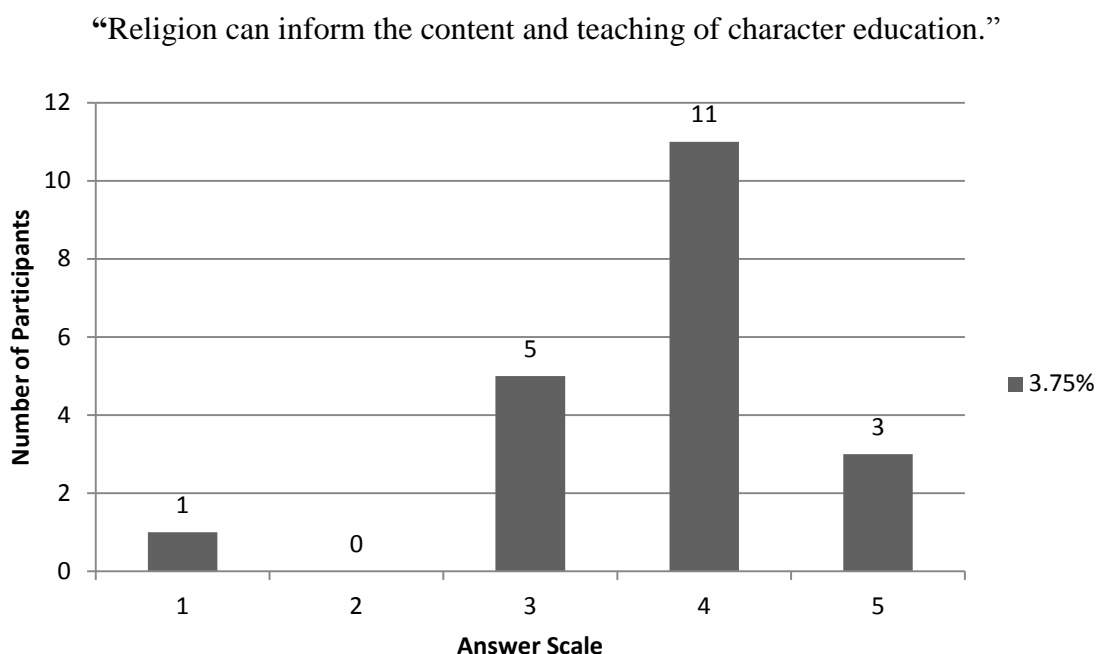
#### **Fourth Research Question**

The last bookend to the research specifically raises the question of religion and its relationship to character education curriculum. The participant has had the opportunity to think through their understanding of the success or failure of character education in their district and whether or not there are any specific values that should be taught. Taken to the last two questions, the participant must consider whether religion can or should have a role in the pedagogy of character education. How the participant answers gives a hint at her perception regarding its usefulness in the success of character education.

For the person of faith, if religion is present or allowed to be present in the discussion, it could be viewed as a scaffold for a child's developing morality. Should it be absent, a person of faith may see this as a deficiency in the curriculum and part of the problem in being able to communicate objective morality to a student. However, to the materialist or naturalist, the presence of religion may be viewed as a conflicting problem for (as already observed), which religion will hold priority? Equally, the presence of religion may be viewed as a reinforcement of superstition, only serving to undercut the objective advances of evolutionary biology.

#### **The Ninth Survey Question**

Considering the historic place of religion in the public and civil life of the United States (see chapter two), survey question nine (Figure 9) inquires whether religion can provide content for character education. Flowing from the previous concerns of research question three, the person of faith and the materialist will have different answers to these questions. Further, they

**Figure 9. Question 9 Responses**

will express different fears regarding the role of religion (its presence or absence) in the character formation of children.

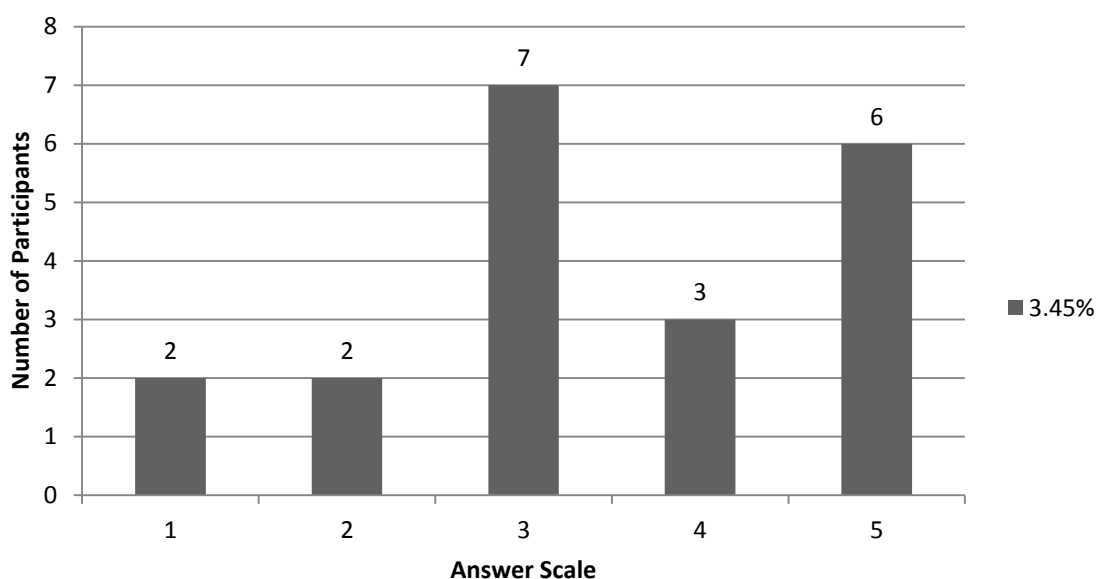
One participant (5%) did not agree that religion can inform the content of character education. Five participants (25%) were uncertain. However, considering the responses to survey questions 5-8, eleven participants (55%) mildly agreed that religion can be an element in character education and three participants (15%) completely agreed. The average response was 3.75%. One participant commented on November 18, “I think it does to some extent, because the religious books (Bible, Koran, etc.) state rules/laws for behavior and consequences.”

### **The Tenth Survey Question**

The last survey question (Figure 10) addresses the issue of the content of character education for historically among the colonies in America, religion was the major component and frame of reference for how one was educated to behave in the new republic. Two participants (10%) did not agree that religion should inform the content of character education. Further, two

**Figure 10.** Question 10 Responses

“Religion should inform the content and teaching of character education.”



participants (10%) mildly disagreed. Seven participants (35%) were uncertain about this issue.

Three participants (15%) mildly agreed and six participants (30%) completely agreed that religion should inform the content of character education. The average was 3.45%. On

November 14, one participant commented, “I have mixed feelings about teaching religion in public schools because of the Pandora's Box that it would open up now with so many other

religions eager to broadcast their causes.” Further, on November 18, two participants

commented, “The question would then become which religion should inform the content. Who's to say the God of one religion is better than another? Surely, not I. I am not worthy to judge” and

“I think it should advise, but it is hard to separate church and state where character ed. [sic] is concerned.”

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overview

In the history of American education, there has been a complicated relationship with religion. Various schools developed in the early colonies and communities of immigrants from Europe and they incorporated their particular expression of the Christian religion from the Protestant Reformation. These simple expressions of faith made their way into spelling and grammar lessons as well as history and formal catechesis since the self-conscious understanding of the colonists was educating Christian children within their own communities.

However, as noted in the first and second chapters, as the nation grew and organized constitutionally, it became apparent that while there existed a degree of national Christian character, over time, it would give way to a more pluralist and multi-cultural democracy. It is in this crucible that American *public* education took shape with a goal of an educated and competent citizenry, but not necessarily a religious one. Leaders such as Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson resisted the religious impulse that sought to govern the citizenry and worked tirelessly for a more pragmatic and utilitarian approach to education. Such indifference to matters of religion was understood as an affront to religious sympathies. Through the efforts of educational leaders such as Horace Mann and John Dewey, American education was thoroughly secularized by the early twentieth century.

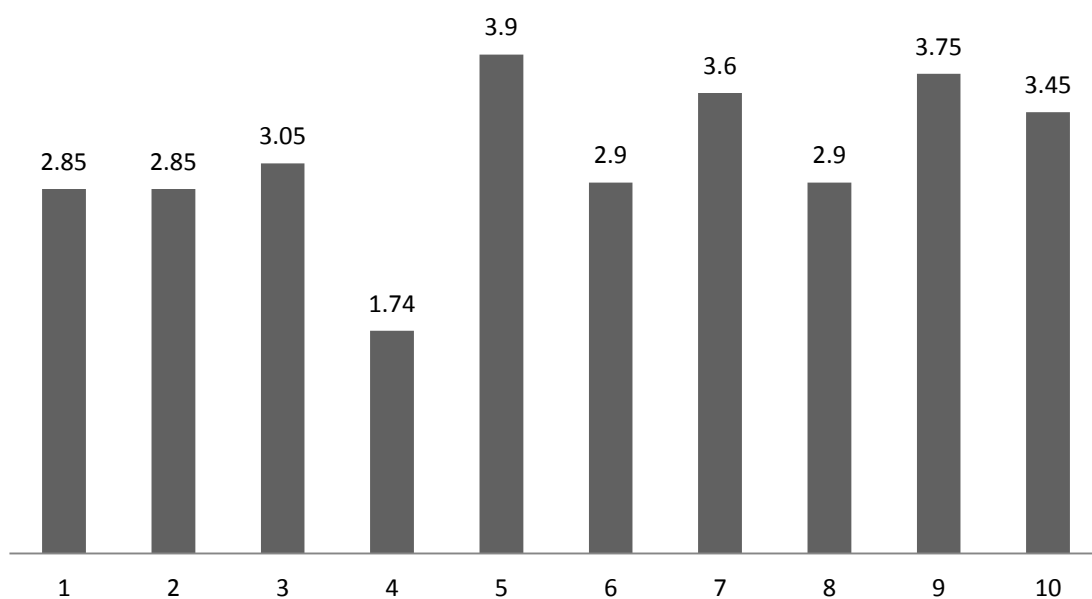
In the wake of two world wars, national religious fervor swelled. Values clarification was implemented in education and the tension between a modernist view of education and a religious one clashed anew; a culture war that in many respects is still being discussed in the current era. Many want to infer the loss of a moral compass among American youth due to the perceived loss of the preferential place Christianity has enjoyed in national/ civil life. The 1980s

saw the rise of new approaches to help aid students in the character formation in an increasingly multicultural and religiously pluralist culture.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this research is to describe the perceptions of educators in a local, public school district whether character education has been successful or not, and particularly with regard to the presence or absence of religion. The methodology chosen by the researcher utilizes an anonymous survey of a purposive sample from four, local, public schools in a district known for its excellence in character education. The researcher began the study asking whether or not character education is successful. As noted in chapter 2, one cannot draw a neat line of cause and effect from the behavior of children to a lack of Christian influence. Even if that were true conclusively, knowing what is right and consistently doing what is right are most often in conflict (cf. Romans 7). Secondly, the researcher considered whether educators themselves, faced with insurmountable behavior crises in classrooms, in and out of school settings and in home, neighborhood and communities, thought not only whether character education was successful, but also, if religion had anything to do with it. The literature demonstrates a lack of consensus in defining character education or appropriate human behavior. Equally, the survey results demonstrate that on the whole character education is not successful in accomplishing its pedagogical goals.

In the previous chapter, the research questions were paired with the survey instrument (see Table 6). Each survey question was examined philosophically in its relationship to the research questions and the responses were reported in narrative and graphically (Figure 11, on the following page).

**Figure 11.** Summary of Percentages**Survey Question 1**

Overall, the general perception of participants involved in character education is somewhat indifferent (2.85%). The efforts of educators are not in vain; eight of those surveyed perceived character education to be successful (40%). The majority, however, were uncertain or disagreed with the idea. Comments were made regarding the lack of consistency and even that that some schools did not have a curriculum in place. Lewis, et al, (2011) attribute the lack of discernible success to a lack of a consensus regarding a definition of character education or consistent pedagogy.

**Survey Question 2**

Regarding the consistency of character education pedagogy, as noted most (55%) do not believe the character education occurred consistently, and comments stated that at one school character education occurred voluntarily. Ironically, nine participants noted some agreement that character education did occur consistently.

Davis' article (2006) demonstrates that the lack of homogeneity in curriculum leads to chaos. He deplores religious infighting over whose religion-laced ethics get taught in public schools, yet teachers are left with competing voices in the classrooms for how a student should act ethically. And yet, Spaulding (2005) observes that teachers can in the absence of a curriculum create a positive environment of learning in which students and teachers cooperate in mutual respect.

In light of this reality—that individual teachers do their best with what they have-- Slater (2007) argues that the teachers of America, who are overwhelmingly religious, can indeed have some effect on the students under their care.

### **Survey Question 3**

There was an equal response (35%) leaning for and against changing the curriculum. However, these responses note a considerable indifference since some commented that there was no character education curriculum in place at all. Six participants (30%) were undecided, while the average answer was 3.05.

Hursch (2007) like many progressives espouses adjusting education along the lines of traditional liberalism since education is about making society a better place of mutual appreciation and tolerance; the practical goal is jobs and economic stability. Character education is subverted under pragmatism. “[The proponents of Character Education] seek to transform the beliefs and behavior of a generation not merely because they think it is desirable, but because they hold that the health of democracy depends upon their success” (Wilhelm and Firmin, 2007, p. 430).

### **Survey Question 4**

To the statement that there is no specific content for moral education, that is, a specific



value or trait that must be taught as part of the curriculum, the average was 1.74%. Eleven participants (57.89%) disagreed and two mildly agreed with six uncertain. One commented that nothing must be taught but values “should be taught.” Ironically, one commented that some ethical principles should be taught, “as long as they do not contradict religious teachings.” It is clear then that something should be taught, but the content is debatable. Wilhelm and Firmin (2007, p. 188) note in the Danby Project that progressives want the fruit of a religious tree. They want the traits of character common to religious ethics without the metaphysical mythology. However, without a sense of a unifying principle, their agenda becomes subjective and eclectic.

Mattox (1948) observed in the 1930s-1940s that the disciples of Dewey recognize that without an objective source of morality and rationally, it is difficult to deduce moral standards from human experience. He quotes Norman Woelfel, “. . . We literally don’t know what to do about these things . . .” (p. 36). C.S. Lewis (1944) observed that without a rational natural law, demonstrable in nature itself, yet transcending human subjectivity, there can be no ethical basis of human behavior.

### **Survey Question 5**

Following the last question, it is significant that 57.89% believed that values should be taught, but when it comes to the question of religion, 65% believed religion to be relative to culture and personal beliefs and 30% were uncertain with an average of 3.90%. This is the growing sentiment for two generations in the West. It is the trend of naturalists such as Dewey and Mann, as well as Davis (2006), and postmodernists like Marsh and Willis who deplore the idea of truth in general. Rushdoony was critical about the origins of public education, for he understood them to be in opposition to the strong covenant education of Colonial America:

At present humanism has brought all things, including most churches, under the sway of man the lord. The purpose of state schools, as laid down by Horace Mann, James G. Carter, and others, was twofold: to establish centralism, the priority of the state over every area of life and second, to eliminate biblical faith. The founders of statist education were Unitarians. They rightly believed that control over the child through the schools is the key to controlling society (Rushdoony, 2001, p. 172)

He did not see this move away from religion to be accidental or coincidental, but purposeful as did R.L. Dabney. He was outspoken about a godless education and warned Christians this could be their undoing. This idea has merit, considering the results of this question.

#### **Survey Question 6**

There was almost an equal response regarding no conflict between religion/ faith and science: 50% stating there is a conflict between religion and science and 45% stating that there is not. There are studies in the current literature to suggest discrimination against Christianity in the public schools system (Riley, 2006). One of the reasons is the controversy over biological evolution and the consequences of such belief in theories of human origins, as well as for human behavior. One commented that there will always be conflicts between religion and science but offered mutual respect and toleration between believers and unbelievers, as well as among people of differing faith traditions.

#### **Survey Question 7**

Considering the responses for question six was almost equal, the overwhelming majority 60% and 20% uncertain to espouse a belief that human moral norms have evolved with the human species. Essentially, those surveyed believe moral norms have their origin in material development and not in religious texts or beliefs. This response hints at the notion that many

educators view religious beliefs as subjective and not objectively true, thus they would have no bearing on the discussion.

“Science” therefore would be at odds with religious traditions that place the source of moral authority in a transcendent Deity, as believed by Christians, Muslims and Jews. One commented that family structures have a great affect on a child’s moral development but in the absence of such structure, personal morality breaks down.

### **Survey Question 8**

Another remarkable contrast is the responses to this question. While the obvious majority believed moral norms have evolved with the species, the participants were equally divided (45%) that moral norms were true for all places, times, peoples and cultures with two uncertain of their belief. This sense of universal norms is self-evident. Even Davis (2006) observed,

No matter what one’s philosophical or theological basis is for moral behavior, most agree on what a moral person should look like. Everyone agrees that a moral person should be marked by honesty, self-control, friendliness, decency, selflessness, fairness, respect, responsibility, compassion, loyalty, empathy and a cooperative spirit. In short, students who are moral should be good people (p. 1).

### **Survey Question 9**

As noted above, eleven participants (55%) mildly agreed that religion can be an element in character education and three participants (15%) completely agreed. To give context to this anomaly, one participant suggested that religion can be useful in communicating how cultures behave. It appears while affirming the evolutionary origins of human moral norms, many see a value in the religious contribution to morality perhaps in terms of comparative religion or

perhaps in the same way as Grimm's Fairy Tales or Aesop's Fables.

### **Survey Question 10**

The obvious majority seemed to agree that religion should inform the content of character education, but this is qualified. Some educators are wary of formally teaching religion in public schools because of potential lawsuits or ideological misunderstandings resulting in conflicts. In this spirit Davis writes,

The need for instruction in ethics and morals in our nation's schools is acknowledged by virtually everyone. Yet there is a great deal of confusion and disagreement about how to do this, especially in the public schools. Many educators want to teach morals from a religious perspective, and are frustrated by U.S. Supreme Court decisions that make advancing a particular religious worldview inappropriate in the public schools (p. 1).

As noted above, Slater observed this religious impulse.

Teaching is as much a moral effort as it is an intellectual enterprise; teachers not only educate our children how to think and solve problems, they also inform children's beliefs about what is right, good, and important in life, shaping their values in the process (Slater, 2007, p. 47).

## **Conclusions**

### **Research Question 1**

Of those surveyed, it appears that the general perception is that character education is at best a "decent attempt" by individuals. The comments by participants indicate distrust in the so-called curriculum, pedagogy and activity. Arguably, this confusion is a product of an absence of a unifying consensus to say what character education is.

## Research Question 2

A surprising number of responses showed educators believe there is apparently specific traits, habits, and moral norms to teach to children, but as observed, already, no one seems to be able to indicate what those traits are—especially since they keep changing.

## Research Question 3

The questions regarding religion are important because of the observation by Wilhelm and Firmin (2007). If religion is merely subjective and religious/ moral truth is trivial and subjective, it is practically useless. As already observed, most participants believe religion to be personal and not objectively true; to be the survival traits of the species. If no one can identify the source of these traits in a meaningful way that is convincing to children, teenagers and young adults, they are reduced to nonsense.

## Research Question 4

Participants perceived character education on the whole deficient without religion and more successful with it. Not only “can” religion inform character education (3.75%) but it “should” (3.45%). They expressed concern however for a potential lack of toleration. *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) paved the way for the slow normalization of teaching comparative religion, which could serve as model pedagogy.

It is not surprising when the majority of participants in the survey report that character education has not been successful overall and that it has not been consistently taught. Many surveyed acknowledge a lack of consistent character education curriculum and pedagogy other than what individual teachers muster together in lesson plans. Moreover, an equal number of participants surveyed noted that the current curriculum and pedagogy should not change; others say that it should and almost as many seem to be unconcerned. However, an alarming number

believe that there are certain values that should be taught to children and that those values have evolved with the human species and ironically, that they are true for all times and all peoples and all cultures. Yet, there is no identifiable consensus (Lewis, 2011) as to what should be taught, how one should teach it and from what source these values should come. While those surveyed were almost equally divided in their perceptions that religion and science are in conflict, most participants believe that religion should inform the content of character education and that it can, despite the fact that most believe religion to be subjective and personal opinion.

### **Unforeseen Consequences**

It is worth noting, how the religious character of the United States slowly gave way to a secular democracy. This is not to argue for a so-called “Christian America,” but to demonstrate the historical tension. The crisis of character is a religious one. The plight of the story in America is that Christians of the Reformation traditions (Lutherans, Presbyterians, Mennonites, Congregationalists and Baptists, Pilgrims and Puritans, Anglicans and the later Methodists) regardless of how committed they were to the principles of the reformation, lost the cultural foothold in a short period of time. This is partly due to the underlying principle noted above. Everyone has access to the Bible’s text and consequently everyone is an expositor to its meaning. Some interpreted it literally, some interpreted it allegorically. Conservatives attempted to conserve the tradition that broke down in New England within a generation. Emerging progressives with more confidence in humanity than the Calvinists and Lutherans took advantage of opportunities as they emerged in places of leadership, particularly education. As the young America welcomed other immigrants (many non-Christian) from other countries, a new openness to citizenship and new opportunities of work and education became realities for those without a home who had come to the new and free world. America became a home not just for Christians,

but all people.

The theoretical framework provided in this research presupposes a classical and Thomist notion that what is rational is true and is natural, good, beautiful and moral. It is found in all cultures and it certainly has preserved the species. But the foundation (as Aquinas observed) that religion provided what is rational, natural, good, beautiful and moral was disrupted by the events at the time of the renaissance that allowed for a rupture, a discontinuity with the past and (as Russell observed) provided no framework for speaking consistently or rationally of the natural, good, beautiful and moral. This is demonstrated in the degeneration of philosophy and the consequent degeneration of culture on the basis of “man as the measure of all things” as noted in chapter two.

C.S. Lewis observed at the time of the educational reforms in America that the educational trends were increasingly irrational. As noted earlier, he wrote “If the view held by [the authors of the *Green Book*] were consistently applied it would lead to obvious absurdities” (Lewis, 1944, p. 3). The literature reviewed here demonstrates a lack of consistency in educational curricula, educational philosophy and particularly character education. In addition, it is supported by the data collected in the survey and accompanying comments.

### **Implications**

As a Christian people, whose lives were defined by a Christian ethos and religious frame of reference, one could easily say and teach what proper behavior was and why. However, as the nation expanded to include non-adherents, the identification with “the what” and “why” became difficult to say in a meaningful way to American citizens and their children. Without any consensus to address moral issues in a rational, natural and truthful way, culture begins to breakdown as expectations diminish and our educational systems produce “men without chests”

that we demand to perform for no reason.

It is the observation of this researcher in light of the survey results that character education would (should?) benefit from a comparative religions curriculum, which as noted before is constitutional. As long as the religions presented in the curriculum are equally presented, the task can be accomplished. The primary benefits would be to demonstrate the common traits and ethical traditions in world religions that when followed have produced a better and safer society, as observed by C.S. Lewis. In light of Psalm 19, Romans 1, 2 and Acts 17, a Christian of any tradition can and should be able to conduct herself in such an environment that demonstrates how God has made himself known in the world.

### **Limitations**

It is the desire of this researcher to have made a positive contribution to the field of educational and moral philosophy. Having sought to listen to the educators themselves in the survey, it was the goal to represent their observations and perceptions clear and objectively.

The school district from which the representative sample is derived is small (a characteristic of purposive sampling) and is further limited by four participating schools (N.B. the researcher desired a minimum of twenty participants). One weakness of purposive sampling however is “. . . there is no reason to assume that the units judged to be typical of the population will continue to be typical over a period of time” (Ary, et al, 2006, p. 174). In contrast however, the goal of purposive sampling in descriptive research is to describe a sample within a particular chronological and historical period, reflecting the current and actual situation. This is the judgment of the researcher, who believes the research group

to be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding of what [he] is studying.

[He uses his] experience and knowledge to select a sample of participants that [he



believes] can provide the relevant information about the topic or setting (Ary, 2006, p. 472).

Perhaps the perceived weakness in this project is the small number of responses from the population. “Researchers generally agree that nonresponse can bias survey data especially when it is nonrandom . . .” (Ary, 2006, p. 438). More responses would have made for a more representative sample and would have curtailed the threat of biased interpretation. However, Ary, et al, (2006) also write, “Recent studies, however, suggest that the effect of nonresponse may not be as pronounced as was once thought and that low response rates may not necessarily indicate bias (McCarty, 2003)” (p. 438). They argue that low response rates only indicate that they are less preferable to higher ones and do not logically conclude a biased sample.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research gave the perspective that religion can and should inform the teaching of character education. Equally, however, is the reality that there is no consensus in how this should be implemented. The following questions should be considered for future research in comparative religion pedagogy:

1. How could the major religious traditions of the world (their cosmologies, mythologies and moral parables) provide wisdom in a multicultural context that would be mutually benefitting and acceptable to state standards?
2. Should the curriculum for such character education be the stories themselves? Part of the measurable outcomes for a comparative religion approach to character education could be the identification of those character traits and ethical guidelines shared by the world’s major religions, which are globally demonstrable in varying cultures. This could be implemented in a character education pedagogy that respects the multicultural environment of our public

schools and respects religion.

3. How could persons of virtue in various cultures and religions exemplify character traits to be modeled in a student's life?

The research here demonstrated an overlooked element in the literature regarding the inconsistencies of character education: the perceptions of educators regarding the success or failure of character education in the presence or absence of religion. The conclusions discuss the lack of consensus in identifying what character is and how it should be taught; hence, a general sense of failure on the part of educators who teach character in a school district known for its great reports on teaching character. However, what emerged from this study is the observation by educators for the inclusion of religion in the teaching of character.

From the research, it appears that the inclusion of religion (via comparative religion) would provide a moral framework from a sociological perspective allowing students to be exposed to the ethical traditions of the world and observe their common traits and moral standards. This proposal is to be distinguished from merely teaching about religion as a cultural or sociological phenomenon. In a culture of moral decline and a loss of moral framework, a comparative religions approach to character education is possible within the framework of toleration and mutual respect, emphasizing the multicultural contributions of various religions and their ethical traditions.

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## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Please mark on the questions below on the following scale: 1 (least/disagree), 5 (most/agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. The current character education curriculum has been /successful in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Character education has been consistently taught in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The current character education curriculum should be changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. There are no specific values that must be taught in character curricula.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Religion is relative to culture and personal beliefs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. There is no conflict between Religion/ Faith and Science	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Human moral norms have evolved with the species.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Moral norms are true for all times, peoples, places and cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Religion can inform the content and teaching of character education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Religion should inform the content and teaching of character education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Dear [email address],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study. If you choose to participate, click on the link below. This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message. It will take you to a secure, educational survey site, where you will enter a password and begin an anonymous ten question survey about character education. It should take approximately five minutes for you to complete the survey. I will not be able to see your email address so your answers will remain anonymous. Soon after your completion of the survey, you will receive an invitation to be interviewed.

If you agree to be interviewed, we will discuss in a non-school related public setting the issues detailed in the survey and answer/discuss an additional ten questions that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation will be completely confidential, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

An informed consent statement appears at the beginning of the survey and contains additional information about my research. You consent by participation. A separate informed consent letter will be given at the time of the interview. If you choose to participate in the interview, you will be compensated with a \$5.00 gift certificate to Amazon.com.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Joseph F. Johnson

Here is a link to the survey:  
[SurveyLink]

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message. Your password for access to the survey is "character."

Thanks for your participation

**APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**

THE SUCCESS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN RELATION TO RELIGION IN A  
PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

Joseph F. Johnson, MA, MDiv

Liberty University, School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of character education. You were selected as a possible participant because of the excellent scores in character education in your district. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by Joseph Johnson, a student in the School of Education at Liberty University.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to allow educators, who are in the day to day activity of educating students to develop good character traits and habits, to speak for themselves. I want to hear you understand or perceive your own successes, that of your school and the success of character education in general. In addition, I have framed this discussion in the context of religion. Many believe if there was an active presence of religion in public schools that all the problems would go away; some see this as too simple an answer.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to answer a ten question, *anonymous* online questionnaire to the best of your ability. Your survey will take less than five minutes to complete and will be sent to me and an auto-generated response will be sent to you thanking you for your participation and inviting you for the interview. If you agree to be interviewed, the researcher will meet with you *in a non-school related, public setting* and hear from you in

greater detail regarding your understanding of the success or failure of character education. I will record by notation the brief comments and discussion in the interview, that itself will remain confidential.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

No study is without risks; however, there are minimal risks in this research project, no more than in everyday life. The benefits to participation include the opportunity for you to contribute to the continued study of character education.

**Compensation:**

There is no compensation for voluntary completion of the ten question survey.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The records of this study will be shredded after the required duration required by federal law. This information is used only and explicitly for this project dissertation.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future employment in your district or any relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Joseph Johnson. If you have questions, **you are**

**encouraged** to contact me by mail (813 Sunset Dr., Greenwood, SC 29646), or by phone (864.992.6301) or by email (jfjohnson3@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact my advisor, Dr. Clarence Holland of the School of Education (434.592.4275) or by email (cholland@liberty.edu).

You may also contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email (irb@liberty.edu).

*Please keep this copy of the information to keep for your records.*

**IRB Code Numbers:** 1620

**IRB Expiration Date:** November 11, 2014

**APPENDIX D: LETTER TO DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT**

Wednesday, September 25, 2013

Joseph F. Johnson  
813 Sunset Dr.  
Greenwood, SC 29646

Dr. Rex Mahoney, Interim Superintendent  
[local address]

RE: Survey and Interviews for a Dissertation Project

Dr. Mahoney:

My name is Joseph Johnson. I am an adjunct professor of religion at Lander University and I am a doctoral student in Education at Liberty University (Lynchburg, VA). My research field is character education and after examining your schools 2012 report card, I noticed that [your] School District overall received an “excellent” rating for character development. Many educational theorists, parents and teachers alike have opinions regarding the success or failure of the character education agenda. My research concentrates on the opinions of educators regarding the success or failure of character education as well. Equally, in the South, religion is often viewed in a positive light and my research focuses on whether or not educators believe character education is a success or failure considering the presence or absence of religious themes and emphases. The purpose of the research is to note the opinions of educators without making value judgments.

With your permission, I would like to send the attached survey to your faculty and discover who is interested in answering the ten questions. The survey is posted securely on an educational survey site and is completely anonymous and only will report the statistics noted. In addition, there is a \$5.00 Amazon gift card for those that would like to participate in a 10-15 minute interview. This too is anonymous and every effort is made to maintain objectivity and anonymity. I believe you will find the results interesting and important for your district and the efforts at the training of children in character development. I look forward to hearing from you soon. You may call or email me.

Sincerely,

Joseph F. Johnson  
864.992.6301 or jfjohnson3@liberty.edu

## APPENDIX E: LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE FROM SUPERINTENDENT

**From:** Rex Mahoney  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 02, 2013 11:29 AM  
**To:** jfj@nctv.com  
**Cc:** [recipients]  
**Subject:** Re: Survey and Interviews for a Dissertation Project

Mr. Johnson, you have permission to send surveys to school counselors and administrators at [nearby] Schools per your request to me concerning your Dissertation Project.

>>On Wed, Sep 25, 2013 at 9:53 PM, Joseph Johnson <jfj@nctv.com> wrote:

Good evening Dr. Mahoney,

I trust your year is going well in your position as interim superintendent in [local town]. My name is Joseph Johnson. Attached is a letter providing information regarding my dissertation project for a doctorate in education. Please review the letter and respond at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

**Joseph Johnson, MA, MDiv**  
 Adjunct Professor of Religion  
 Department of History and Philosophy  
 Lander University  
 320 Stanley Ave., Greenwood, SC 29646  
[www.lander.edu](http://www.lander.edu)



## APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

### LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 11, 2013

Joseph Johnson

IRB Approval 1620.111113: Why Be Good? A Phenomenological Study of the Perceived Success or Failure of Character Education Considering the Role of Religion in a Local School District

Dear Joseph,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
**Counseling**

(434) 592-4054

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