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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
FORMAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND THE RELIGIOUS
BELIEFS OF MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
CURRENTLY ATTENDING A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

by

Monique N. Igbinoba-Cummings

2001

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College of Graduate Studies

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITH A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Igbinoba-Cummings, Monique N., Ph.D.

Lynn University, 2001

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who guided and strengthened me throughout my doctoral program. To my husband, Erik Cummings, I am grateful beyond measure for your continuous prayers, encouragement, support, and, most importantly, your love. “God gave me you.” To my parents, Victor and Karen Igbinoaba, thank you for being the wind beneath my wings. I want you both to know that your words of advice and encouragement throughout the years helped to lay the foundation for all of my personal and professional accomplishments. To my siblings (the crew), Egheosa, Uwagiahano, Ebony-joy, Ewensia, and Osato the legacy is ours to carry on, this is only the beginning!

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORMAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CURRENTLY ATTENDING A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

by

Monique N. Igbinoba-Cummings

Lynn University, 2001

Boca Raton, Florida

Throughout the Common Era, large segments of mankind have used Biblical principles to guide their lives. In many instances, religion has served as the guiding force behind both positive and negative societal changes. So, it is not surprising that questions regarding the place of religion within the field of education have remained a source of controversy since the earliest days of the American republic. The purpose of this study was to a) examine the relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school, b) to examine the relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school, and c) to examine the differences between the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

Two hundred twenty-one middle and high school students participated in this research study. The study participants responded to two questionnaires, a demographic

questionnaire and a questionnaire designed to determine the level of religious beliefs. The demographic questionnaire collected information regarding the set of independent variables: grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school. The dependent variable, religious beliefs, was measured by the Religious Belief Questionnaire. To analyze the data collected, the following statistical procedures were utilized: frequency distributions, basic descriptive statistics, correlations, cross tabulations, regression analyses, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients and a *t*-test.

The data revealed that there were no statistically significant relationships between the religious beliefs of the middle and high school subjects attributable to the set of independent variables. When addressing the individual relationships of the independent variables, varied information was obtained.

The findings of this research study indicate various relationships between the dependent variable and each independent variable that should not be ignored. This research should prompt educational practitioners to no longer underestimate the importance of utilizing religious teachings in helping students develop to their fullest potential. The importance of this research challenges each of us to revisit our thoughts regarding the relationship between religion and education.

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Chapter I

Introduction

“In the United States, close to 150 million individuals are affiliated with some religious group” (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. 180). According to a national survey conducted on religious beliefs, 95% of American teens between the ages of 13 and 17 say that they believe in God (Lickona, 1999, p. 22). So, it is not surprising that current literature indicates that ones “religious . . . values are tightly entwined with [his or her] beliefs regarding education” (Dijkstra and Peschar, 1989, p. 47).

Religion tends to be so important in the lives of people, and so surrounded by powerful emotions, that many want to use schools to maintain and spread their religious beliefs at the same time that others insist on the complete exclusion of religion from public schools (Fischell, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 199).

Over the past fifty years, modern public schools have slowly removed the “common spiritual and moral values [that were] built into the foundations of American public education” (Wright, 1999, p. 17) in the early nineteenth century.

Romanowski and Talbert (2000) write that “[a]t the heart of all culture . . . is religion, or a system of faith” (p. 135). As a result of the cultural diversity in America, there is much difficulty incorporating religion into the arena of education. This, in effect, has led to the issue of the place of religion in American education going through stages from teaching and reinforcing religious principles, to neutrality, and finally to ignoring the subject of religion altogether.

Some parents are seeking educational institutions that provide spiritual guidance as well as academics, making modern-day Evangelical Christian schools a viable and

effective educational alternative. As a result, a growing number of parents are turning to religious schools to provide for their children's educational needs (Baker, 1999).

Background of the Problem

The United States is a multicultural nation of persons who identify themselves with, or are identified by, various microcultures. These microcultures include race, class, religion, and native language to name a few. "In addition [to the aforementioned microcultures], there are natural differences [between US residents] based on gender, age and physical and mental abilities" (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. V). Interestingly, "many [Americans] are experiencing the daunting personal and professional experience of adapting in adulthood to a degree of diversity that did not exist during their childhood" (Garcia, 1999, p. 9).

Living in a society with such racial, socioeconomic, religious, and linguistic diversity, many opportunities are provided for exposure to those who are different from ourselves. Exposure to various those who are different from ourselves can include both positive and negative information. "Often [we receive] distorted messages about people who are . . . different from oneself . . ." (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. V).

Religious diversity has existed in the United States since the earliest days of the Republic. As a result, the controversy of religion in schools has been as ever-present issue. "A major point of disagreement focuses on who should determine the moral [and spiritual values] that will provide the context of the education program in a school" (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. 209). As a result, most public schools incorporate American values that transcend most religions. "In response, some [parents opt to send their children] to schools operated by a religious body; other students attend religion classes

after school or on Saturday; and many students receive their religious training at Sunday school” (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. 209). This serves to alleviate some of the conflict between different religious groups who place different emphases on what children should be taught.

Statement of the Problem

Questions regarding the significance of religious education in American schools date back nearly 200 years. Wright (1999) asserts that the research that addresses religious education conveys support for successfully nurturing and socializing future generations of children. Romanowski and Talbert (2000) write that failing to include religion in the rich history of the United States rejects a large body of ideas, events, people, and themes. When teachers neglect the study of religion in U.S. history courses, they render religion irrelevant to both history and society (Romanowski & Talbert, 2000). Many Evangelical Christian parents have become disenchanted with public schools because their core values and principles were not being taught. As a result, Evangelical Christian schools have become the fastest growing segment of private schools in the United States (Baker, 1999). This rapid growth combined with the struggle to rear children with moral and spiritual values has led “to the continuing discussion regarding [religious] education’s purpose, nature, and identity (Kuhl, 1998, p. 1) in both public and private schools.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to identify the relevant factors which influence the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students who currently attend a

Christian school. This study investigated the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The information obtained in this study was used to further identify, understand and address the relevant issues concerning the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students.

Research Hypotheses

This study investigated the following research hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no relationship between middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school regarding the following set of independent variables: grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

H₀₂: There is no relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02A}: There is no relationship between grade level and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02B}: There is no relationship between gender and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02C}: There is no relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02D}: There is no relationship between the average number of hours middle school students spend per week participating in religious activities outside of

school and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H₀₃: There is no relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03A}: There is no relationship between grade level and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03B}: There is no relationship between gender and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03C}: There is no relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03D}: There is no relationship between the average number of hours high school students spend per week participating in religious activities outside of school and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H₀₄: There is not a significant difference between the religious beliefs of middle school students and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

Conceptual Framework

Researchers and theorists in the area of Christian education have indicated that there are many important questions regarding religious education (Wright, 1999). The research that addresses religious education carries an underpinning of successfully rearing and socializing successive generations of children (Wright, 1999). Educational scholars have written that classrooms that are free of religious doctrine and perspective

do not provide a desirable value orientation for students (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

Furthermore, while many theorists and researchers have addressed many issues regarding religious education, little is known about the impact of the exclusion or inclusion of this area on future generations. However, the fact that schools are influenced greatly by the predominant values of the community, leads many researchers and theorists to the conclusion that religious education cannot be ignored (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

Glasser's Choice Theory lays one foundation for those who are seeking to make religious education a foundational element of the educational process. Choice Theory allows its users to discover what most satisfies their individual needs (Glasser, 1997). The incorporation of Choice Theory into the arena of religious education arms parents and educators with a weapon of delivery which incorporates the option of religious education to better satisfy the needs of students.

A cluster sampling technique was used which selected an intact group to participate in this research study. The sample population consisted of middle and high school students who currently attend a Christian school in Miami, Florida. A total of 221 subjects participated in the study.

The following input-output model was a symbolic representation of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables: $Y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4)$. The study investigated the relationships between Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students who attend a Christian school and the factors that affect the religious beliefs. The dependent (output) variable (Y) represented the religious beliefs of the study subjects as measured by the Religious Belief Questionnaire. The dependent variable was measured as follows. Respondents rated the 64 Religious Belief Questionnaire statements, each being a Likert-scale with a choice range of 1 to 5 points.

The results of all 64 items were summed, resulting in a total score index ranging from 64 to 320. The total score results were used to identify the level of religious beliefs among the middle school and high school study subjects.

The independent (input) variables were grade level (x_1), gender (x_2), number of years of formal Christian education (x_3) and the average number of hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school (x_4).

Grade level (x_1) was measured through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. The dichotomous results were coded in dummy variables with middle school subjects coded as 0 and high school subjects coded as 1. The results were used to identify the differences between the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students. Grade level was also measured as a continuous variable for middle school students and high school students. The results were used to identify the differences between the religious beliefs of students in grades six, seven, and eight and also the differences between religious beliefs of students in grades nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. The dependent variable gender (x_2) was measured through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. The dichotomous variable of gender was coded as 0 for males and 1 for females. The results were used to identify the differences between the religious beliefs of the male and female subjects. Number of years of formal Christian education (x_3) was measured through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. The results were used to identify the relationship between years of formal Christian education and the dependent variable, religious beliefs. The average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school (x_4) was measured through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. Results were used to

identify the relationship between number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school and the dependent variable.

The data was analyzed using the appropriate Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 10.0 procedures to test the null hypotheses and investigate each independent variables relationship to the dependent variable. The results of the study were obtained by utilizing several statistical techniques to analyze data for the investigation of the religious beliefs among middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

The major statistical procedures that were utilized in this study include frequency distributions, basic descriptive statistics, correlations, cross tabulations, regression analyses and a *t*-test. Correlational analyses were conducted on the dependent variable, Religious Belief Score, and the independent variables, grade level, years of formal Christian education and average number of hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school, to determine the correlation between the variables. Cross tabulations were conducted by grade and gender on the demographic information provided. Multiple regression analyses were conducted on the data to analyze the combined effects of the independent variables. This procedure was used to weight each predictor (independent) variable so that the predictor variables in combination would give the optimal prediction of the criterion (dependent) variable (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). Also, a *t*-test was conducted to determine the difference between the middle school and high school students religious beliefs. The .05 alpha level was set for all analyses conducted which rejected all null hypotheses at this level.

The purpose for this study was to investigate the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students

currently attending a Christian school. The information obtained in this study will be used in the continuing discussion regarding the purpose, nature, and identity of Christian education. In addition, the information will be used to encourage further research of Christian education and as an examination of the relationship between religious beliefs and the lives of the population at-large. This research may contribute to the support of Christian education as a viable and effective alternative to secular education. Further, it is the intent of the researcher to provide valuable information to school districts, parents and students regarding the importance of an Evangelical Christian education.

The above research hypotheses grew out of the researcher's personal concern regarding the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. Current research indicating that Evangelical Christian schools are the fastest growing segment of private schools in the United States (Baker, 1999) further validated and directed the inquiry into the research hypotheses that were posed in the investigation.

Delimitations of the Study

The population was comprised of middle school and high school students who attend a Christian school in the southeastern region of the United States. The study did not include any students who attended other Christian schools or public schools. The study did not include other Christian schools to control for type of school. Further, this study did not include public school students because the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution declares "the state may not establish one religion over others" (Romanowski & Talbert, 2000, p. 135).

The participants completed two questionnaires. It was assumed that all participants were honest in their questionnaire responses.

Definition of Terms

A Christian education was operationally defined in this study to include the following objectives as stated by Northwest Christian Academy located in Miami, Florida, in the Northwest Christian Academy Student Handbook on page 1:

1. To provide an education of academic excellence.
2. To provide an alternative to a secular philosophy of education.
3. To minister to the total person.
4. To teach that there are discipline based on Biblical authority, which govern the disciplines of life.
5. To instill in the mind of each student a loyalty to Biblical, as well as, democratic principles.
6. To provide a curriculum that harmonizes the biblical precepts.
7. To graduate students willing to seek God's will.

God's will was operationally defined in this study as the practice of Biblical principles found in the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

Religious beliefs are operationally defined in this study as the emphasis on how the Judeo-Christian God and His Word, principles and applications can guide everyday life.

Formal Christian education was operationally defined in this study as formal education that incorporates the teachings of Jesus Christ and other Biblical principles across the curriculum.

Religious homelife was operationally defined in this study as participation in more than three hours of organized religious activities outside of school per week. Organized religious activities include church services, prayer meetings, Bible study classes or Sunday school classes.

Non-religious homelife was operationally defined in this study as participation in less than three hours of organized religious activities outside of school per week.

Current Christian middle and high school student was operationally defined in this study as any student in grade six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven or twelve at Northwest Christian Academy.

Evangelical Christian was operationally defined in this study as those persons who believe “[a]ll scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness . . .” II Timothy 3:16 NAS (Ryrie, 1978, p. 1827).

Grade level was operationally defined in this study as the information regarding student classification at Northwest Christian Academy. Subjects were identified as sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh or twelfth graders.

Number of hours spent per week participating in organized religious activities was operationally defined in this study as the number of hours students spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school (e.g. religious services, praying, Bible study classes or Sunday school classes).

Gender was operationally defined as the biological classification of being a male or a female human being.

Years of formal Christian education was operationally defined in this study as complete academic years from August to May. Attending a Christian school for more than five months during an academic year was calculated as one academic year.

Common Era was operationally defined in this study as equivalent to Anno Domini (A.D.). Anno Domini is defined as “in the year of our Lord.” (Ryrie, 1978, p. xi).

Before the Common Era was operationally defined in this study as equivalent to Before Christ (B.C.). (Ryrie, 1978, p. xi).

Organization of the Study

The remaining chapters of this study are organized as follows: Chapter 2 contains a review of related research on the history of religious education, the current status of religious education in America, the growth of religious schools, the conceptual framework of the study, and a summary of existing research; Chapter 3 contains the purpose of the research, the research hypotheses, and a detailed description of the research methodologies utilized in this study; Chapter 4 contains the results of the study; and Chapter 5 presents the summary and discussion of findings, conclusions, significance for theory and practice, and the recommendations for further research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The studies highlighted in this literature review examine research on religious beliefs among middle school and high school students. Various studies are discussed focusing on the relevant factors that develop the religious beliefs of these students. The first section explores the historical perspective of religion in education and historical trends influencing present religious education. Following this section, the current status of religious education in America is examined through relevant research and literature impacting the field of religious education. The third section highlights the growth of religious schools. The final two sections of this literature review provide the conceptual framework of the current research study and a summary of the research existing on the relationship of religious beliefs and student development.

The History of Religious Education

Throughout the Common Era, large segments of mankind have used Biblical principles to guide their lives. In many instances, religion has served as the guiding force in support of many positive societal changes from the abolition of slavery to the provision of equal rights for all citizens. In contrast, religion has also served as the guiding force behind many negative societal changes such as world wars and the oppression of religious freedoms. Intense conflict regarding the place of religion in instruction in American schools has been ongoing for nearly 200 years. “[Conflicts] date back to the beginning of the ‘common school’ movement in the 1830s and were, in many respects, carried over from Colonial days” (Wright, 1999, p. 17).

Common schools, the precursor to today's modern schools, continued to be embroiled in bitter conflict until Horace Mann assured the various religious sects that the Bible would be read, but without comment to discourage the view that one religious sect was more important than another (Wright, 1999). Interestingly, "[n]ineteenth century common schools offered no course on or about religion and made no self-conscious effort to teach the role of religion in American history" (Wright, 1999, p. 17). Instead, religion was stressed throughout the curriculum.

In the late nineteenth century waves of immigration again added to the conflicts that religious education faced. For example, "[b]ickering between Protestants and Catholics in Cincinnati over which translation of the Bible to use for morning devotions in the school was so intense that in 1869, the school board abolished the practice of daily Bible reading" (Wright, 1999, p. 17). Across the country, various city and state laws were enacted to ensure the continued relationship between public schools and religious education. During the 1914–1915 school year, Gary, Indiana provided a released-time religious education format. Students were released from regular school for off-site instruction provided by various churches and synagogues in the community (Wright, 1999). North Dakota, Colorado and Indiana offered high school credit for Bible courses sponsored by religious institutions with Indiana requiring students to sit for a state sponsored Bible examination. With public schools offering credit for Bible courses, a wave of ideas was set into motion allowing for the continuation of the teaching of religion in public schools.

By the 1950s, public education was related to a generalized form of Christianity (Wright, 1999), but this would prove to be short lived. During this time, ". . . American education was feeling the tugs of opposing cultural forces and incipient ideological

conflicts over religion and spirituality” (Wright, 1999, p. 17). It was at this time that a moral and spiritual duty was developed between educational authorities, the government and the major churches resulting in the “Golden Rule” which was said to be shared by the Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews (Wright, 1999). Although this seemed to be a good idea, by the early 1960s, the movement to teach moral and spiritual values based on the Judeo-Christian ethics was coming to an end (Wright, 1999). A number of detractors were against this idea because the “Protestant, Catholic, Jew” formula did not adequately “. . . describe the extent of American diversity [because it did not take into account] race, national origin, language, gender and ideological persuasion . . .” (Wright, 1999, p. 4).

In the midst of these distractions, “the cause for religious pluralism entered the federal courtrooms, and a far-reaching, slow, constitutional process began to unfold” (Wright, 1999, p. 4). Technically, the Supreme Court in three famous cases – *Engle v. Vitale* (1962), *Murray v. Curlett* and *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) – overruled state-required prayer and Bible reading. After these rulings, mainstream education and religion fell in line behind the United States Supreme Court, declaring in effect that the practices of Bible reading and school prayer were only empty gestures, devoid of any real religious value (Wright, 1999, p. 5). “Practically, [these] cases ended the era of common school morality and spiritual ritual” (Wright, 1999, p. 5).

Following these various court decisions, increasing public attention began to focus on the issue of religion and public schools. In 1971, The US Supreme Court developed principles to be followed in cases involving the Establishment Clause which declares that “the state may not establish one religion over others” (Romanowski & Talbert, 2000, p. 135). The principles were first applied in the *Lemon v. Kurtzman* case that involved “two appeals [addressing] the constitutionality of Pennsylvania and Rhode

Island statutes providing state aid to church-related schools” (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 210). The principles became known as the *Lemon* test. To satisfy the Constitution, each of the following questions of the *Lemon* test must be answered in the affirmative:

1. Does the policy or practice have a secular purpose?
2. Is the primary effect of the policy or practice one that neither advances nor inhibits religion?
3. Does the policy or practice avoid an excessive entanglement with religion?

(Lemon et al. v. Kurtzman, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Pennsylvania, et al., 1971)

In the mid-1980s, the objective instruction of religion reemerged and has remained a controversial topic ever since. It is argued that objective study can introduce the existence and history of religion, but it cannot teach the underpinnings of the values and moral standards of religion. Emerging from the resurgence of objective religious education, is the effort to teach character education which bases its teachings on learning “right” from “wrong, which is a central goal of any moral instruction (Wright, 1999, p. 5). Interestingly, the basis of character education is in many ways parallel to the tenets of religious education.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court developed the *Lemon* guidelines, they are now under careful reexamination. In a strong dissent from the 1985 case of *Wallace v. Jaffree*, Justice William Rehnquist indicated “his readiness to abandon the *Lemon* test and the idea of ‘separation of church and state’” (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 213).

[Justice Rehnquist's] views, along with those of Justices Thomas, Scalia and Kennedy, gleaned from several cases, seem to indicate that the Court is moving toward 'accommodation' between church and state, a position different from [the] view previously dominant and embodied in the *Lemon* test. A clear, authoritative statement of [a] new doctrine evolving is yet to be announced (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 213).

With the possibility of "accommodation" between church and state on the horizon, the inclusion of religious education in public schools could be revisited.

For many people, religion provides a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Many aspects of everyday life are shaped by certain religious beliefs acquired in youth. So, it is not surprising that "controversies concerning the appropriate place, if any, of religion in the public schools have occurred periodically since the early days of the Republic" (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 199).

Current Status of Religious Education in America

"A careful examination of the American public school system reveals the stunning fact that American students can receive a high school diploma, and even graduate with honors, without ever confronting a religious idea" (Romanowski & Talbert, 2000, p. 134). An examination of American history textbooks and curriculum guides indicate that religion is often ignored. Failing to include religion in the history of the United States excludes a significant number of ideas, events, people and themes (Romanowski & Talbert, 2000). "Although the First Amendment states that 'Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' the interpretation of these general provisions and their application to

public schools have been problematic” (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 199) (United States Constitution, Article I, Section I).

For several reasons, religion proves to be a troublesome area for most US history teachers. First, teachers seem to be confused about the legality of teaching universal religious constructs. They are fearful of the personal and legal conflicts that may arise with students and their parents. Second, teachers seem to be uncertain as to what should be taught regarding religion and US history. Third, as Loewen (1995) argues, the majority of social studies teachers do not have a solid understanding of the roles religion and faith have played in US history or of the relationship of religion to their particular subjects and disciplines.

As a result, religion is often ignored in public schools due to a misunderstanding regarding the doctrine of the separation of church and state. “The general meaning of the ‘establishment clause’ is [to ensure] that the government and all its policies and employees will remain neutral with respect to religion, neither favoring nor disparaging it” (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 204). The misunderstanding is apparent in the hesitancy of some public school teachers to discuss the subject of religion at all. Some teachers believe that these discussions may be offensive to those with religious beliefs other than those discussed; that discussion may lead to the support of specific religious tenets or to the alienation of those without organized religious beliefs. Other teachers are concerned that they will violate the doctrine of the separation of church and state. It is important to note that religion can be taught without establishing a set of particular principles.

Romanowski and Talbert (2000) write that the lack of discussion in American classrooms is particularly striking. The exclusion of religious education essentially

violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment in that it places a nonreligious curriculum in a privileged position over a religiously-based curriculum (Romanowski & Talbert, 2000). Although the *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania, et al. v Schempp et al* United States Supreme Court decision declared prayers and Bible reading unconstitutional, the decision was quite clear in establishing “that studying about religion is perfectly legitimate . . .” (Fischer, Schimmel, & Kelly, 1999, p. 210).

The Growth of Religious Schools

“Evangelical Christian schools are the fastest growing among all private schools in the United States” (Baker, 1999, p. 1). The movement behind Evangelical Christian schools is fueled in part by the fact that schools are influenced greatly by the predominant values of their surrounding community. “Whether evolution, sex education, and values clarification are part of instruction in a school is determined in great part by the religious beliefs of a community” (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. 209).

Evangelical Christian schools are filled with students whose parents want their kids to have a Christian education and students whose parents are disenchanted with the public school system and are seeking effective educational alternatives that teach the values they wish to pass on to their children. This change in educational demographics finds its foundations in the relationships of family, home and society at-large. Some literature indicates that “many children in the United States are strongly influenced by religion” (Trusty & Watts, 1999, p. 30). “Families provide funds, support, trust, and their children to [public schools], in exchange for the understanding that [the] school will support the values of the home and prepare their offspring to [successfully function] in the world and within [their] family and community” (Cooper, 1984, p. 433). The

findings of Bulman (1999) further support this assumption. He concludes that the social and cultural histories of families would still be used by families to select or reject certain schools. “Furthermore, while many argue that only the wealthy currently have school choices available to them, [his] research suggests that past parental educational experiences in private school or a family’s religious faith often make school choices possible independent of financial resources” (Bulman, 2000, p. 1).

Many Evangelical Christian parents are not seeing their basic core values and principles being taught in the public school system and choose to move their children to educational institutions which are more aligned with their values and principles. Interestingly, Falkowski (2000) notes that for some, “. . . the responsibility in living the tenets of his/her faith in the world is more critical than [the] core religious beliefs” (p. 1).

One of the most important elements to spring from the Evangelical Christian school movement is the ability of the growing parent base to rally support to bring about legislative change, thereby increasing their political power in the United States. The increased growth of private religious education has placed policymakers on notice that parents are no longer willing to sit idle where their children’s education is concerned. As a result, it has become widely accepted that whether public or private, the subject of religion should be included in the American education process because of its contribution to history and education. It is important to note that a fair amount of empirical evidence exists pointing to the positive aspects of religion (Lickona, 1999) within the American education process. For example, Marshall (2000) writes that “. . . there is some evidence that [a student’s religious] faith might help them be more diligent in school” (p. 1).

Although Evangelical Christian schools are successful in implementing their stated goals, there are opponents to the tenets associated with religious schools. These

opponents argue that religion is not a necessary component of education. According to Thayer (1998), the principles of conduct we want young people to live by are common aspects of our culture and independent of religious beliefs. Further, opponents argue that the notion that religion underwrites our behavior has no basis. In their analysis, philosophical and religious theories will begin to emerge as little more than explanations and interpretations or revisions to the way we would have grown up anyway (Thayer, 1998).

Conceptual Framework

Theory is justified by its ability to suggest useful practice (Law, 1999). Although the basis of Glasser's Control Theory, renamed Choice Theory in 1996, is not religious tenets, it is an excellent foundational theory for the Evangelical Christian School movement. Choice Theory is based on the precept that "... the only . . . behavior we can control is our own" (Glasser, 1997, p. 16). For many, this is a difficult lesson to learn and accept. Glasser (1997) writes that "Choice Theory teaches that we are all driven by four psychological needs embedded in our genes: the need to belong, the need for power, the need for freedom and the need for fun" (p. 17). He goes on to say that "[w]e can no more ignore these needs than we can ignore the food and shelter we must have for survival" (Glasser, 1997, p. 17).

Choice theory is based on the satisfaction of one or more of the four psychological needs. Glasser (1997) writes that ultimately we suffer because we are not able to figure out how to satisfy our needs. Further, Glasser writes that Choice Theory is based on the concept of a quality world. This quality world is a "small, very specific, personal world which is the core of our lives because in it are the people, things, and

beliefs we have discovered most satisfy our needs” (Glasser, 1997, p. 17). Most Evangelical Christian school curriculums teach that satisfaction of needs is found in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

In direct contrast to Glasser’s writings is the foundation of stimulus response theory, which is based on coercion through either reward or punishment (Glasser, 1997). Stimulus response theory states that our behavior is almost always motivated by a stimulus that exists outside of us.

For example, most people believe that students stop talking because the teacher asks for silence or that jail sentences deter crime. But [choice] theory points out that this is not the case. Students keep quiet only when they believe it is to their benefit to do as the teacher asks; otherwise they keep talking. And our jails are filled with lawbreakers who have been there before and have not been deterred by that experience (Glasser, 1990, p. 39-40).

Choice theorists stop short of saying that what happens outside of us means nothing.

“What happens outside of us has a lot to do with what we choose to do, but the outside event does not cause our behavior” (Glasser, 1990, p. 41). Ultimately, students make the judgment of how important the outside information is. “The more important they think it is, the more they will do what they are asked and the better they will do it” (Glasser, 1990, p. 41).

To successfully implement Choice Theory within the religious education process, teachers must impart information to students in such a way that will allow the use of such information to better satisfy the needs of students. Students must actively use Choice Theory within their religious beliefs and practices. The basic tenet of most Evangelical Christian schools can be found in choice theory. Evangelical Christian schools provide

students with information on the teachings of Jesus Christ and other Biblical principles in the hope that students will choose to use the information they were taught concerning religious beliefs both in and out of the school setting.

Evangelical Christian schools are based on the ministry of Jesus Christ whose works and teachings throughout The Holy Bible are of a proactive nature. Bartlett (2000) writes that most people live reactionary lives – allowing life to happen and just doing what comes naturally. However, many Christians strive to live proactively, allowing every situation to lead to an appropriate response based on Christian principles (Bartlett, 2000). Bartlett (2000) writes that human beings respond in context. The context is the situation surrounding the response.

The writings of Bartlett (2000) and Glasser (1997) may be incorporated as foundational elements of the religious beliefs of Evangelical Christian school students. To continue to enjoy the fruit of being a pluralistic society, religion and education must continue to incorporate and accommodate one another (Berrier, 1999) in the learning process if we are to find the proper balance between the two. The previously cited literature suggests that private religious schools are far more important to American education than their proportional numbers indicate, further prompting examination into what is being taught in Evangelical Christian schools.

Research addressing the idea of religious education has identified various factors that may influence the relationship between the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students and Christian education. Many current research studies have addressed issues regarding grade level, gender, the number of years of formal Christian education and religious activities outside of school.

The literature indicates that adolescents in different grades behave differently. Miller (2000) notes a difference in the behavior of ninth and eleventh graders. Further, Balamore (1987) found that “grade level differences in reported decision making were found to be caused by specific factors, such as changing patterns in friendship in adolescence, and not due to developmental changes in moral judgment per se” (p. 1). The findings of Miller (2000) and Balamore (1987) indicate the importance of taking a closer look at grade level in the present inquiry.

The independent variable gender was selected to determine whether or not gender has an effect on the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. A common theme emerged from the literature regarding the effects of gender in research inquiries suggesting that there are marked differences in the behavior of males and females. For example, Miller (2000) notes that adolescent girls, especially older ones, are more “. . . affirming of socially competent behavior compared to adolescent boys. [In addition], older adolescent boys were particularly unaffirming of achievement striving compared to younger adolescent boys and older adolescent girls” (p. 2). Further, the research of Bateman (1998) cites various theorists who assert that gender plays a role in ethical decision making and contributes to the differences in moral development growth. Brantmeier (2000) writes that gender is “. . . critical in defining one’s identity . . .” (p. 1).

A review of current literature found various relationships between religious beliefs and the number of years of formal Christian education. For example, Marshall (2000) concluded her research with a number of main findings. Among them, a student’s religious beliefs may influence his or her choice of school and that faith may help these students to be more diligent in school. Further, Marshall (2000) writes that in comparing

K-8 Christian school students with K-8 public school students, that “. . . while [Christian school] students are grateful for the foundation that an early Christian education provides, nearly all of them are vehemently against its continuing to be a ‘shelter’ from the secular world” (p. 1). In addition, the findings of Rozman (1989) “[s]how that the adolescent biblical self-concept is spiritually based and is enhanced through Christian education” (p.2).

Current literature also suggests a relationship between religious beliefs and the amount of time spent at religious activities. The research of Trusty and Watts (1999) indicates that

positive perceptions of religion and frequent attendance at religious activities were related to the following for high school seniors: (a) positive parental involvement, (b) positive perceptions of the future, (c) positive attitudes toward academics, (d) less frequent drug use, (e) less delinquent behavior, (f) fewer school attendance problems, (g) more time spent on homework, (h) more frequent volunteer work, (i) recognition for good grades, and (j) more time spent on extracurricular activities (p. 36).

Further, Falkowski (2000) writes that the majority of a sample of Christian (primarily Protestant) seminary students “. . . endorsed a traditional view of salvation as being freed from sins by the action of Jesus . . .” (p. 1). Further, the results of the research of McCoy Harrison (1999) indicate that “. . . girls who attend church regularly [rely] on their spiritual teachings to help them make important decisions, study for exams, and maintain Christian attitudes during challenging situations” (p. 1). These findings are significant because these Christian teachings, generally taught in religious services, prayer meetings, Bible study classes, or Sunday school classes, may indicate a

relationship between the religious beliefs and the activities of students who participate in these religious activities outside of school. These findings bode well for the inclusion of religious activity participation in the current study.

Summary of Existing Research

The fact that the issue of religious education has continued to persist is not surprising because religious education concerns one of society's most persistent challenges – our youth (Wright, 1999). Common spiritual and moral values are built into the foundations of American education.

For many people, religion provides a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Various aspects of everyday life are shaped by certain religious beliefs acquired in youth. So, it is not surprising that “controversies concerning the appropriate place, if any, of religion in the public schools have occurred periodically since the early days of the Republic” (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 199). Decisions regarding what aspects of religion and what will be taught have been equally problematic. “Equity and propriety are often in the eye of the beholder, and one's religious orientation may strongly influence one's perception of what constitutes objectivity, fairness and legality” (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. 182) within religious education.

“Religion tends to be so important in the lives of people, and so surrounded by powerful emotions, that many want to use the schools to maintain and spread their religious beliefs at the same time that others insist on the complete exclusion of religion from public schools” (Fischer, Schimmel & Kelly, 1999, p. 199). In many instances, the issue of religion in America has gone through stages from teaching and reinforcing religious principles to neutrality and finally to ignoring the subject of religion altogether.

Research conducted by Jeynes (1999) shows a positive relationship between religious commitment and academic achievement among Hispanic and Black children. Further, research conducted by Norman, Richards, and Bear (1998) indicates a significant relationship between religious education and decision making concerning moral dilemmas in elementary and middle school students. The results of the above mentioned studies ultimately lead to a sense of responsibility among teaching religious principles. The research designs of both studies utilized religion as an independent variable to investigate the effectiveness of religion in relation to academic achievement and decision making. Both studies indicate a positive correlation between religious commitment and academic achievement and religious education and decision making respectively.

In the global arena, Downey (1996) writes that the mix of religion and education has also become an increasingly problematic issue within the pervasive secular culture of modern society. For example, a reunified Germany is facing many of the same issues related to religious education as the United States. Traditionally, public schools in West Germany have taught German youth Christian ideals, but with the reunification of the country and two-thirds of those living in the former East Germany not participating in church activities, religion in public schools has faced opposition (Downey, 1996).

The research in this literature review has shown that the issue of religion in education leaves more questions than answers. The previously cited research revealed the depth of this controversy. Given the historical placement of religion in American history, educational practitioners can no longer continue to ignore the importance of religion when educating our children (Romanowski & Talbert, 2000). Romanowski and Talbert (2000) sum up the status of religious education stating, "the natural inclusion of religious perspectives [provides] an important opportunity to help students grasp how

human beings have struggled with and answered questions of meaning and value throughout history” (p. 137).

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this correlational study was to identify the relevant factors that influence the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students who attend a Christian school. This study investigated the relationship between aspects of formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The information obtained in this study was used to further identify, understand, and address the relevant issues concerning the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to investigate the following hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no relationship between middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school regarding the following set of independent variables: grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school.

H₀₂: There is no relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02A}: There is no relationship between grade level and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02B}: There is no relationship between gender and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02C}: There is no relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{02D}: There is no relationship between the average number of hours middle school students spend per week participating in religious activities outside of school and the religious beliefs of middle school students currently attending a Christian school.

H₀₃: There is no relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03A}: There is no relationship between grade level and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03B}: There is no relationship between gender and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03C}: There is no relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H_{03D}: There is no relationship between the average number of hours middle school students spend per week participating in religious activities outside of school and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

H₀₄: There is not a significant difference between the religious beliefs of middle school students and the religious beliefs of high school students currently attending a Christian school.

Research Design

The purpose of this correlational study was to identify the relevant factors that influenced the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students who attend a Christian school. Gay (1996) writes that “correlational research attempts to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables” (p. 15). This study investigated the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The following model, $Y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4)$, is a symbolic representation of the relationship between the dependent variable, religious beliefs, and the independent variables, grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school. The dependent variable (Y) represented the religious beliefs of the study subjects and is operationally defined as the emphasis on how the Judeo-Christian God and His Word, principles, and applications can guide everyday life. The dependent variable was reported as follows. Respondents rated the 64 Religious Belief Questionnaire statements, each being a Likert-scale with a choice range of 1 to 5 points. The results of all 64 items were summed, resulting in a total score index ranging from 64 to 320. These total score results were used to identify the level of religious beliefs among the middle school and high school study subjects. The lower the Religious Belief Questionnaire score, the lower the religious beliefs of the study subject. The higher the Religious Belief Questionnaire score, the higher the religious beliefs of the study subject.

The independent variables were grade level (x_1), gender (x_2), number of years of formal Christian education (x_3), and the average number of hours per week spent

participating in religious activities outside of school (x_4). These variables were recorded utilizing the self-report demographic questionnaire.

Grade level (x_1) was operationally defined as the student classification of either middle and high school. Subjects were identified as sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth graders. Grade level was self-reported through the demographic questionnaire. In the data analysis, grade level was used as both a dichotomous variable and a continuous variable. In the Multiple Regression Analysis, grade level was used as a continuous variable. The independent variable grade level was selected to determine whether or not there was a relationship between grade level and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. In the cross-tabulations, the continuous results were used to show the number of subjects in each grade level as well as the total number of subjects in middle school and the total number of subjects in high school.

Gender (x_2) was operationally defined as the biological classification of being a male or a female human being. Gender was self-reported through the demographic questionnaire. In the data analysis, the dichotomous variable of gender was coded as 0 for males and 1 for females. The results were used to identify the differences between the religious beliefs of the male and female subjects.

Number of years of formal Christian education (x_3) was operationally defined as the number of complete academic years from August to May that the respondent attended. Attending a Christian school for more than five months during an academic year was calculated as one academic year. Number of years of formal Christian education was recorded through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. The independent variable number of years of formal Christian education was selected to

determine whether or not there is a relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

The variable average number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school (x_4) was operationally defined as the number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities such as: religious services, prayer, devotion, Bible study class, Sunday school class, etc. Average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school was recorded through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. The independent variable average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school was selected as a variable to determine whether or not there was a relationship between the average number of hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

Description of Sample

A cluster sampling technique was used in this study which selected an intact group to participate in the study. The sample population consisted of middle and high school students who currently attend a Christian school in Miami, Florida. The study subjects consisted of students currently enrolled in grades six through twelve at Northwest Christian Academy in Miami, Florida. Students at Northwest Christian Academy were selected because Biblical principles are taught across the curriculum. Northwest Christian Academy utilizes an in-depth Bible curriculum to ensure that all students are taught Biblical principles.

Northwest Christian Academy is a ministry of Northwest Baptist Church located in Miami, Florida. The academy provides a Christian based education to 610 students in grades Kindergarten-4 through twelve. The school is accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International and the Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools. There are 341 students enrolled in grades six through twelve at Northwest Christian Academy. There are 48 students enrolled in grade six, 50 students enrolled in grade seven, 48 students enrolled in grade eight, 40 students enrolled in grade nine, 48 students enrolled in grade ten, 49 students enrolled in grade eleven and 58 students in enrolled in grade twelve. The study sample was taken from students currently enrolled in grades six through twelve. Of the 341 middle school and high school students identified at Northwest Christian Academy, 221 participated in the study. This yielded a total participation rate of 64.81% for the study.

The data gathered provided information as to whether or not a relationship existed between the dependent variable, religious beliefs, and the set of independent variables grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

Instruments

Data for this study was collected through the use of a demographic questionnaire and a religiosity questionnaire. All information collected was completely confidential. Written and informed consent was obtained from all participating students and their parents/guardians. Parental/guardian consent was obtained from all students regardless of age (See Appendix C and D).

Demographic Questionnaire.

A researcher designed demographic questionnaire containing four items was used to gather information regarding the independent variables of grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school (See Appendix A).

Religiosity questionnaire.

The second instrument used in the study was the Religious Belief Questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by Dr. Max Apfeldorf and Dr. Walter J. Smith of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The religiosity questionnaire was used to investigate the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The Religious Belief Questionnaire was “designed to assess an individual’s religious beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and practices. The questionnaire is multi-dimensional and covers God, prayer, Bible, good and evil and their consequences, organized religion, religious practices, and duties of daily living” (Apfeldorf & Smith, 1969, A-3) (See Appendix B).

The Religious Belief Questionnaire is a 64-item questionnaire that is self-administered. For example, the following items appear on the questionnaire:

Item 1. I am sometimes very conscious of the presence of God.

Item 24. I can talk to God in prayer and He hears me.

Item 30. I believe the Bible is the word of God.

Item 46. My church (synagogue) is too strict.

Item 57. People should attend religious services once a week, if possible.

Item 62. We should love our friends, but only tolerate our enemies.

Study participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with each of the 64 items by marking the appropriate space on the answer sheet according to the following code:

- A – Complete and thorough agreement
- B – Agree but not completely
- C – Undecided
- D – Disagree but not completely
- E – Complete and thorough disagreement.

One to five points were assigned to each response on the Religious Belief Questionnaire with the greatest number assigned to responses indicating strong belief in religion. The following Religious Belief Questionnaire statements utilized the scoring format, A = 5 points, B = 4 points, C = 3 points, D = 2 points, and E = 1 point: statements 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, and 64. In addition, the following Religious Belief Questionnaire statements utilized the scoring format, A = 1 point, B = 2 points, C = 3 points, D = 4 points, and E = 5 points: statements 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, 17, 18, 23, 25, 26, 31, 33, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 51, 54, 55, and 62. The summed responses resulted in a score ranging from 64 to 320 with higher scores indicating stronger religious beliefs among the study participants.

Reliability Analysis

Gay (1996) defines reliability as the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures. The more reliable a test is, the more confidence one can have that the scores obtained from the administration of the test are essentially the same scores that

would be obtained if the test were re-administered. Gay (1996) writes that “[a] common type of internal consistency reliability is referred to as split-half reliability” (p. 148). The odd-even strategy was used to determine the reliability of the 64-item Religious Belief Questionnaire. “Since longer tests tend to be more reliable, and since split-half reliability represents the reliability of a test only half as long as the actual test, a correction formula must be applied to the coefficient” (Gay, 1996, pp. 148-149). The corrected split-half reliability of the Religious Belief Questionnaire is .95, reflecting a high level of internal consistency (Apfeldorf, 1972). Overall, the Religious Belief Questionnaire is internally consistent.

Validity Analysis

“The most simplistic definition of validity is that it is the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure and, consequently, permits appropriate interpretation of scores” (Gay, 1996, p. 138). Further, Gay (1996) writes that “[a] test is not valid per se; it is valid for a particular purpose and for a particular group” (Gay, 1996, p. 138).

In constructing the questionnaire, items were suggested by scales developed and available in Shaw and Wright’s book, Scales for the Measurement of Attitudes. Three hundred thirty-eight items were collected. During the construction of the instrument, it was realized that the items covered a number of different categories of religious beliefs, attitudes, feelings and practices. It was then decided to identify the categories and to construct additional items for each category to cover the elements common to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Each of the items were placed into one of nine categories which were identified as:

1. God's existence and control of the universe.
2. Prayer.
3. The Bible.
4. Good and Evil.
5. Reward and Punishment.
6. Life after Death.
7. Organized Religion.
8. Religious Practices.
9. Duties of Daily Living (Smith & Apfeldorf, 1969).

The items were numbered consecutively from 1 to 338 and scrambled through a table of random numbers. The items were then evaluated by the Veterans Affairs chaplains. To check the logical validity of each item, 90 theological and rabbinical students, 30 Catholic, 30 Jewish and 30 Protestant were asked to sort the items into the nine categories. "Items assigned to their original categories by 75 percent or more of the judges were retained. The rest were eliminated. The remaining items were examined and all with a standard deviation of more than 1.0 were discarded" (Smith & Apfeldorf, 1969, p. 6). From the remaining items, two parallel forms of the Religious Belief Questionnaire were constructed. Through the aforementioned process, both content and logical validity of the Religious Belief Questionnaire were established.

This study utilized a 95% confidence level which corresponds to a *p* value of .05. Gay (1996) writes that by working at the alpha level of .05, the researcher is stating that "... [t]he chances are 5 out of 100 (.05) that a difference as large (or larger) as the one found would occur just by chance as a result of sampling error" (p. 473).

Procedures

The proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of Lynn University for project approval prior to data collection. A meeting was held on Wednesday, April 18, 2001 with the administrator of Northwest Christian Academy. The following items were discussed: Parent/Guardian Consent Forms, Subject Assent Forms, the demographic questionnaire, and the Religious Belief Questionnaire. The researcher explained the purpose of the investigation to the administrator and reviewed the Parent/Guardian Consent Form and the Subject Assent Form. The researcher answered any questions regarding the research project (see Appendix C and Appendix D).

The researcher visited each middle school and high school class to explain the research project. The researcher informed the students that the research study would investigate the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students who currently attend Northwest Christian Academy. After the explanation, the researcher gave each student two copies of the Parent/Guardian Consent Form and the Subject Assent Form, one copy of each form for the researcher, the other for the parent/guardian and student. Students were asked to return the consent and assent forms signed by Tuesday, May 8, 2001. Additional Parent/Guardian Consent Forms were provided to all middle school and high school homeroom teachers for any students who did not return the forms.

On Tuesday, May 8, 2001, during school hours, under the supervision of the researcher, each study participant received a large brown envelope containing the demographic questionnaire, the Religious Belief Questionnaire and the Religious Belief Questionnaire Answer Sheet. Each envelope, demographic questionnaire, Religious Belief Questionnaire and Religious Belief Questionnaire Answer Sheet was coded to

ensure the responses provided on the demographic questionnaire and the Religious Belief Questionnaire Answer Sheet were matched (e.g. demographic questionnaire – 1, Religious Belief Questionnaire – 1, Religious Belief Questionnaire Answer Sheet -- 1 will be placed in the envelope labeled 1).

At the beginning of each session, each group of students was told that all responses would be kept strictly confidential. They were informed that the demographic questionnaire responses and Religious Belief Questionnaire responses would not be provided to parents, teachers or school administrators. In addition, study participants were informed that all data collected during the research study would be stored in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the researcher for a period of five years.

Study participants were asked to direct all questions to the investigator. Study participants were asked to remove all contents from the envelope to check that each envelope included a demographic questionnaire, a Religious Belief Questionnaire and a Religious Belief Questionnaire Answer Sheet. They were asked to confirm that their envelopes contained all three pieces. The study participants were then asked to make sure that the number that appeared on the outside of their envelope matched the numbers which appeared on each item found in their envelope (e.g. Demographic questionnaire – 1, Religious Belief Questionnaire – 1, Religious Belief Questionnaire Answer Sheet -- 1 will be placed in the envelope labeled 1).

Study participants were instructed to respond to the 4-items on the demographic questionnaire to the best of their ability. Upon completion of the demographic questionnaire, students were asked to sit quietly and wait for further instructions. After the study participants completed the demographic questionnaire, they were instructed to remove the Religious Belief Questionnaire and the Religious Belief Questionnaire

Answer Sheet from the envelope. The researcher informed the subjects that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions posed by the Religious Belief Questionnaire and that they should feel free to answer according to their individual beliefs. As subjects completed the Religious Belief Questionnaire they were given two Hershey hugs candies for their participation.

Seven sessions were conducted. At the conclusion of each session, study participants were asked to place the completed demographic questionnaire, Religious Belief Questionnaire and the Religious Belief Questionnaire Answer Sheet back into the envelope. The researcher collected the envelopes one at a time from the study participants. Study participants were asked not to discuss the session until all study participants had completed the demographic questionnaire and the Religious Belief Questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the appropriate procedures in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 10.0 to test the null hypotheses and investigate each independent variable's relationship to the dependent variable. The discrete data collected in this study were gender and grade level. The continuous data collected in this study were grade level, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school and the Religious Belief Questionnaire score. Grade level was used both as a discrete variable and a continuous variable, depending upon the analysis.

The data was reported in two sections. Section I provided demographic information which included grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian

education, and the average number of hours per week students spent participating in religious activities outside of school. Section II was based on the study participants' responses to the Religious Belief Questionnaire.

The results of the study were examined utilizing several statistical techniques to obtain and analyze data for the investigation of the religious beliefs among middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The major statistical procedures that were utilized in this study included frequency distributions, basic descriptive statistics, correlations, cross tabulations, regression analyses, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients and a *t*-test. Frequency distributions were calculated for the discrete variables.

The minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis were calculated for the continuous variables. The minimum and maximum were calculated to show the range of subject responses and Religious Belief Questionnaire scores. The mean (*M*) was calculated for each continuous variable to show the arithmetic average. The standard deviation (*SD*) was calculated to measure the variance of the scores around the mean. Correlational analyses were conducted on the dependent variable, Religious Belief Score, and the independent variables, grade level, years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school, to determine the correlation between the variables.

Cross tabulations were conducted by grade and gender on the demographic information provided. Multiple regression analyses were conducted on the data to analyze the combined effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. This procedure was used to weight each predictor (independent) variable so that the predictor variables in combination would give the optimal prediction of the criterion (dependent)

variable (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). Additionally, the Beta weights (B) were calculated to identify the strength, direction and statistical significance of the each independent variables relationship with the dependent variable. A coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to show the total amount of variance of the dependent variable which was explained by the set of independent variables. The F statistic was calculated to determine if the combined effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable was statistically significant. The “ t ” statistic was calculated for each independent variable. Additionally, a t -test was conducted to determine the difference between the middle school and high school subjects’ religious beliefs. The .05 alpha level was set for all analyses conducted which rejected all null hypotheses at this level.

Chapter IV

Results

This study examined the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school with regard to their gender, grade level, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school. In this chapter, the demographic characteristics of the sample, the statistical methods used, and the research findings of the study are discussed. Four null hypotheses and eight sub-null hypotheses were analyzed using frequency distributions, descriptive statistics, cross tabulations, correlation analyses, Pearson product-moment correlations, multiple regression analyses, and a *t*-test.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. Further, this study investigated the relationship that these students believe a formal Christian education has on their religious beliefs. The information obtained in this study was used to understand whether or not there is a relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The following independent variables were measured to determine their relationship to the dependent variable, Religious Belief Questionnaire score: grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The demographic questionnaire used in this study recorded grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school for each study participant. The data from the demographic survey was tabulated and analyzed to provide a complete picture of each variable and to highlight any similarities and differences between and within the middle school and high school groups. Additional information regarding a description of each group was gathered through a cross-tabulation between grade level and gender. The gender groups were further analyzed in the study to determine whether there were any differences between each group in how they responded to the demographic survey questions in regard to the number of years of formal Christian education and the number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

Data Analysis

Demographics of subjects

A total of 221 middle and high school students participated in this study. The study participants' grade levels ranged from six to twelve. Of the 221 subjects, 38.5% ($n = 85$) were identified as middle school students and 61.5% ($n = 136$) were identified as high school students. Of the 85 middle school subjects, 35.3% ($n = 30$) were sixth graders, 34.1% ($n = 29$) were seventh graders, and 30.6% ($n = 26$) were eighth graders. Of the 136 high school subjects, 19.9% ($n = 27$) were ninth graders, 23.5% ($n = 32$) were tenth graders, 22.0% ($n = 30$) were eleventh graders, and 34.6% ($n = 47$) were twelfth

graders in this study. More than half, 54.8% ($n = 121$), of the subjects reported that they were female while 45.2% ($n = 100$) reported that they were male (see Table 1).

Descriptive Statistics of Selected Variables

To describe and measure the dependent variable, religious beliefs, and the independent variables, grade level, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school, the following descriptive statistics were reported for each: mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewness, and kurtosis. Within the sample population, the grade level minimum was 6 and the maximum was 12 with a grade level mean of 9.27, a standard deviation of 2.10, a skewness of $-.153$, and a kurtosis of -1.327 . The subjects reported a minimum of one year of formal Christian education and a maximum of 14 years of formal Christian education with a mean of 5.79 years, a standard deviation of 3.46, a skewness of $.287$, and a kurtosis of $-.903$. Subjects reported a minimum of 0 hours and a maximum of 25 hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school with a mean of 5.98 hours, a standard deviation of 4.71, a skewness of 1.573 , and a kurtosis of 2.875 . The minimum Religious Belief Questionnaire score was 122 and the maximum was 320 with a mean of 274.63, a standard deviation of 28.47, a skewness of -2.051 , and a kurtosis of 7.610 (see Table 2).

Cross Tabulations of Variables

Two cross tabulations were conducted, one between gender and middle and high school classification and one between gender and grade level. Of the 85 middle school subjects, 31.8% ($n = 27$) were classified as middle school males and 68.2% ($n = 58$) were

Table 1

Demographics of Subjects: Grade Level, School Classification and Gender (N = 221)

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Grade Level		
6	30	13.6
7	29	13.1
8	26	11.8
9	27	12.2
10	32	14.5
11	30	13.6
12	47	21.3
School Classification		
Middle School	85	38.5
High School	136	61.5
Gender		
Male	100	45.2
Female	121	54.8

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Selected Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Grade ^a	6	12	9.27	2.10	-.153	-1.327
Years ^b	1	14	5.79	3.46	.287	-.903
Activities ^c	0	25	5.98	4.71	1.57	2.875
Score ^d	122	320	274.63	28.47	-2.051	7.610

^aGrade indicates the grade level of the subjects.

^bYears indicates the number of years of formal Christian education of the subjects.

^cActivities indicates the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

^dScore indicates the Religious Belief Questionnaire score.

classified as middle school females. Of the 136 high school subjects, 53.7% ($n = 73$) were classified as high school males and 46.3% ($n = 63$) were classified as high school females. Among the subjects that were classified as sixth graders, 30% ($n = 9$) were classified as males while 70% ($n = 21$) were classified as females. Of the 29 seventh graders, 17.2% ($n = 5$) were classified as males while 82.8% ($n = 24$) were classified as females. Of the 26 eighth graders, 50% ($n = 13$) were classified as males while 50% ($n = 13$) were classified as females. Of the 27 ninth graders, 51.9% ($n = 14$) were classified as males while 48.1% ($n = 13$) were classified as females. Of the 32 tenth graders, 56.3% ($n = 18$) were classified as males while 43.8% ($n = 14$) were classified as females. Of the 30 eleventh graders, 46.7% ($n = 14$) were classified as males while 53.3% ($n = 16$) were classified as females. Of the 47 twelfth graders, 57.4% ($n = 27$) were classified as males while 42.6% ($n = 20$) were classified as females (see Table 3).

Gender Group Differences

No major differences were noted between the two gender groups in response to the demographic questions and the scores of the Religious Belief Questionnaires. The male subjects ($n = 100$) reported a mean of 5.59 ($SD = 3.61$) years of formal Christian education while the female subjects ($n = 121$) reported a mean of 5.97 ($SD = 3.34$) years of formal Christian education. Male subjects reported spending a mean of 5.6 ($SD = 4.69$) hours per week participating in religious activities outside of school while female subjects reported spending a mean of 6.29 ($SD = 4.73$) hours per week participating in religious activities outside of school. Additionally, male subjects scored a mean of 272.87 ($SD = 31.76$) on the Religious Belief Questionnaire while female subjects scored

a mean of 276.09 ($SD = 25.48$) on the Religious Belief Questionnaire. All subjects, regardless of gender, reported a mean of 5.79 ($SD = 3.46$) years of formal Christian education, a mean of 5.98 ($SD = 4.71$) hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school, and a mean Religious Belief Questionnaire score of 274.63 ($SD = 8.47$) (see Table 4).

Correlational Analyses

Three correlational analyses were conducted to identify the variables that are highly correlated using the data collected from: all subjects, the subjects classified as middle school students, and the subjects classified as high school students. Three Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were identified using the data from all subjects. Non-directional two-tailed tests were conducted for all analyses.

When all subjects were analyzed, the variables of grade level and the number of years of formal Christian education rendered a positive correlation ($r = .272$) with a statistical significance level of .01 indicating that as grade level increased, the number of years of formal Christian education increased. The variables, number of years of formal Christian education and the Religious Belief Questionnaire scores, have a positive correlation ($r = .140$) with a statistical significance level of .05 indicating that as the number of years of formal Christian education increased, religious beliefs also increased. The variables average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities and the Religious Belief Questionnaire score have a positive correlation ($r = .192$) with a statistical significance level of .01 indicating that as the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school increased, the religious beliefs of middle and high school students also increased (see Table 5).

Table 3

Cross tabulations Between Gender and Grade Level

Grade Level	Male		Female	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
6	9	30.0	21	70.0
7	5	17.2	24	82.8
8	13	50.0	13	50.0
9	14	51.9	13	48.1
10	18	56.2	14	43.8
11	14	46.7	16	53.3
12	27	57.4	20	42.6
Total	100	45.2	121	54.8
School Classification				
Middle ^a	27	31.8	58	68.2
High ^b	73	53.7	63	46.3
Total	100	45.2	121	54.8

^aMiddle indicates middle school subjects.

^bHigh indicates high school subjects.

Table 4

Gender Group Differences

	Years ^a	Activities ^b	Score ^c
Males			
<i>n</i>	100	100	100
<i>M</i>	5.59	5.60	272.87
<i>SD</i>	3.61	4.69	31.76
Females			
<i>n</i>	121	121	121
<i>M</i>	5.97	6.29	276.09
<i>SD</i>	3.34	4.73	25.48
Total			
<i>n</i>	221	221	221
<i>M</i>	5.79	5.98	274.63
<i>SD</i>	3.46	4.71	28.47

^aYears indicates the number of years of formal Christian education of the subjects.

^bActivities indicates the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

^cScore indicates the Religious Belief Questionnaire score.

Table 5

Correlational Matrix: All Subjects ($N = 221$)

	Grade ^a	Years ^b	Activities ^c	Score ^d
Grade ^a				
Pearson Correlation	1.000	.272**	.036	.015
Sig.		.000	.592	.821
Years ^b				
Pearson Correlation	.272**	1.000	.123	.140*
Sig.	.000		.067	.038
Activities ^c				
Pearson Correlation	.036	.123	1.000	.192**
Sig.	.592	.067		.004
Score ^d				
Pearson Correlation	.015	.140*	.192**	1.000
Sig.	.821	.038	.004	

^aGrade indicates the grade level of the subjects.

^bYears indicates the number of years of formal Christian education of the subjects.

^cActivities indicates the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

^dScore indicates the Religious Belief Questionnaire score.

* $p = .05$

** $p = .01$

The data collected from the subjects classified as middle school students did not yield any statistically significant correlations. Additionally, three correlations were identified using the data collected from subjects classified as high school students. The variables years of formal Christian education and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school yielded a positive correlation ($r = .174$) with a statistical significance level of .05 indicating that as the years of formal Christian education increased, the average number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school also increased for the high school subjects. The variables years of formal Christian education and the Religious Belief Questionnaire score have a positive correlation ($r = .195$) with a statistical significance level of .05 indicating that as the number of years of formal Christian education increased, the religious beliefs of the high school subjects also increased. The variables Religious Belief Questionnaire score and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school have a positive correlation ($r = .205$) with a statistical significance level of .05 indicating that as the religious beliefs increased, the average number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school increased for high school students (see Table 6).

Multiple Regression Analyses

Several multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the data collected from all subjects, the middle school subjects, and the high school subjects. The data was used to determine the relationship between the dependent variable, religious beliefs, and the set of independent variables which included: grade level, gender, number

of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

Multiple regression analysis for null hypothesis H_{01} yielded an R^2 of .052 indicating that the independent variables accounted for 5.2% of the variance leaving 94.8% of the variance unaccounted for thereby indicating that the independent variables represent a minimal proportion of the variance in the dependent variable. The analysis yielded an F statistic of 2.971 ($p = .020$) with statistical significance level of .05 indicating a high level of statistical significance in the relationship between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable. The small R^2 indicates that the set of independent variables are not the right set.

The data collected from the middle school and high school subjects indicated that the independent variable grade level has a small negative effect ($B = -.017$, $t = -.233$) on the dependent variable, although it is not statistically significant ($p = .816$). The independent variables gender ($B = .033$, $t = .488$, $p = .626$) and years of formal Christian education ($B = .121$, $t = 1.730$, $p = .085$) have small positive effects on the dependent variable, Religious Belief Questionnaire scores, although the values are not statistically significant. In addition, the independent variable average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school ($B = .175$, $t = 2.620$, $p = .009$) has a small positive statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. The small positive statistically significant effect of this independent variable indicated that as the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school increased, the more the religious beliefs of the sample population increased (see Table 7).

Therefore, null hypothesis H_{01} must be accepted. There is no relationship

Table 6

Correlational Matrix: High School Subjects ($n = 136$)

	Grade ^a	Years ^b	Activities ^c	Score ^d
Grade ^a				
Pearson Correlation	1.000	.155	.022	-.089
Sig.		.071	.796	.305
Years ^b				
Pearson Correlation	.155	1.000	.174*	.195*
Sig.	.071		.043	.023
Activities ^c				
Pearson Correlation	.022	.174	1.000	.205*
Sig.	.796	.043		.017
Score ^d				
Pearson Correlation	-.089	.195*	.205*	1.000
Sig.	.305	.023	.017	

^aGrade indicates the grade level of the subjects.

^bYears indicates the number of years of formal Christian education of the subjects.

^cActivities indicates the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

^dScore indicates the Religious Belief Questionnaire score.

* $p = .05$

between middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school regarding the following set of independent variables: grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school (see Table 7).

The second Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted using only middle school students to test null hypothesis H_{02} . The analysis yielded an R^2 of .057 indicating that the independent variables accounted for 5.7% of the variance leaving 94.3% of the variance unaccounted for thereby indicating that the independent variables represent a minimal proportion of the variance in the dependent variable. The analysis yielded an F statistic of 1.213 and a significance level greater than .05 ($p = .312$) indicating no statistical significance in the relationship between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable (see Table 8).

The data collected from the middle school subjects indicated that the independent variable, number of years of formal Christian education, had a small negative effect ($B = -.067$, $t = -.614$) on the dependent variable, although it is not statistically significant ($p = .541$). Additionally, the independent variables gender ($B = .135$, $t = 1.223$, $p = .225$), average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities out side of school ($B = .160$, $t = 1.471$, $p = .145$), and grade level ($B = .133$, $t = 1.203$, $p = .233$) have small positive effects on the dependent variable, Religious Belief Questionnaire scores, although the values are not statistically significant.

Therefore, multiple regression analysis indicates that null hypothesis H_{02} and sub-null hypotheses H_{02A} , H_{02B} , H_{02C} , and H_{02D} must be accepted. There is no relationship between the independent variables, grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and the average number of hours spent per week participating in

religious activities outside of school, and the dependent variable, Religious Belief Questionnaire score, for middle school students currently attending a Christian school (see Table 8).

The final Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted using only high school students to test null hypothesis H_{03} . The analysis yielded an R^2 of .082 indicating that the independent variables accounted for 8.2% of the variance leaving 91.8% of the variance unaccounted for thereby indicating that the independent variables represent a minimal proportion of the variance in the dependent variable. Although the R^2 is small, the analysis yielded an F statistic of 2.945 ($p = .023$) with statistical significance level of .05 indicating a high level of statistical significance in the relationship between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable. The small R^2 indicates that the set of independent variables are not the right set (see Table 9).

The data collected from the high school subjects indicated that the independent variable gender ($B = .004$, $t = .043$, $p = .966$) has no effect on the dependent variable. Independent variables, years of formal Christian education ($B = .183$, $t = 2.114$, $p = .036$) and average number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school ($B = .175$, $t = 2.056$, $p = .042$) both had a small positive statistically significant effects on the dependent variable. The small positive statistically significant effect of number of years of formal Christian education on the dependent variable of religious beliefs indicates that as the number of years of formal Christian education increase, the more the religious beliefs of the high school subjects increased. In addition, the small positive statistically significant effect of average number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school on the dependent variable, religious beliefs, indicates that as

this variable increased, the more the religious beliefs of the high school subjects increased. However, the independent variable grade level ($B = -.121$, $t = -1.424$, $p = .157$) has a small negative effect on the dependent variable although it is not statistically significant (see Table 9).

Therefore, Multiple Regression Analysis indicates that null hypothesis H_{03} and sub-null hypotheses H_{03A} and H_{03B} must be accepted. To the contrary, sub-null hypotheses H_{03C} and H_{03D} must be rejected. There is no relationship between the independent variables grade level and gender and the dependent variable, Religious Belief Questionnaire score, for high school students currently attending a Christian school (see Table 9). However, there is a small positive statistically significant relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school, and the dependent variable, Religious Belief Questionnaire score, for high school students currently attending a Christian school (see Table 9).

t-Test Analysis

A two-tailed *t*-test was conducted for null hypothesis H_{04} to determine the difference between the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The *t*-test indicated that the middle school subjects ($n = 85$) had a mean score of 273.11 ($SD = 31.68$) on the Religious Belief Questionnaire while the high school subjects ($n = 136$) had a mean score of 275.59 ($SD = 31.68$) on the Religious Belief Questionnaire. The *t*-test ($t = .630$, $p = .530$) indicated that the scores did not differ significantly at the .05 level. Additionally, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances indicates that variances for middle school and

high school subject's Religious Belief Questionnaire scores do not differ significantly from each other ($F = 1.982, p = .161$). Therefore, t -test analysis indicated that null hypothesis H_{04} must be accepted. There is no difference between the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school (see Table 10).

Table 7

Multiple Regression Analysis: All Subjects (N = 221)

$R^2 = .052$

$F = 2.971$

$p = .020^*$

Independent Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Gender	.033	.488	.626
Years ^a	.121	1.730	.085
Activities ^b	.175	2.620	.009*
Grade Level ^c	-.017	-.233	.816

^aYears indicates the number of years of formal Christian education of the subjects.

^bActivities indicates the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

^cGrade Level indicates middle school classification, subjects in grades six, seven and eight.

* $p = .05$.

Table 8

Multiple Regression Analysis: Middle School Subjects ($n = 85$)

$R^2 = .057$

$F = 1.213$

$p = .312^*$

Independent Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Gender	.135	1.223	.225
Years ^a	-.067	-.614	.541
Activities ^b	.160	1.471	.145
Grade Level ^c	.133	1.203	.233

^aYears indicates the number of years of formal Christian education of the subjects.

^bActivities indicates the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

^cGrade Level indicates middle school classification, subjects in grades six, seven and eight.

* $p = .05$.

Table 9

Multiple Regression Analysis: High School Subjects ($n = 136$)

$R^2 = .082$

$F = 2.945$

$p = .023^*$

Independent Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Gender	.004	.043	.966
Years ^a	.183	2.114	.036*
Activities ^b	.175	2.056	.042*
Grade Level ^c	-.121	-1.424	.157

^aYears indicates the number of years of formal Christian education of the subjects.

^bActivities indicates the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

^cGrade Level indicates high school classification, subjects in grades nine, ten, eleven and twelve.

* $p < .05$.

Table 10

Difference Between Middle School and High School Religious Beliefs (N = 221)

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

$F = 1.982$

$p = .161$

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
School Classification			
Middle	85	273.11	22.52
High	136	275.59	31.68

* $p = .05$.

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Statement of the Problem

Questions regarding the place of religious education in American schools date back nearly 200 years. During this time, researchers have reported various findings regarding the importance and appropriateness of Christian education. “During the 1960s and 1970s, the number of Evangelical Christian schools exploded across the United States. This rapid growth [combined with the struggle to rear children with moral and spiritual values] continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s” (Lindsey, 1998, p. 1) leading “. . . to the continuing discussion regarding Christian education’s purpose, nature and identity” (Kuhl, 1998, p. 1) within the American educational arena. As a result, Berrier and Lance (1999) contend that religion and education continue to maintain a somewhat uncomfortable coexistence faced with continued issues of incorporation and accommodation within the educational arena.

Methodology

This study investigated the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The following input-output model is a symbolic representation of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables: $Y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4)$. The information obtained in this study was used to further identify, understand, and address the relevant issues concerning the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students. A total of 221 Northwest Christian Academy students in grades six through twelve participated in the study.

The dependent (output) variable (Y) represented the religious beliefs of the study subjects. The dependent variable was measured as follows. Respondents rated the 64 Religious Belief Questionnaire statements, each being a Likert-scale with a choice range of 1 to 5 points. The results of all 64 items were summed, resulting in a total score index ranging from 64 to 320. These total score results were used to identify the level of religious beliefs among the middle school and high school study subjects.

The independent variables were grade level (x_1), gender (x_2), number of years of formal Christian education (x_3), and the average number of hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school (x_4). These variables were measured utilizing the self-report demographic questionnaire.

Grade level was self-reported through the demographic questionnaire. In the data analysis, grade level was used as both a dichotomous variable and a continuous variable. In the Multiple Regression Analysis, grade level was used as a continuous variable. This independent variable was selected to determine whether or not there was a relationship between grade level and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The results were used to identify the differences between the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students.

Gender was self-reported through the demographic questionnaire. In the data analysis, the dichotomous results were coded as 0 for males and 1 for females. This independent variable was selected to determine whether or not there was a relationship between gender and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. The results were used to identify the differences between the religious beliefs of the male and female subjects.

Number of years of formal Christian education was measured through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. This independent variable was selected to determine whether or not there was a relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. In the data analysis, the results were used to identify the relationship between years of formal Christian education and the dependent variable, religious beliefs.

Average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school was measured through self-report utilizing the demographic questionnaire. This independent variable was selected as a variable to determine whether or not there was a relationship between the average number of hours per week spent participating in religious activities outside of school and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The primary objectives of this study were to a) examine the relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle school students, b) to examine the relationship between Christian education and the religious beliefs of high school students, and c) to examine the differences between the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school. Each examination was conducted using a set of independent variables which included: grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent participating in religious activities outside of school. This study also gathered demographic data of the study participants in order to provide a composite picture of the middle and high school

subjects. This data was further analyzed to determine if there were any significant differences between the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students.

The findings of this research study indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in the religious beliefs of the middle school and high school subjects attributable to the set of independent variables which included: grade level, gender, number of years of formal Christian education, and average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school and their interactions.

Of the four null hypotheses and eight sub-null hypotheses examined in this study, two sub-null hypotheses were disproved. The small positive statistically significant effects of the independent variables, number of years of formal Christian education and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school, on the religious beliefs of high school students indicated that sub-null hypotheses H_{03C} and H_{03D} must be rejected. As a result, relative evidence was found to allow the researcher to assert that the religious beliefs of the middle and high school subjects may be affected by other external control factors. These external control factors may include family, community, and even religious denomination. For example, the research of Sloane and Potvin (1985) indicate that family relations are important in respect to the transmittal of religious beliefs to younger generations. Based on the findings of the current research and previously cited research, the aspects of other external control factors should be investigated.

Researchers Gollnick and Chinn (1994) asserted that “[a] major point of disagreement focuses on who should determine the morals that will provide the context of the education program in [our] schools” (p. 209) which, at best, is a nearly impossible task when considering the diversity in America. Many aspects of everyday life are

shaped by certain religious beliefs acquired in youth. As a result, many parents who want to instill religious beliefs and practices in their children send them to schools operated by a religious body (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

Concerning the gender of the 221 study subjects, the researcher found that it was not an important factor in relation to the religious beliefs of the study subjects. For both the middle school and high school subjects, gender had a small positive but not statistically significant relationship with the religious beliefs of the subjects. This finding is supported by previously cited research. The research of Jeynes (1999) indicates that gender does little to explain the increased levels of academic achievement among the religious subjects of his research. In contrast, the research of Trusty and Watts (1999) indicate that female adolescents seem to be more religious than their male counterparts. Considering the findings of previously cited research and the findings of the current research study, gender has little or no relationship to the religious beliefs and attitudes of middle and high school students.

The findings of this study are multi-faceted. Of the 341 possible study participants, 221 (64.81%) participated in this research study. Of those participants, 85 (38.5%) were middle school students and 136 (61.5%) were high school students. The data collected in this study suggests that the middle school and high school subjects had high religious beliefs with 68.26% of the subjects scoring between 236.16 and 303.10 on the Religious Belief Questionnaire and 95.44 percent of the subjects scoring between 207.69 and 320. The Religious Belief Questionnaire has a score index with a minimum of 64, which indicates a low level of religious beliefs and a maximum of 320, which indicates a high level of religious beliefs.

Research indicates that understanding the importance of religion to students and their families is a very effective preparatory tool for effective religious education. The previously cited research of Gollnick and Chinn adds positive support for the high levels of religious beliefs among the study subjects. Religion beliefs influence the way many children in US classrooms think and perceive (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994). This is apparent when looking at the minimum and maximum Religious Belief Questionnaire scores of the middle school and high school subjects. Further, the research of Trusty and Watts (1999) indicate various positive aspects of development for high school seniors who have positive perceptions of religion and frequently attend religious activities.

When analyzing the demographic data years of formal Christian education, both positive and negative relationships were found. The data from this research study does support the perceived benefit of formal Christian education and its relationship to the religious beliefs of the study subjects. However, the data also indicates that the high school subjects benefited more from the number of years of formal Christian education than the middle school subjects. A very small negative relationship exists for the middle school subjects regarding years of formal Christian education while, a small positive relationship exists for the high school subjects. This finding may be attributed to increased years of religious education having a positive impact on the study subjects. Again, the previously cited research of Trusty and Watts (1999) support the findings of this research study in regard to the years of formal Christian education. Further, Romanowski and Talbert (2000) suggest that religious education “. . .will stimulate intellectual and moral thought regarding what is important in life, what young adults deserve in their lives, and how what [they] believe in shapes [their] lives, relationships,

and actions” (p. 6). These findings indicate the importance of increasing the years of formal Christian education.

The relationship between grade level and the religious beliefs of the study subjects provided both positive and negative results. Grade level among middle school subjects indicated a small positive relationship, while the same demographic yielded small negative results for high school subjects. This finding indicated that as grade level increases, religious beliefs decrease. This finding is supported by current research. Smoliak (1998) writes that there were significant changes in the representations of God as children matured. According to Harms (1944), the young child’s religion is simply an extension of parental religion and it is only later in life that the child discovers the religious institution and becomes capable of personal religious decisions. Steinberg (1981) writes that as adolescents mature, the search for self-identity requires some freedom from parental control. These findings support the current research that high school subjects may yield lower levels of religious beliefs than middle school subjects.

The average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school yielded a small positive relationship with the religious beliefs of all participating subjects. An examination according to school classification yielded small positive relationships among the middle and high school subjects. These findings are very important when considering previously cited research. For example, research conducted by Trusty and Watts (1999) found that adolescent religious perception and behavior seem to be important to their social and psychological development, leading to the conclusion that adolescents should be encouraged to develop intrinsic belief systems. Further, “religious values and perceptions . . . can be powerful tools toward problem amelioration” (Trusty & Watts, 1999, p. 37). These findings indicate the importance of

increasing religious activities participation among the middle and high school students in this research study.

Conclusions

The data collected in this research study revealed several incisive facts. Although there are twice as many female middle school subjects ($n = 58$) as male middle school subjects ($n = 27$), male high school subjects ($n = 73$) outnumbered female high school subjects ($n = 63$). More high school subjects participated in the research study than middle school subjects.

When addressing the demographics of gender, religious beliefs, as measured by the Religious Belief Questionnaire, were very close. Males had a mean score of 272.87 and females had a mean score of 276.09. Although a large body of research has been conducted noting varied differences between the two genders, the difference between the male and female subjects of the current research study are very small. This indicates that there is not a significant relationship between gender and religious beliefs among the middle and high school students who participated in this study.

The data focusing on the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school provided a composite of the research subjects' non-school related religious activities. More than half (68.26%) of the research study subjects participated in 1 to 10 hours per week of religious activities outside of school. The activities included religious services, prayer, devotion, Bible study, and Sunday school classes. Many of the subjects participated in three or more of the activities each week. Additionally, more than half (68.26%) of the subjects had been enrolled in formal Christian schools between 2 and 9 years.

Further, the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school seems to be related to the religious beliefs of high school subjects. In addition, there seems to be a relationship between the number of years of formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of high school students. Although these relationships were present for the high school subjects, they were not present for the middle schools subjects.

The data focusing on the value of the relationships between religious beliefs and the set of independent variables grade level, gender, years of formal Christian education, and the average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school revealed engaging information. For both middle and high school subjects, average number of hours spent per week participating in religious activities outside of school revealed a small positive relationship. This relationship was supported by the research of Trusty and Watts (1999) which found that frequent attendance at religious activities can have various positive effects on the lives of high school seniors such as: positive perceptions of the future, positive attitudes toward academics, and less frequent drug use. Based on the previously cited research of Trusty and Watts (1999), it is the assertion of the researcher that the increased cultivation of the participation of religious activities outside of school should continue.

Significance for Theory and Practice

As an educational practitioner, the role of religion in education with respect to the moral structure of America raises many questions. The issues of religion and morality are controversial. Currently, "learning 'right' from 'wrong,' a central goal of any moral

instruction, is . . . a compelling social concern” (Wright, 1999, p. 20). Such compelling social concern is admirable, but on what will these moral values be based?

Trusty and Watts (1999) write that many children in the United States are strongly influenced by religion. Romanowski and Talbert (2000) write that “everyone is guided by a faith in a higher ideal or ultimate concern for their lives that is brought to consciousness and somehow given expression” (p.2). Wright (1999) advocates a revisiting of the tenets of the common school philosophy, which built common spiritual and moral values into the fabric of American public education (p.17). Based on the research of Trusty and Watts (1999), Romanowski and Talbert (2000), and Wright (1999), educational practitioners have an arduous task ahead of them to find just the right mix of religion and education to impart moral values in American children.

Recommendations for Future Research

To further understand the factors affecting the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students currently attending a Christian school, future research should focus on the community, home environment, and activities students participate in and outside of school. Studies in this area may lead to an increased awareness of the importance of religious education within the American educational arena. Further, through increased awareness, educators may be moved to no longer underestimate the importance of utilizing religious teachings in helping their students develop to their fullest potential.

The purpose of this study was to identify the relevant factors which influence the religious beliefs of middle school and high school students who currently attend a Christian school. This study investigated the relationship between formal Christian

education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

It is important to address the inverse relationship between grade level and religious beliefs. It is of interest to the researcher to find the contributing factors to the small negative relationship between grade level and religious beliefs; whether this is attributed to a move from the parental locus of control, the influence of peers, or other factors.

Further research should be conducted to identify, understand, and address the relationship between parental locus of control and the influence of peers and religious beliefs. It is suggested that this study might be replicated to expand the population parameters so that the findings may be generalized to larger populations. Likewise, comparative studies may be conducted to include other types of religious schools and public schools.

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Demographic Questionnaire

1. Grade Level _____

2. Gender
 _____ Male _____ Female

3. Number of Years of Formal Christian Education (e.g. a year of formal Christian education is defined as a complete academic year, August to May). If you have attended for less than one year, please indicate the number of months you have attended.

4. Amount of time you spend per week participating in religious activities outside of school.

Activity	Amount of Time Spent Per Week
Attending religious services (e.g. church, temple, mosque, etc.)	
Prayer	
Devotion	
Bible Study Class	
Sunday School Class	
Other _____	

Religious Belief Questionnaire

Directions: This is a series of statements about religious beliefs. Please read them carefully and answer them with complete honesty. Your reactions to these statements will be kept confidential and will help the researcher understand your religious beliefs.

Are you a member of a religious faith or church?

___ Yes

___ No

___ Don't Know

If you are a member of a faith or church, check which one.

___ Assembly of God

___ Lutheran

___ Baptist

___ Methodist

___ Congregational

___ Pentecostal

___ Eastern Orthodox

___ Presbyterian

___ Episcopal

___ Roman Catholic

___ Jewish Conservative

___ Unitarian

___ Jewish Orthodox

___ United Church of Christ

___ Jewish Reform

___ Other _____

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by marking the appropriate space on the scantron answer sheet according to the following code:

- A – Complete and thorough agreement
- B – Agree but not completely
- C – Undecided
- D – Disagree but not completely
- E – Complete and thorough disagreement

1. I am sometimes very conscious of the presence of God.
2. God is very real to me.
3. The idea of God is mere superstition.
4. God is what makes life real.
5. I am quite convinced of the reality of God.
6. It is childish to believe in a personal God.
7. God is only a product of one's imagination.
8. My daily experience does not convince me of the existence of God.
9. There is an all-wise and all-powerful creator of the universe.
10. God is only what some people call "nature."
11. There are many events which cannot be explained except on the basis of divine action.
12. The idea of God is the best explanation for our world.
13. Belief in God makes life on earth worthwhile.
14. The idea of God is unnecessary with today's advances in knowledge.
15. God is our eternal father who has a personal interest in our welfare.
16. The fact that nature is orderly shows that there must be a God who created it.
17. It is simple-minded to picture any God in control of the universe.
18. If you really think clearly, you can understand that the orderliness of nature does not require that there be a God who created it.
19. God has definite plans or goals which He is working out in the world.
20. God does marvelous things which people sometimes call "miracles."

- A – Complete and thorough agreement
- B – Agree but not completely
- C – Undecided
- D – Disagree but not completely
- E – Complete and thorough disagreement

- 21. I feel spiritually better after prayer.
- 22. Praying quietly is as good as speaking your prayers.
- 23. After a person grows up, he does not need to pray.
- 24. I can talk to God in prayer and He hears me.
- 25. Prayer is for those who are too weak to solve their own problems.
- 26. The only thing people receive from prayer is that it can make them feel good.
- 27. Good results come from praying to God.
- 28. It is never too late to start praying.
- 29. People should pray even outside of religious services.
- 30. I believe that the Bible is the word of God.
- 31. The Bible is mostly stories which came from the minds of men.
- 32. The Bible was written by men chosen by God to tell people His word.
- 33. The Bible is not the word of God.
- 34. Our good actions are rewarded only by the praise and thanks of people we are good to.
- 35. There is an evil spirit working in the world, which some people call “the devil.”
- 36. A person dies when his body dies and never lives again in any way.
- 37. People who obey God’s laws will be rewarded.
- 38. Our good actions are rewarded only by the good feelings they give us.
- 39. God rewards those who are sorry and change their evil ways.
- 40. The idea of rewards and punishments in a life to come is only a product of man’s hopes and fears.
- 41. Man’s body dies, but his soul lives on.
- 42. It is impossible for the soul to live on after the body has died and the brain has stopped living.
- 43. I believe that the soul lives on after the death of the body.

- A – Complete and thorough agreement
- B – Agree but not completely
- C – Undecided
- D – Disagree but not completely
- E – Complete and thorough disagreement

- 44. The belief in life after death is merely a product of the human mind.
- 45. The church works to have peace and good will take the place of hate and fighting in the world.
- 46. My church is too strict.
- 47. The church spreads the teaching of the brotherhood of man.
- 48. Churches do more harm than good.
- 49. The church is the important force in the moral and social life of the community.
- 50. The church deals in empty words and is afraid to face facts.
- 51. The country would be better off if the churches and synagogues were closed and the minister, priests and rabbis were set to some useful work.
- 52. I believe in keeping the Sabbath.
- 53. Laws which keep people from having a good time on the Sabbath protect the good behavior of young people.
- 54. People who speak out for keeping the Sabbath are religious fanatics.
- 55. Keeping the Sabbath is based on childish beliefs.
- 56. Everyone should go to services on the Sabbath.
- 57. People should attend religious services once a week, if possible.
- 58. We should visit the sick when the visit is welcomed by the patient.
- 59. Everyone should be willing to save another person from harm, even with the risk of his own safety.
- 60. We should be willing to do good deeds for others without people knowing about them.
- 61. Everyone should try to avoid hurting anybody.
- 62. We should love our friends, but only tolerate our enemies.
- 63. Everyone should have friendly feelings toward all kinds of people.
- 64. We should help the poor, even if they are not willing to help themselves.

Appendix C

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

This is to inform you that your child's school has been selected to participate in a research project designed to investigate the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school. Your child has been chosen to participate because he/she is in sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh or twelfth grade at Northwest Christian Academy located in Miami, Florida. Each participant will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and a Religious Belief Questionnaire. The Religious Belief Questionnaire is designed to assess an individual's religious beliefs, attitudes, feelings and practices. The goal of this study is to better understand the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

At no time will the identity of any of the study participants be revealed. Participation in this study is voluntary. Any information disclosed will be kept strictly confidential. Demographic questionnaire and Religious Belief Questionnaire responses will be coded so that no names are attached to them. Reports of this information will not include any identifiable data. The results of this research will be published in a doctoral dissertation as well as other possible venues (e.g. professional journals).

This research will potentially contribute to an increased awareness of the importance of a Christian education for middle and high school students. Upon your request, a copy of the dissertation will be provided to you upon final approval from the university. If you have any questions about the project or your child's participation in it, please feel free to ask at any time.

The researcher in this project is Monique N. Igbinoba-Cummings, M.Ed., a doctoral student in the College of Education at Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida. She is conducting this research to satisfy the school's requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership with a Global Perspective. You may contact the researcher at [redacted] or the chairperson of her dissertation committee Dr. William J. Leary, Lynn University, at [redacted]

Two copies of this parent/guardian consent form have been provided. Please sign both copies indicating that you have read, understand and agree to allow your child to participate in the study. Please return one copy to your child's homeroom teacher by May 8, 2001, and keep one for your files.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Monique N. Igbinoba-Cummings

Name of Student Participant (please print) Date

Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

SUBJECT ASSENT FORM

I understand that this research study is designed to investigate the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian high school. I understand that I have been asked to participate because I am in sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh or twelfth grade at Northwest Christian Academy in Miami, Florida. I understand that my participation in this study will involve the completion of a demographic questionnaire and a religiosity questionnaire during school time. The goal of this study is to better understand the relationship between formal Christian education and the religious beliefs of middle and high school students currently attending a Christian school.

At no time will my identity be released without my separate consent. Participation in this research study is voluntary. Any information provided will be protected to the limits allowed by the law. The demographic questionnaire and the Religious Belief Questionnaire will be coded so that no names are attached to them. I understand that the results of this research will be published in a doctoral dissertation as well as other possible venues (e.g. professional journals).

I understand that this research will potentially contribute to an increased awareness of the importance of Christian education for middle and high school student populations. If I have any questions about the research project, the researcher will be available for discussion at any time.

I further understand that the researcher in this project is Monique N. Igbinoba-Cummings, M.Ed., a doctoral student in the College of Education at Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida. She is conducting this research to satisfy the school's requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership with a Global Perspective. I may contact the researcher at [REDACTED] or the chairperson of her dissertation committee Dr. William J. Leary, Lynn University, at [REDACTED]

I have read this form. I understand what it says, and based on this information, I hereby agree to participate in this research project.

Two copies of this subject assent form have been provided. Please sign both copies indicating that you have read, understand and agree to participate in the study. Please return one copy to your homeroom teacher and keep one for your files.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Monique N. Igbinoba-Cummings

Name of Participant (please print)

Date

Signature of Participant

Date