The attrition from Christian faith of our graduates while at university: Why does it happen, and what can be done about it?

TEACH[R]

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Keywords: Attrition, apologetics, mentoring, lived community

Abstract

Academic literature, supported by empirical evidence indicates there is a huge drop out from Christian faith amongst those who begin university ostensibly as Christians. While this may be seen as a manifestation of the Parable of the Sower, it nonetheless represents an existential problem for the broader church in so far as much potential future membership and leadership within Christian circles has evaporated within a few short years. Questions arise as to whether the Christian community is sufficiently alert to the issue and is attempting possible mitigation strategies. Approaches to stemming the tide include avoiding cocooning young people in a Christian bubble without the skills to navigate the intellectual and ethical challenges of campus life, the importance of developing a strong Christian worldview underlaid by effective apologetics, the need for focussed mentoring supported by strong biblical teaching, and the critical nature of experiencing lived Christian community. Without such approaches, the church at large will probably continue to experience the corrosive impact of very extensive fall out from faith of young people in their late teens and early 20s.

1. Analysis of the problem

Over recent decades, there has been extensive attention given in schools, and in the academic literature, to transitions: from pre-school to kindergarten, from primary to high school. What has not been so commonly discussed in schools, in university education faculties and certainly not in churches, is the transition from high school to university of those who have been identified, by themselves, their schools or their churches, as Christian. This issue has gained little traction in schools, which are inclined to regard the future progress of their graduates as outside their concern. They do, after all, have rather enough demands on their time and energy, as new cohorts move up a stage within schools. There is, however, a case to be made that preparation of these young people for a sustainable transition, in which their Christian faith will not only survive but flourish, is part of the shepherding remit of the school, and of fundamental concern to churches, which, without worthwhile interventions, all too often see the departure of their youth, their future adult lifeblood, not only from their churches but from the practice of faith entirely.

Various sources put the fall-out rate of those who are ostensibly Christian on beginning university at between 70 and 75 per cent. American research cites similarly large figures in 'an epidemic of young people leaving the evangelical church' (Powell & Clark, 2011, pp. 15-16). This is a fearsome statistic, and one which should concern deeply those of us in Christian schools if we are to care longitudinally for the young people we have discipled. It represents a comprehensive collapse, indeed evisceration, of much of our work. It is, in Christian terms, an aspect of the aphorism of getting all A's but failing life. NCLS (National Church Life Survey) research shows that a third of Christian school leavers will have departed from faith by the age of 19, probably within one year of leaving school (Sing, p. 16).

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The last stages of adolescence, typically the university years, are a key time of making life decisions before pathways become locked in by prior choices (Garber, 2007, pp. 94-125). This echoes the precept of the writer of Ecclesiastes:

> Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come.
>
> (Eccles 12:1, NIV)

One commentator has remarked that at the end of their school years, some students hang their faith, like a now unwanted garment, on a hook at the door as they leave the building for the last time (Cooling, 1997). They do not move successfully through the stages of affiliation and searching faith to an owned faith (Maple, 1997, p. 92 citing Westerhoff). Powell and Clark (2011), in an American context, agree (pp. 62, 74, 91). For some, faith has not existed outside of their practice of it at school (Maple, 1997, p. 100). What are the possible dynamics of this apparent widespread collapse of faith post-school?

2. Causes of the problem

Many Christian analyses of secular universities in a post-Christian age, written largely from the 'inside', raise issues of concern about the intellectual and cultural climate for Christian young people at university. Budziszewski (2004, p. 17) asserts that as soon as tertiary students arrive on campus, their Christian convictions are under attack. They are alone (p. 22), at the same time as having to assume adult responsibility (p. 24). They experience a form of culture shock, often, as a coping strategy, adopting the norms of those around them (p. 27). Any Christian beliefs they have are patronised by academic staff (p. 52). Sometimes the opposition is more militant, as in the case of academics like Rorty who were determined to undermine the Christian faith of students and reshape them (Edlin, 2014, p.19). At its very best, faith will have been pushed to the margins of academic study (Benne, 2001, p. 5) while a nihilistic purposelessness reigns supreme (Garber, 2007, p. 73), overtaken by training to make money in large quantities (p. 94). This produces a sense of alienation and a crisis of identity (p. 98). There is a lack of meaning or coherence (p. 90); a technical competence (p. 89) belies a lack of commitment and purpose (p. 91). It is what MacIntyre (cited in Garber, 2007) has identified as the loss of a credible telos (p. 157). Despite its emptiness, it can be absorbed by the power of material allure, perhaps by osmosis.

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Elements of this loss of meaning can be found in what Taylor (2007, p. 473) describes as 'expressive individualism' or pathological self-orientation. Trueman (2020) describes this as "the expressive individualism of psychological man" (p.325). Taylor sees it as a form of emergent egomania (p. 552), allied to and partially driven by the consumerist revolution and pursuit of (ephemeral) happiness (p. 474) which leads to superficial and unsatisfactory "channel surfing through life" (p. 480). To J. K. Smith (2016), these are false orientations, "pedagogies of desire" (pp. 21-22) which habituate in unhelpful ways forming "liturgies of desire" (Smith, 2009, pp. 25-54) which shape identities and determine concepts of 'the good life' and establish dispositions (Smith, 2009, p. 71). Individuals define themselves according to the narrative in which they see themselves (Smith, 2014, p. 25).

Garber (2007) asserts that in a university culture of relativism, where deconstruction leads to an avant-garde incoherence (p. 63), there is a determined effort to evacuate all moral precepts (p. 68), so that there are no compelling values (p. 71) and, perversely, whoever ends life with the most 'toys' is the victor (p. 5). If we wonder why those familiar with faith would abandon it for emptiness, the answer may be that it is packaged alluringly, with its own intellectual sub-structure. Some approach this by adopting multiple identities, assuming whatever fits the context – whether faith based for some and devoid of faith for others, without acknowledging the tension or disintegration implied (Powell & Clark, 2011, pp. 50-51, 54). They lock their faith and its ethical implications away in an 'identity box' (pp. 54-55, citing Clydesdale), to be opened only on occasions when it is not in the way. This of course can be the preliminary to the loss of faith entirely.

Menzies (2019) has, with this the moral torpor, identified a new Western secular 'fundamentalism' based on the implicit adoption of market liberalism, freedom of choice (without constraints) and the right to continuous sexual enjoyment (p. 5). If there is any truth, it is only accessible through science (p. 16), all of which will lead to a utopia (p. 23). This is not unrelated to what Parker (2017) identifies as the salvific claims of the happiness movement (p. 116).

Corney (2009) would see this failure to maintain faith commitment as part of a general social malaise. Factors such as extensive family dysfunction and breakdown, and the possibility of being 'cancelled' by friends for taking a strong stance on beliefs and behaviour, both contribute to a fragility, fear of rejection and abandonment and insecurity, which renders firm and lasting commitments less likely.

To this, he adds the impact of an increasingly consumerist society, where there are so many options, committing long-term (to anything) is less likely than keeping options open for the emergence of better possibilities. Even where there appears to be commitment, Corney explains that this can mask the existence of a double life, as young people operate in different registers in different environments – one at church and in Christian circles, and an altogether different and antithetical one elsewhere – without acknowledging the tension between these modes.

If this is the milieu which many apparently Christian young people enter and in which they flounder, how may we interpret this theologically? The Parable of the Soils (more commonly known as the Parable of the Sower - Luke 8:1-15, Matthew 13:1-23) provides a structure within which an interpretion of a failure of faith to geminate to maturity can be formed. Some fall at the hurdle of opposition or strife (Luke 8:13), such as the emaciation of a Christian hope and ethos, as described above. Some are drawn away by life's vicissitudes or pleasures (Luke 8:14). Graduates fellowship staff worker Rowan Kemp (personal communication - email 9th February, 2021) identifies amongst the latter: the strong lure of money, possessions, popularity, sex, luxury, pleasure, materialism and power - as patent lures away from a life of faith, while a focus on building a career and worldly success can be equally crushing of the primacy of faith. Garber (2007, p. 93) refers to a university survey which indicated that overwhelmingly what students wanted was vacation homes, expensive foreign cars, yachts and private jets. The 'hook up' culture of alcohol laden, emotional commitment free casual sex is very powerful and widespread on campus (Powell & Clark, 2011, p. 17). Trueman (2020) writes of the normalisation through the sexual revolution of (almost anything) (p. 21). He describes it as 'the triumph of the erotic' (p. 301). The party scene which gives it context is an antidote to loneliness and a searching for friends, and a desire to enjoy the 'good life' free from restraints (Powell & Clark, 2011, pp. 18, 55). However, some recent research (Vashishtha, Pennay, Dietze, & Livingston, 2021) suggests a trend for youth becoming more risk averse in some areas.

Opposition to faith, Kemp mentions, is likely to associate itself with the alleged misogyny and homophobia of the Church, as well as the disclosed outrages (mostly, recently, sexual abuse) perpetrated by some of its official representatives. All of this can be corrosive of faith, particular in the face of intellectual assaults on Christianity by lecturers and tutors. Wolterstorff (2019) writes of the common view amongst academics that belief in God indicated a 'rationality deficit' in students (p. 63), citing Weber, 100 years before, insisting that faith has no place in a university (p. 9). Taylor (2007) refers to Weber's view that to maintain faith in the Academy is a form of intellectual suicide (p. 550). These views, strongly put by academics, can leech away faith.

At this point, consideration turns to whether the Christian community has in any way aided and abetted their departure from faith, whether gradually (Garber, 2007, p. 47) or in precipitate collapse. Much of the literature suggests that, sadly, the answer is yes. Poplin (2014, p. 37) argues that Christian theologians pioneered the process of secularising Christianity, maintaining the husk but stripping out the key contents. Maple (1997, p. 95) argues that the low view of the importance of ministry to youth in churches has left them without satisfactory preparation for an adulthood embracing of faith. It represents a lack of vision (p. 1). They are not equipped to critically evaluate culture, but often instead are offered a denial of and refuge from that culture (p. 30). Benne (2001) claims that too often those transitioning to adulthood have been left with a Sunday School understanding of faith that is not compatible with or sustainable through tertiary learning, and so are encouraged into a dualistic theology where they cannot connect their faith with the world beyond the church. Moreover, this 'two spheres' model of disintegration has often been positively encouraged in churches (Benne, 2001, p. 76, Holmes, 2001, p. 115), in contradistinction to the famous epithet of Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper which states "There is not a square inch on the whole plain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord over all, does not proclaim 'This is mine!' " (cited in Benne, 2001, p. 70).

The withdrawal from the world into piety has also failed to prepare young university students for the very real challenges of life in the actual world (Newbigin, 1989, p. 113) as it strips intellectual content from faith and so renders faith irrelevant to academic pursuits (Benne, 2001, pp. 36-37). Indeed, Dreher (2017) argues for a kind of monastic withdrawal from the current post-Christian society into a counter-culture (p. 16). This did not seem to be Jesus' intention (John 17:15-18). This has played into what Noll (1994) has called 'The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind'; the scandal, put simply, is that evangelicals have ceded the world of thought to the secularists, giving way to a religious programmatic utilitarianism (p. 12), leading non- or anti- Christians to dominate the intellectual life of those starting out in university life as apparent Christians (p. 17). Blamires (2005), puts it even more starkly the Christian mind does not exist (p. 4). In contravention of this view, Smith (2009), argues that Christian faith is too Cartesian, concentrating on the cognitive to the virtual exclusion of the affective (p. 127).

In reflection on youth ministry, Roberts (2021) quotes T. C. Hammond, writing as long ago as 1940, claiming that part of the malaise visible even then was that the fundamentals of Christian faith were not well enough taught, nor was the Bible well

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enough exposited.

Michael Williamson (cited in Sing, 2021, p. 16), outgoing Director of Anglican Youthworks' Gap Year Program Year 13 represents the program as an attempt to fill a gap in the transition of churched young people into adult responsibility in a variety of areas, including education, tutelage without which many will become 'pigmy' Christians.

3. Possible interventions

It would be easy to see this level of attrition as simply an outworking of the Parable of the Sower (which no doubt it is) and hence resign ourselves to the loss of so many who appear to begin well, only to fall from faith. That the Lord will preserve his own, can be asserted (John 10:28-29) for he is Sovereign. However, Christian educators are responsible for effective ministry, as sub-shepherds of the Lord. What then can be done?

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Models and Mentors

Phillip Jensen, former Chaplain at UNSW and who has devoted so much of his ministry life to this age and developmental stage, reflected (interview March 2020) from his extensive experience on this dilemma: observing that those in Christian circles would usually not persevere with faith unless they had two, or preferably three, pillars of support. These he identified as *Christian family, church* or church youth group and *para-church organisation*, for instance a Christian group on campus. The best approach therefore is to engage maximum immersion in multiple sources of faith enculturation and sustaining interaction. His views are consistent with Garber (2007, p. 51), who maintains that what is necessary is a combination of conviction (a robust Christian worldview adequate for the challenges of post-modernism, pluralism and secularism), character (as modelled by a Christian who embodies faith authentically) and community (a support structure of other Christians seeking to live integrated lives of integrity). To Garber, intentionality (p. 49), conceptually rather like Smith's desires of the heart, and a peer group of other Christian people on a similar journey (p. 163) are significant supports. Smith (2016, p. 155) sees this in terms of formation, where it is vital to habituate Christian people into the 'liturgies' and practices of faith, in a manner which becomes self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating, and which sparks the imagination. This is a form of apprenticeship training in a Christian telos, a formation in virtue (Smith, 2016, p. 159). To Dow (2013, passim[1]) it can be expressed in the development of a virtuous Christian mind, with aspects of intellectual courage, tenacity, curiosity, honesty and humility, amongst others. To Maple (1997, p. 99), a mature Christian mentor who can assist in engaging a Christian mind with faith challenges is very important. Garber (2007, p. 21) agrees, seeing mentors as a chief means towards the interpretation and understanding of Christian beliefs. They can interpret 'the good life', such a powerful aspiration in current Western society, in Christian terms (pp. 142-143). This is consistent with Cooling (1997), who maintains that unless there are those who can assist robust exploration of Christian responses to difficult questions (for instance, the compatibility of a good God with the ubiquity of pain and suffering), the likely consequences are either a cessation of faith or a containment of it within the ideological enclosure of fundamentalism in which it ceases to relate to the real world. This is reiterated by Holmes (2001, p. 117). Benne (2001, p. 106) argues for a four-pronged approach including: the attitudinal (a positive motivation towards Christian thinking), the ethical (a Christian moral framework), the foundational (which challenges the assumptions of fields of learning) and identified worldviews. This quadrilateral approach can essentially be reduced to the importance of preserving Christian morality and a Christian worldview if one is to persist in truth. Budziszewski (2004) insists on the formative importance of a deep study of the Bible and accountability to others within a faith community, and a spiritual mentor as well as an intellectual support circle (p. 158). Important also are resisting the demands of the flesh (pp. 77, 165; 2 Peter 2:19) otherwise, as Smith (2009, 2016) argues, 'desires of the heart' will shape life affinities and beliefs. Part of this proactivity is the maintenance of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, worship and living life in the presence of God (Budziszewski, p. 28) and frequent fellowship with believers, "otherwise if you go into the world alone, you'll be swallowed" (p. 29). In the world, one needs to adopt the whole armour of God (p. 98; Ephesians 6:10-18). To McGrath (2019), it is important to live out a better story than the secular narrative (p. 16), one capable of capturing the imagination (p. 98), a better narrative, a paradigm which offers 'meaning, significance and fullness' (p. 99). Smith (2016, p.10) paraphrases Augustine: as our hearts are made for God, we will remain restless with the substitutes.

Mentoring modalities – in church and family

In terms of praxis, the voices of those on the 'inside' are important. Former St. Andrew's Cathedral School Captain and subsequent Sydney University Evangelical Union faculty leader Anthony Segaert

[1]Latin term for 'scattered'.

noted (personal communication - email 12th March, 2021) that university experience is for most a time of shifting community and reappraisal of previous thinking, in which the attraction of riches and pleasures is both constant and alluring. To cope with this in Christian terms, he argues for formal mentoring and, in a framework where the real issues are on the planes of contentment and emotion, clear exposition of the beauty and wonder of the gospel, with opposition and counter lifestyle to be met not with retreat into a Christian bubble, but with a deep immersion in the Word of God. Powell and Clark (2011) agree that 'sticky faith' (that which sticks or lasts) involves both Christian practices and inner thoughts; it is personal and communal (p. 22), it gives faith primacy (p. 23).

Mentoring modalities – in schools and youth groups

Sing (2021), in interviewing the incoming Director of Anglican Youthworks Year 13 Program, Stephen Shearsby, reports his view that the time to invest in young people is while they are still at school, before 'Schoolies' week, when many, without sufficient support structure, may abandon faith in the dissolution of this week, when restraint can be thrown to the winds. They need to be ushered into networks and have already had visits at school from Christian campus workers who can shepherd them into study and fellowship groups upon their arrival at university (p. 17). One example of attempting to bridge this school to university gap is Phillip Jensen's (n.d.) Launch Camp, convened immediately before university orientation week.

Richard Edlin asserts (personal communication email March 1, 2021), it is critical for Christian schools to engage in training that will equip their staff to integrate Christian world view thinking into their teaching in a manner which assists their students to recognise and critique the assumptions of secular humanism. He argues that schools need to equip teachers, and therefore students to operate "from a deliberate, biblical worldview that is all-embracing, imaginative, dynamic, uncompromising yet epistemologically humble, and hope-filled in the current spiritually-bewildered post modern society." Such an approach will assist in case-hardening secondary students for the assaults, intellectual and ethical, they will experience at university. Failure to do this he describes as 'pre-emptive capitulation' to the dominance of the secular humanist narrative.

Christian educators also need to consider that the situation may not be what it seems on the surface. Sociologist Christian Smith has pioneered and popularised the notion of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD – Smith & Denton, 2005 – see an extended discussion in Powell, Mulder & Griffin, 2016, pp.130-135), contending that the real religion of many who may be assumed to be Christian, and are even involved in Christian practice (Church membership, Christian meeting attendance) is in fact sub-Christian. Their defacto religion, he suggests, is an amalgam of three essential propositions: good people go to Heaven (without repentance or Jesus); the role of God is to make us happy, which is the essential purpose of life, and to help us out when we experience a problem; God is essentially an uninvolved deity who makes no demands (Smith & Denton, 2005, pp. 48-49). They describe this concept of God as a combination of 'Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist' (p. 50) and claim that MTD has "colonised many established religious traditions and congregations" (as) "a parasitic faith" (p. 57). It "feeds upon and shapes – one might say infects" (p. 55) the host faith. This is consistent with the finding by Bellah in 1967 (cited in Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 55) that religious faith was often 'eclectic, idiosyncratic, and syncretistic' (p. 55). This may be a cause, or otherwise a symptom, of mission drift in some Churches, and/or a sign that the Bible has not been exposited faithfully or clearly by them, or related to life beyond a Christian sub-culture. Indeed, in terms of the young, Budziszewski (2004, p. 35) claims that as they mature, the content of Christian training often depletes. Without proper Christian formation, the allure of sin can lead to an evacuation of faith (p. 77). Powell and Clark (2011), citing Willard, argue along with Smith that many apparent Christian young people have not in fact grasped the gospel and instead apply themselves to a form of satisfactory (in their terms) morality which aims at 'sin management' (p. 34). It is a form of performance-based (sub-) Christianity (p. 36). Garber (2007) remarks tellingly that once primary culture defaults to the paradigms of the therapist, good and evil are recast as appropriate and inappropriate while right and wrong lose their absolute status and become a matter of relative judgment (p. 130), thereby eroding the absolute claims of Christian ethics and beliefs.

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Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES), the umbrella group of Christian organisations on campus across Australian Universities, have in an email (personal communication, March 4, 2021), assessed multiple causes of the apparent collapse of faith across the years of university attendance. They indicate the failure of some to transition from a derivative faith owned by their parents to an adult faith of their own. Sometimes this is associated with a failure to grow beyond an elementary understanding of faith at the very time when their university and

hence secular studies are growing in complexity and sophistication. Each have left the world where the thought problems of Jerusalem and Athens contended together (Judge, 2014, passim) and entered the world of Babylon (Williams, 2020), where faith is in exile, surrounded by an alien environment. Such casualties from faith adherence in fact have had no plan, and no mechanism, for growing as Christians. Some have been taught an anaemic version of faith, which is otherworldly, lack any tutoring in Christian apologetics to equip them to deal with the level of opposition they will face to the credibility of faith in the tertiary sphere, lack a strong community that will give plausibility to faith, and wilt when they are challenged to apply faith in terms of self-sacrifice, mission and evangelism. They have not understood the need to 'take up their cross' (Luke 9:23). Some have never been more than loosely affiliated in a nominal adherence, which quickly melts away. Some have been attracted to the relational and even entertainment aspects of Christian youth groups, but are not ready for or committed to real engagement with Christian beliefs and ethics. Some cannot equate a binary but aberrant view they import, that all Christians are good and nice and all non-Christians are the opposite, with the reality of a larger and more diverse pool of people at university. In these comments, AFES staff identified the inadequacies of Church teaching and preparation of young people, and the unhelpful Christian 'bubble' experience of some schools, which cocoons students within an unexamined Christian culture and, which failed to prepare students for an often adversarial view of faith at university level, where a fragile faith is quickly shattered, particularly in an environment where, if they do not conform to peer group norms, they can be 'defriended' or 'cancelled'.

> *Some have been taught an anaemic version of faith, … [and] lack any tutoring in Christian apologetics to equip them to deal with the … opposition they will face … in the tertiary sphere*

All of these observations can of course be understood through the prism of the Parable of the Sower and are contemporary manifestations of it. At this point, we need to decide whether we give a collective theological shrug, and say that those who have fallen away were obviously not of the elect, or whether we attempt to stem the tide. Yes, the Lord is Sovereign, but are we not also responsible to endeavour to, if not stop the torrent, at least slow it?

Conclusion

The departure from faith of such significant numbers of apparently Christian persons during their university years represents a major challenge for the Christian Church. National Christian Life Survey (NCLS) data shows that congregations across the nation are aging, in the sense that their average age considerably exceeds the norm of the population at large. If renewal and replenishment is to come, the most likely source would appear to be through the young, who are underrepresented in churches. Consequently, the fall-out from faith of so many, indeed most, well-educated youth who might be expected to not only populate churches, but provide various forms of leadership, represents a major blow, and an existential dilemma. While this may be seen as the Parable of the Sower in action, the situation does raise questions as to what may be done to at least partially stem the tide of attrition.

The challenges to faith at tertiary level are considerable. Garber (2007) refers to the belittlement of beliefs and faith as non-cognitive (p. 60) and subjective (p. 67), part of the radical privatisation of faith as mere feeling. He notes the loss of Christian idealism when confronted with the harsh realities of the world, resulting in a loss of hope and faith paralysis (p. 32), further the polarisation of 'facts' away from faith and values (p. 107), leading to a disintegration of life and beliefs. Smith (2009) notes the habituation of the previously Christian into desires and loves which are antithetical, and hence undermining, of truth.

The literature suggests a range of measures which may, under God, assist in limiting the toll of attrition. Amongst these are clear and robust teaching and application to life of the Bible in churches, youth groups and Christian schools. Such teaching needs to provide a corrective to an apparent cultural drift into a reductionist Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. It needs to equip students transitioning from school to university with a comprehensive grasp of Christian faith. Necessary is the development of a strong Christian worldview. Garber's (2007) research and experience indicated that always, when faith survives and flourishes into adulthood, a student has been: assisted by a mentor who embodies and lives a Christian worldview (pp. 143-144) and supported by a community who lived out that worldview (p. 124). Part of the development of that Christian worldview will involve education in Christian apologetics, for one's own sake and those one can influence (instead of having faith undermined by being unable to find any answers to their contentions). As the Apostle Peter has urged "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

To Smith (2009) the affective aspects are more important, but consistent with, the cognitive. For faith to flourish, young people need to be habituated into its practices, and find their loves and their hearts' desires within it. Without this occurring,

they will be habituated into other desires and loves which lead them away from faith.

People who sustain faith over a lifetime are those, says Garber (2007) who can navigate their way through the problems posed by existence, as they have "woven together beliefs and behaviour into a fabric of faithfulness" (p. 18). They have combined a worldview, a mentor and a community into "habits of heart" (p. 21). They have transitioned into adulthood without compromising their Christian integrity or being seduced by money and lifestyle (p. 33). They have a coherent faith and a worldview which addresses all of life (p. 138). They will have avoided nihilism, and a cancerous individualism and have a counter-identity to the dominant culture (p. 159).

Unless Christian schools, churches and Christian young people themselves actively strategise for the preservation of faith, through growth in learning and understanding of their faith and the worldview on which it is postulated, through mentoring and Christian community and through applying their hearts to the captivating riches of the gospel, the attrition rate from faith will probably continue, perhaps even worsen. TEACH

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When authoring this work **Dr John Collier** was Head of St. Andrew's Cathedral School, Sydney and Head of St. Andrew's Gawura (Indigenous) School, a position he held for 12 years before initiating the succession planning that resulted in appointment of the first female Head of School Dr McGonigle.

In 2022 he will transition to new roles as Dean of Education at Morling College including a passion to research the best possible model of Christian education. John shares this work was written as part of his immersion in the Pacific Hills Christian School Excellence Centre while on Study Leave from St Andrew's.

"Unless Christian schools, churches and … young people themselves actively strategise for the preservation of faith, … the attrition rate from faith will probably continue, perhaps even worsen."