EXPLORING WHY PARENTS CHOOSE TO ENROLL THEIR CHILDREN IN A CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May, 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first acknowledgement and deepest gratitude goes to the greatest educator the world has ever known, a marginalized Jewish Rabbi whose teachings live on indelibly in the hearts and minds of his followers. Jesus not only launched the largest and most multicultural socio-religious movement in the history of humankind. Jesus' teachings on the nature of love and the character of God have touched and transformed me. So thank you, Jesus Christ, for the gift of new life. Thanks also for being my strength and guide throughout my time as a doctoral student.

Second, unmeasurable thanks to you, my Grace. We did it! I'm grateful for your continuous love, affirmation, encouragement, and support that sustained me throughout this journey. I could not have done it without you. You are more amazing than I ever could have imagined when I married you 27 years ago! Words cannot express my love and appreciation.

Third, to my two amazing daughters, Daniella and Stephanie, my "guinea pigs" in Classical and Christian education. I had so much fun teaching you the education I never received. I'm so proud of how you've taken that education and succeeded in your young lives. I will always be your biggest fan (with your Mom) as you continue to achieve all that God has called you to.

And to all other friends and family who prayed for and supported me along the way, including my Mom, thank you!

As for those at Oklahoma State University, I start with Dr. Blum who guided me through the early stages of my doctoral program and was extremely helpful and kind in showing me the ropes. Thank you.

Next came Dr. Bindewald who planted the seeds that germinated into this document. I'm appreciative for your assistance in providing me direction during the early stages.

As for Dr. Zhao—wow—I was captivated as you expounded the philosophy of education and its theoretical foundations. How fun it was to reconnect with the philosophy I studied so long ago through your instruction at OSU. I'm deeply appreciative for seeing me through Chapter V of this dissertation when the chips were down.

Dr. Bailey, thank you for grabbing the baton when I needed input on Chapter VI. I will remember your encouraging emails, graciousness in communication, and your detailed

marginal comments which proved extremely helpful.

Dr. Harris, I'm grateful for your help on my methodology chapter and for your instruction in Qualitative Research II. Dr. Bays, I'm grateful for your presence on my committee and the interest we share together in Classical Christian education.

To all my other friends, colleagues, and fellow students at OSU, thank you! You've enriched my life at various stages of the journey. I'm grateful I shared it with you.

To Mr. Andy Shapleigh, headmaster of Regent Preparatory School in Tulsa, I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to learn more about Classical and Christian education through meeting parents whose children study at Regent. Thank you also for taking the time to meet with me and respond to my numerous emails. I think you are doing an amazing job at Regent and I hope this study will be beneficial to the Regent community.

To the 19 parents whom I interviewed for this study, thanks to you as well. Many of your concerns resonated in my hearts as I listened to your school-selection pilgrimages and your educational values and beliefs. I hope this study will also be of value to you.

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness."

(New International Version, 1984, Psalm 115:1).

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Date of Degree: MAY, 2021

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Major Field: EDUCATION

Abstract: The purpose of this naturalistic inquiry study was to explore parents' rationales for enrolling their children in a Classical Christian education (CCE) school accredited by the Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS). The curriculum of CCE is unique in its biblical and classical (Trivium and Quadrivium) content, its pedagogical progression (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), and its emphasis on the classics and history of Western Civilization. Classical Christian education is growing in hybrid, home, and private religious schools across the U.S.

This study utilized the social identity and secular goods theories (Pelz & den Dulk, 2018) to explore the religious and non-religious factors influencing parents' decision to enroll their children in an ACCS school that teaches CCE. Utilizing 15 semi-structured interviews, observations, and document and artifact analysis to understand parents' meanings about their CCE school decision making, five themes emerged from this study: a) rooting education in a biblical worldview; b) passing on a faith that can become their own; c) a community of like-minded people; d) our kids are being challenged; and e) we kept running into people who sent their kids there.

The themes indicated that parents enrolled their children to ground them in a biblical worldview and to transmit their religious beliefs and values to them. The themes also signified that parents valued the strong and challenging academics that the classical element of the curriculum provided. Further, social networks frequently introduced parents to the school, and the school's like-minded community incentivized annual re-enrollment. This study's findings have implications for pluralism and religious diversity in public education, parental priorities in private religious education, and the importance of belonging, social relationships, and a nurturing environment in school decision making.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"**Education, n.** The bringing up, as of a child; instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. To give children a good *education* in manners, arts and science, is important; to give them a religious *education* is indispensable."

- *Noah Wester's definition of education in his 1828 dictionary (Kendall, 2010, p. 11)*[1]

I discovered Classical and Christian education while residing overseas and researching English-medium curricula to educate my two daughters. Both girls were born and raised in Turkey until our family moved to the United States of America when they were, respectively, nine and eight years old. In Turkey, my wife and I decided to educate them in both Turkish public education and English homeschool curriculum. However, with dozens of available homeschool curricula, we were faced with the pressing question of which one to choose.

I possessed no formal training or initial understanding of Classical and Christian education's content and pedagogy. I stumbled upon it. However, my appreciation for this education deepened over five years of homeschooling my daughters. I found myself excited for each new day of lessons and drawn into my children's learning, which became my learning. I also

[1] Noah Webster's dictionary defined 70,000 words, 12,000 more than *Johnson's Dictionary* published in 1818. Webster's definitions influenced American diction and discourse for generations (Kendall, 2010).

found Classical and Christian education conducive to passing on my religious values and beliefs to my children. My girls learned biblical content and a biblical worldview not only through church on Sunday mornings but also in their curriculum throughout the week. Concurrently, my daughters read liberally from the Greek and Roman classical tradition, which answered metaphysical and ontological questions from a completely different frame of reference.

Over the years my girls were homeschooled in Classical and Christian education, I observed their deepening intellectual inquisitiveness and formation of excellent study habits. My wife and I partially attribute their National Merit scholarships, valedictorian awards, and acceptance into elite universities to the academic foundation and habits they internalized from Classical and Christian education.

During my coursework at Oklahoma State University in the Social Foundations of Education program, I took a class on the history of education in the U.S. While reading primary source material, I discovered many of the prominent features of U.S. education before the Civil War (1861-1865) are implemented into contemporary Classical and Christian education's curriculum and pedagogy. I wondered about factors leading other parents to educate their children with Classical and Christian curriculum and the value parents ascribe to it.

The Rebirth of Classical and Christian Education in the U.S.

Advocates conceptualize Classical and Christian education in the U.S. as a revivification and resurgence of colonial and antebellum educational practice as opposed to a novel development. In 1980, modern Classical and Christian education was introduced by parents who simultaneously launched private religious schools in three different locations (Topeka, Kansas; Moscow, Idaho; and South Bend, Indiana), each without the others' knowledge. Classical and Christian education's influence grew after the publication of Wilson's (1991) book, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*. A founder of the Logos School in Moscow, Idaho, Wilson (1991; 1996; 2003) articulated Classical and Christian education as a unique *pedagogy, content, and worldview*. His conceptualization provided the philosophical and pedagogical foundations for one stream of this embryonic schooling

movement. In 1994, Wilson was instrumental in the formation of the Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS) to train educators and accredit schools *in his conceptualization* of Classical and Christian education, henceforth referred to as Classical Christian education and abbreviated CCE.[2]

Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise, a mother-daughter duo, further popularized Classical and Christian education with their publication of *The Well-Trained Mind* (1999), an accessible manual for homeschooling parents, who desired a more ancient and holistic pedagogy that was Classical and Christian. According to Sherfinski (2014), *The Well-Trained Mind* was

> revolutionary in that it went beyond the traditional packaged or self-designed eclectic homeschooling curricula and made possible for thousands of homeschoolers a new form of coherent, rigorous education that helped mother-teachers to acquire a classical education along with their children. (p. 176)

Three years after its publication, ACCS-accredited schools doubled in number as parents now had a new, classical and Christian framework within which to instruct and advocate on behalf of their children and to band together to launch CCE schools throughout the U.S. (ACCS, n.d.-b).

In 2007, ACCS membership doubled again to 218 schools. Moderate growth followed until 2015 (ACCS, n.d.-b). In 2013, the 280 ACCS-affiliated schools constituted almost 2% of all non-Catholic private religious schools in the U.S. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2013). From 2015 to 2019, ACCS membership growth exploded, increasing from 234 to 304 schools (ACCS, n.d.-d). As of July 2019, 40,000 students in 46 states and seven foreign countries are studying CCE in 304 ACCS-accredited schools (ACCS, n.d.-b; ACCS, n.d.-d). Besides, Markos (2019) asserted that, when considering curricular variations and modalities through which Classical and Christian can be

[2] I henceforth refer to the educational pedagogy, content, and worldview that Wilson and the ACCS espouse as CCE. However, I refer to the synthesis of Classical and Christian education throughout history, in contemporary homeschooling, and in non-ACCS schools as Classical and Christian education and not CCE.

delivered, a conservative estimate of homeschoolers engaged in some form of Classical and Christian education is well above 100,000 students.

A Brief History of Classical and Christian Education

Since Classical and Christian education has a 2,500-year pedigree, it is of paramount importance to outline its genesis, historical developments, and contemporary articulations to situate this study. My intention in this historical survey of Classical and Christian education is not to equate the ACCS' or Wilson's conceptualization of CCE with a Classical-Christian synthesis during any one historical period. In other words, although the ACCS' and Wilson's understanding of CCE has absorbed many key features of Classical-Christian syntheses through the ages, modern CCE cannot be equated carte-blanc with the Classical-Christian educational fusion of any single historical period.

In regard to the origins of the Classical-Christian educational synthesis, Sherfinski (2014) observed the following:

> Because ancient Christians lived in a classical world, they absorbed the commonsense notions from the dominant culture around them: that civilization is required for existence and that there is already in place a technique for producing perfectly developed human beings. (p. 175)

Augustine (354-430 CE), father of the Western theological tradition, spearheaded the appropriation of classical learning into Christianity during the Patristic Period,[3] likening this endeavor to the Israelites' plundering the silver and gold of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36) before they fled for the Promised Land (Jordan, 2014). According to Kenyon (2012). Augustine believed that Greco-Roman culture's ultimate value lay not in content, but in opportunities for learning and reflecting on

[3] Cunliffe-Jones (1981) labeled the Patristic Period in church history from 100-600 CE, beginning at the end of the Apostolic Period (33-100) and terminating with the beginning of the Middle Ages (600-1350). During the Patristic Period, the Nicene, Chalcedonian, Ephesian, and Chalcedonian Councils hammered out the orthodox doctrinal positions for the Trinity and the deity of Jesus. During the Medieval Period, education and learning centered in monasteries, cathedrals, and then universities, and the Roman Catholic Church became the most powerful institution in Europe. Western Christian theologians undertook synthesizing Christianity with classical knowledge.

humanity, the world, and God. Thus, Augustine advised Christians to discern between what he saw as superstitious Greek and Roman notions and genuine knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences that can be integrated into a Christian framework (Kenyon, 2012). Other church fathers in the Patristic Period like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Basil the Great, and Jerome, also tried to harmonize classical Greco-Roman learning and Neo-Platonic philosophy into a Christian metaphysical and epistemological framework (Cunliffe-Jones, 1981; Kelly, 1978).[4] Martianus Capella (circa fifth century CE) was the first to formally classify the seven liberal arts as the three, word-based *Trivium* of grammar, logic, rhetoric, and the four, number-based Quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music, the same seven liberal arts that contemporary CCE curriculum utilizes (Conrad, 2014).

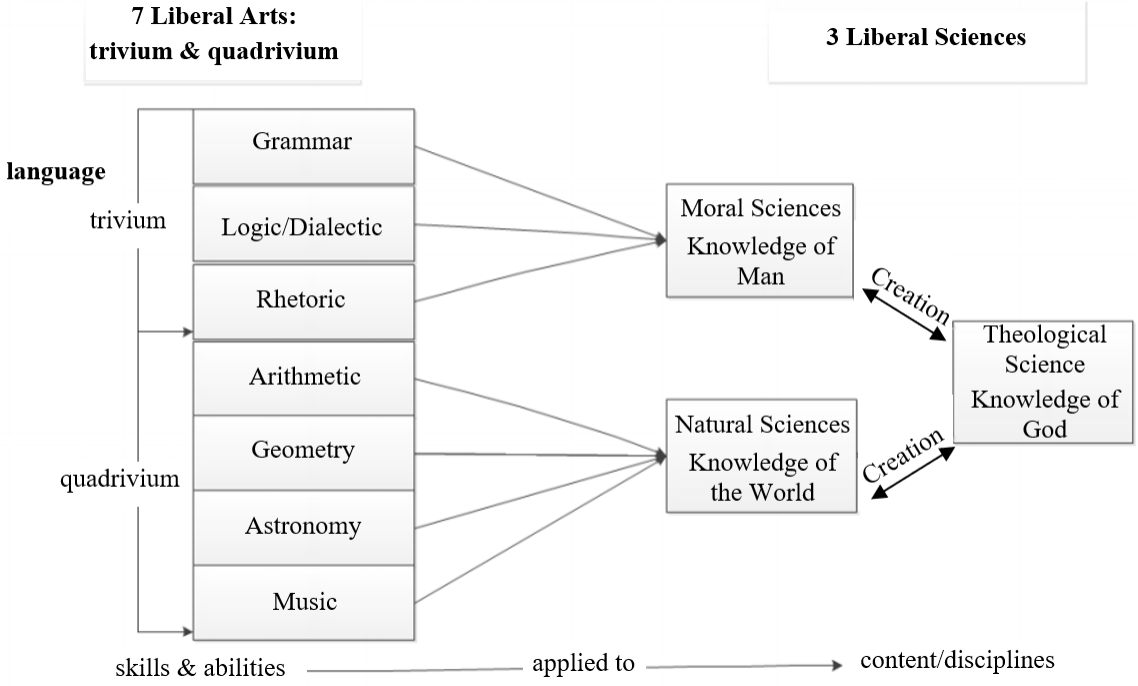
The medieval scholastics replaced Plato and Aristotle's conception of a monadic, impersonal god (the unitive source of all being), with the biblical and Trinitarian personal God. They also integrated Greco-Roman pedagogy, liberal arts, and liberal sciences into their biblical worldview. Figure 1.1 depicts a model for classical education during the medieval period.

According to Jeffrey (2007), from Boethius (480-525) to the 19th century, a biblical worldview was the foundation of education and scholarship in Western civilization. Jeffrey maintained, "It is difficult to find a major European humanist [until the 19th century] whose intellectual formation was not in some way grounded in study of the sacred page" (p. 27-28).

[4] Neo-Platonism went through many iterations in the Medieval Period. But generally speaking, it posited one inclusive, monistic, and impersonal reality, from which all that is has emanated. While Christianity posits creation is *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), Neo-Platonism teaches creation is *ex deo* (out of god). For Neo-Platonism God is the highest level of being, after which is Nous, World Soul, finites souls, souls that descend into bodies, and then non-being (Holmes, 2015).

Figure 1.1

A Model for Classical Education



Note. From "Teaching the Quadrivium," by J. Veith, 2012, *Classical and Lutheran Education Journal*, *6*, p. 11 (http://www.ccle.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/59961345851208CLEJ2012.pdf).

Many changes occurred between the European high medieval period (1300-1500) and the first settlers arriving at Jamestown in 1607: The Renaissance (1300-1700), the Age of Exploration (15th - 17th) century), the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648), and the Scientific Revolution (1550-1700). [5] Even so, Howe (2011) argued that both classical and Christian learning continued to provide educated Europeans and North Americans with a common foundation and frame of reference until the second half of the 19th century.

[5] Through the Scientific Revolution, Newton's mechanistic model of science (with form and motion) supplanted the Greek scientific worldview's categories of forms and essences. The Scientific Revolution is regarded as the foregoer to the modern world.

Royer and Bindewald (in press) examined the prevalence of Classical and Christian education in the U.S. from colonial to contemporary times. Our historical analysis indicated that embedded in colonial American society was a cultural, moral, and ethical vision of life based on Puritan theology. Historians such as Cremin (1970) have estimated that 50% of all printed material in the U.S. from 1639 to 1689 was religiously oriented and that accordingly, personal salvation and personal and societal virtue were primary educational goals. Further, Nieli (2007) argued that a compatibility and connectedness of all knowledge, both sacred and secular, existed in colonial and antebellum America. This epistemic harmony was based upon medieval scholasticism's presupposition that "no contradiction could exist between God's two great gifts to mankind—the created natural order and the divinely revealed Scripture" (p. 315).

Hence, as listed in Table 1.1, Harvard's 1642 prescribed curriculum (no electives existed) to train clergy and other colonial leaders included numerous features of classical education and Christianity: The Trivium, the Quadrivium (astronomy and math, but not geometry and music), three liberal sciences (ethics, physics, and metaphysics), biblical languages, and a catechetical divinity course.

Table 1.1

Harvard's 1642 Curriculum

	8 A.M.	9 A.M.	10 A.M.	1 P.M.	2 P.M.	3 P.M.	4 P.M.
				First Year			
Mon & Tues	Logic; physics				Disputations		
Wed	Greek etymology and syntax				Greek grammar, from literature Hebrew Bible readings		
Thurs	Hebrew grammar				Hebrew Bible readings		
Fri	Rhetoric				Rhetoric	Rhetoric	
Sat	Catechetical divinity	Commonplaces		History; nature of plants			

Second Year

	8 A.M.	9 A.M.	10 A.M.	1 P.M.	2 P.M.	3 P.M.	4 P.M.
Mon & Tues		Ethics; politics				Disputations	
Wed		Greek prosody and dialects				Greek poetry	
Thurs		"Chaldees" grammar				Practice in Chaldee: Ezra and Daniel	
Fri	Rhetoric	Declamations	Rhetoric		Rhetoric	Rhetoric	
Sat	Catechetical divinity	Commonplaces		History; nature of plants			

Third Year

Mon & Tues			Arithmetic geometry; astronomy				Disputation
Wed	Theory of Greek [style]	Theory of Greek [style]	Theory of Greek [style]		Exercise in Greek style, both in prose and verse		
Thurs		Syriac grammar					Practice in Syriac; New Testament
Fri	Rhetoric	Declamations	Rhetoric		Rhetoric	Rhetoric	
Sat	Catechetical divinity	Commonplaces		History; nature of plants			

Note. Hebrew was considered essential to exegete the Old Testament in its original language. Greek's importance lay in exegeting the New Testament and in reading classical Greek literature. Catechetical divinity is a theology course. In the ancient church, catechism was a form of instruction, usually based on the dialectic method, that prepared new converts for baptism. From *American Education: The Colonial Experience: 1607-1783*, by L. Cremin, 1970. Harper Torch Books, p. 214.

CCE advocates maintain that Classical and Christian education was widespread until the Civil War (1861-1865). Further, they maintain that the following four components of Classical and Christian education are incorporated into modern CCE: (a) a biblical worldview, (b) parents' integral role in educating their children (c) education's telos as virtuous human beings, and (d) and the

classical Greco-Roman curriculum and methodology of the Trivium, Quadrivium, and liberal sciences. Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary definition of education included two of these four components: religion's essential role and conceptualizing education's telos as virtue.

Classical and Christian Education's Decline (1860-1963)

In 1862, the Morrill Act overtly challenged the primacy of the classical sciences in favor of modern ones. Eschewing the Trivium and Quadrivium, the Morrill Act established federally subsidized land-grant colleges for the explicit purpose of studying agriculture and engineering. From 1870 to 1920, another wave of immigration occurred, predominantly from non-Protestant eastern and southern European countries. Immigration, modernism, and the call for vocational education based in utilitarianism were factors that chipped away at the common school's broadly Protestant modus operandi and biblical worldview.[6] Henceforth, U.S. education slowly became more secular, fragmentary, specialized, bureaucratized, and thus disjointed from its biblical, classical, and morally formational moorings (Provenzo, 1990; Urban & Waggoner, 2014; Zimmerman, 2002).

John Dewey was an enormously influential educational theorist in the 20th century who accelerated the post-Civil war trends of extracting classical learning, a religious and moral telos, and a biblical worldview from the classroom. Ravitch (2001) emphasized Dewey's popularization of "learning by doing" and creating a "highly individualized approach built around children's interest and the social life of children's community" (p. 67). Rejecting traditional Christian metaphysical schemes and their accompanying eternal essences and absolutes, Dewey viewed truth as instrumental and pragmatic. Thus, according to Knight (1998), Dewey opposed students' passive reception of proscribed knowledge from authorities who have gone before. Rather, students should construct knowledge as they interact with their environment— "learning by doing"—and solve issues interesting and pertinent to their daily experiences.

[6] Modernism is the religious and philosophical view in late nineteenth and early twentieth century that called for advances and insights from science and secular institutions to be incorporated into ecclesial and secular institutions (Pritchard, 1999). Utilitarianism in education was argued for by Thomas Henry Huxley and John Stewart Mills (Jordan, 2011).

Although essentialists continued to push back against progressivist gains, by the 1940s, Dewey's ideology and praxis had spread across the U.S.[7] Progressivists upheld the primacy of the child while essentialists prioritized the subject matter. Progressivists stressed innovative approaches to learning while essentialists favored formal ones. Progressivists were motivated to change the nation's cultural heritage while essentialists sought to preserve it. From 'Christ-centered' to 'child-centered,' from deference to traditional authority (the Bible, parents, and the Classical-Christian synthesis), to determination to implement a novel and progressive approach, the progressivists substantially altered the character of education during the first half of the 20th century. By the end of World War II, homeschooling was largely defunct, and most Americans assumed that school (and not the family) was the primary institution of learning.

Two 1960s Supreme Court decisions *de jure* expelled a broadly Protestant ethos from public education. First, the Supreme Court disallowed school-sponsored prayer (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962), and then, one year later, it struck down school-sponsored Bible reading (*Abington School District v. Schempp*, 1963). One century earlier, when the Wisconsin superintendent was confronted with people proposing the removal of the Bible from the classroom, he retorted, "Christianity is everywhere incorporated in the law of the land," and removing the Bible from schools would endanger "all we now hold dear and sacred: our homes, our country, Christianity, and the Bible" (Kaestle, 1983, p. 101). However, Feinberg and Layton (2014) remarked that after 1963, "The most authorized of all books in the Western tradition, the Bible, became one of the books school districts were most unwilling to teach" (p. 7).

Classical and Christian Education's Dormancy (1963-1980)

With the erosion of Christianity's philosophical foundations in U.S. education—namely, that monotheism offers the ultimate, most coherent, and most plausible explanation of reality and that

[7] In contradistinction to progressivists, essentialists held that school should have a more purely academic end, namely, the intellectual development of students in the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Essentialists also valued greater teacher authority, more explicit instruction, and more emphasis on memorization and student practice (Knight, 2006).

human beings can know God through reason and revelation—three other metaphysical systems began to emerge. First, the metaphysical primacy of individual autonomy and freedom in moral choices which was a derivative of Locke's classic liberalism. This development has resulted in the present-day culture of "rights-talk" and "the notion that sincerity of conviction serves as a moral warrant for the views that one holds" (White, 2018, p. 3-4). Second, the rise of scientific naturalism, which presumes the objectivity of modern scientific knowledge and biological determinism in human beings. Scientific naturalism "lays bare the illusion of our religious past and argues that scientific progress makes the world a better and more rational place" (White, 2018, p. 4).[8] Third, White argued that the metaphysics of power, originating from the views of Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault, also gained traction in the U.S. The metaphysics of power seeks to subvert subjective and oppressive bourgeois conventions and to call for cultural deconstruction and transformation through critical theory.

Multiculturalism is an offshoot of this third metaphysical stream. Gutek (1992) avowed that during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, heretofore assimilatory and homogenizing curriculum, pedagogy, patterns, and practices abated. Thus, a broad, non-sectarian Protestantism was no longer promoted or in vogue in public education, partially due to racial and gender oppression historically associated with and perpetrated by white Protestants (Nieli, 2008).

Dorothy Sayers' Influence on the Rebirth of Classical and Christian Education in the U.S.

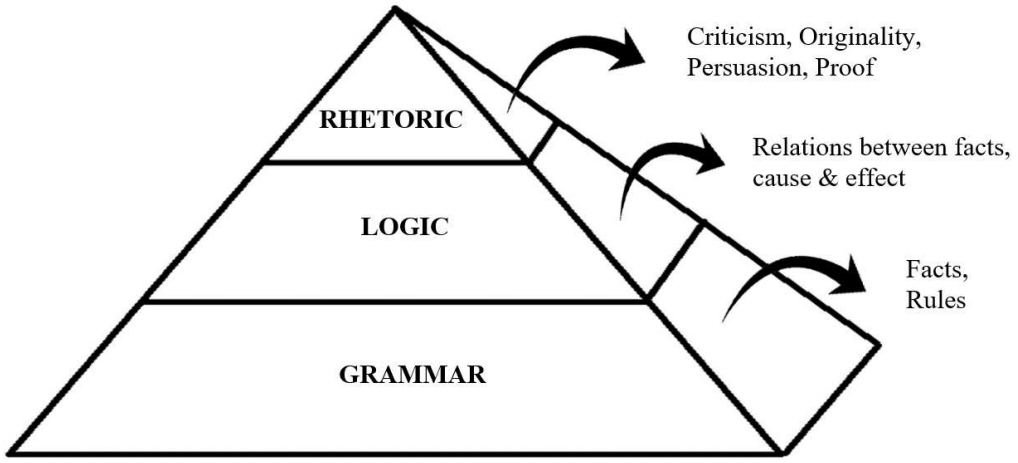
Council & Cooper (2011), Hicks (1999), Littlejohn & Evans (2006), Sherfinski (2014), and Wilson (1991, 1996, 2003) and all have observed Dorothy Sayers' generative influence in the CCE movement. A Middle Ages scholar, detective stories author, Christian apologist, and one of the first female graduates of Oxford University, Sayers argued for reviving the Trivium in an address entitled, "The Lost Tools of Learning" (Wilson, 1991). Sayers' paramount concern was that children in 1940s

[8] In contradistinction to progressivists, essentialists held that school should have a more purely academic end, namely, the intellectual development of students in the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Essentialists also valued greater teacher authority, more explicit instruction, and more emphasis on memorization and student practice (Knight, 2006).

England had lost the tools for critical thinking: "Is not the great defect of our education today … that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils 'subjects,' we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think" (Wilson, 1991, p. 149). Sayers claimed that the remedy was to resurrect the Trivium (literally, "three roads" or "three paths"), an integral component of education in the fifth through 19th centuries that had waned in her day. The Trivium is illustrated in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

The Trivium



Note. Grammar results in students' memorization of copious facts and rules. Logic results in students' learning how to utilize grammar in analysis. Rhetoric results in students' developing skills to winsomely and persuasively communicate the grammar and logic they have studied. From "Teacher self-efficacy in a classical Christian environment versus a traditional Christian environment," by E. Anderson, 2016, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (10109972), p. 30.

Sayers suggested that educators emphasize memorization of nursery rhymes, poetry, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, Bible passages, mathematical tables, dates, places, geographical names, historical periods, and more, for kindergarten through sixth-grade students. Sayers labeled this grammar phase—during which rote memorization for children comes naturally and pleasurably (provided a well-trained teacher and solid curricula are in place)—the "Poll-parrot" stage (Wilson,

1991, p. 154). Sayers adamantly emphasized that children can enjoy memorizing large amounts of information during this stage, especially content that piques their imaginations.

Conceding that overlap between stages naturally exists, Sayers labeled the Trivium's ensuing logic phase (middle school years), the "Pert Stage" (Wilson, 1991, p. 154).[9] During middle school, students are predisposed to persistent arguments as their faculties for abstract and complex thinking begin to develop. Thus, Sayers reasoned that educators should provide students the necessary tools to present their opinions rationally and cogently, channeling their "natural argumentativeness" for good purposes, as opposed to allowing it "run away into the sands" (Wilson, 1991, p. 160). Therefore, formal courses in logic should be emphasized in this curriculum. Finally, Sayers labeled the third sequential stage of the Trivium, rhetoric, the "Poetic Stage," but inadequately developed its ramifications and praxis in her address.

Sayers also contended that the Trivium's sequence of grammar, logic, and rhetoric should apply not only to English and foreign languages, but to all subjects because all disciplines have a grammar, an internal logic, and a need for rhetoric. For example, Sayers stressed that the grammar phase of history should involve copious memorization of dates, timelines, Kings of England ("provided they are accompanied by pictures of costume"), and much more (Wilson, 1991, p. 156). Sayers reasoned that even if kindergarten through sixth-grade students are unable to extract meaning from memorized material, this information still constitutes the building blocks for future learning during the logic phase when they will examine the connections and causalities of their memorized material. Sayers' also noted that grammar instruction must continue during the logic and rhetoric phases because every important factual detail cannot be learned by the sixth grade.

Sayers' Oxford address was never intended to be a comprehensive and detailed policy manual for CCE as evidenced by her inadequate summation of the rhetoric stage. Nonetheless, despite negligible details on how rhetoric interfaces with grammar and logic, Sayers' Oxford address was

[9] Pert means "a saucily free and forward: flippantly cocky and assured." (*Definition of PERT*, n.d.) Merriam-Webster. (n.d.).

seminal for the rebirth of Classical and Christian education in the U.S. and the launch of the CCE movement (ACCS, n.d.-b; Bauer, 2016; Wilson, 1991). Sayers' address persuaded Wilson to establish the Logos School, and her sequential three-step pedagogy undergirds Wilson's voluminous books and articles. Most Classical Christian practitioners and theorists, even those who do not pedagogically agree with Sayers, also refer to the groundbreaking nature of her work

Wilson's Four Theological Assumptions Undergirding CCE

Wilson is the most erudite proponent of CCE and a co-founder of the ACCS. Wilson claimed to build his pedagogy on Sayers' educational theory. Thus, it is important to understand Wilson's articulation of CCE's theological moorings because the research site for this study, Regent, is an ACCS-accredited school.

First Theological Assumption: The Great Antithesis and the Fallen Nature of Humans

Wilson's (1996) educational launching point was the a priori presupposition of the truth of Christianity and thus, an antithesis between Christianity and all other forms of non-Christian thought. Wilson affirmed the Christian worldview's declaration of humankind as fundamentally flawed, prone to evil, and desperately in need of God's grace in Jesus to restore the fractured image of God inherent in every human being. Thus, Wilson did not affirm that education possesses latent power for the moral and spiritual transformation of the student. Rather, he argued education can be utilized to till the soil of students' hearts and minds to prepare it to receive the grace of God. Afterward, education's role is to cultivate ethical, intellectual, and physical growth to maturate students, resulting in their service to humanity and their own individual flourishing. Hence, according to Wilson (2003), although humanism posits that humankind is basically good and thus only needs improvement, CCE views humankind as originally created good but now prone to evil and thus in need of spiritual transformation which stems from a relationship with God. Wilson and most CCE advocates copiously

refer to Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord [and not education] is the beginning of knowledge," as a guiding verse for their curriculum and pedagogy.[10]

Second Theological Assumption: Education is Fundamentally Religious

Wilson (2003) declared, "*All education is religious* [emphasis added]. Consequently, there is no question about whether morality will be imposed in that education, but which morality will be imposed" (p. 26). Surveying history, Wilson observed that Jews, Muslims, and Brahmans have traditionally taught their children according to their respective religious beliefs and practices. Wilson asserted that one byproduct of Dewey's progressivism was public education's unraveling from the broad, non-sectarian Protestant worldview and ethos that permeated it. Although Wilson expressed concern for what he considers the ailments of public education —poor test scores, drugs, bullying, school violence, etc.—his primary justification for CCE was not phenomenological, but theological. Namely, he disagreed with public education's secular foundations and orientation.

Third Theological Assumption: Parents Have the Primary Role in Education

Citing biblical texts such as Deuteronomy 6:4-8, Wilson located the primary responsibility for educating children in the family as opposed to the civil state.

> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them *diligently to your children* [emphasis added] and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Wilson asserted that because children are not born as mature adults in infant bodies, they are unable to search autonomously for truth, beauty, and goodness. Thus, their parents' roles and responsibilities are to teach and guide them morally, spiritually, and intellectually. Youth—whether intentionally or non-intentionally—are always educated by their elders. Indicative of the importance Wilson afforded

[10] This study utilizes the New International Version translation of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

to the parent-teacher is the ACCS' practice of K-2nd graders spending school days at home every week with parents as their educators.[11]

Fourth Theological Assumption: Education Has a Moral Telos

Jordan (2014) asserted that Classical and Christian education is an intellectual means to a moral and spiritual end. Wilson (2003) also envisioned a primarily moral telos for education. First, that the whole person—spirit, mind, will, affections, and body—will love God. Second, that education will maturate and grow all aspects of students (especially minds) so that they actualize their potential, serve their fellow human beings, and flourish in life.

Other Conceptualizations and Variations of Classical and Christian Education

I now turn to alternative conceptualizations of Classical and Christian education and theorists propagating them. Dietrich (2009), referencing Veith and Kern (2001), observed that in addition to CCE, there are five other contemporary models of Classical and Christian education. Dietrich labeled the first Classical and Christian alternative to CCE as "democratic classicism," and argued it is best embodied in the Paideia Schools. Mortimer Adler provided the intellectual framework for the creation of Paideia Schools through his 32-volume Great Books of the Western World (1982) course which, according to Bayon (2003), promoted three wide-ranging goals for instruction: "1) acquisition of organized knowledge; 2) development of intellectual skills, and 3) enlarged understanding of ideas and values" (p. 19). These aims reflect the Trivium's structure: grammar corresponds to the acquisition of organized knowledge, logic to intellectual skills, and rhetoric to a broader understanding of ideas and values. However, the hub of Alder's pedagogical wheel (to which and from which all spokes of learning extend) is not Christianity (as in CCE), but the liberal arts. Adler (1990) declared, "Only the liberal arts can provide the standard for judging excellence in teaching, for

[11] Regent Preparatory School kindergarten through 2nd-graders attend school either Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, or Tuesday and Thursday. On the traditional school days when they are not at school but at home, Regent tasks parents with educating their children from its primary school curriculum.

measuring the efficacy of educational means, or for inventing others; and the liberal arts are neither pagan nor Christian, but human" (p. 179).

The second Classical and Christian alternative to CCE is based on David Hicks' Norms and Nobility (1999). Inspired by Plato, Hicks' model of education linked knowing to doing and thought to action, resulting in cultivation of virtuous norms and nobility in the pupil. Hicks' Classical and Christian pedagogy has been called "moral classicism" because he underscores that a moral telos is essential to learning. He argued that Deweyan pragmatism and moral relativism have ejected this telos from public education.

The third Classical and Christian alternative to CCE is what Dietrich (2009) labeled "liberating classicism," which focuses on struggling students in disadvantaged communities and impoverished areas. Veith and Kern (2001) observed that Marva Collins is one of the best-known proponents for this expression of Classical and Christian education. Collins opened a private classical school in West Garfield Park, a low-income neighborhood in Chicago, to teach black children whom the Chicago Public School system had categorized as disabled (Roberts, 2015). Emphasis in this liberation-oriented model is placed on inculcating virtue and mitigating the propensity to excuse failure in traditionally low-performing schools.

A fourth Classical and Christian alternative is Catholic Classicism. No other institution has been practicing classical education longer or more actively than Catholic schools. Although few Catholic schools would label themselves as "classical and Christian," Catholic education from the time of Augustine onwards has synthesized classical and Christian learning.

The fifth and final Classical and Christian alternative to CCE that Dietrich (2009) cited is classical education by homeschoolers, popularized by Wise Baur's (1999) book: *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to the Classical Education You Never Had*. Predicated on Sayers' and Wilson's (1991; 1996) articulations of CCE, Wise Baur (1999) not only introduced curriculum for grammar (grades one through four), logic (grades five through eight), and rhetoric (grades nine through 12), but she also provided practical, easy-to-follow pedagogical guidance for aspiring yet uninformed CCE

parent-teachers. Wise Baur's (1999) book motivated and inspired parent-teachers to become self-learners by obtaining a Classical and Christian education concurrent to that of their children.

Summary on the History of Classical and Christian Education

Contemporary CCE educators view themselves as benefactors of the 2,500-year-old Classical and Christian educational tradition birthed in ancient Greece and Rome, developed through the amalgamation of Christianity with the classical tradition, robustly practiced in the U.S. until the mid-19th century, and recently re-birthed in 1980. However, Classical and Christian and education is by no means monolithic. Numerous conceptualizations, iterations, and modalities of Classical and Christian education exist. The market for Classical and Christian materials continues to expand. Douglass Wilson and the ACCS which he helped establish promulgates a prominent form of Classical and Christian education in the U.S., which is referred to in this research as Classical Christian education and abbreviated as CCE. This research explores parental attitudes toward CCE in an ACCS-accredited school: Regent Preparatory School in Tulsa, Oklahoma.[12]

Problem Statement

Research indicates parents enroll their children in non-traditional public, private religious, private non-religious, and home schools for a plethora of reasons. Non-religious parental rationales for eschewing assigned neighborhood public schools for alternative schooling include strong and rigorous academics (Holmes Erickson, 2017), teacher quality (Stewart et al., 2009; Teske et al., 2007), class size (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; DiPerna & Catt, 2016; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Stewart et al., 2009), school safety (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016, Stewart et al., 2009), school proximity to home, and a school that shares their values (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013).

Less voluminous research exists exploring why some parents specifically select a private religious school for their children. Parental rationales for selecting a private religious school encompass integrating religion into children's educational experience (Stewart & Wolf, 2014) and

[12] Henceforth, I refer to Regent Preparatory School simply as "Regent."

schools making quality education their highest priority (Bossetti & Pyryt, 2007; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013). Other research indicates parents select a private religious school because they share its values and beliefs (Bosetti, 2004) and desire to restrict their children's exposure to other religions (Cohen-Zada & Elder, 2018). However, no extant literature examines parental rationales *for selecting a school that teaches CCE*. Thus, a knowledge gap exists about this burgeoning educational movement and parental perceptions of it.

One avenue to address this gap is to introduce and utilize theories that encompass educational and non-educational aspects of CCE schools. *The social identity theory* suggests that parents' primary rationale for CCE is not educational, but religious. Parents want to transmit their religious identity, including beliefs and values, to their children. Conceptualized by Pelz and den Dulk (2018), the social identity theory posits that parents act on their religious preferences in school-selection because their religious subcultural identity affords them "a distinguishing and compelling sense of meaning and community" (p. 85). Put simply, parents try to transmit their religious identity to their children through private, religious schooling.

The secular goods theory, also conceptualized by Pelz and den Dulk (2018), suggests that foremost in parents' minds are the non-religious benefits that result from their children attending private religious schools. Parents perceive that private religious schools are the best avenue for their children to obtain "secular goods" such as excellent study habits, self-discipline, and strong academics. Thus, they enroll their children in private religious schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore why parents choose to enroll their children in a CCE school.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What role does parents' religious identity play in their decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school?

2. What other factors significantly influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I utilized for this study is a fusion of two theories conceptualized by Pelz and den Dulk (2018): the social identity theory and the secular goods theory. The social identity theory conceptualizes school choice as an avenue for parents to preserve and transmit their socio-religious identity to their children. Through this lens, I intend to understand the first research question: what role does parents' religious identity play in their decision to enroll their children in a CCE school? Subsumed under the religious identity rubric are the religious values and beliefs of parents because values and beliefs are constituent elements of identity.

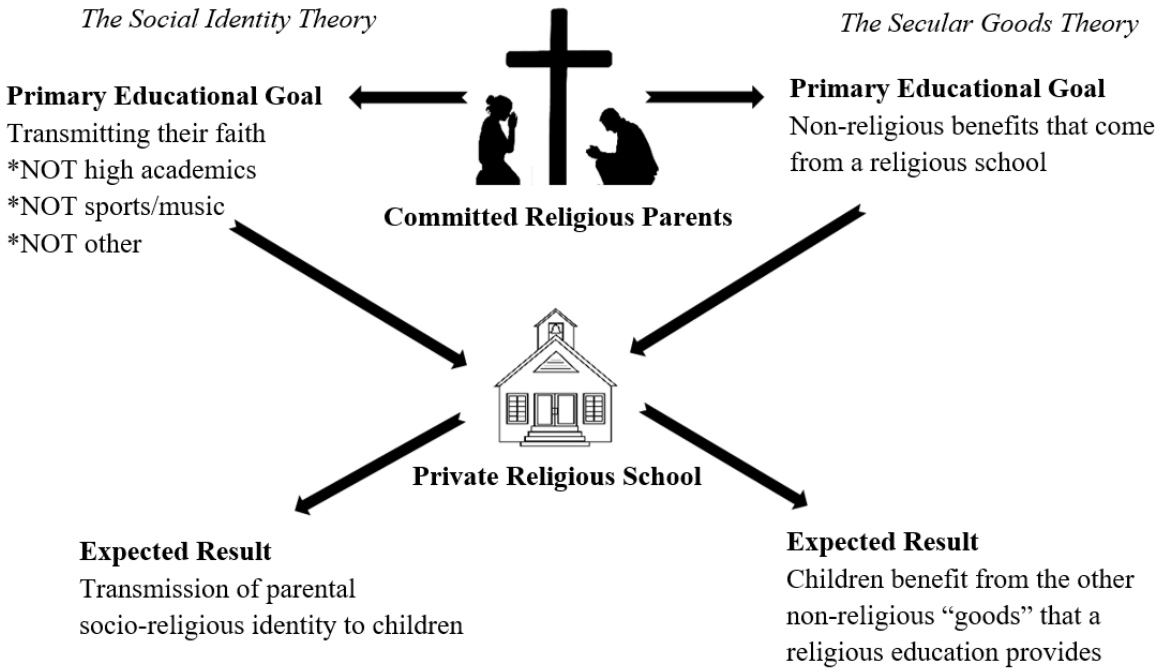
The secular goods theory suggests that parents' demand for religious private schools is anchored in the non-religious benefits a religious school may provide, such as rigorous academics, school safety, and small class sizes. Therefore, parents who enroll their children in religious schools may come from multiple sects and denominations, or from no religious background at all. Through this theoretical lens, I attempt to answer the second research question: what other factors significantly influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school? I designed this question to ascertain the degree to which Regent parents value academics and other non-religious factors in their school-selection process.

In sum, these two theories provide the necessary framework to explore parents' reasons for selecting CCE. These two theories are theoretically distinct but not necessarily mutually exclusive. According to Pelz and den Dulk (2018), they frequently operate in tandem to explain parental choice of private religious schools.

Figure 1.3

The Social Identity Theory and Secular Goods Theories

The Social Identity Theory and Secular Goods Theories



Note. Images are from G. Altmann, (https://pixabay.com/illustrations/cross-humility-devotion-silhouette-4433377/), and V. Oberholster (https://pixabay.com/illustrations/church-building-hall-town-clock-5726268/). Images are copyright-free.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, CCE-related terms are defined in a manner consistent with the ACCS and its most erudite founder, Doug Wilson. "Classical" indicates the curricular and pedagogical priority of the Trivium (Wilson, 2003). "Classical" also signifies an affirmative (and not reactionary) educational posture situated within the broad ethos and centuries-long stream of Western culture.

"Christian" indicates that CCE is not the fusion of two equal educational curricula and worldviews but the enculturation of classical education into Christianity. Ancient Greek and Roman ideas are interpreted through (and incorporated into) a biblical, Christian framework because CCE

proponents contend that Jesus is the foundational value and principle "of all life and thought" (Wilson, 2003, p. 109).

Classical Christian Education (CCE) refers to an educational *pedagogy* (Trivium), *content* (primarily the Trivium and Quadrivium), and *cultural-historical situatedness* (Western Civilization). The goals of CCE are to nurture, mature, educate, and develop the whole person for her or his proper end (Perks, 1992; Wilson, 2003;). ACCS-accredited CCE schools are private institutions governed by independent boards, and not by church affiliations or denominations.

Significance and Contribution

Cohen-Zada and Justman (2019) reported that eight percent of all primary and secondary students in the U.S. are enrolled in private education, and of this eight percent, 80% attend private religious schools. This study adds to the limited literature examining factors that influence parents to send their children to private religious schools. Second, although CCE is a burgeoning educational movement, very few scholars have critically examined it. Addressing a significant gap in the scholarly literature, this research focuses on the contemporary phenomenon and relevance of CCE from a parental perspective within the changing U.S. cultural, social, educational, and historical context. Third, this research gathers, describes, and interprets data on factors that influence parents in their school-selection process of CCE. This study bestows voice and visibility on these parents whose religious beliefs inhibit them from participating in public education due to its dominant and pervasive secular ethos. Fourth, this research illuminates the religious communal components that are important to CCE parents as well as the combination of religious and academic qualities they seek during school decision making. Fifth, this research contributes to the field of education by describing how Classical, Christian, and Classical and Christian education have influenced education within the Western tradition and continue to shape education today.

Summary

Chapter I opened with a snapshot of my homeschooling experience and the reasons studying CCE interests me. Next, I surveyed the histories of modern CCE and Classical and Christian

education to situate my study. I then articulated my problem, purpose statements, research questions, and theoretical framework before providing definitions to guide this study. I concluded by describing the significance of this study's contributions.

Chapter II reviews literature pertinent to my study, beginning with school choice and parental rationales for choosing different schooling models. I subsequently introduce and describe this study's theoretical framework, including the rational choice theory, from which my theoretical framework—*the social identity* and *the secular goods theories*—historically and logically emerged. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology of this study, including the setting, sampling criteria, data sources, data analysis, and researcher positionality. Chapter III also describes the standards for this study's trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter IV presents the data through richly describing each participant's school-selection journey. Next, Chapter V interprets this study's findings, presenting five themes emerging from the data. Chapter VI concludes this study by discussing the findings and their implications, suggesting actions stemming from this research, and proposing future research ideas.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter II includes a literature review of related literature on school choice and parental rationales for choosing religious and non-religious schools, as well as research examining the CCE model of schooling. This chapter also elaborates and justifies the theoretical framework of this study—the combination of the social identity theory and the secular goods theory—and the rational choice theory from which the theoretical framework is historically and logically developed. Chapter II concludes with a summary.

Literature Review

The literature review addresses three topics pertinent to my research. First, I detail the historical origins and development of school choice after *Brown v Board of Education* (1954). This historical development contextualizes studies that examine parental rationales for school choice. Second, I survey studies investigating the values and thought processes involved in parents' selection of public and *non-religious* private schools and then proceed to *religious* private schools. Third, I review CCE-related literature to further situate this study.

Historical Origins and Development of School Choice

Foreman (2005) argued that the political left had a significant role in the discourse, scholarship, and growth of school choice in the aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Faced with abysmal educational opportunities in their neighborhoods and strong resistance to

integrating into predominantly white schools, black nationalists, civil rights organizers, and some members of the liberal political establishment pioneered the concept of school choice "to meet the needs of poor and working class [sic] black children" (p. 1290). The *free school movement* that developed through the 1950s and 1960s had as many as 800 schools offering free lunches and included curriculum that focused on civil rights and women's liberation, as well as the arts and self-expression. Foreman stressed that these free schools "were a direct challenge by left-leaning reformers and progressive educators to the existing educational establishment" (p. 1300). They were an attempt to break the historical arrangement of students attending schools in their own locality, an arrangement that propped up segregation because most blacks and whites lived in different neighborhoods (Garcia, 2018).

Milton Friedman was prominent economist and statistician who thought deeply about integrating free market principles in U.S. society. His article, "The Role of Government in Education" (1955), spawned a concurrent movement for school choice on the political right. Friedman expressed concern over the government assuming three major roles in education: legislating, financing, and administrating. While comfortable with legislating and financing roles, Friedman (2006) contended that the government's administrating resulted in a de facto monopoly and "nationalization" of education not justifiable on economic or free-market grounds (p. vii). Friedman also remarked that this administration infringes upon parental liberty and responsibility for children's education.

Thus, Friedman proposed a system of school vouchers through which government gives educational credit to parents, and thus enables them to make the best decision (private or public) for their children. Friedman envisioned shifting government subsidization of education from the supply side (schools) to the demand side (parents). The precedent for this idea was the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly referred to as the GI Bill), which granted money to qualified U.S. veterans for use at an educational institution of their choice. Friedman argued for a gradual de-nationalization of education. However, his ideas immediately clashed

with the interests of the well-funded National Education Association, and thus, his voucher philosophy initially gained little traction.

School Choice in the 1970s Through the 1990s

Logan (2018) argued that the magnet school movement of the 1970s emerged from the free school movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Magnet schools are public schools created to incentivize suburban whites back into urban districts and disincentive "white flight" from urban districts by providing theme-based academic offerings in the arts, sciences, math, or unique instructional programming like the International Baccalaureate (Smrekar and Goldring, 1999; Rossell, 2005). Frequently located in minority neighborhoods, magnet schools receive financial assistance from the federal government.

A second approach originating in the 1970s that increased school-choice options were tax credits and tax deductions. By the mid-1970s, 17 states offered a tax credit or deduction for families with children attending private or public schools or colleges (Logan, 2018).

Controlled school choice, a third avenue for school choice that developed in the last quarter of the 20th century, emerged "as a means to provide parental choice while maintaining racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic balance in schools" (Logan, 2018, p. 5). An amalgamation of court orders and district and state policies, controlled school choice allowed parents to prioritize their choices of schools but did not guarantee parents unrestricted access to their top choice (Garcia, 2018). For example, the Racial Imbalance Law of Massachusetts enabled racial minorities to send their children to white-majority schools to achieve better socioeconomic and racial diversity. Overall, controlled school choice was unpopular because it encompassed busing and driving children substantial distances to and from schools which exacerbated white flight.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*. It was highly critical of U.S. public education. The report observed the U.S. falling behind its global competitors because of the deteriorating academic quality of schools. Chubb and Moe (1990), originators of the rational choice theory (discussed later) empirically analyzed the High

School Beyond (HSB) and the Administrator and Teacher Survey (ATS) studies, concluding that greater school choice is the best antidote to low achievement in U.S. schools. Chubb and Moe published a book, *Politics, Markets, & American Schools* (1990), which described their research and argued that strong academic outcomes should be the preeminent goal of U.S. education.

Subsequently, Wisconsin began implementing a fourth mode of school choice: school vouchers. Although vouchers were initially reserved for nonsectarian schools, the Milwaukee School District eventually opened access to parochial schools. Ohio also enacted a school voucher program when Cleveland allowed public vouchers to be used at private and parochial schools. In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), the Supreme Court determined that redeeming public vouchers at private and sectarian schools is constitutional because of neutrality with respect to religion:

> It [the Ohio voucher program] provides benefits to a wide spectrum of individuals, defined only by financial need and residence in a particular school district. It permits such individuals to exercise genuine choice among options public and private, secular and religious. The program is therefore a program of true private choice. (Garcia, 2018, p. 30)

Clear prioritization of parental rights and choice undergirds the Supreme Court's ruling. According to the Court, vouchers, in and of themselves, do not promote religion (Garcia, 2018).

A fifth school-choice model that emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century was charter schools. Charter schools are publicly-funded schools administered by a private, independent board. Charter schools are unhindered by district policies in exchange for stronger accountability that comes through parental involvement (Junge, 2014; Mondale and Patton, 2001; Rushing, 2001). A hybrid of public and private schools, charter schools are required to accept all applicants. If the school lacks sufficient space, a lottery system determines admittance. Democrats endorse charter schools for providing education to minority and underserved communities. Republicans support them because they are another entrée to greater school choice.

Sixth, as increasing modalities of school choice became legislated realities across the U.S., the heretofore marginalized homeschooling movement fought for legal recognition throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, eventually achieving it in all 50 states in 1993 (Lines, 2000).

School Choice in the 21st Century

Parental appetite for school choice has shown no signs of abating in the 21st century. Magnet schools (discussed above) are one avenue of school choice. Charter schools are a second. Approximately 3 million children attend over 6,100 charter schools in 42 states (Center for Education Reform, n.d.; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, n.d.; Wang et al., 2019).

Private schools, with an enrollment of 5.8 million students, are a third vehicle of school choice. About 80% of private school students (4.64 million) attend private religious schools (Wang et al., 2019),

Fourth, homeschooling is rapidly increasing as a school-choice alternative. The number of homeschoolers doubled between 2000 and 2016 from 1.7 to 3.3 million students (NCES, 2018). More recent post-COVID-19 statistics from Gallup revealed the percentages of American children now being homeschooled are between 9% and 10% of all students (Brenan, 2020). However, Brewer & Lubienski (2017) claim that obtaining accurate data on the number of homeschoolers nationwide is difficult because of its decentralized nature and because many states do not record homeschooling numbers.

Fifth, most states permit intra- and inter-district open enrollment, which affords students the possibility of transferring to a public school outside their residential neighborhood, space permitting (Education Commission of the States, 2020).

Vouchers are a sixth avenue of school choice, but available in only five states: Arizona, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Arizona has the highest percentage of students receiving a voucher (6.3%) while Wisconsin records the greatest number of total students receiving vouchers (Grube and Anderson, 2018).

A seventh (and the most recent) modality of school choice is an educational saving account (ESA). Garcia (2018) stated,

> ESAs allow eligible families to opt out of enrolling their children in a public school. Instead, families can access 90 percent of the allotted state per-pupil amount that would have been spent on their children had they been enrolled in a public school" (p. 41).

ESAs, unlike school vouchers, are distributed directly to parents who decide where to spend the money. ESAs are available in five states.

An eighth and rapidly growing avenue of school choice is virtual education, whether full-time or supplemental. Online public charter schools like K-12, Calvert, and Connections are amalgamations of charter schools and homeschooling. These charter schools are governed by state charter policies and are publicly funded, but children study at home with no financial disadvantage to their parents because curriculum and textbooks are provided by the public charter school.

Residential choice, the ninth and most prevalent vehicle of school choice, shows no sign of receding (Peterson, 2010). Parents with sufficient financial means continue to move into desirable school districts and thereby exacerbate the stratification of U.S. society along socioeconomic and racial lines (Peterson, 2010).

To summarize, the modalities of school choice in the U.S. have increased markedly since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Moreover, the number of students eschewing their assigned neighborhood school to attend an alternative public or private school is over 20% of the U.S. primary and secondary student population.[13] School choice continues to be a dynamic and flourishing element in U.S. society.

[13] As of 2016, 47.3 million children were attending traditional public schools. Approximately 3 million children attend charter, 5.8 million private religious, and 1.7 million home school, totaling 10.5 million children (not including magnet school and other modalities). This number (10.5 million students) equates to 22.19% of the nation's student population not attending their assigned neighborhood schools.

Factors Influencing School-Choice

Having situated school choice in its historical and contemporary context, I now move to scholarly literature that examines the values, thought processes, beliefs, and other factors influencing parents to move their children from traditional public schools to alternative educational environments. I begin with the dynamics that sway parents to enroll their children in an alternative public or private, non-religious school distinct from the public school assigned to their home address.

Factors Influencing Alternative Public and Private Non-Religious School Choice

Bauch & Goldring's (1995) empirical study utilized questionnaires returned from parents who exercised school choice in Chicago, Washington, DC, and Chattanooga.[14] Based on 565 returned questionnaires on family demographic variables by school choice arrangements, Bauch & Goldring created a percentage distribution table which indicated that the most consistent factor in selecting an alternative public school is high academic performance. However, other factors like safety and proximity also played into decision making.

In their massive empirical study, Schneider et al. (2002) examined parental attitudes and values toward school choice through their quasi-experimental research design, which matched an urban district of choice (Community District 4, NY City) with a similar urban district of non-choice (District 1, NY City), as well as a suburban district of school choice (Montclair Public Schools, Montclair, NJ) with a suburban district of non-choice (Morris School District, Morristown, NJ).[15] Through controlling many conditions that affect school choice, they asserted

[14] Bauch & Goldring's (1995) empirical study examined Catholic, single-focus magnet, and multifocus magnet public schools in close geographic proximity to one another to maximize the possibility of parental choice. Bauch & Goldring (1995) wrote, "All schools had steep competitors among other types of schools of choice, theoretically providing most parents with more than one type of 'choice' option" (p. 5). All twelfth grade students in every school were given questionnaires to take home. The total sample population was 565: 239 from Catholic, 81 from single-focus, and 245 from multifocus magnet schools.

[15] Schneider et al. (2002) utilized Polimetrics Research and Survey Laboratory at The Ohio State University to conduct random telephone interviews of 400 parents in each of the four school districts. All participants needed to have at least one child between kindergarten and eighth grade in a public or private school. Interviewers were given extensive training, and bi-lingual interviewers were available for Spanish-speaking parents. Fifteen percent of interviews were randomly monitored to ensure quality.

they were able "to identify the effects of various contextual and institutional features on the behavior of parents" (p. 60) and to determine what parents wanted from schools. They concluded that when selecting schools for their children, the decision-making process for parents unfolds as follows. First, parents have educational preferences; second, they collect information about potential schools their children could attend based on these preferences; third, they evaluate the attributes of possible choices; and fourth, they select the school that best fits their preferences.[16]

After selecting a school, Schneider et al. (2002) found that parents gauge their schools' and children's performance to ensure their choice was appropriate, and if their choice was a poor one, they seek a different school. They also found that the most important characteristics for *school-choosing parents*, listed in order of importance, are as follows: (a) teacher quality, (b) high test scores, (c) safety, and (d) values. Schneider et al. reported that less important characteristics parents desired were small class sizes, special programs, discipline, same race, economic background, diversity, and location.

According to Schneider et al. (2002), *college-educated parents* (the participants in my research) ranked their desired characteristics in the following order: teacher quality, high test scores; and values. Their study likewise found that *minority parents* valued a quality education, but they rated safety extremely high in contradistinction to middle- and upper-class parents. Schneider et al. concluded that minority parents regard academic performance and test scores highly because they viewed secondary educational success as the gateway to higher education.

Schneider and Buckley's (2002) research into the internet search habits of Washington, DC parents exercising school choice revealed that black parents strongly value rigorous

[16] Schneider et al.'s (2002) description of parents' decision-making process comports with the rationale choice theory discussed later in this chapter.

academics.[17] Schneider and Buckley stressed that safety, health, and religious and moral instruction are also highly regarded alongside academics.

Bosetti's (2004) mixed-method study investigated 29 elementary schools in a large, urban district in Alberta, Canada. Eight public, 10 alternative public, and 11 private schools responded to Bosetti's request to investigate how parental values and beliefs influence school-choice decisions. Bosetti's anonymous survey provided 22 possible preferences relevant to the school-choice process.[18] Follow-up focus groups convened to further explore parental school-selection experiences. The data indicated that among *non-religious private schools*, the top four values parents identify are small class size, shared values and beliefs, teaching style, and strong academic reputation.[19]

Hastings et al. (2005) analyzed data from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina for the top priorities in parents' school selection. Their results indicated that parents highly valued residential proximity. However, parents who strongly desired academic achievement were willing to travel outside their local neighborhood to obtain it.

Roda and Wells' (2013) qualitative study of high-income New Yorkers found that even parents who highly value diversity in their children's school were willing to sacrifice this diversity for strong academics. These privileged New York parents were bothered by segregation and stratification in their city, but they were more concerned with their children gaining access to "the 'best' (mostly white) schools" (p. 261).

Kelly and Scafidi's (2013) study of 754 parents whose children received scholarships under Georgia's GOAL Scholarship Program confirmed the findings of previous research (Bauch

[17] From November 1999 to June 2000, Schneider and Buckley (2002) examined over 2,300 visits to the http://www. DCSchoolSearch.com website and telephone surveys to determine the values and characteristics parents looked for during school selection.
[18] The survey also requested parents write additional factors influential in their school choice that were not listed on the survey.
[19] The survey response rate was 37% (n=412) for public school parents, 37% (n=429) for alternative public school parents, and 34% (n=671) for private school parents (Bosetti, 2004).

& Goldring, 1995; Bosetti, 2000; Bosetti, 2004; Schneider et al., 2002).[20] Out of 21 possible reasons for picking a private school, parents' topmost answers were "a better learning environment (85%), better education (81%), smaller class size (80%), and more individual attention for my child (76%)," all factors that contribute to overall academic success (Kelly & Scafidi's, 2013, p. 10). Further, Kelly and Scafidi found that black parents and parents without a college education "are willing and able to be informed and active education consumers on behalf of their children" (p. 10).

Lincove et al.'s (2016) *ceteris paribus* analysis of school selection in New Orleans among students who applied for a different school in the 2013-2014 year than the ones they attended from 2012 to 2013 also strengthens Bosetti's (2004) findings.[21] Lincove et al. found that among 892 students who ranked both private and public schools, a high value was placed on strong academics.[22]

Thus far, a review of the literature has indicated that strong academics are extremely important for parents, regardless of whether they chose an alternative public or non-religious private school. Many other qualities parents prioritized, like teacher quality, high test scores, and small class sizes, contribute to or can be subsumed under "strong academics." Also, the literature to this point has revealed that the school-choice process is nuanced, multi-dimensional, and interfacing with educational and non-educational factors. Parents have multitudinous and sometimes conflicting preferences, which adds to the complexity.

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[20] Georgia Goal Scholarship recipients are able to use scholarships for private non-religious and private religious schools. Georgia law offers tax credits for private contributions made to Student Scholarship Organizations (SSOs) which then distribute contributed funds to parents to redeem at religious or non-religious schools.

[21] *Ceteris paribus* literally means "if all other relevant elements and factors remained equal or unaltered." Prior to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans operated like a typical urban school district. However, after Hurricane Katrina, traditional school attendance zones were abolished which enabled students and parents to annually submit their school choice for the following year. After their submission, if insufficient slots were available for any particular school, applicants enter a lottery system.

[22] Lincove writes, "To our knowledge, this small group [892 students] reflects the only available simultaneous ranking of voucher and public schools by parents in a US school district. This group represents parents who are at the margin of exiting public schools for a voucher but also willing to remain in the public system, as evidenced by raking both public and voucher schools" (p. 13).

According to Bosetti and Pyryt's (2007) mixed-method investigation of school choice in Alberta, Canada, among 1,871 parents,[23] the *social networks* of parents was also an influential factor in school choice. Catt and Rhinesmith (2016) also affirmed the importance of parents' social networks in their mixed-methods, multi-phase study of 2,056 Indiana parents engaged in school choice. A majority indicated that their most trusted information source was their social network. Specifically, 50% designated their friends or relatives and 26% pointed to their church as their most trusted source. Catt and Rhinesmith's findings also supported Schneider et al.'s (2002) findings, namely, that highly educated parents utilized social networking more than minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) parents in the school-selection process. Middle- and upper-class parents generally have access to more people with useful information about potential school choices than lower SES parents do.

Altenhofen et al. (2016) also contended for the significance of social networks, especially among suburban high-income parents. Asking for closed and open-ended responses from parents in Denver, Colorado, they found that parents depended on their social network when choosing schools and evaluating the effectiveness of teachers.[24] Moreover, since higher-income families generally have "a greater array of social resources and connections to trust when choosing a school," the schooling-selection decision for high-income parents "seems almost effortless" (Altenhofen et al., 2016, p. 3). Altenhofen et al. reported that social network was the most prevalent answer in *open-ended* questions addressed to parents regarding why they chose a charter school.[25] In *closed-ended* questions as to why parents chose a charter school, good

[23] These 1,871 parents come from a total of 31 (public and private) schools in the Edmonton and Calgary jurisdictions. Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) disseminated surveys to parents of students in grades one, three, and six through homeroom teachers.
[24] They also found parents "do their homework" when considering possible schools. I address this in my discussion of the rational choice theory.
[25] School choice was mentioned in 50.63% of the responses, and the second most repeated answer, doing research, was only mentioned in 18.26% of responses.

teachers (91.9%), reputation for academic quality (91.3%), and child safety (83.4%) were the top three reasons.

Bosetti and Pyryt's (2007) mixed-method study found that parental "values and habits serve as a filter to determine what factors, priorities, or utilities they [parents] seek to maximize in their choice of schools" (p. 92). Factors besides strong academics, values, and social network heretofore not mentioned include overall "fit" for children (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013), extracurricular activities (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Lincove et al., 2016), and class size (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; DiPerna & Catt, 2016; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013).

In summary, despite a plethora of factors that parents list as desirable in their school-selection process, the literature consistently reveals that strong academics are highly regarded and prioritized among parents in all racial and SES demographic categories. As aforementioned, several qualities that parents consistently rate highly, such as high test scores, teacher quality, good learning environment, and small class sizes, contribute to or can be subsumed under "strong academics." Holmes Erickson (2017) surveyed and synthesized school choice literature from the previous 20 years and remarked, "I found no study that showed a majority of parents considered only religious instruction, school location, or extracurricular activities *without accounting for academic quality* [emphasis added]" (p. 502). In short, parents who choose alternative public and private schools for their children highly value academic quality, but academic quality is not their sole or primary concern. Parents realize that they are forced to make trade-offs among numerous and sometimes competing values. Accordingly, they do not always choose a school with the strongest academics.

Factors Influencing Private Religious School Choice

In a mixed-methods study, Bosetti (2004) reported the top two reasons parents provide for enrolling their children in *private religious schools*: shared values with the school and strong academic reputation. Bosetti found that among traditional public school, alternative public school,

private non-religious school, and private religious school parents, private religious school parents were the group most likely to weigh their religious beliefs when choosing a school. Less prevalent criteria for selecting private religious schools were teaching style and smaller class sizes, criteria that contribute to and can be subsumed under the rubric of "strong academics."

Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) found that the primary reason parents choose a pryvate religious school is because the school shared their highest prioritization of education and, secondarily, that the curriculum contained religious content.

Utilizing data on church attendance as a proxy for parents' religiosity, Cohen-Zada and Sanders (2008) found that religiosity and religion were linked to the demand for private religious education. In particular, as a region's fundamentalist Protestant religiosity rises,[26] the demand for Protestant schools increases. Correspondingly, as a region's Catholic religiosity grows, the demand for Catholic schools also increases. However, mainline Protestant religiosity does not affect the demand for private religious schooling.[27] Furthermore, Cohen-Zada and Edler (2018) found that parents' choice of religious schools is partly to safeguard their children from contact with other religions, *including secularism*, and to preserve and transmit their own religious beliefs.

Kelly and Scafidi (2013) reported that in Georgia's GOAL Scholarship Program, when asked to choose from a list of 21 reasons with the most important factor for selecting a private school, parents' fifth most frequently given response was "religious education."[28] When asked to

[26] Fundamentalism arose as a movement within Christianity in early 20th century America to affirm the fundamentals of the Christian faith against liberalism's and modernity's rising influence. Fundamentalists affirmed the historicity of the miraculous events recorded in the Bible, including Jesus' virgin birth and resurrection, as well as his deity and second coming (Grenz et al., 1999). I discuss fundamentalism in-depth in Chapter V.

[27] African Methodist Episcopalians, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians are the larger historical denominations generally considered as mainline Protestant. These denominations were formerly a cultural force in American life in terms of prestige and church membership numbers. Today they are frequently divided between traditionalist and progressive factions.

[28] Parents can choose religious or non-religious schools for their children under Georgia's GOAL Scholarship Program. I also discussed this program above under the heading of "Factors Influencing Alternative Public and Private Non-Religious School Choice."

indicate only one reason for selecting a *private religious school*, the most frequent answer was better education (28.2%). However, religious education (28.1%) followed just one-tenth of one percent behind.

Stewart and Wolf (2014) examined the voucher system in the Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington, DC. They engaged in a stratified random sampling technique based on students' grade levels and language spoken at home while gathering qualitative data from 110 families representing 180 students in a longitudinal study occurring over four years. Based on interviews of parents, Stewart and Wolf found that the primary reason low SES parents in Washington, DC pursued a private school was to "integrate religion into their children's educational experience" (p. 43). They also found that strong academics highly motivated parents through their school-choice journey and that the valuation of their preferences can change over time.

The purpose of Catt and Rhinesmith's (2016) multi-phase, mixed-method study of Indiana parents was to "better understand the experiences of private school parents and examine the reasons behind parental religious and non-religious schooling decisions, especially when their children are using a voucher" (p. 1). Catt and Rhinesmith found that the *top qualities* attracting voucher parents to *private religious schools* were religious and moral instruction (85%), morals/character/values instruction (82%), better academics (66%), smaller classes (58%), and safe environment (54%). The three central reasons parents chose *a private school* was religious environment and instruction (39%), better academics (20%), and morals/character/values instruction (19%).

Catt and Rhinesmith (2016) also recorded parents' social networks' prominent role in decision-making: 50% of parents named family or friends and 26% church as their most trusted information source to learn about private schools.

In their quantitative study, Cohen-Zada and Edler (2018) analyzed county-level data and individual surveys, finding that enrollment in private religious schools is driven partly by parental

desire to restrict children's exposure to other religions.[29] They also discovered that the dynamic between religious schooling and socialization has often been overlooked, affirming a link between parental aspirations for kids to adopt their own religious identity and religious schooling as a means to accomplish this goal. Furthermore, they reported that mainline Protestants are not as fervent as Catholics and Evangelicals in preserving or passing on religious identity to their children. Cohen-Zada and Edler posited that "religious groups whose practices are least consistent with public school environment will have the largest shares of their children enrolled in religious schools" (p. 341), and that as a particular religion or denomination increases in numbers, outside forces are perceived as less threatening. Thus, participation in religious school declines.

In Cohen-Zada and Justman's (2019) condensation of their empirical literature from 2003 onward, they indicated that parents' motives for sending children to religious schools are mainly religious. Strongly religious parents are more willing to sustain the additional expenses of private tuition and taxes that support public education. Moreover, parents with a preferred religious denomination generally prefer sending their children to a denominationally-associated school (Cohen-Zada & Justman, 2019).

In summary, similar to parents' choice of non-religious schools, choosing private religious schools is complex, multi-layered, and nuanced. Numerous factors, influences, and dynamics are involved, including parents' social networks. Even so, the literature indicates that parents choose private religious education principally for religious reasons and strong academics (Cohen-Zada and Justman, 2019).

Factors Influencing Private Religious School Choice of Classical and Christian Education

To the best of my knowledge, Sherfinski's (2014) research is the only study examining parental attitudes toward Classical and Christian education. However, Sherfinski's research did

[29] Cohen-Zada and Elder's (2018) data came from NELS:88 (a representative sample of 24,599 eighth grade students conducted in 1998, 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000); ECLS-K (18,644 kindergarteners from over 1,000 schools between 1998-1999); and the Public School Survey of 1999-2000 by the U.S. Department of Education (p. 331-332).

not investigate CCE in an ACCS-affiliated school; rather, it considered Classical and Christian education in a homeschool environment.[30] Sherfinski (2014) utilizes ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, artifacts, and interviews to examine why and how one homeschooling mother-teacher, April, utilized Classical and Christian curriculum. Sherfinski observed that Classical and Christian education's intellectually and spiritually challenging curriculum, pedagogy, and its ability to shape Christian and classical identity were the salient reasons April chose and continued this education.

Additionally, April selected Classical and Christian homeschooling because it "resonated with her desire to be fully devoted to her children" (p. 183). Classical and Christian homeschooling created a daily opportunity for April to concretize her maternal dedication to her boys. Sherfinski also noted April sustained commitment to Classical and Christian education because she saw evangelical Christians like herself as a marginal force in U.S. culture. The curriculum provided intellectual tools to contribute toward a more Christian and, in April's view, a more positive culture. Finally, the curriculum's emphasis on probing the true, good, and beautiful inspired April.

Nonetheless, homeschooling for April in Classical and Christian curriculum was not without its challenges. Significant hurdles included the financial costs of annual curriculum purchases, time commitments, isolation (in a rural area), and gendered burdens (her husband did not significantly contribute to teaching their children). More than that, April regretted that her boys had less agency than other boys their age and missed out on chances to pursue their own interests.

[30] Here I repeat the definitions of "CCE" and "Classical and Christian education" indicated in Chapter I. CCE refers to the educational method, content, and worldview that Wilson and the ACCS espouse. However, I refer to the synthesis of Classical and Christian education throughout history, in contemporary homeschooling, and in non-ACCS schools simply as "Classical and Christian education" and not "CCE."

Summary on Factors Influencing School Choice

Cohen-Zada and Justman (2019) have noted that the most significant underlying factor behind private religious education in the U.S. is the firm constitutional division of Church and State. The Church-State separation disallows public funds to be spent on religious education. Thus, parents who desire to religiously educate their children must seek alternative schooling.

Holmes Erickson (2017), surveying school choice literature over the previous 20 years, contends that three general patterns exist among parents with regard to school choice. First, the literature reflects the consistency of parents' preferences, including academic rigor, safety, teacher quality, religious or moral instruction, class size, and overall fit for children. Second, though not always identified as parents' top consideration, academic quality is consistently and highly valued. Third, based on parental surveys that ask parents to rank reasons for their school choice, parents compromise and make concessions when choosing a school. Parents do not always get everything they want.

However, Holmes Erickson's (2017) study did not incorporate parental motivation for Classical and Christian educational modalities, like homeschooling, parent co-ops, or CCE at ACCS schools. Since limited scholarly literature has been published about CCE and the reasons why parents choose it, this study helps address a knowledge deficit through research that illuminates parental rationales for choosing CCE.

A Review of Literature Examining CCE

I now survey scholarly literature written about CCE. In a conceptual dissertation, Calhoun (1999) examined the roots, establishment, and development of the Trivium and education in antiquity. Calhoun then contrasted ancient articulations with contemporary receptions of the classical and Christian educational tradition. Calhoun determined that Sayers and CCE have modified the Trivium as practiced in the medieval period. Therefore, Calhoun labeled CCE's conceptualization of the Trivium "reformed" (p. iv) and further argued that mainstream secular education's interest in the classical Trivium is geared toward improving

students' capabilities in rhetoric and composition. Thus, it is less comprehensive than the "reformed" approach championed by CCE.

Moreover, Calhoun (1999) asserted that the Trivium's classical roots and formation in late antiquity were a program for education and character development. Examining assorted contemporary formulations of the Trivium, with copious space devoted to Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Proposal* (1982), Calhoun nonetheless concluded that the Trivium proposed by Sayers, applied by Wilson, and later accepted by the ACCS, is the most faithful contemporary reception because it maintains "a remarkable degree of similarity to its classical design" (p. 138).

Bayon's (2003) conceptual dissertation interrogated the goals of a neo-classical education in a modern world. Bayon investigated the vestiges of the liberal arts tradition in contemporary U.S. education, the ancient rhetorical and philosophical educational ideal, Renaissance humanism, modern science, and the modern mind, before arguing for a neo-classical alternative to contemporary education. Bayon observed that Classical and Christian models of education generally anchor justification of their pedagogy and curricula on philosophical and theological grounds which pre-date psychology and the modern social sciences. Bayon acknowledged other shortcomings of CCE.

First, according to Bayon (2003), CCE exhibits "extraordinary dependence upon a brief essay by a modern writer [Dorothy Sayers] unjustly revered as an authority on the content and methods of classical education" (Bayon, 2003, p. 217). Second, the order and importance of logic and rhetoric, historically speaking, are not as ensconced in the Trivium CCE advocates might like to portray them. Third, Bayon argued that excessive emphasis on the Trivium's subjects at younger grades can disadvantage students with limited interest or aptitude in these subjects. Fourth, Sayers' reference to the Quadrivium as subjects that students should study in university is factually inaccurate. Law, theology, and medicine are subjects to be studied at university in the medieval period, not the Quadrivium. Bayon proposed a model and educational vision that integrates Classicalism and Christianity, which Bayon called, "Neo-Classical Curriculum."

Littlejohn and Evans (2006) embraced Sayers' emphasis on medieval pedagogy. Nevertheless, they avowed that, historically speaking, logic and rhetoric have been curricula studied for their own merits and not merely as pedagogical steppingstones to reach and engage other subjects. Likewise, Littlejohn and Evans contended that it is reductionist to confine the "tools of learning" to grammar, logic, and rhetoric as if they alone are springboards into every other subject. The tools of learning, they continued, are multitudinous: medieval syllabi (contrary to Sayers' claim) directed students to engage with all seven liberal arts from day one. In other words, Littlejohn and Evans asserted that Sayers' articulation of the Trivium is too literal, ahistorical, and therefore, unjustified.

Literature Examining Leadership of CCE Schools

Dietrich's (2009) dissertation examined leadership styles of CCE headmasters and their job satisfaction, career aspirations, and job efficacy. Dietrich utilized an instrument labeled CACHE (Christian Classical Headmasters Exploration) for the study. Dietrich found that headmasters are overwhelmingly white, male, highly educated, and yet inexperienced in classroom teaching and administrative experience. Headmasters' most significant role is accountability to their governing board, and secondarily, to "support and train teachers in the use of classical pedagogy" (p. 121). Further, Dietrich (2009) found that job satisfaction is related to headmasters' age, with those over 50 experiencing greater satisfaction. Dietrich also found that CCE schools must expend more resources to "identify, challenge, and train leaders with the schools for headmastership" (p. 126). Dietrich observed that the heightened rigor of CCE schools as compared to traditional Christian schools draws increased enrollment.

Council & Cooper's (2011) regression analysis of CCE headmasters' job satisfaction found that CCE headmasters experience significant satisfaction. They also concluded that headmasters have a deep commitment to Christianity's values and CCE pedagogy. Moreover, headmasters heartily identified with "servant" and "transformational" leadership styles (p. 132).

Council and Couper noted most CCE schools are less than 15 years old, have small student body populations, and are in suburban areas.

Observing that most teachers in CCE were neither educated in CCE nor taught CCE pedagogy in university, Anderson (2016) examined teacher self-efficacy in a CCE environment and compared it to teacher self-efficacy in a contemporary Christian educational environment. Using a casual-comparative research design and the Teacher Efficacy Scale-Long Form, Anderson reported no statistically significant differences "in student engagement or instructional-strategies self-efficacy between teachers in traditional and classical Christian-education settings" (p. 83). In sum, scholarship that examines CCE headmasters and teachers is limited. Extant literature indicates CCE headmasters experience contentment from their work and that teacher self-efficacy in a CCE environment is comparable to self-efficacy in other Christian private schools.

Literature Examining the Efficacy of CCE Curriculum and Spiritual Formation

Dernlan (2013) compared spiritual formation between a CCE and a modern Christian school in the Midwestern U.S utilizing Fowler's Development Theory to explain his findings,[31] intending to examine which type of institution better spiritually forms its students. Dernlan reported that by the time CCE students reach 12th grade, they are more biblically literate and committed to the Christian faith than students who attend traditional Christian schools. In fact, as the age of students increases in CCE schools, so does their commitment level. Conversely, as the age of students increases in modern Christian schools, their Christian commitment decreases.[32]

Dernlan's (2013) explanation for these findings was that the "modern Christian school is often a reflection of the modern public school with the exception of a Bible class or chapel

[31] Dernlan (2013) defined a modern Christian school as "similar in structure, form, and methodological instruction to modern public schools but adds a Christian class and/or Chapel service to the curriculum" (p. 14).

[32] Dernlan (2013) developed a 37-question survey to measure the spiritual formation of fourth-, eighth-, and 12th-grade students at CCE and non-CCE private Christian schools.

inserted into the curriculum" (p. 74). Dernlan surmised that modern Christian schools place God "in a box called 'religion class' or 'weekly chapel'" (p. 74). In other words, Christianity is not deeply integrated across the curriculum. Therefore, Dernlan asserted that "the instructional methodology of the Trivium in classical education could be a contributing factor to the increased levels of students 'always' wanting to live like a Christian" (p. 75).

Vaughan (2018), through a casual-comparative study, examined preliminary scholastic aptitude test (PSAT) scores for CCE schools and compared them to non-classical Christian schools from the 2003-2004 to 2012-2013 school years. Vaughan concluded that students who develop the comprehensive knowledge base (which the Trivium's grammar phase is supposed to effectuate) before engaging in higher cognitive functions (such as analysis, synthesis, and application) scored significantly higher on the PSAT than Christian students in non-CCE schools. Vaughan's results comport with Ediger (2012) and Nasrollahi-Mouziraji (2015), who both argued for mastery of core knowledge via memorization before moving up to higher cognitive levels.

In short, scholars have conducted limited research about CCE since the late 1990s and their and research has focused on the efficacy of CCE's leaders, curriculum, and spiritual formation. Some research has also investigated CCE's historical and philosophical roots as well as contemporary articulations. But overall, researchers have not examined parents' reasons for selecting CCE for their children.

Theoretical Framework

Merriam (1993) asserted that researchers operating with an interpretivist theoretical perspective seek to contextualize, interpret, understand, and describe the phenomena they are observing. Thus, they either generate a theoretical framework from their data or utilize a previously existing theoretical framework to provide structure and direction to their inquiry. In this study, I utilized two theories developed by Pelz and den Dulk (2018) as my theoretical framework to investigate factors that influence the parental choice of a religious private school: the secular goods theory and the social identity theory. Since Pelz and den Dulk generated these

two theories from the rational choice theory, I begin with a description of this theory and pertinent literature.

Rational Choice Theory

The process of school choice—withdrawing one's children from one school and enrolling them in another—requires some measure of rational deliberation and effort from parents. Chubb and Moe (1990) first linked the rational choice theory (which heretofore economists and sociologists had utilized) to parents' school selection. Undergirding the rational choice theory is the assumption that parents act rationally and toward their own greatest utility. They gather and evaluate materials about potential schools that might meet their children's needs. Parents then logically calculate the costs and benefits of potential options and make the most advantageous choice for their children's and their own self-interest (Hernstein, 1990; Krull, 2016).

The rationale choice theory predominated school-choice literature and school planning in the 1990s and early 2000s (Bosetti, 1998; Bosetti, 2004; Fuller et al., 1996; Hatcher, 2006). Theoretically, rational choice was viewed as an extension of parental rights, such as in Levin's (2000) theoretical framework for evaluating vouchers. Levin argued that parents, in a manner consistent with their own preferences, should have the right to choose their children's school because education is an extension of the natural child-rearing rights of parents.

However, the empirical validity of rational choice theory among lower SES groups, especially minorities, began to be questioned in the early 2000s, even by scholars who advocated for its validity among middle- and high-income parents. For instance, Schneider and Buckley (2002) found that parents with little educational background and low SES do not always act rationally in their educational choices for their children: "Low-income and less educated parents…fall for the attraction of nonacademic (and thus "wrong") school attributes" (p. 134). Harris and Larsen (2016) also found that lower SES parents in post-Katrina New Orleans made some "irrational" decisions based on extracurricular activities and proximity to schools.

Nonetheless, they soften their conclusions by underscoring that these parents nonetheless acted on their stated rational preferences for school selection.

Moreover, in her extensive literature review of the last 20 years examining how parents choose schools, Holmes Erickson (2017) attenuated critiques of lower SES parents' rationality is school selection in three ways. First, Holmes Erickson argued that the notion of "correct" and "incorrect" choices is highly subjective and hinging on parental values. If parents value school safety, proximity to home, or religious instruction over academic quality, their choice of lower academic quality cannot be labeled as incorrect or irrational. Second, Holmes Erickson contended that literature over the last twenty years demonstrates low-income parents gather information about school possibilities for their children but collect less information and rely upon a smaller social network than higher-income families. Third, Holmes Erickson found that even though academic quality is not always "the most prized feature" of lower SES parents, scholarly literature still demonstrates that these parents consistently value academic quality.

Bosetti's (2004) and Bosetti and Pyryt's (2007) research also demonstrated that rational choice theory informs parental decision making. Bosetti and Pyryt remarked that parental "values and habits serve as a filter to determine what factors, priorities, or utilities they [parents] seek to maximize in their choice of schools" (p. 92). The underlying assumption is that parents have their own and their children's best interests in mind. Through the school choice process, parents attempt to maximize their families' benefits. Accordingly, Bosetti and Pyryt avowed the need for further research on the rational choice theory to better understand parents' considerations in the school-selection process, especially when choosing religious schools. Bosetti and Pyryt's challenge is part of the impetus of this dissertation.

More recently, Krull (2016) employed the rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory in research analyzing survey results of parental school-selection preferences in Milwaukee. Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) competes with inter-district open enrollment schools, private voucher schools, magnet/specialty schools, and both MPS and non-MPS charter

schools. Therefore, maintaining student enrollment has been difficult for MPS. Krull utilized surveys through six indices to gain a better understanding of parental considerations in school choice: academics, school climate, convenience, school information sources, school community, and social networks. Krull's results indicated that regardless of education or income level, parents valued schools with strong academics and acted in a manner consistent with the rationale choice.

The Social Identity Theory and Secular Goods Theory

Pelz and den Dulk (2018) advocated employing the rational choice theory to explain the religious and non-religious factors behind parental school choice. From the rational choice theory, they generated two concurrent theories to further specify the relationship between parents' religious values and their decisions to enroll children in a private religious school. These two theories—the social identity theory and the secular goods theory—are the *theoretical framework* of this study.

Pelz and den Dulk (2018) generated these two theories from their regression analyses, which predicted "private school market shares between 1993-2011 among different religious groups" (p. 79). For the regression analyses, Pelz and den Dulk merged several public and private state-level educational databases into one vast master file, the U.S. K-12 Schools Database.[33] The dependent variable in their investigation was student enrollment in various private schools: mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, Catholic, other Christian, and non-sectarian. The two sets of independent variables were "religious dimensions within state populations over time" (p.

[33] They created their database from the following databases. First, the National Center of Education Studies (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) from 1993-2011 demographic, fiscal, enrollment, and other information on public schools and districts, but is restricted to charter and public schools. Second, the NCES' biennial surveys from 1993 to 2011 which are located in the Private School Universe Survey (PSS) database. They added the religious identity of each school as a variable, thereby merging these two files. Third, they included racial, religious, and economic data from the Friedman Foundation's and Alliance for School Choice's websites, the U.S. Census' Current Population Survey, and the Federal Reserve Economic Database (FRED). Fourth, the Cooperative Congressional Elections Studies (CCES) and Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Surveys ascertain religion at the state level.

90),[34] and environments for school selection within each state.[35] The control variables included quality of public school education based on data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

From their study, Pelz and den Dulk (2018) found that parents may be motivated to enroll their children in religious schools by two considerations they viewed as maximizing utility. One consideration is the "secular" benefit associated with a religious education, such as quality teachers, rigorous academics, and the inculcation of good study habits into students. Private religious schools, they confirmed, attract students both from within and without the school's theological and denominational heritage. Put another way, their data affirmed that the increasing avenues and options for school choice are opening up "religious private schooling to new consumers who value the non-religious benefits (e.g., academics discipline, safety) of a religion-based education" (p. 80). Pelz and den Dulk (2018) underscored this point: private religious schools "are increasingly drawing from a larger pool of consumers with no direct religious ties to these schools" (p. 105).

The secular goods theory corresponds with my second research question: "What other factors significantly influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school?" Thus, I designed this question to ascertain the degree to which Regent parents value academics and other non-religious factors in their school-selection process.

Whereas the "secular goods" are one consideration influencing parents to enroll their children in religious schools, another consideration is transmitting socio-religious identity to their children. Pelz and den Dulk (2018) observed that in pluralistic societies, commitment to one

[34] Religious dimensions had two components. The first was religious tradition, such as Catholic, black Protestant, evangelical Protestant, white Protestant, and no affiliation. The second component was religiosity. Pelz and den Dulk (2018) measure religiosity through frequency of attending religious services.
[35] Pelz and den Dulk (2018) tracked school selection through three forms of school choice policies: "A dichotomous variable measured the existence of a state voucher program. An interval variable coded 0-2 measured the presence of either a state tuition tax credit program or a state scholarship credit program" (p. 90).

particular religious identity protects and transmits "a sense of meaning and community" (p. 85) through differentiation from the culture-at-large. The urge to preserve and protect religious identity by those who are or perceive they are minorities in a hostile culture is normal. Further, Pelz and den Dulk found that the religious commitment and devotion associated with a school's leadership and faculty is a more important factor in parental school choice than the school's ethnic tradition or denominational affiliation. Accordingly, private religious schools unbound from sectarian traditions appear to draw students from parents who value high levels of religious commitment, even if the school is not tied to the parents' denominational heritage.

Regent is inter-denominational and lacks a prestigious pedigree because it is only 21 years old. Thus, this school is a suitable "fit" for investigating the social identity theory. The social identity theory corresponds to my first research question: "What role does parents' religious identity play in their decision to enroll their children in a CCE school?" Subsumed under the religious identity rubric are religious values and parental beliefs, constituent elements of identity.

As the number and types of educational modalities increase, Pelz and den Dulk (2018) speculated that increasing numbers of parents will capitalize on expanded choices to preserve and pass on their family's religious identity. Moreover, Pelz and den Dulk argued that because 80% of private schools are religious, more research is needed to investigate the link between school choice and parental faith. My research responds to their challenge.

Summary

In this literature review, I discussed the origins and development of school choice after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the criteria important to parents when selecting a school. I also discussed factors influencing parents' selection of non-religious and religious schools and followed with a brief description of factors influencing the choice of CCE curriculum. I also examined other scholarly literature that explores various aspects of CCE, such as educational leadership and efficacy. Next, I described the rational choice theory, which historically and

logically generated the two theories that comprise my theoretical framework: the social identity theory and the secular goods theory.

This literature review reveals significant knowledge gaps in the relationship between CCE and school choice and in the role that CCE parents' religious and "secular" values play vis-à-vis school choice. This study intends to produce knowledge that helps address this void through utilizing the lenses of the social identity and secular goods theories to explore parents' rationale for choosing CCE.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III provides the theoretical grounding of this research and the methodology and trustworthiness criteria it employed. This chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions that guided the study. I then discuss this study's research design followed by my positionality in relation to the study. A presentation of the methodology follows, including setting, site selection, purposive sampling criteria, sampling size, data sources, and data analysis. Afterward, this chapter presents the trustworthiness criteria utilized and then a discussion of ethical issues, concluding with an overall summary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore why parents choose to enroll their children in a CCE school.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What role does parents' religious identity play in their decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school?
2. What other factors significantly influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school?

Research Design

Crotty (1998) argued that research is grounded in particular ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions. The ontological orientation of this study was realism. Realism in this study refers to the existence of material objects existing independent of humans' ability to know or perceive them, whereas the opposite of realism, idealism, posits the primacy of immaterial ideas and essences. Christianity holds ontological idealist assumptions such as God exists, God is love, and the immortality of the soul. These (and other) theological doctrines are embedded within CCE and the minds and hearts of many Regent parents, but not within the research design of this study. The ontological theory anchoring this study is realism, not idealism.

Ontological realism is compatible with constructionism, the epistemology of this study. Epistemology provides the philosophical rationale for determining how we know what we know, and what types of knowledge are possible and legitimate (Crotty, 1998). A constructionist epistemology assumes that social reality is constructed by human beings and that every individual humanizes the world in different ways. Expressed differently, a constructionist epistemology asserts that people, including researchers, do not extract or receive meaning from an object through scientific inquiry (epistemological objectivism), nor is meaning determined solely by the subject and her imposition of meaning upon an object (epistemological subjectivism). A constructionist epistemological position—the posture of this study—asserts that meaning is generated by the interaction of the subject and object in the world. Accordingly, for this study's purposes, parents' perceptions were not seen as readily or objectively available but only constructed and interpreted through interaction with them. This understanding of meaning generation comports with an interpretivist theoretical perspective which is the theoretical perspective of this study.

Crotty (1998) defined theoretical perspective as "the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology" (p. 66). The theoretical perspective of this study was interpretivism because this study sought "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world"

from parents whose children study at Regent (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Expressed differently, interpretivism guided the methodology of this study as it explored the values, attitudes, and beliefs of parents who enrolled their children in an ACCS-accredited school that exclusively teaches CCE curriculum.

Researcher Positionality

Banks (1998) suggested four categories in determining one's positionality in relation to a study's participants: indigenous-insider, indigenous-outsider, external-insider, and external-outsider. I consider my positionality in the CCE subculture at Regent as that of an "external-insider." I am not an "indigenous-insider" nor "indigenous-outsider" because my children do not (and have not attended) school at Regent nor any other ACCS-accredited school. Besides, I have no prior experience nor relational network with Regent's parents or teachers. However, I am not an "external-outsider" because CCE and the atmosphere at Regent did not feel external or foreign to me. In fact, I felt quite comfortable dialoguing with Regent administrators and parents about CCE. Thus, according to Banks' categorization, I am an "external-insider" because I was naturally comfortable with parents who selected CCE for their children and I have taught Classical and Christian curriculum myself, albeit through a homeschooling modality. Moreover, my race (white), sexuality (heterosexual), religion (Protestant), and socioeconomic status (middle class) also situated me as an external-insider.

Further, from an ideological point of view, I am sympathetic and supportive of the CCE movement because many of the beliefs and values implicit in CCE mirror my own. As one working in vocational Christian ministry as an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church (2008-2012) and now the Anglican Church of North America (2012-present), I believe that CCE is a helpful educational movement to counter the moral and intellectual decline I perceive in public education. I am aware that my subjectivity could skew my study's results. Therefore, I am being transparent and explicit about my positionality relative to the participants in this study.

To mitigate my positionality affecting participants' responses during interviews, I did the following things. First, I did not mention my vocation was the priesthood until after the interview, and then, only if asked. Second, I tried to steer introductory conversations away from my own experience teaching Classical and Christian curriculum while living overseas. Further, on a more general level, I did the following things to mitigate potential prejudices.

First, I shared my data collection and analysis with my doctoral advisor weekly, asking him to review it for potential biases. Second, I shared the interview transcripts with each participant to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected their words. Third, I emailed to parents the vignettes of their school-selection journeys (described in Chapter IV) to ensure that my descriptions accurately described their experiences. I received confirmation from all 15 parental units that the descriptions were a sound depiction of their feelings, attitudes, and circumstances throughout the school-selection process. Finally, I discussed my data analysis with a few of the participants and the school's headmaster to establish that my analysis corresponded with their own perceptions of their school choice process.

Methodology

According to Crotty (1998), a study's methodology is "the research design that shapes our choice and use of particular methods and links them to the desired outcomes" (p. 7). The methodology of this research was naturalistic inquiry, also known as basic qualitative research. Miles and Huberman (1994) declared naturalistic inquiry is a study among participants in their natural context, taking into account the influences and factors of that context. My study utilized naturalistic inquiry because it explored the values, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives of CCE parents in their own setting and sociocultural situatedness (Erlandson et al., 1993). My study also utilized naturalistic inquiry since this research employed methods compatible with it such as in-depth interviewing, document analysis, and participant observation. Erlandson et al. (1993) contended that these avenues of data collection "bring together multiple perspectives and allow the researcher to better understand the whole, the essence, through the use of his or her senses"

(p. 109). A holistic understanding of the meanings parents made in their decisions to enroll their children in CCE was the very thing this research attempted to accomplish, and thus my choice of naturalistic inquiry.

Grounded theory roots and inductively derives theory in the analysis process from the data of the researcher's interviews and observations in the field (Erlandson et al., 1993). Naturalistic inquiry utilizes grounded theory while incorporating a theoretical framework into the research process to provide order and structure. According to Harris (2015), the theoretical framework does not determine or force the results, but guides and informs "the emergent research design and process" (p. 149). I utilized my theoretical framework, a combination of the social identity and secular goods theories, in this manner. Namely, to shape and direct my study and to link its results to the wider body of literature while remaining open to the meanings and implications of the data during the interactive process of collection and analysis

The Setting of the Study

The setting of this study was Tulsa, Oklahoma. The intercom announcement at the Tulsa International Airport declares that Tulsa defies simplistic regional characterization: Tulsa is "Oklahoma's cultural crossroads…combine[ing] southern hospitality, southwestern charm, eastern sophistication, and mid-western values" (M. Evans, personal communication, September 9, 2020). As of 2020, Tulsa's population was 396,543, but the population of Tulsa County was 651,552 (World Population Review, 2020; United States Census Bureau, 2019). The city of Tulsa is 64.0% white, 15.3% African American, 16.3% Hispanic or Latino, 4.4% Native American, 3.3% Asian, and 7.6% two or more races. (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Tulsa is the 46th most populous city in the U.S and the second in Oklahoma (World Population Review, 2020). Over 39% of Tulsans have an Associate's degree or higher, 23.14% have completed some college, and 13.98% have a 12th-grade education or less (World Population Review, 2020).

There are 27 school districts in the Tulsa Metro Area, and the one with the largest enrollment is the Tulsa Public School District (TPSD) which matriculated 39,105 students in 77

schools (including charter and alternative schools) during the 2019-2020 school year (Tulsa Public Schools, n.d.). There are 14 school districts in Tulsa Country, the largest being the TPSD (Tulsa Country, n.d.). The school district in Tulsa County with the second-highest enrollment is Broken Arrow. It matriculated 19,070 students in 31 different schools during the 2019-2020 school year (Niche, 2020a; Niche, 2020b). The third-largest school district which is geographically located in both Tulsa County and the city of Tulsa's limits is the Union School District. Union matriculated 15,983 students in 17 different schools during the 2019-2020 school year (Neighborhood Scout, 2020).

Demographers often refer to Tulsa as a part of the "Bible Belt." Disciples of Christ, Southern Baptists, Assemblies of God, and other evangelical Christian denominations are prominent in Tulsa. Oral Roberts University, Victory College, and RHEMA Bible Training College (in Broken Arrow) contribute to the religiosity of the city. A recent survey found 39% of Oklahomans attend a religious service once a week, making Oklahoma a top-ten state in terms of religious attendance per capita (Sherman, 2015).

There are 23 private religious schools in the Tulsa metro area: 21 Christian, one Jewish, and one Islamic. Of the 21 Christian schools, eight are Catholic and 13 are Protestant. Of the 13 Protestant schools, two are K-5 grades, one is 6-8 grades, and 10 are K-12 grades. Of the 10 K-12 grade schools in Tulsa, two schools (Regent Preparatory School and St. Augustine Academy) are members of the ACCS and teach CCE curriculum (Private School Review, 2020).

Site Selection

Regent is a private school whose foundations date back to the mid-1990s when four parents began learning about CCE. After they visited a CCE school in Dallas, Texas, they returned to Tulsa, determined to establish a CCE school. They opened their school in August 2000 with 61 students from 42 families at a rented facility (Regent, n.d.-e). In 2002 they became a member of the ACCS and in 2011 they received ACCS accreditation (ACCS, n.d.-e). In 2006 they added middle school and moved into a 70,000 square-foot building that they purchased. In

2008 they added grades nine through 12, and in 2012 they opened a 25,000 square-foot athletic facility which included basketball and volleyball courts. Regent joined the Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association in 2014 (ACCS, n.d.-e). At the beginning of the 2020 school year, 528 students were enrolled at Regent (A. Shapleigh, personal communication, September 28, 2020).

Regent was an intriguing and appropriate choice to gather data for the following reasons. First, it has exhibited consistent growth over its 20-year history. It is, prima facie, a successful CCE school. Second, Regent attracts students from an assortment of educational and religious backgrounds with parents from diverse professional backgrounds. Thus, Regent's diversity is conducive to maximum variation sampling (see below). Third, as an ACCS-accredited school submitting to ACCS guidelines and procedures, RPS provided a window into the burgeoning ACCS educational movement. Fourth, the RPS headmaster indicated a willingness to be cooperative in this research and assist with arranging for purposive sampling

Purposive Sampling Criteria and Sample Size

This study utilized purposive sampling to identify and guide the recruitment of participants. Erlandson et al. (1993) stated that "purposive and directed sampling through human instrumentation increase the range of data exposed and maximizes the researcher's ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate account of contextual conditions and cultural norms" (p. 82). Erlandson et al. stressed that there are various types of purposive sampling: extreme or deviant cases, intensity, maximum variation, critical case, criterion, opportunistic, random purposeful, and convenience sampling. This research implemented *maximum variation* sampling, first conceptualized by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Patton (2015) asserted that maximum variation sampling is useful in sampling broad and varying examples of the same phenomenon "to document diversity and … to identify important common patterns that are common across the diversity on dimensions of interest" (p. 267). For this study's purposes, the "dimension of interest" was Regent parents. Ranges of variation

occurred in the participants' ages, genders, church affiliations, professions, years educating their children in non-CCE modalities, and income levels—though differences in income level were coincidental, not intended.

I recruited interview participants through the initiation and direction of Regent's headmaster, Mr. Andy Shapleigh, who emailed parents on my behalf, asking if they would like to participate in my study. I asked Mr. Shapleigh to contact parents with substantial variations in their professions, church affiliations, ages, years educating in non-CCE modalities, and ethnicity.[36] I also informed him I wanted to interview both men and women. After parents responded affirmatively to Mr. Shapleigh, he emailed their names and email address to me which enabled me to contact them directly. The content of my initial emails to parents, asking for an interview, is found in Appendix A. Four participants I contacted wished to be interviewed with their spouses sitting beside them and participating in the interview. I did not object to these requests and thus I interviewed 15 family units but 19 separate people. The breakdown of my interview participants was four fathers, seven mothers, and four sets of fathers and mothers together.

Each of the fifteen interviews lasted about an hour. Semi-structured interview questions are found in Appendix B. I initially proposed 15 interviews due to my perception that saturation and redundancy would occur at or about this number. Lincoln and Guba (1985) avowed:

> in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from the new sampled units; thus, redundancy is the primary criterion (p. 202).

[36] All interview participants were Protestant, though "probably 4-6 families representing 12-15 [Catholic] students" attend Regent (A. Shapleigh, personal communication, September 28, 2020). I tried to interview at least one Catholic family but none of the families contacted were willing or able to participate.

After I achieved data saturation through 15 interviews, in consultation with my adviser, I made the decision not to procure additional interviews.

Data Sources

In addition to 15 semi-structured interviews with Regent parents, I gathered data from observing parents during school activities, artifact analysis, and analysis of ACCS and Regent documents. The purpose of all four forms of data collection was to acquire data that informed my research questions, namely, the values, beliefs, and other factors that influence parents to enroll their children in a school with CCE curriculum.

The COVID-19 pandemic began in March, 2020. I gathered data from June to December, 2020. After March, 2020, Regent turned to a virtual format for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Regent held in-person classes for the 2020-2021 school year, but school was not open to outside visitors for health and safety reasons. Therefore, my access to campus activities and direct observation of parents was largely limited to outdoor activities like sporting events, school chapels, and student drop-offs and pick-ups. However, I did attend one indoor Regent open house for prospective parents and a few indoor volleyball games (masks were required for both events).

Observations of parents provided background and context for the study. Based on my observations, I took fieldnotes with a pen and pad of paper. I divided my paper in half, writing descriptive notes on the left side and interpretations of the data that I was describing on the right side. In addition, I examined artifacts on the Regent campus to analyze how these data communicate and reflect the values of the Regent and Regent parents. I also examined ACCS and Regent pamphlets, websites, application forms, and promotional brochures to determine how these materials reflect and communicate the values of Regent and Regent parents. Although I had intended to interview participants primarily on the Regent campus, the COVID-19 pandemic made on-campus interviews unfeasible due to shelter-at-home and social distancing requirements. Thus, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews through Zoom and eight in-person interviews

(in a safe and socially distanced manner) at Ludger's Bavarian Bakery, a coffee shop one mile from the Regent campus.

I utilized the Otter application on my Android phone to record the interviews and transcribe them onto a Word document. (I also recorded each interview on a Sony, hand-held recorder as a back-up.) Then, I listened to each interview in its entirety from my Otter application to ensure that the transcription matched the recording, that is, that the software accurately documented the words which it transferred onto the Word document. In areas where Otter incorrectly transcribed the participants' words, I made corrections on the interview manuscripts. Afterwards, I emailed each interview transcript to the participant and asked each participant to check the transcript for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Erlandson et al. (1993) contended that for naturalistic inquiry "data analysis is closely tied with data collection…a naturalistic study involves an inseparable relationship between data collection and data analysis" (p. 114). Hence, I followed Erlandson et al.'s guideline by analyzing data immediately after I collected them which led to revisions in the procedures and strategies for collecting additional data going forward. Erlandson et al. contended that this dialectical process of data collection, data analysis, and revised strategies for more data collection leads to "the effective collection of rich data that generate alternative hypotheses and provide the basis for shared constructions of reality" (p. 114). As a result, my data analysis was not a one-time event that occurred after all semi-structured interviews and observations had been completed, but an ongoing process and progression.

During data analysis I also implemented triangulation which is examining several different data sources to support and disconfirm insights. For instance, when I observed developing motifs from semi-structured interviews, I frequently contacted the Regent headmaster for confirmation or refutation and additional insight. I also circled back to Regent's digitized

documents and website for affirmation or repudiation and greater understanding. Throughout the process, I developed working hypotheses to test emerging or recurring themes.

Coding

Patton (2015) asserted that coding is necessary to prevent falling victim to confirmation bias which is forcing data to fit into the conceptual categories provided by the theoretical framework. During the coding process I followed Erlandson et al.'s (1993) guidelines. First, I read each of my participants' transcripts word by word. Then, I read each transcript a second time to disaggregate data from these transcripts into the smallest possible chunks or bites of information that could be classified or categorized as independent thoughts without additional information. The codes I created ranged from one word to one sentence. Erlandson et al. called this process unitizing data.

During data unitization (the initial round of coding), I gave specific attention to the exact words and phrases of participants. Saldana (2016) labeled this practice *in vivo* coding; Saldana argued that this analytic practice is congruent with all qualitative studies, but especially useful for those seeking an emic perspective, desiring to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (p. 295). Thus, since I wanted to capture participants' voices—their slang, jargon, and verbatim expressions—I utilized *in vivo* coding during the first cycle. Of the 114 initial codes emerging from the data, 19 were *in vivo* codes.

After my initial, open-ended process of unitizing data, I re-read every code and merged codes with similar names. Then, I engaged in what Erlandson et al. (1993) labeled *emergent category designation*, sorting codes into categories of ideas. As I re-read and re-examined each particular code, I looked for relationships between and among the codes. I made evaluative judgments regarding whether each code could logically be subsumed under one particular idea or category. Through this process, I reduced the original 114 codes to 19 categories. I created a descriptive word, phrase, or sentence for each category, including a category labeled "everything else" for data that did not fit other categories or was insufficient for its own category.

Next, I made evaluative judgements to align the 19 categories under the five broad themes that are discussed in Chapter V. A few categories became the headings for themes; other categories became the headings for sub-themes. I allowed the data to dictate this process. I intentionally chose the participants' language for the titles of themes and sub-themes due to the emic perspective of this study. Finally, throughout the process I engaged in what Erlandon et al. labeled negative case analysis which is "considering alternative interpretations of the data, particularly noting pieces of data that would tend to refute the researcher's reconstructions of reality" (p. 121).

After I reduced my data to five themes, I utilized my theoretical framework to interpret my findings while remaining cognizant of my theoretical framework's limitations. Harris (2015) citing Morgan, discussed the paradoxical nature of theoretical frameworks. Resembling a metaphor that compares two dissimilar things to provide insight into the principal thing under consideration, a theoretical framework can also provide new perspectives and insights about a particular topic of research. However, a theoretical framework, like a metaphor, can also be misleading or obstructive insofar as it may force other ways of seeing and perceiving into the background.

Consequently, during my interpretation of the findings I intentionally searched for motifs and patterns among the five themes that might be illuminated through the secular goods and the social identity theories. I utilized thick, rich descriptions of the data to tell the story of parents' school-choice journeys. At the same time, I stepped back from my theoretical framework through evaluating, considering, and reflecting upon alternative theories to make sense of findings that did not logically, sensibly, or intuitively align with my theoretical framework.

Database

I utilized the NVivo 12 version of Computer-Assisted (or Aided) Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for storing, organizing, coding, categorizing, and analyzing data.

Trustworthiness

Standards for the trustworthiness of research differ between quantitative and qualitative traditions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Merriam, 1998: Patton, 2015). Scholars in the positivistic tradition generated the constructs of validity and reliability. However, applying these notions to qualitative inquiry is not simple or straightforward because as Stake (1995) commented, "Most qualitative researchers not only believe that there are multiple perspectives or views of the case that need to be represented, but that there is no way to establish beyond contention, the best view" (p. 108). Moreover, there is little consensus in the qualitative research community regarding the appropriate vocabulary and terms to employ when assessing the trustworthiness of a study. To resolve these issues, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative findings. I implemented these criteria throughout the study. Table 3.1 provides a depiction of the criteria, techniques, and strategies I utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

Table 3.1

Trustworthiness Criteria and Examples

Credibility

Criteria/Technique	*Result*	*Examples*
Prolonged Engagement	• Build rapport	Engaging with headmaster since 03/2018
Persistent Observation	• Obtain in-depth data • Obtain accurate data	Observation of participants in chapels, sports events, and prospective parent nights
Triangulation	• Verify data	Multiple sources of data; interviews, observations, artifacts, websites, and emails.
Member checking	• Verify documentation and conclusions	Participants verified accuracy of conclusions and vignettes

Purposive sampling	• Site selection provided access to an ACCS-accredited school. Also good access to parents.	Purposeful in the selection of parent participants and observations
Debriefing	• Verify data and holistic understanding	Regular meetings with advisors

Transferability

Criteria/Technique	*Result*	*Examples*
Thick descriptive data	Meaning making	Multiple in-depth interviews

Dependability

Criteria/Technique	*Result*	*Examples*
Established audit trail; kept calendar of interviews	Data stability	Faculty advisor

Confirmability

Criteria/Technique	*Result*	*Examples*
Practiced triangulation; practiced reflexivity	Verified data; revealed biases	Multiple data sources/methods; revealed assumptions

Note. Adapted from Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985)

Ethical Issues

Referencing the *Belmont Report*, Glesne (2016) described three ethical considerations vital to all research: respect, beneficence, and justice. I implemented these principles in this study. Regarding respect, Glesne stated, "The principle of respect emphasizes that people should participate in research through voluntary and informed consent" (p. 159). My research respected individuals' privacy; I obtained their voluntary consent before they participated in the research. Further, I obtained IRB approval before commencing research and ensured that each participant understood the informed consent form, including their rights in the research process.

Second, I entered each interview and observation minding the principle of beneficence. I protected participants' right to privacy by assigning each participant a pseudonym to ensure their

anonymity. Third, I informed the participants that I will provide them a copy of my finished dissertation that they may benefit from the results of my research, thereby minding the principle of justice. Although I did not provide monetary remuneration to interview participants, I hope that my empathic listening and giving voice to their viewpoints not only facilitated an enjoyable interview experience, but also an opportunity for their voices to be heard more broadly in the research community. Finally, I hope that the finished dissertation will be beneficial for Regent parents, students, and administrators.

Summary

My goal for utilizing naturalistic inquiry in the research design was to understand the daily values and beliefs of parents who enroll their children in CCE curriculum. In this chapter, I discussed the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions undergirding this research. I elucidated my methodology and the specific data collection instruments. I further discussed strategies for interpreting and analyzing the data. In the next chapter, I provide brief vignettes of each parent-participant's journey into CCE to ground and situate the study. Then, in Chapter V I present, analyze and interpret the findings from this study.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARTICIPANTS: PARENTS' JOURNEY TO FIND CLASICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Chapter III outlined the methodology I utilized in obtaining data for my research questions. In this chapter, I situate my study by introducing the participant-parents and their journeys from conventional educational modalities (public, private religious, private non-religious, and home school) to Classical Christian Education (CCE), a mostly untraveled road. I provide a vignette of each story: key events, beliefs, values, and dynamics that motivated parents to leave the familiar behind and embark onto the peculiar terrain of a foreign educational model.[37] Thus, the material in this chapter contextualizes the overall study. Further, it serves as the basis for the fifth theme that emerged from the data. I identify, analyze, and interpret each of the five emergent themes in the next chapter, Chapter V.

Demographics of the Participants

I include information on the demographics of these family units in Table 4.1.

[37] CCE was "foreign" to each parent because none of them received instruction in CCE as a child, and for all but a few, Regent was their first CCE exposure.

Table 4.1

Demographics of Participants

	Name	Age	Kids in household	Kids at Regent	Years enrolled in non-CCE	Driving distance (in miles) to Regent	Education Level
1	David	40-49	4	3	0	3	B.A
2	Grace	50-59	3	3	5	6	B.A
3	Hannah	40-49	2	2	2	2	B.S
4	Kevin	40-49	4	3	1	8	M.A
5	Lynn	40-49	4	4	0	4	B.A.
6	Marybeth	40-49	3	2	1	6	B.A.
7	Mitch	30-39	3	3	0	15	B.A.
8	Nancy	50-59	2	2	4	14	B.A.
9	***Noah &***	30-39	3	2	0	4	B.A.
	Margaret	30-39	3	2	0	4	M.A.
10	Risa	40-49	3	3	5	20	B.A.
11	***Roy &***	50-59	4	4	1.5	13	B.A.
	Linda	50-59	4	4	1.5	13	B.A.
12	Sarah	50-59	4	2	0	5	B.A
13	***Tom &***	30-39	3	3	0	5	M.A
	Heather	30-39	3	3	0	5	B.A
14	***Tristan &***	30-39	2	1	0	4	M.D.
	Beth	30-39	2	1	0	4	B.A.
15	Tyler	40-49	2	2	0	10	B.A.

Note. Emboldened and italicized names indicate parents who are married to each other. For example, Tom is married to Heather, and Tristan to Beth.

This study's design implemented maximum variation sampling to capture and document common relational, attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral patterns observable across the diversity of the participants (Patton, 2015). Demographically noteworthy is the broad variation among participants regarding the church they have chosen to attend. Twelve family units attend a church where none of the other participants regularly worship, and three separate churches are attended

by two family units each. Thus, significant variation in my sample is reflected in participants' church affiliations. Interviewees' age range also demonstrates significant variation: four units were 50 years old or older, seven units were 40-49 years old, and four units were 30-39 years old.

Further, participants' income level varied significantly from $75,000/year to $500,000/year,[38] with the mean income being $259,300. Participants' transition into CCE occurred in many ways: seven family units (46%) enrolled their children in non-CCE schooling (whether public, private, or home school) at some point in their school-choice journeys. Thus, for 54%, Regent was their first (and only) school choice.

All participants interviewed have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, and eight participants have obtained a degree in education. When I asked the headmaster about this high percentage of participants with an education degree, he indicated his lack of knowledge about interviewees' educational or professional backgrounds when arranging these interviews. Finally, although the headmaster attempted to arrange semi-structured interviews with Catholic families and parents of color whose children attend Regent, none of them were interested in participating in this research.

The School-Choice Pilgrimage of the Participants in This Study

Pilgrimage is not only a common motif in the biblical narratives, but also an apt metaphor for each participant's journey out of traditional and familiar modes of education into the enigmatic *worldview*, *curriculum*, *and pedagogy* of CCE. Principle characters in the Old Testament like Abraham, Moses, and Nehemiah, treaded many miles over several years in search of elusive and unclear destinations. Although this study's participants did not physically or geographically sojourn in foreign lands, their school-choice processes evoke images of pilgrimage.[39] And despite expressing support for parents who choose to enroll their kids in public

[38] Four family units declined to list their annual income.
[39] Margaret is the lone exception; she spent one year in Africa teaching CCE at an orphanage. She did not know what CCE was until she arrived at the orphanage and the administration instructed her to teach CCE.

schools, most participants' "pilgrimages" were birthed through a gnawing and indescribable feeling that something was lacking and deficient with public education. Like Abraham, who "went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8), most parent-participants commenced their educational journeys with no clear end in sight. But once they discovered this end, parents described CCE with effusive praise and bubbling joy. Below are brief snippets from each parent-pilgrim's school-choice journey from traditional modes of education into CCE.

David

David is in his mid-40s and has been married for 15 years. He has four kids (ages 10, eight, six, and four). While living in Tulsa, David's retired neighbor used to joke: "Work hard so you can pay for my social security, and don't put your kids in the public schools around here!" Like most participants in this study, David heard of Regent through a friend's recommendation. David graduated from Broken Arrow High School, southeast of Tulsa (see Figure 4.1 below). Broken Arrow's enrollment is consistently over 3,000 students per year.

Figure 4.1

Tulsa Metropolitan Area Map Area

Note. Travel Maps (n.d.). *Map of Tulsa Oklahoma*. Retrieved March 23, 2020, from http://travelsmaps.com/map-tulsa-oklahoma.html.

When David started thinking about his children's education, he wanted his kids to attend a smaller school than his alma mater. Further, he stated,

> the fact that it [Regent] was a Christian school that stood on biblical principles and viewed the education of a person, not just in an academic sense but in a spiritual sense, teaching them about the Bible and truth and stuff. Huge, probably the number one factor in us choosing Regent.

However, Regent was not initially David's obvious choice. He investigated other schools and recalled, "To be honest, when I first looked into it [Regent], it seemed a little too old-fashioned." He continued by describing the oddity of Pioneer Day when Regent's parents and kids dress up like the pioneers of 100 years ago. Nonetheless, after he and his wife visited a Regent open house, they "decided to give it a shot." Unlike many parents I interviewed, David did not speak with glowing certainty about his decision. However, once his oldest son began attending, "he loved it."

David and his family are now passionate about Regent. After our interview, David wrote in an email that Regent "has been an unexpected joy for the family." He continued, "We plan on our kids graduating from Regent — all 4 of them. We would reduce living costs (house, vehicles, etc.) in order to keep our children at Regent."

Grace

Grace, a mother of three Regent kids who each started attending in different years, began our interview by stating she became a Christian later in life. Two women who mentored Grace in her newfound faith encouraged her to homeschool her children, partly because of oversized classes in public schools. Grace did not immediately heed their advice. Instead, she enrolled each of her three kids in the public-school pre-K program, and each of her kids attended public school for at least a few years. However, when her oldest son was in first grade, she shared that "it was not a good experience." Thus, Grace gradually and prayerfully began thinking through a transition from public school to homeschool. She ultimately homeschooled her three children for respectively three, five, and seven years.

Living in Jenks, close to Regent's campus, she constantly heard Regent's reputation for requiring kids to memorize vast portions of the Bible, something Grace desired for her kids. As they grew older, Grace began feeling her academic limitations in teaching homeschool. She also became more averse to enrolling her kids in public school because of what her husband, a public school teacher, told her about his own school environment:

> I'm married to a man who would come home and tell me story after story about the complete darkness there, and the sinfulness—of course, there's sin in everybody…I won't go into specifics stories of what was going on there. They're [public schools] just so big and the Christ-lessness, even though there are some Christian teachers there.

One day, Grace's friend challenged her to start praying for her kids to go to Regent and for God to provide the necessary finances. Concurrently, Grace's husband became increasingly disheartened with the problems in his public school: alcohol, drugs, discipline issues, and sex. Grace then ebulliently recounted how God provided additional finances for each of her children to begin attending Regent in different years. Although most participants did not mention finances as an impediment to or consideration of enrollment, for Grace and a few others, overcoming financial hurdles was part of the school-choice journey.

Hannah

Growing up, Hannah attended a private Christian school she described as "anything but excellent!" Accordingly, she adamantly refused to enroll her kids in a private Christian school. Her husband grew up on the West Coast with above-average public schools, so he concurred with her assessment. However, while living in Chicago, they observed their pastor's wife classically homeschooling her children. Hannah was intrigued. When her family moved to Tulsa, some of her newfound friends introduced her to Regent. Before committing to Regent, she investigated "a bunch of options," and stated with confidence that she comprehensively grasped different options.

One possibility was a large private school with an opulent, well-manicured campus. The tuition was expensive, so Hannah decided she might need to return to work. But when she asked

about integrating God into the classroom, the school responded that "they talk about God in a very ecumenical sense. *We never mention Jesus Christ* [emphasis added]." Afterward, Hannah and her husband simply knew this door was closed.

When Hannah visited Regent, she was not "overly impressed," in part because "they had just moved into their building." She continued,

> while RPS provided a community, teachers, curriculum, and physical space to educate classically, at the time, they lacked the extra-curricular enrichment activities and physical amenities available at other schools on our list. Our first thought was that while the education quality would be excellent, the value we placed on the "extras" led us to keep looking or to homeschooling. We kept running into people that sent their kids there with great results and the Holy Spirit impressed upon us both, 'You might need to give this a further look.' At the time, at that point, we were realizing homeschooling probably wasn't going to be the best option for our oldest child. And so, we gave it a second look, we researched some more, I really felt very comfortable.

In the end, Hannah felt comfortable with Regent because she was looking for a "high-quality education with a Christian worldview." She decided Regent satisfied these criteria.

Kevin

Kevin is a young father with four children, all under the age of 10. Even before his kids were old enough for school, one of his friends urged his wife and him to consider Regent. Later, as his oldest child approached kindergarten, Kevin and his wife investigated the private Christian school Kevin attended during his childhood. Next, they visited a Regent open house for prospective parents. Kevin described,

> it seems to be better. And there seems to be more … we think of our kids being fed more of an education and the biblical side of things … not that the [other] school wasn't, but it just seemed it [Regent] was a more solid rigorous study.

In his school-choice quest, Kevin was disturbed that the other private Christian school allowed elementary students to use cell phones in school, albeit with obvious boundaries. Kevin recounted, "I was just a little surprised to hear that. And so, it's not a bad thing—it's not something we just wanted to have our kids do." He elaborated that phones are distracting and that unknowingly, kids can access pornographic and other harmful internet sites. Kevin's desire for minimalist technology is shared by roughly half the participants in this study.

When I asked Kevin if he ever considered public education, he responded, "For about five seconds! My wife grew up in public schools in Bartlesville, and so I know there are benefits … but honestly … we weren't comfortable with the education." Kevin was also not comfortable with his children' possible exposure to negative, unbiblical, and corrupting influences in public education.

Lynn

Lynn and her husband have been married for nearly 20 years and have four children at Regent. Their oldest daughter is counting down the days until she gets her driver's license. Lynn and her husband both attended Tulsa Public Schools, but Lynn's mother and her husband's father taught in private school. These experiences exposed Lynn to a significant assortment of educational modalities. Although she was the valedictorian of Jenks High School, one of the largest schools in the Tulsa metropolitan area, she lamented the education she received, noting the difference between studying for tests and cultivating a posture of intellectual curiosity and engagement. She continued, "I just wanted to make an 'A.'… I missed out on an education in a lot of ways, and I don't blame that even solely on the school. It's just that it [Jenks High School] was massive and you could get through."

Even before Lynn was married, she learned about Regent from some founding families. She recounted that one factor attracting her to Regent "was seeing these 12th graders graduating, and just how poised, how well-spoken, they were. They weren't intimidated to engage with adults and look them in the eye and have a good conversation."

When her kids approached school age, Lynn concedes that she did not visit many other schools. Regent's headmaster's discussion of CCE quickly captivated her: "It was just so intriguing and so delightful to hear education talked about in that way, because the, because [*sic*] we were not familiar with the Classical Christian model." CCE was a novel, exciting breath of fresh air. In her own words, "This [CCE] makes such sense, and it's so wonderful!"

Marybeth

Marybeth's oldest child started public-school kindergarten in another state. The town was so small, Marybeth shared, that a lot of people "like to call it a 'public-private school.'" Marybeth loved the community feeling of the school. However, her son, two years younger than her daughter, had been diagnosed with autism. Marybeth related, "We didn't know what that was going to look like for him," but she was certain that the public-school environment was not a good fit. And so, her school-selection quest began. She described,

> we started looking elsewhere and didn't really know what we were going to do. And honestly, I woke up one morning and just felt this pull of the Holy Spirit that I needed to be more involved in my kids' education.

Unaware of what this meant, Marybeth started researching educational options and discovered a CCE school a few miles from her house. She went to an informational meeting and learned the content, pedagogical vision, and purpose of the curriculum. Marybeth continued, "We just kind of felt that peace that, you know, this is the door that the Lord's opening and so we walked through that door with my daughter when she went into first grade."

In 2019, when Marybeth knew her family would move to Tulsa, the first thing she researched was a school for her children. She admitted, "So I'm a little bit of a detail-oriented person. And I looked at all of the private schools in Tulsa, and kind of made a spreadsheet and picked out the ones that I thought would be close to be [*sic*] where we wanted to live." This list contained eight schools. When she visited Regent, despite the craziness of after-school pickups, a receptionist warmly welcomed her. Marybeth explained, "We just immediately had that same

sense of peace and feeling that this is where God was kind of leading to." Her final confirmation occurred when the headmaster "struck a chord" within Marybeth's heart during a school tour. She recollected these words:

> Regent's goal is to not just focus on merely the educational components of the school, but to send out *consecrated disciples* [emphasis added] into the world … That it's about unlocking the calling that God has in your life. And then equipping you to go out into the world to fulfill that calling, whatever it is.

After our interview, I emailed Marybeth a copy of her vignette for her to proof check. She concurred with my analogizing the school-selection process to pilgrimage and added that pilgrimages are full of

> unexpected detours [and] are often huge opportunities for growth and a deepening of our dependence on the Lord. The same has been true for our kids and the journey with their education in a classical Christian setting. It is certainly not an "easy" path but we know that this has grown and changed our children and our family for the better.

Mitch

Mitch is a Regent teacher, football coach, and father of three kids (ages 11, nine, and six). Both his parents were public school teachers, and he taught in public school for 10 years before moving to Tulsa and joining the Regent faculty. While articulating (as most other Regent parents did) that Jesus Christ is the core of education, Mitch grew increasingly frustrated with teaching in public school. One summer, during a mission trip to Central America, he devoured two books his friend brought on the trip: *Repairing the Ruins* and *The Lost Tools of Learning*, by Douglas Wilson. He thought, "Man, this is, this is really what I've been looking for in an education." So, he began his trek. Initially, he attempted to launch his own CCE school. However, this endeavor eventually failed due to insufficient financial commitment from parents. Afterward, he searched the ACCS' online "job board" and made arrangements to interview for an open position at Regent.

Central to Mitch's CCE pilgrimage was his dissatisfaction with public education. He remarked, "I knew there was more that can be done in schools than what the public schools were able to do." He shared remorsefully about his time coaching high school boys in public school:

I would see these high school boys struggling. You know, with their lives, basically and just getting to the point of, you know, the end of the rope kind of point, where they were just ready to quit school, and quit football, quit everything, and it really was scary to me. And then I would talk to them away from school, and we would have conversations about church, and leading to Jesus. And, I mean, nearly every single time those kids were open, they were receptive. They, you know, their hearts were being softened by the Lord. I could tell as we as we [*sic*] just listened to them a lot, really, is what we did. And so I would kind of take that back to the school, and I would listen but it just seemed like in a, in a sphere of their peers, they were more hard-hearted than when you get them separated.

Mitch was not denigrating public school teachers. In fact, he was quick to praise them, stating that "they're fighting heroically" for the betterment of students, analogizing their battle to jousting in a sword fight with two hands tied behind their back. Instead, Mitch was expressing the following: "As good as the public school system is, I knew it could be better with, you know, focused … focused time and focused efforts on prayer, on Christ, and on the community, kind of circling around Jesus." Mitch believes he has found a better educational modality and curriculum at Regent for educating his children.

Nancy

Of all the parent-participants, Nancy lives the furthest from Regent (14 miles). She has two teenagers studying at Regent and had never heard of CCE before enrolling her kids in Regent. Because she had children later in life, she and her husband "pretty much knew what we wanted regarding education for our children." Initially, they enrolled in a small, private Christian school (K-sixth grade) with a total student body of fewer than 50 students. Nancy described, "It was very intimate and they got very much one-on-one attention."

Because Nancy is not, by her own admission, "an educator at heart, and my children will wholeheartedly agree with that," she never considered homeschooling. As her kids grew older, she realized her need to find another school extending beyond sixth grade. Nancy was open to magnet schools but also considered Regent because of a friend's recommendation. Nancy later learned that Regent students began studying Latin in fourth grade. After she decided on Regent, she enrolled her kids in fourth grade so that they would begin Latin with all other students and not be disadvantaged.

Instrumental in Nancy's school-selection pilgrimage were the headmaster's words: "Everything here we do with intent." Regent teachers, enthusiastic about teaching, also influenced Nancy. One teacher told Nancy that Regent was her "dream job" and went on to say, "We love to teach. We love the curriculum. We love the community. We love our administration." Nancy related, "Well, that pretty much solidified it for me because I thought I want my children going, [sic]sitting under a teacher, where she feels like she's in an atmosphere, that this is her dream job." Another component in her school-selection journey was the introduction of iPads in the initial private, Christian school. Nancy thought, "Ah, no, this is not the way. … We don't want our children on technology, all day at school, and then have them to [*sic*] do some technology in their free time [at home]."

Noah and Margaret

After college, Margaret embarked on a one-year mission trip to Africa to teach orphans in a CCE school. She confessed she knew nothing about CCE when she went, but she fell in love with both the kids and the CCE curriculum. Back in the U.S., the family she nannied for in Texas enrolled their children in a CCE school. Thus, CCE became appealing and familiar to her. Nonetheless, when her first child was about to begin school, Margaret decided to visit a few other non-CCE schools. Regent's Pre-K through second-grade class schedules, as illustrated in Table 4.2, eventually persuaded Margaret to enroll in RPS. Pre-K through second-grade students can

Table 4.2

Regent Pre-K Through Third-Grade Class Schedules

Enrichment II (Pre-K)	Mon/Wed/Fri	8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
	or Tues/Thurs	8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Enrichment III (Kindergarten)	Mon/Wed/Fri	8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
	or Tues/Thurs	8:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Classes 1-2	Mon/Wed/Fri	8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
	Tues/Thurs	8:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Classes 3-8	Mon-Fri	8:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Classes 9-12	Mon-Fri	8:40 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.

Note. Due to shorter instructional times and fewer class days, neither of the two options provides for snack or nap time. Regent. (n.d.). Retrieved January 28, 2021, from http://www.rpsok.org/academics/enrichment.cfm.

either attend Regent on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.) or Tuesdays and Thursdays (8:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.). Accordingly, Regent tasks parents with completing much of the curriculum at home.

After considering these options, Margaret expressed, "A five-day-a-week thing didn't didn't really work for our family on the front end." Additionally, the open house for prospective parents significantly impacted her decision-making process. She described, "It was the *biblical worldview* [sic] that I had never heard. I just never heard that come out of a school before."

Noah, Margaret's husband, initially doubted Regent. He related, "Originally, when I went to public school, I always scoffed at private school kids. Money associated. So I had my doubts." However, he continued,

> what I learned that night [at the RPS open house] was the biblical worldview which I assumed was there to some level, but it was, it was just the centerpiece of what they communicated, and that resonated with me … I think the biblical worldview was the, was

> the biggest thing that made me go, 'Yep,' we need to, we need to invest, we need to put our kids there. That's where they need to be.

For Noah and Margaret, Regent is a year-to-year decision, based on the best choice for their kids, finances, and God's leading and guidance.

Risa

Risa's three kids (ages 16, 14, and 13) have studied at Regent for just over one year. Before Regent, she homeschooled for six years, and before homeschooling, her kids attended a private, religious school. Needless to say, Risa's educational trek has taken several twists and turns.

A middle school teacher by profession, she taught sixth grade in Tulsa before starting a family. She recounted, "It was hard. I had about 145 students. And it wasn't what I had envisioned it being." She continued that after her experiences teaching in public school, "I knew … that was not something that I wanted for my kids. That's just us: I'm not trying to be negative [about public school]." So, when Risa's kids grew old enough to go to school, she enrolled them in a traditional private school. But Risa "quickly realized that I [she] was unhappy with the amount of extra busywork … and it was, just it [*sic*] became frustrating to me." Frustration also resulted from spending money on private education, despite her belief she could do a better job educating them. She related,

> if I'm paying all of this [money], I want to see the fruit of it, you know. That's important … I'm not paying to put them in a private school so that they don't have to go to public school. I'm paying a private school to give them the education that I'm expecting from paying for it. Does that make sense?

Accordingly, she withdrew her children from private school and purchased Classical Conversations material, a homeschool curriculum following a Classical and Christian educational model. "It was beautiful and wonderful," she related. But the following year, she needed help

with the teaching and turned to a hybrid model. She taught some subjects to her children while farming out other subjects, such as Latin and Greek, to other teachers.

Risa stressed that she was not 'married" to homeschool or any other educational modality during her school-selection journey. She continued,

> I always was an open door with my kids, and just said anytime that you're wanting to change something, come and talk to me, and it was kind of a family decision at the end … to go back to traditional school.

By "traditional school," Risa meant Regent. Risa heard many positive things about Regent while immersed in the homeschool community, so once her family decided to move on from homeschooling, Regent became the only option.

Roy and Linda

Roy and Linda have four kids attending Regent who are in middle and high. Linda was working in a church office in Tulsa when her co-worker's five-year-old son walked into the office and said, "Hello, Mrs. Johnson." He confidently shook her hand. Linda was impressed by the presence and politeness of this young boy, so she asked, "Where do you go to school?" He answered, "Regent." Then, his mom asked for a recitation of a Psalm he had just memorized. Linda recounted that when he verbalized the Psalm,

> my [Linda's] heart was warmed just because I thought that is precious! That a five-year-old has learned at school, his first year, to memorize Scripture. And that meant a lot to me. So, I think from that day on, we were sold on Regent.

Other factors in Roy and Linda's school-choice journey included the realization that they could send their kindergarteners to Regent for just two or three days per week and educate them at home on other days. Roy recounted, "Linda wanted to be involved!" Further, during their visit to Regent, when they observed some teachers and classes, Linda still remembers "the caring and loving biblical-based attitude of the teachers."

Roy and Linda, unlike most other parents, never visited other schools. However, they did talk with other parents about alternative schooling options, concluding, "Nothing compared to what we felt would be right at Regent. And maybe it was just the Lord's leading, I mean honestly, we prayed and asked the Lord to show us and we were in peace about it."

Sarah

Sarah is married and has four kids (ages 13-21). Two of her sons completed their entire K-12th grade education at Regent. The others still study at Regent. Sarah unequivocally declared, "The Lord led us to Regent through a series of events." Living in Bixby, an affluent and predominantly white suburb south of Tulsa, she was saddened to learn that because Oklahoma was cutting educational funding, Bixby's class sizes would increase to 27 kids per teacher. Moreover, she also lamented Bixby's pre-K programs increasing from half- to full-day. However, as both she and her husband grew up in public education, she remarked, "We really didn't know anything else." But 27 pre-K kids with just one teacher for a full day did not sit right, and so, their pilgrimage began.

By Sarah's own admission, she "stumbled" onto Regent through advice from church friends who knew one parent who extolled Regent. Sarah described, "I felt like this was a divine appointment," because everything Sarah's friend described about Regent felt like exactly what Sarah wanted for her kids. Nevertheless, Sarah decided to visit three private schools to ensure Regent indeed was the right fit. Regent was her third and final visit. She remarked,

> when I sat in Regent's classroom, it was just so different. I didn't know that school could look like this for children. *I remember just crying in the back of the room.* Mr. James [the teacher] asked, "Is everything okay?" "Yes," I said, "I'm just so touched by what has happened in your classroom the last hour, and it's so different than what I've observed [before]. So, that sealed the deal.

Subsequently, Sarah felt her Regent enrollment decision was a "no-brainer," partly because children at public and private schools she visited were easily distracted, lacked discipline, and

engaged in many activities with minimal learning. At Regent, however, she observed intentional, structured learning, high behavioral standards, and thorough Bible memorization. With these fundamentals in place, Sarah felt her kids were "free to learn and engage."

Tom and Heather

Tom and Heather are in their mid-30s and have three kids —ages 13, 11, and seven— attending Regent. Both of Tom's parents taught in public school, and his dad became a superintendent of an Oklahoma school district. Furthermore, both his sisters taught in public education. Heather received an elementary education degree at Oklahoma State University. After graduation, she taught sixth grade for two years until she became a mother. Thus, according to Tom, education has "always had a high value" for his family. He continued,

> as our kids started getting closer to school years, we started doing a lot more research about what our options were … *it was early on a big leap for me* [emphasis added] in particular coming from a public-school family to choose something different. So, it wasn't something we did off the cuff. I would say a couple years of thinking through that before we committed.

Heather added that they first heard about Regent through volunteering in their church's youth group. She noticed two students who excelled in their "communication skills and their ability to have conversations about the Bible…I was kind of like, 'Where do they go to school?'" After learning that these students attended Regent, Tom and Heather started researching the school alongside other school options. At first, Tom admitted, "We just thought it was another private Christian school." But when they began to "peel back" educational layers, he explained, "Wait! They're doing this totally different approach, a different paradigm than I had been exposed to."

In the end, their conviction that education should develop children's intellect and *character* [emphasis added] strengthened. Tom stressed, "If we were going to…outsource it [education], we wanted that outsourcing to be on the same page as us and what we're about and, all of the values …that are important to us." He continued that at Regent, from a values

perspective, it "feels like we're always on the same team, in the same page…cultivating wisdom and virtue in our children, nourishing their soul: the true, the good, and the beautiful." Pursuing and inculcating the true, good, and beautiful are educational teloses of CCE.

Tristan and Beth

Tristan and Beth have two children. They are relatively new to Regent; their oldest child is in his third year of school. Growing up, both parents attended public schools. After majoring in education, Beth taught in Tulsa Public Schools for seven years. Based on her experience, she never seriously considered enrolling her children in public school. She explained,

> when it comes to your own son, you know … I think about all my wonderful years in a public school, and I think, 'Oh, no way!' Like, it'd be a huge mission field and like, really good for them to do, and go into those classrooms … but … he would be formed by whatever was happening around him … and it was just hard for me to think that.

Because public school was a non-starter, Tristan and Beth's school-selection pilgrimage led them to consider homeschooling. They did not want to pay for private school. Accordingly, Beth attended a major homeschooling conference and learned about unique educational philosophies like CCE and the Montessori approach. After the conference, Beth started homeschooling her pre-K child. Despite reservations about public school, Tristan still thought,

> if homeschooling doesn't work out, we've got a good public school just right here … Yeah, we both went to public school, good enough experience. I think he can learn all the things he needs to learn if he did something like that.

Later, when one of Beth's friends told her to consider Regent, Beth thought, "I'll just humor her and I'll go ahead and go along with it." But after Tristan and Beth sat in a Regent Pre-K class for 45 minutes, Beth was "sold on the way they were teaching." She recalled kindergarteners "sitting in a circle and they were, you know, verbally giving these answers, that I was like, 'How does a kindergartener know this already?'" So they committed to trying Regent for a year.

Tristan was likewise impressed by the rigor, discipline, and sheer amounts of memorization characterizing Regent's pre-K education. He became adamant about Regent, even more so than Beth, who intermittently wondered if their boy was receiving sufficient playtime due to the structure and routine that Regent imposed.

Tyler

Tyler is in his mid-40s and has two kids enrolled in Regent. He and his wife both graduated from public high schools and met in college. Tyler majored in music education, and his wife majored in early childhood education. Tyler recounted, "We took a lot of the same education classes together—I slept through a lot of them!" But the long and short of it was that after graduation, although Tyler decided that he did not want to teach, he still maintained lofty educational goals for his kids' education.

When they moved to Tulsa, Tyler's wife began teaching at a private Christian school. Tyler and his wife decided that they wanted the nurturing environment that a private Christian school could offer for their future kids. In their school-choice journey, related Tyler, "We pretty much visited all the schools in town, including those in Owasso." But because his wife happened to meet the teacher of the year at Regent, Tyler ended up visiting Regent's open house. He described,

> I was impressed by the students at the door. In fact, they were dressed nice. And they looked me in the eyes. And they seemed well-spoken. And I was probably interested in the, I'll say, Harry Potteresque elements—the Latin!

But more than the Latin, Tyler stressed that it "felt right." His experience was akin to walking onto a college campus "and knowing somehow … this is where I'm supposed to be." Tyler went home and told his wife, "This is the place!" Subsequently, he decided to bring her with him on a school visit. Tyler explained, "I wanted to know if she had the same feeling, and she did!" He stressed that "strong, Christian community, an ideal class size, and the fact that Regent "seemed

to take academics more seriously than your rank and file Christian schools," were Regent's most appealing factors.

Summary

Chapter IV's vignettes have detailed the school-choice pilgrimage of all 15 family units to provide a geographical and socio-religious context for this study. Chapter V analyzes and interprets the beliefs and values which motivated parents to enroll (and annually re-enroll) their children in CCE at Regent.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Chapter IV introduced the 19 participants and each of their school-selection journeys. Chapter V presents the themes that emerged from analyzing and interpreting data derived from interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts through the theoretical framework of this study. This study's theoretical framework has two parts. First, *the social identity theory*, which conceptualizes school choice as a vehicle for parents to pass on their religious identity, beliefs, and values to their children (Pelz and den Dulk, 2018). Through this lens, I attempt to understand the role parents' religious identity played in their Regent enrollment decisions. The second component to the theoretical framework is *the secular goods theory* (Pelz and den Dulk, 2018). Through this lens, I try to understand the role non-religious benefits played in parents' enrollment decisions. My analysis concludes that both the transmission of religious identity and the non-religious benefits that Regent provides played an important role in parents' school-selection decisions.

Rooting Education in a Biblical Worldview

The first theme emerging from the data is that parents highly valued Regent rooting education in a biblical worldview. Although countless variations and definitions of the term "biblical worldview" exist among Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Christians, Regent

parents denoted the definition of a biblical worldview that Regent communicates in its official documents:

> A worldview based on the Scriptures provides a unified education in which all subjects - history, English, biology, philosophy, science, and the arts - are understood as part of an integrated whole. This worldview may be boldly stated, or it may be implicit, but it is always present. (Regent, n.d.-e, p. 1).[40]

Thus, *rooting education in a biblical worldview* is Regent parents' a priori philosophical, theological, and "faith-based" assumption that everything Regent teaches should be grounded in and flow through the lens of the Bible. Like Nieli (2007), both the Regent administration and Regent parents perceived an interconnectedness and compatibility between all sources of knowledge, viewing all learning as part of an integrated whole. Metaphorically, a biblical worldview can be analogized to the trunk of a tree from which every academic branch of learning extends, and to which every academic branch is organically connected. Science, Christianity, common sense, and morality are all aligned and understood from a biblical point of view, resulting in a collective unity of knowledge and academic purpose (Nieli, 2007).

An examination of Regent's statement of faith reveals that the biblical worldview Regent ascribes to is broad and ecumenical:

> **We believe** that the Scriptures are the very Word of God in their entirety and, therefore, are our authority in matters of faith and practice.
>
> **We believe** in one God, creator of the universe, eternally existing in the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[40] Regent's articulation of a biblical worldview comports with CCE founder Douglas Wilson's four theological assumptions undergirding CCE found in Chapter I: a) an antithesis between Christianity and all other forms of human thought and knowledge because of the fractured nature of the image of God in every human being, and thus, the inability of humans to know truth by human means alone; b) all education is fundamentally religious, including public education, because all education explicitly or implicitly makes truth-claims; c) parents have the primary role in education of their children; and d) education has a moral telos, finding its fulfillment in loving God and serving humanity.

We believe that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, crucified for our sin, and raised from the dead in eternal victory. He is undiminished deity and genuine humanity in one person.

We believe that Heaven is the abode of God and the place of eternal joy for the saved, and that Hell is the place of eternal punishment of separation from God for the lost.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is a personal Being who convicts the world of sin and who regenerates, indwells, empowers, guides, and seals believers eternally for God.

We believe that God created man in His own image, and when man disobeyed God, he fell from grace and brought sin into the world. We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Rom 10:9-10).

We believe that regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for the salvation of lost sinners, and those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith are born again into the family of God.[41]

We believe that the family of God is the Church, which is the body of believers of which Christ is the head.

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male and female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen 1:26-27). Further, we believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning; the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (Gen 2:18-25) (Regent, n.d.-g).

Noticeably absent in Regent's statement of faith are articulations of doctrines that have divided Christendom over the last five centuries. For instance, the first proposition about the authority of Scripture makes no reference to the Bible's authority over the church or, conversely, the church's

[41] I address the meaning of regeneration in the context of identity in the second theme.

authority to interpret the Bible. Moreover, phrases such as "ultimate authority," as in the Scriptures are "our ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice," are conspicuously missing. If inserted, they would push Regent in a more overtly Protestant direction and exclude many sincere Catholic Christians because the great cry of the Reformation was "Sola Scriptura" (literally, "Scripture alone").

Sola Scriptura denotes the Bible's position on the summit of spiritual authority. Scripture corrects and watches over the church when her doctrines and practices are viewed to be in error. The Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation was to repudiate the primacy of the Bible ("Sola Scriptura"), re-asserting the church's expository and interpretative authority over the Bible. Regent's statement of faith does not engage this historically thorny and divisive Protestant-Catholic issue. The school remains open to both a Protestant and Catholic interpretation.

At the beginning of this research, I wondered if Regent was intentionally vague in this matter to draw students from both Catholic and Protestant traditions. On a hot summer day, I asked Regent's headmaster, Mr. Shapleigh, this very question. He began by noting that a few Catholic families send their children to Regent. He continued by expressing that as long as parents subscribe to Regent's statement of faith, Catholics and all Christians are invited to enroll because Regent is interdenominational.

Moreover, Mr. Shapleigh emphasized that Regent's statement of faith intentionally addresses "what we call primary doctrine … the basic tenets of the faith upon which we all agree." He places responsibility for "secondary doctrines … like a denominational difference, baptism, [and] communion," on parents to "lead the way" for their children. This deference to parental authority on second-tier theological issues is not accidental but flows from Regent's educational model and biblical worldview. Regent asserts, based on its interpretation of

Ephesians 6:4, "Bring them [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord," that the principal agents of education should be parents, not the school.[42]

Therefore, Regent parents are exhorted "to accept the responsibility to prayerfully study and teach every day the Word of God to their children" (Regent, n.d.-e, p. 3). Expressed differently, Regent upholds the foundational doctrines of Christianity, but "beyond these primary doctrines, we [Regent] respect[s] and acknowledge[s] the primacy of the family, and refer any secondary doctrinal questions to parents for clarification" (Regent, n.d.-e, p. 1).

Consequently, Regent's statement of faith is broad, ecumenical, and lacking in dogmatic precision. One example is the absence of soteriological clarity.[43] Protestant Christians have engaged in heated polemical battles over the mechanics of how an individual comes to saving faith in Jesus. Calvinists root individual salvation in the unconditional election of God. God predetermines, based on his sovereign will, who will receive his offer of salvation through the agency of Jesus. On the other hand, Arminians place the onus of salvation squarely within and upon the individual: every person has the genuine opportunity to freely accept or reject Jesus' offer of salvation (Grenz et al., 1999). Regent has intentionally chosen to forego wading into this theologically divisive landmine that has formed and torn apart denominations.

Further, Regent's statement of faith, rooted in its biblical worldview, altogether neglects eschatology, a doctrine usually addressed in standard textbooks on systematic theology.[44] The statement of faith also avoids the contentious doctrine of sacraments. Catholics assert seven (communion, baptism, ordination, absolution, matrimony, confirmation, and unction); Anglicans claim two (communion and baptism) with five sacramental acts (ordination, absolution, matrimony, confirmation, and unction); and many other Christians, such as Baptists, refuse to

[42] This viewpoint comports with antebellum Classical and Christian education in the U.S. as understood by CCE advocates.
[43] Soteriology, derived from the Greek word σώζω "sōzō," means, "to save." Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation.
[44] Eschatology is derived from the Greek word ἔσχατος "ĕschatŏs" meaning, "end" or "end of." Eschatology is the theology of the end times, or last days.

even use the word sacrament, preferring to label communion and baptism as ordinances.[45] Thus, by avoiding sacramental specifics in its statement of faith, Regent can attract students from multiple Christian faith traditions.

Regent's *rooting education in a biblical worldview* is reflected not only in written documents, but also artifactually, on Regent's insignia (Figure 5.1. 5.5, and 5.6) that is visible in the school's hallways, official documents, and on its website (Regent,

Figure 5.1

The Regent Insignia (Digital)

n.d.-a). The Regent insignia portrays an image of an open Bible in its upper left-hand quadrant. Here, the Bible represents not only wisdom and humanity's charge to seek it, but also that "Scripture provides the basis of all knowledge and a complete worldview" (Regent, n.d.-e, p. 4).

Written across the top of the insignia is the Latin phrase "Fidelis Veritati" which means "Faithful to the Truth." Regent's mission and philosophy statement elucidate that the word "truth" on the insignia denotes "the truth and authority of the Bible" (Regent, n.d.-e, p. 1). Hence, Regent and its parents like Tom, equate truth with the content of the Bible. Tom said, "We have a biblical worldview … we believe in one God, His Son, Jesus Christ, and knowing Scripture, and *the inerrancy of Scripture*" (emphasis added). Theologically, "inerrancy" means the inability of the Bible to be in error, especially in doctrinal matters like the divinity of Jesus and the existence

[45] Ordinances emphasizes that baptism and communion were "orders" given by Jesus to his followers (Grenz, S., Guretzki, D., & Nordling, C. F., 1999).

of the Triune God. Thus, Tom (and other parents whose perspectives I discuss further below) equates biblical propositions, principles, doctrines, and precepts with truth itself. Consequently, Regent parents believe that all learning should be projected through a biblical lens and built upon a biblical foundation.

On a cold December night, nine months into the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Shapleigh spoke winsomely and profoundly to prospective Regent parents about what rooting education in a biblical worldview looks like. I was uncertain as to how many prospective parents would attend the open house. As I walked through the glass front doors, I was greeted by a teacher. Then I walked down the main hallway with pictures of recent graduating classes on my left and the auditorium entrance directly before me. Above the two sets of auditorium double doors was written, "Faithful to the Truth" (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2

"Faithful to the Truth" Inscription Written over the Doors to the Auditorium Entrance

On the left side of the hallway, just before one set of doors, Tyler, a Regent parent and my first interview participant, recognized and warmly greeted me. He looked sharp and was

dressed in a sporty tie and a nice jacket. At the request of the headmaster, he was attending the open house, manning a literature table, mingling with prospective parents, and answering their questions.

Tyler and I talked for a while about our interview. Then he spoke gleefully, almost ecstatically, about how his application to start a classical charter school in Oklahoma had been approved. This school would begin education in the fall of 2022. Henceforth, Classically Formed Charter Schools would be his mission, career, and contribution to educating the next generation of Americans (Classically Formed, n.d.). Tyler chose to launch a state-certified classical charter school as opposed to a CCE school because the number of graduates CCE schools produce is limited by parents' finances. Tyler continued,

> if I want to scale the size of that [virtue-based educated] community, I can't do it in a private environment. I need to use the public dollars to create a system for what the true intent of what education is about.

Tyler's risky, career-altering decision to walk away from a lucrative and secure job for a charter school start-up communicated passion and a deep investment in elements of CCE's educational approach, characteristics I observed in most participants. In an analytic memo I analogized parents' zeal for CCE that I repeatedly observed to Jesus's parable of the pearl of great price: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).

Tyler metaphorically "sold everything" by choosing to become an educator in his mid-40s due to his kids' CCE experience. Other parents declined lucrative job offers in different states to keep their kids at Regent. Some moved to be closer to Regent's campus, and still others moved into the same neighborhoods where Regent families were already living. Parental passion for CCE at times felt illogical, but never feigned or disingenuous. Parent after parent that I

interviewed was demonstratively emotional about CCE. A few even shed tears as they recounted how CCE had blessed their families.[46]

Once inside the auditorium, I sat in the back and waited for the beginning of Mr. Shapleigh's presentation of CCE to prospective parents. I counted around 30 parents in attendance. Mr. Shapleigh started by underscoring Regent's motto of "faithfulness to the truth [in the Bible]." He bluntly stated, "We believe there's an absolute truth in this world. That doesn't change this week, next week, next year. And so it's the responsibility of our students to pursue it, understand it … The Scriptures guide them, direct them, into truth." He then argued that although we live in a "very postmodern sort of environment right now," the conversation about truth has been occurring for centuries. He then transitioned into worldview, declaring, "Everyone has a worldview."

He explained that worldviews shape our choices and actions. Worldviews are shaped by answers to some of the following questions: "Why are we here?" "Where did we come from?" "What's wrong with the world?" "What's the solution?" Next, he made his pitch to potential parents to consider enrolling their kids in CCE at Regent. He claimed, "When we bring Christianity and worldview together, it's really a transformational sort of thing … it ends up unifying what they're [students] doing." He continued that a biblical worldview in math teaches and reminds students that God is a God of order, and that God's character can be understood through math. As for art, students understand that creativity comes from God and that Christian artists will paint differently. Regarding science, students understand that everything was made by God. And then he framed the Christian impetus to learn language arts in the most unique, fresh, and creative way I have ever heard in my 40 years of identifying as a Christian.

[46] I continue discussion of Tyler's career-altering encounter with CCE under the fourth theme of this chapter: *our kids are being challenged.*

Mr. Shapleigh quoted John 1:1: "In the beginning was the *Word*, and the *Word* was with God, and the *Word* was God" (emphasis for "Word" added). He followed with Genesis 1:3, "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." Mr. Shapleigh continued,

> God spoke the world into being. His actual words formed the reality of the physical world. Later, that "Word [Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" [John 1:14].
>
> > *To be full of grace and truth is the ultimate goal of all communication* [emphasis added]. That is why we study vocabulary; that is why we learn to write great sentences. *Because language is a gift from God* [emphasis added] and we have a stewardship responsibility over it.

It was evident from the content of Mr. Shapleigh's address that he had thought deeply about applying a biblical worldview to education. Rooting education in a biblical worldview was not a slogan or talking point. Rather, it was the a priori theological and philosophical anchor for Regent's instruction.

In an analytic memo that night, I wrote how impressed I was with his innovative yet exegetically sound biblical exposition of the rationale for studying grammar! As one with three advanced theology degrees who has worked in Christian ministry my entire adult life, I have known from my college days that, according to the Bible, God spoke the world into existence. But Mr. Shapleigh's connection of studying English to God's gift of language (and that the telos of studying language is to communicate with grace and truth), came across as a fresh and exegetically credible interpretation of old, familiar texts.

As previously asserted, Regent's biblical worldview as voiced in its statement of faith comes across as broadly ecumenical and denominationally inclusive for many traditional Christians. By "Traditional," and "Traditionalism," I adopt the terminology of Pelz and den Dulk (2018) who articulated two components to these terms: Christians with high levels of

commitment and religious devotion and Christians who hold to the traditionally accepted essential doctrines of the Christian faith like the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, the authority of the Bible, the fall of humankind, and thus the need for redemption.[47]

However, while Regent's statement of faith comes across as broadly ecumenical and denominationally inclusive for many traditional Christians, Christians from more liberal traditions as well as non-Christians may find it exclusive and even discriminatory. The final tenet in the statement of faith declares the following:

> We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male and female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen 1:26-27). Further, we believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning; the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (Gen 2:18-25) (Regent, n.d.-g).

Regent unambiguously and unapologetically defines marriage in its traditional sense as a monogamous, life-long relationship between one man and one woman. Regent grounds this anthropological and theological belief in a biblical worldview, and specifically, in doctrine derived from Genesis, the first book of the Bible. On this religious ground, Regent rejects contemporary social and cultural thought on homosexual marriage, diverse sexual identities, and sexual orientation.

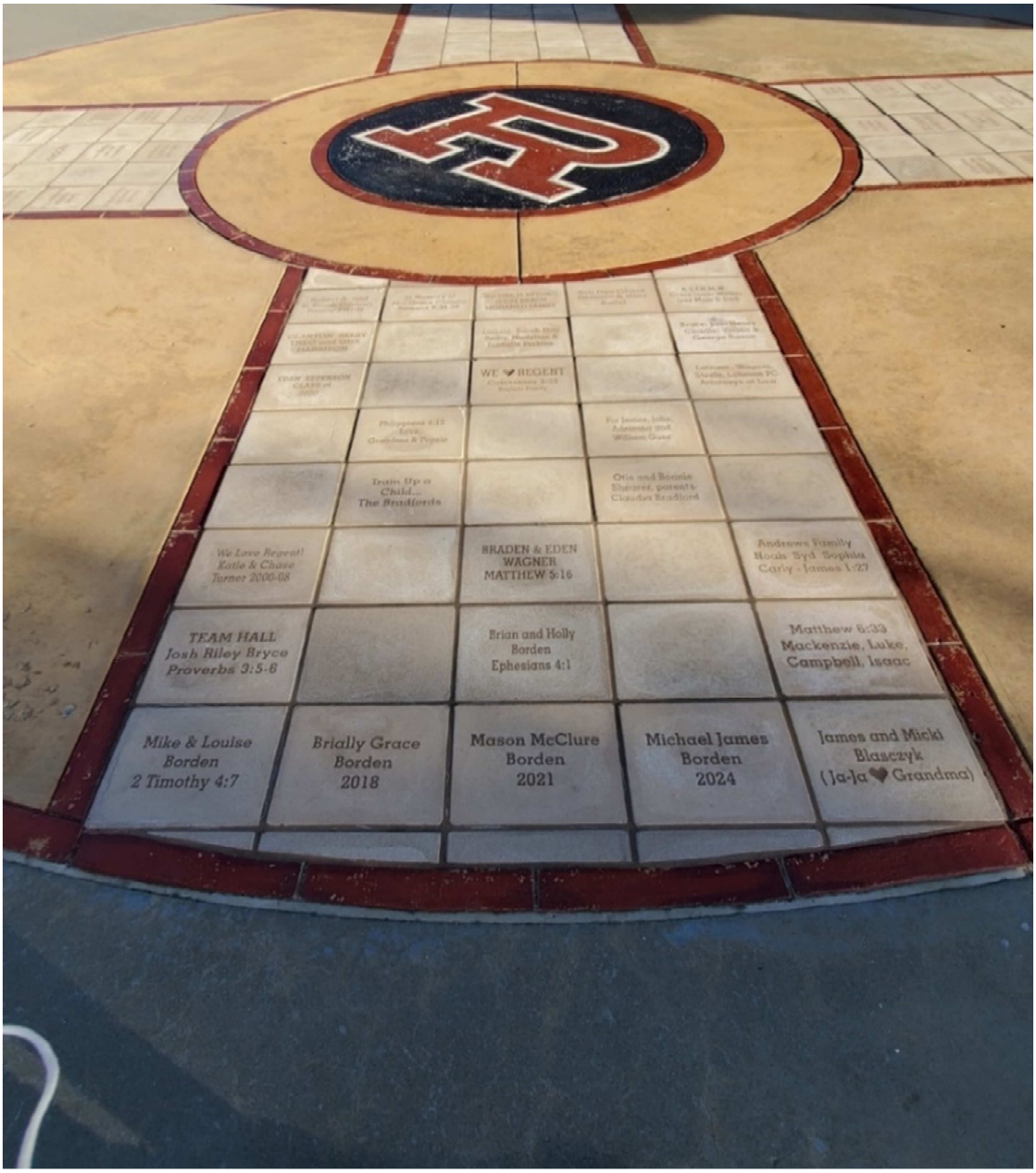
Not only does Regent convey an education embedded in a biblical worldview, but the data also indicated that parents acknowledge Regent's biblical worldview as a mirror of their own. In the outdoor walkway between Regent's elementary school building and the gym is the renowned Regent Circle (Figure 5.3), a meeting point for students, parents, and the Regent community. On the day I snapped photos for this research, the high school girls' varsity

[47] According to Pelz and den Dulk (2018), Traditionalism defined in this way "has a positive relationship to relative enrollment shares in other Christian and largely non-denominational private schools. This outcome is clear evidence that traditionalism based on religiosity is relevant to private school enrollments" (p. 93).

volleyball team was sitting upon the circle while waiting for the school bus to transport them to the state volleyball finals. The girls were calm but focused, munching on some fast food. During outdoor school chapel, the school's athletic director prayed that the girls would represent Christ with excellence, not only the state tournament, but in all they do.

Figure 5.3

The Regent Circle



The Regent Circle is more than a meeting point and campus hub. The Circle embodies Regent's mission and vision, an artifactual display of its beliefs and values. Individuals, parents, and organizations who desire to contribute financially to the ongoing mission of Regent can do so by purchasing and inscribing memorial stones to add to the Circle. Of the 99 extant inscribed memorial stones, 34 reference Bible verses and another 16 allude to the Bible. Put another way, 50% of the extant inscriptions reference the Bible or biblical themes.

For instance, the second-from-the-bottom stone in the left-hand row of Figure 5.4 reads, "TEAM HALL Josh Riley Bryce Proverbs 3:5-6." Proverbs 3:5-6 states, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." This verse is often referenced in CCE literature (Wilson, 1991) to root education in the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition instead of in the latest philosophies, pedagogies, and methods emanating from the education departments within the academy. Likewise, inscribed on the second-from-the-bottom stone in the right-hand row is the following: "Matthew 6:33 Mackenzie, Luke, Campbell, Isaac." Matthew 6:33 states, "But seek first his [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The emphasis of this verse lies in subsuming all of life's pursuits and activities, including education, to the kingly reign of God. Subsequently, God provides for all of one's needs. Even on stones that do not directly reference Bible verses, allusions and metaphors of biblical themes are readily observable. For example, one stone in Figure 5.2 reads "Soli Deo Gloria," which is Latin for "Glory to God Alone."[48]

Of the non-religiously-orientated inscriptions, most appreciate or honor parents or students. For example, "Brially Grace Borden 2018," refers to a 2018 Regent graduate.[49] Only a few non-familial and non-religious inscriptions such as " Go Rams" or "Boomer Sooner" exist.

[48] There are 285 Bible verses that contain the word "glory, the great majority of them referring to glorifying God, like "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name" (Psalm 96:8), and "I will not yield my glory to another (Isaiah 48:11).

[49] This inscription is found in Figure 5.1 on the bottom row and the second column from the left-hand side.

"Boomer Sooner" is the illustrious chant at University of Oklahoma football games, a sure giveaway that this research transpired in "The Sooner State."

Norum (2008) asserted that artifacts reveal insights into how people lived, what they valued and believed, and their ideas and assumptions. Further, Norum (2008) contended artifacts are objects that may be intentionally left behind by a community to express ideas, beliefs, and values to current and future generations. Both the specific location of the Regent Circle—at the crossroads between the first two buildings of the campus—and the inscriptions on bricks themselves reflect intentionality and purposefulness to communicate the Regent community's biblically-rooted beliefs and values.

The majority of these memorial stones were commissioned by past and present parents. Their stone inscriptions point to the importance parents ascribe to rooting education in a biblical worldview. This induction, namely, that Regent parents highly value a biblical worldview in education, is supported by other data sources in this study, including semi-structured interviews. These interviews revealed that parents' socio-religious identity was a significant (but not the sole) factor in their decision to enroll their children at Regent. Every parent I interviewed highly valued Regent's rootedness in a biblical worldview. One example was Linda.

Linda is in her 50s and has four teenage children at Regent. I sat down with Linda and her husband Roy at a local coffee shop and recorded their recollections of their first experiences at Regent. Linda stated,

> I think wow! This is really neat in a Christian environment. I don't think I would ever want to do it [education] outside of a Christian environment because I just love the idea of the Bible being the truth foundation to everything.

Here, despite Linda referring to how "neat" Regent's Christian environment was and how she clearly appreciated it, she primarily emphasized Regent's theological rootedness in a biblical worldview: "The Bible being the truth foundation to everything." Linda perceived Regent's biblical worldview as aligning with her own by declaring, "God is our Creator and Christ is our

Savior and the Holy Spirit lives in us and provides all the answers. The Bible provides every answer they [her children] need in life." Linda stressed that the Bible has "meaning every day, in every subject." Linda viewed all knowledge as unitive, emanating from only one source.

"Biblical worldview" was one of the codes I created during the first round of coding. This code amassed ninety different units of data and was articulated by all fifteen parental units I interviewed. Moreover, nine individuals from an alternative artifactual data source—the video testimonials on the Regent website—also mentioned "biblical foundation/worldview." The frequency that parents from these two different data sources invoked this terminology underscores their perceptions of its importance.

Tom is another participant who boldly and unapologetically stressed the prominence of Regent's biblical worldview for his enrollment decision. Tom stated,

> *we have a biblical worldview* [emphasis added]. … We believe in one God, his Son, Jesus Christ, and knowing Scripture, and the inerrancy of Scripture, *and those are the big things* [emphasis added]. … And so to be on the same framework [as Regent] on the Christian side, operate on that same moral foundation, to me is vital to pursuing education.

Tom did not divorce Christian morality from the lens of the biblical worldview. Put another way, he joined his a priori epistemological assumption regarding the validity of a biblical worldview with the moral ramifications of such a position.[50]

But the key to his conceptualization of "biblical worldview" is what he did not say. He did not define "biblical worldview" dogmatically or denominationally, but broadly and ecumenically. In Mr. Shapleigh's words, he focused on the *primary doctrines* of God, Jesus, knowing the Bible, and the Bible's inerrancy. In Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) terminology, Tom is a *Traditionalist*, one concerned with Christianity's theological essentials and committed to piety

[50] I address the moral ramifications of a biblical worldview in the second and fourth themes.

and religious practice. Thus, Tom's and Regent's explication of a biblical worldview appear more or less aligned.

In Chapter III, I noted the large Christian demographical presence in Tulsa. Another parent, Lynn, while acknowledging Christianity's imprint upon her city, still felt as if Tulsa's Christian demographics alone were not necessarily sufficient for her to transmit her faith. Regent's assistance in rooting education in a Christian, biblical worldview, was a primary reason Lynn enrolled her children at Regent. She stated,

> but the world has changed so much. … We [her husband and her] did not get excellent education in our public school education, but it was, it was decent and good, and we had good experiences and we had Christian friends. … But the world has changed so much since we were there [public school], *and just knowing the, the liberal bent, that's so prevalent in the educational system* [emphases added]. Even though we're in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which is, you know, not as, not as liberal. … *But just* [*sic*] *just feeling, the importance that our kids are really taught a Christian worldview* [emphasis added]. … And though we can do it at home, *it's really hard when you're going against, you know, when they spend six hours a day* [at a public school] *for all those years* [emphasis added].

Pelz and den Dulk (2018) claimed that the most-cited rationale for the connection between the decision to enroll children in a private school and religion is parents' desire for cultural transmission, "a mechanism for parents to preserve their own distinctive religious culture through their offspring (p. 85). Further, Bisen and Verdier (2000) explained that the desire to guard one's socio-cultural identity is strong in religious minorities who encounter pressure to adapt to societal behaviors and standards. Although Christianity is not a minority religion in the U.S., and especially not in Tulsa, Lynn's words reflected an internal struggle over her children's religious future. I sensed that in the arena of U.S. public education Lynn felt like a religious minority.

First, she desired that her kids "really are taught a Christian worldview," exuding passion that they learn who God is "through the arts and the sciences and even math." She felt that the

public school environment would be extremely disadvantageous to cultivate a biblical worldview in her children. She was even reluctant to enroll them in Tulsa County's most academically prestigious public school district, Jenks. Second, Lynn longed for her children to become Christians and cultivate Christian virtues.[51] Yet, her words reflected an uneasiness that this development could be actualized in public education due to its "liberal bent." Third, Lynn's words seemed to signify a tactical change in traditionalist Christians' approach to the secularist worldview that permeates public education. In other words, Lynn did not engage public education to make it more "Christian-friendly." Instead, Lynn's approach reflected a resignation, shared among many traditional Christians, to accept the status quo in U.S. public schools and seek alternative educational modalities.

In response to the Supreme Court forbidding school-sponsored prayer in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and school-sponsored Bible devotional reading in *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), some traditionalist Christians began lobbying for the re-integration of a biblical worldview and morality into public education (Deckman, 2014). Traditionalist Christians also began rallying against multiculturalism and its challenge to classical liberalism and Protestantism. According to Royer and Bindewald (in press), these Christians contended that "multiculturalism was not fairly representing Christian beliefs and that schools' allegedly neutral approach toward religion was in fact mis- and under-representing Christianity while taking an excessively positive stance toward other faith traditions" (p. 6).

In the 1980s, the posture of many traditionalist Christians was still to engage the increasing secularity in the U.S. public school system. Swayed by their constituents on the religious right, Congress passed the Equal Access Act (1984) which required public schools to provide equal access to public school facilities for all religious and non-religious student-run clubs during pre- and post-instructional hours. Signed into law by President Reagan, this bill

[51] I address the theme of children becoming Christians and cultivating the Christian virtues in the second theme.

represents a posture of engagement by traditional Christians. However, as the last quarter of the 20th century progressed, traditionalist Christians became increasingly willing to disengage from battling secularism in public education, seeking transmission of their biblical worldview to their children through alternative educational modalities. Emblematic of this traditionalist Christian attenuation in public education is the story of Vicki Frost, a mother of public school children in Hawkins County, Tennessee.

When Vicki Frost realized that a secular worldview underlay the curriculum her children were reading in elementary school, she launched a battle to obtain religious accommodation. In *Battleground: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of our Classroom*, Bates (1993) recounted how Vicki Frost successfully obtained a religious accommodation from Judge Hall at the district court level for her children to study less secularized material—a curriculum that reflected her conservative Christian worldview. However, in *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education* (1987), the Sixth Circuit's reversal of this decision was a loss for both Vicki Frost and traditionalist Christians. Frost's decision to not appeal the circuit court's decision is in some ways symbolic of the loss of traditional Christians' collective will and energy to contest their religion's marginalized status in public education.

Lynn stated, "It's really hard when you're going against, you know, when they spend six hours a day [at a public school] for all those years." I submit these words reflect Lynn's realization that a wholly different educational reality exists today as compared to her day. In reference to when she was in public school, Lynn stated,

> it was decent and good, and we had good experiences and we had Christian friends. … But the world has changed so much since we were there [public school], and just knowing the, the liberal bent, that's so prevalent in the educational system.

It seems that for Lynn, the possibility of her children having good Christian friends in high school is insufficient grounds for assuming that they will adopt her worldview and faith. It seems that if

the milieu, curriculum, and dynamics of public schools were the same today as in Lynn's high school days, Lynn would have more strongly considered enrolling her kids in public education.

But Lynn appears forlorn in regard to transmitting her worldview if her kids attend public school because she presumed that the public school is actually *working against her* religious beliefs, not simply playing the role of a neutral arbiter: "It's really hard when you're going against, you know, when they spend six hours a day [at a public school] for all those years." Thus, her school-choice journey led her to Regent, a school rooted in a biblical worldview.

Regent's educational rootedness in a biblical worldview was also foundational to David's enrollment decision. David was one of the few Regent parents I interviewed who lived overseas. A confident entrepreneur with a muscular frame and a disarming smile, David similarly lamented the current trajectory of American culture and its ripple-effects in public schools:

> *There's a very big battle against what I would consider truth* [emphasis added]. … So especially at a young age, before they're older and more responsible and can think for themselves, I wanted to put them in an environment that backed what I believe was truth.

In David's thinking, rooting his children's minds in a biblical worldview while studying at public schools would be a "battle." David, like Lynn, evoked combat imagery vis-a-vis the worldview of public education. And David, like Lynn, desired not to engage.

Reflected in David's sentiments is a biblical principle found on one of the memorial stones in the Regent Circle (Figure 5.4): "Team Phillips Romans 12:2." Romans 12:2 states, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Put simply, David desired that his young children's minds be shaped and formed biblically, so they might carry this biblical worldview into adulthood. He was dubious that the biblical formation of his children's minds could ever occur at public schools. David clearly articulated this rationale as a factor for enrolling his children at Regent:

> The fact that Regent was a Christian school *that stood on biblical principles* [emphasis added] and viewed the education of a person, not just in an academic sense, but in a spiritual sense, *teaching them about the Bible and truth and stuff* [emphasis added]. Huge! Probably the number one factor in us choosing Regent.

Figure 5.4

Romans 12:2 on the Regent Circle

To be clear, Regent's instruction in a biblical worldview was not his only reason for choosing CCE at Regent. But in his own words, it was "huge" and "the number one factor." While I did not specifically ask David's thoughts on Regent's mission and philosophy statement, it seems clear that his conception of rooting education in a biblical worldview comported with Regent's approach. Regent's website states the following:

> Education is a broadening experience that begins in childhood and lasts a lifetime. Our motto, "faithful to the truth," reflects our goal of providing a Christ-centered education that is rooted in the truth and authority of the Bible. … A worldview based on the Scriptures provides a unified education in which all subjects - history, English, biology, philosophy, science, and the arts - are understood as part of an integrated whole. (Regent, n.d.-e, p.1)

Regent's statement unequivocally asserts that education is "rooted in the truth and authority of the Bible." David reported that teaching his kids the Bible at Regent was "huge!" Neither Regent nor Regent's parents attempted to amass evidence to prove these a priori educational, epistemological, and faith-based assumptions. Rather, they posit them as *foundational* beliefs and values.

The two most salient aspects of rooting education in a biblical worldview are the *integration* of a biblical worldview across the curriculum, and "Wow, your kids really know the Scriptures." In this section, the data has already revealed that parents desired a broad application of a biblical worldview across all disciplines. Thus, this first sub-theme does not present altogether new data and analysis. Rather, the intent is to add another layer of interpretation and analysis. The second sub-theme, w*ow, your kids really know the Bible*, has not been discussed heretofore but fits nicely and logically under *rooting education in a biblical worldview.*

Integration of the Biblical Worldview Across the Curriculum

"I heard the gospel in math," said Grace. "And I love that about Regent…how everything relates to the Creator, and how God has given us literature and math and logic and rhetoric. That sold me after that day." Grace, like most parents I interviewed, valued Regent's integration of every academic subject into a biblical worldview. Mitch, another parent, similarly perceived what Mr. Shapleigh discussed at the open house. Namely, Regent thoroughly *integrates* academic subjects into a biblical framework:

> It's not just an education with a Bible class tacked on the end. It's not just Christian in name only to try to be separate from a government-run school, but the core, for me the

deepest core is, in the math classes, it's centered around Christ; in the English and the sciences.

Tristan, a parent who loves science and works in a science-related profession, agreed with Mitch. Tristan bluntly stated, "The world didn't happen by accident, you know, God created the world." Tristan continued with his gratitude and appreciation for Regent integrating the Bible into science classes. With palpable excitement in his voice, even for a "science-guy," he exclaimed, "Science is an amazing thing. It's just so detailed, so, so amazing. It was created by a God that loves us and cares for us." Tristan affirmed that teaching science from a biblical perspective, which purports "a loving, creator God," is one of his core educational values because he maintained that science and the Bible go "hand in hand." Regent's integration of the Bible into science, and science into the Bible, is one reason he continues to enroll his children at Regent.

Based on the data, I conclude that Regent attracted the type of parents whom Pelz and den Dulk (2018) labeled *Traditionalists*. As previously mentioned, Traditionalists value religious commitment, piety, and devotion, as well as adherence to the historically essential doctrines of Christianity. They can be characterized as "true believers" as opposed to "nominal believers." Traditionalists may come from an assortment of sectarian traditions (Lutheran, Baptist, non-denominational, and many more) and thus tend to be charitable in adiaphora, but resolutely committed to theological orthodoxy and orthopraxy.[52]

I submit that integrating the biblical worldview across the curriculum is vital to these Traditionalists for two reasons. First, as committed Christians, their de facto worldview is that the Bible should be integrated into every part of their lives. Parents do not compartmentalize their lives—God on Sundays and whatever they want during the rest of the week. On the contrary,

[52] Adiaphora is a theological term indicating beliefs not essential for salvation that Christians may (and do) rightfully disagree upon. Examples of adiaphora are the number and meaning of the sacraments, the various forms of church government, and eschatological viewpoints. Orthopraxy literally means "right practice" and refers to practically living out the known and experienced tenets of Christianity in love and justice (Grenz, S., Guretzki, D., & Nordling, C. F. (1999)).

every parent I interviewed regularly attended both mid-week church gatherings and Sunday worship services. These tangible signs of religious commitment pointed to an integrative and holistic understanding of Christianity. Thus, it is natural that parents would also desire the integration of Christianity in their children's lives.

Further, the Bible commands Christ-followers in countless places to love God with their minds. In fact, in what is universally referred to as the Great Commandment, Jesus decreed, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Here, Jesus instructs Christians to love him holistically, which includes their hearts (affections), souls (willpower), and minds. As traditionalist Christians, Regent's parents were trying to devoutly practice what the Bible repeatedly mandates. Loving God cognitively through understanding math, science, the arts, and all subjects through a biblical filter is a natural and logical extension of this commandment.

Lynn is one example of a conscientious parent who desired to integrate her biblical worldview into all facets of her family's life. She stated,

> it's important for kids to see that *life is not … compartmentalized, but God is part of it all* [emphasis added]. So we don't just go to church on Sunday and then then you go to school, and those are separate, but instead, you know, God's part of everything. He created it all, and so they're learning about God and his character, who he is, through the arts and the sciences and even math.

Lynn believed that Christianity should be integrated into every stitch of the tapestry of her children's lives—school, play, friendships, church, and family. Hence, Lynn valued Regent's approach to integrating the Bible throughout and across the curriculum.

Regent's website affirms that all knowledge and disciplines "are understood as part of an integrated whole" (Regent, n.d.-b, p. 1). Hannah was another parent who observed and appreciated this pedagogical orientation of Regent:

> One distinction I see at Regent from other Christian schools is the fact that the Bible isn't separated to "just a class," nor adding creationism to science. The whole education is integrated and training students to look at the world around them through the lens of Scripture.

I observed this intentional, conscientious effort to integrate a biblical worldview into all facets of Regent's education in the unlikeliest of places: a football game. Just before the kick-off at Regent's homecoming Friday night game, a Regent parent prayed over the P.A. system: "Help Yale [the opposing team] play to the best of its ability. Regent too. Let everything that we say and do tonight honor you. In your name. Amen." I later learned that the Regent athletic director requests a different parent to pray before the commencement of each home football game.

That evening, as I reflected on the prayer before the game, my hunch was that the prayer's purpose, in addition to asking for divine blessing and protection upon the players, was to integrate Regent's biblical worldview into physical education, and more specifically, football. Put another way, Regent wanted to subsume every sport in the physical education department under its biblical worldview. My hunch was confirmed two weeks later when I heard the athletic director speak at an outdoor chapel. The context was congratulating Regent's four state-ranked athletic teams. Talking to the girls' volleyball team that was about to depart for their state tournament, the athletic director said,

> we are representing not just Regent, or your families, but Christ in what we do. Never before have we had four ranked teams. We're blessed to be ranked … give a hand to the Lord for protecting us from Covid. … [then addressing the students] Do everything with excellence for God's honor and glory.

In his charge, he was implicitly acknowledging God's hand in Regent athletics by declaring, "We're blessed to be ranked." Accordingly, he incorporated the biblical worldview into even sports and physical education.

In short, the integration of a biblical worldview throughout and across the curriculum was highly significant for parents. They asserted that the Bible should not merely be "tacked onto" the curriculum, compartmentalized, or siloed from other subjects. Rather, parents desired integration across all subjects and chose Regent due to their belief in the success of this integration.

Wow, Your Kids Really Know the Bible

The second sub-theme subsumed under the heading of rooting education in a biblical worldview is *wow, your kids really know the Bible*. Many parents I interviewed stressed their delight at Regent's heavy emphasis on requiring younger students to memorize portions of the Bible. My interview with Grace, in fact, surprised me. She said,

> I heard about Regent a lot because of the memorization. So I'm a big memorizer of the Bible, I came to Christ at 32. I have a mentor who's memorized the entire New Testament. So I'd say *the number one reason we decided to pursue Regent is because I kept hearing from all these friends that the kids memorize chunks of the Bible* [emphasis added] in the King James Version. And that's really how I heard about Regent.

The impact of Grace's words startled me. She did not communicate that Bible memorization was only one factor among many that influenced her enrollment decision. Rather, it was the main factor that drew her to Regent.

Regent's emphasis on immersing children in biblical content to root education in a biblical worldview also impacted Sarah's school-selection decision. Before she enrolled her children, Sarah visited a Regent kindergarten class. She recollected how kindergarteners were "happy and joyful" while reciting Bible verses out loud during their transitions from sitting at their desks to gathering in a circle. After she enrolled her son at Regent, during the first week of school, his teacher required his class to memorize Psalm 8, which contains nine verses and 166 words![53] Her son had eight weeks to memorize and then would recite it in front of the whole

[53] Psalm 8, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. 2 Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies,

class. Sarah recalled, "I remember thinking, 'He can't do that!'" However, a joy-filled smile broke out upon her face as she continued the story: "With just a little bit of practice every day, with that systematic, regular repetition, his young mind absorbed that information."

Regent's emphasis on memorizing large chunks of the Bible stems from its pedagogical embrace of the Trivium.[54] Many parents, like Hannah, raved about this pedagogical emphasis in the lower grades. Hannah stated bluntly, "I love the memorization of Scripture [at Regent]." Linda also, in her bubbly, expressive way of communicating, relayed how their family's Bible memorization has changed their lives. She declared,

> We've had numerous teachers [at church, and not teachers at Regent] say, 'Wow, your kids really know the Scriptures.' And I don't think it's because they've studied it. I think it's just hearing it, over and over, and isn't that what the Word of God says? That you just need to keep hearing it, over and over, and it works its way to your heart. And so I value that, so much, about Regent.

Here, Linda is linking her child's saturation with the Bible ("hearing it, over and over,") to biblical precepts working their way into her child's heart, thereby fostering a disposition within her child that reflects the biblical ideal.

Thus, memorization is one vehicle for immersing kids in the Bible that Regent's parents appreciated. Second is Regent's annual publication of a lectionary (daily Bible reading plan) at the beginning of the school year. At the open house, Mr. Shapleigh noted the intentionality in this decision. He said that holding a biblical worldview means,

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that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. 3 When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; 4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? 5 For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. 6 Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: 7 All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; 8 The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. 9 O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

[54] I address the Trivium in the fourth theme: *our kids are being challenged*.

> we want to expose them actually to the Word of God itself. So, we decided very early we didn't want to have in a Bible curriculum somebody else's opinions and doctrinal statements about the Scripture. … We actually wanted students interacting with the Scriptures themselves.

Therefore, Regent students (most often with their families) read assigned Bible passages at night. The following morning "the teacher spends more time with conversation about that same passage." The intent is to immerse students in the Bible. Mr. Shapleigh also noted how his own kids who studied at Regent had read the entire Bible several times by the time they entered high school. Moreover, like Linda, he commented on how copious biblical content worked its way into their hearts.

To summarize, the documentary, observational, artifactual, and interview data indicated that the socio-religious identity of Regent parents was a significant factor in their school-choice decisions. Parents highly valued Regent's biblical worldview upon which it grounds its educational philosophy and instruction. Parents spoke enthusiastically about the integration of Regent's biblical worldview into every subject, even physical education and the arts. Parents also appreciated the required reading and memorization of biblical texts as opposed to reading about the Bible in secondary sources like theological textbooks.

Passing on a Faith That Becomes Their Own

Rooting education in a biblical worldview was the first religiously-oriented factor that parents identified as influential in their school-choice decision. The second religious factor was *passing on a faith that becomes their own*. Put simply, parents desired not only Regent's rootedness in a biblical worldview but also what this rootedness naturally leads to, the transmission of their Christian identity to their children, or in Marybeth's words, "a faith that becomes their [students'] own."

Passing on a faith that becomes their own here denotes not only students' cultivation of Christian virtues, but even more foundationally, the conscious and willful decision by Regent

students to become Christians, that is, to adopt the socio-religious identity of their parents. These parents, at one point in their lives, also chose to identify themselves with Jesus and to become his followers (Christians). Put differently, passing on a faith that becomes their own contains two sub-themes that are logically and organically connected yet temporally distinct. First, it includes *becoming a Christian*, through a point-in-time volitional decision to follow Jesus, and second, *cultivating Christian virtues*.[55] Since socio-religious identity is at the heart of *passing on a faith that becomes their own*, it is necessary to examine Jesus' teaching on socio-religious identity to ground and situate this theme.

On one occasion, when Jesus was informed that his mother and brothers were waiting outside to speak to him, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50). Here, Jesus placed identifying with him and his way above all earthly and familial relationships. It is not that he disowned his family, as evidenced by later gospel texts,[56] but that *he created a new type of social identity, intended to be stronger than family or kinship, based on faith in him.*

The question of Jesus' identity pops up again in Matthew's Gospel. While in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"[57] Matthew continued this narrative with the disciples' answers:

> "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:14-16)

[55] Because these two sub-themes are so closely related and appear simultaneously in parents' interviews, I will not address them separately, but together.
[56] See John 19:25-27.
[57] These words occur in Matthew 16:15. The term "Son of Man" was a common phrase Jesus utilized to refer to himself.

Subsequently, Matthew recorded Jesus's response to Simon Peter's confession of his identity. Jesus said,

> blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:17-18).

In short, Jesus wanted to know who his disciples said he was and if they were prepared to *verbally confess his identity* that he was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Or alternatively, if his disciples were unprepared or unwilling to accept the identity Jesus attributed to himself. The issue of his identity as the Son of God was critical for Jesus. When Peter eventually answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus not only acknowledged Peter's correct response by blessing him, but also declared *that upon this identity* ("the Christ, the Son of the living God"), Jesus himself would launch a new socio-religious movement called the church.[58]

Two millennia later, Regent parents' active participation in the church is a sign of their Christian identity. Regent parents desired that as their children grow into adulthood, they too will live out this Christian identity in the socio-religious movement inaugurated by Jesus called the church.

After Jesus' explanation of his own identity, he shared with his disciples that he would go to Jerusalem and die on a cross. The disciples were ill-prepared for this declaration. Consequently, Peter, in his characteristic impetuous manner, rebuked Jesus: "Never Lord … This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22)! Jesus, in turn, rebuked Peter and then declared,

> if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will

[58] Considerable difference between Protestants and Catholics exists in the interpretation of this passage. Catholics emphasize that the church is founded upon the person of Peter; Protestants on the confessional words and faith of Peter. Regardless of which interpretation one chooses, both Protestants and Catholics agree that Peter's confession is integral to the foundation of the church and necessary for an individual to become a Christian.

find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26).

Jesus indicated that suffering would be part and parcel of following him and that those who named him as "the Christ" (Christians) must be willing to follow on his terms, not their own. Specifically, they must deny their own self-interests and ego, take up their cross,[59] and follow Jesus, even if it means hardship and martyrdom. Not to follow Jesus on these terms is to "forfeit" one's soul in the age to come.

So, in regard to Jesus' identity, Jesus himself signified its preeminent importance. Therefore, it also carries nearly indescribable significance for Regent parents. Allegiance owed to Jesus based on his identity as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," supersedes political, cultural, and familial loyalties. It is a question, from Jesus' perspective, of eternal gravity and significance. To affirmatively answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" demands a holistic commitment of the mind, the will, and the heart. Further, when individuals respond with a holistic, life-long commitment to the person of Jesus, Jesus (and subsequent biblical authors) claim that God sovereignly, mysteriously, and miraculously changes individuals' identities.

The encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, metaphorically portrays this miraculous and supernatural transformation of individual identity that the biblical writers asserted. Nicodemus said,

> "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." In reply, Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to

[59] The cross was a Roman instrument of public execution.

> flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:3-8)

Two things are important to note in this passage. First, Jesus stated that to become his follower in this newly inaugurated reality called the Kingdom of God, one must be "born again." Nicodemus interpreted Jesus' words literally: "How can a man be born when he is old?" Therefore, Jesus explained that being "born again" is not a literal re-entry into one's mother's womb so that one can physically be born again. That would be ludicrous and physically impossible. Thus, Jesus' description: "Flesh [mothers] give birth to flesh [human babies], but the Spirit [the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity] gives birth to spirit [a new spiritual identity generated within Jesus' followers]."

Important to grasp here is that Regent parents believe they cannot force or coerce their children into adopting *a faith that can become their own*. Although Regent parents had everything to do with their children's ("first") natural birth, the Bible teaches that being born again can only occur through the agency of the Holy Spirit and their children's decision to accept this unconditional offer of a new birth.[60]

[60] The doctrine of regeneration in complex, nuanced, and in some ways paradoxical. Most Christians assert that regeneration is synergistic in that it involves God's free and gracious offer and an individual's subsequent and necessary response. One frequent analogy is a birthday present given by a friend. The gift is freely and graciously offered, but the recipient still has to open her hands to receive, unwrap, and take ownership of the gift. Similarly, though God initiates the offer of regeneration to humankind, each individual must make the conscientious decision to accept and take ownership of this gift. Further, in the evangelical understanding of regeneration, subsequent good works are not a precondition for regeneration. Rather, the understanding is that individuals who truly experience regeneration will joyfully and passionately want to do good works (and grow in Christian virtues) due to the "new birth" that they have experienced. Bible verses such as II Corinthians 5:14 express this principle, "For Christ's love compels us." Also illuminative is Jesus' response to the thief on the cross who was not able to engage in good works after regeneration because he was crucified simultaneous to Jesus. The exchange occurs like this: "'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Zondervan.

Owing to Nicodemus' difficulty in comprehending this concept, Jesus continued his explanation, likening the identity transformation that occurs from being "born again" to the blowing of the wind. Jesus said, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Jesus' words can be summarized like this: as individuals cannot physically see the wind, but only understand its existence from hearing it and seeing its effects, so also individuals cannot see with their eyes how and when God re-births individuals into the Kingdom of God. Nonetheless, according to Jesus, those who decide to follow him are mysteriously and miraculously "born again" through the agency of the Spirit of God (the third person of the Trinity) who henceforth dwells and resides inside them.

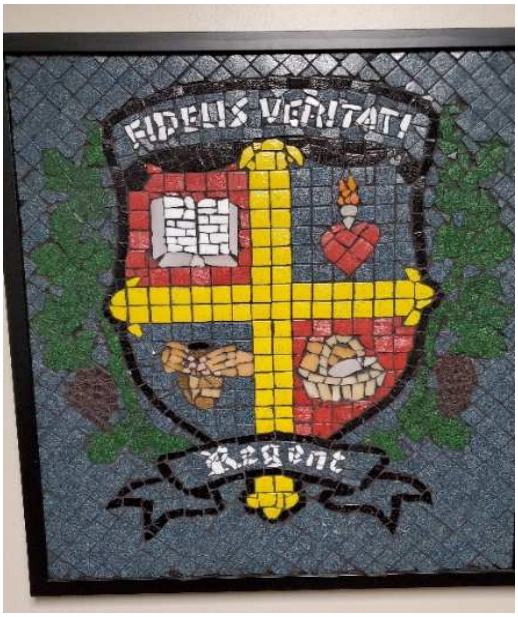
The second important thing to note in this passage is the Greek verb γεννάω ("gĕnnaō"), translated as "born," and the Greek adverb ἄνωθεν ("anōthĕn") translated as "again." Like most words, gĕnnaō has a whole range of meanings, including "to procreate, to bear, to bring forth, to conceive," (Strong, 2009, p. 20), and anōthĕn can mean "from above, again, from the beginning (very first)" (Strong, 2009, p. 13). Thus, from the root of the verb gĕnnaō and the meaning of anōthĕn (again), the word "regeneration" has come into the English language. Theologically, regeneration denotes "the re-birth or re-creation of fallen human beings by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit" (Grenz et al., 1999, p. 101). Put another way, regeneration is a theological term that Christians employ to denote the socio-religious identity transformation that occurs inside individuals when they holistically commit to following Jesus and receive the Spirit's subsequent indwelling.

Regent utilizes the term "regeneration" in its statement of faith: "**We believe** that regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for the salvation of lost sinners, and those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith are born again into the family of God" (Regent, n.d.-g). The inclusion of this article of faith attests to the importance that Regent places on *passing on*

a faith that becomes their own. The Regent insignia (Figure 5.1, 5.5, and 5.6) also confirms the school's emphasis on this value.

Figure 5.5 and 5.6

The Regent Insignia (Cloth), and the Regent Insignia (Mosaic)



Note. Both these insignias are found in prominent school hallways

communicates the importance of regeneration (becoming a Christian) and its natural consequences: the cultivation of Christian virtues.

The insignia is circumvented by a grapevine, which refers to Jesus' words in John 15 (Regent, n.d.-e, p. 3).[61] Jesus analogized himself to a vine and his followers (Christians) to branches. As branches must physically and organically be connected to a vine to sustain

[61] John 15:1-5: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

biological life, so also, Jesus asserted, individuals must be connected to his identity to become a Christian. In short, although Jesus is changing the metaphor from wind and new birth to vines and branches, the message he communicates here is the same: a transformed identity is predicated upon an organic and spiritually life-giving connection to God.

However, becoming a Christian is only the first step (and first sub-theme) of *passing on a faith that becomes their own*. As the purpose of branches is to grow and bear fruit, so also Christians' purpose is growing in Christ-like characteristics, or put another way, *cultivating Christian virtues* (the second sub-theme).

One morning after outdoor chapel, I ran into Regent's headmaster, Mr. Andy Shapleigh. I was eager to chat about the service. Chapel met at the football field due to COVID-19 concerns.[62] Students sat on the bleachers, but those students whose parents attended were able to sit together with their parents on the sideline of the football field. The musical worship team and the speakers' microphones were set up on the 40 yard-line inside the field of play.

I estimated there were about 60 parents and 120 children on the sideline of the football field. Many of the 120 children present were younger than four-years-old and thus too young to be students at Regent. Still, a good number of Regents students came down from the bleachers and sat with their families for the 45-minute service. Most parents had brought pop-up outdoor chairs or picnic blankets to sit on. Folding chairs were also available at the main entrance. There was ample socializing before and after chapel. The whole morning felt rather like a small-town picnic on a Sunday afternoon, even though there was no food.

At 8:15 a.m., Mr. Shapleigh opened the chapel service with a brief welcome and prayer. Then the musical worship team comprised of one adult, who played guitar and led the singing, and six student musicians began leading the Regent community in musical worship. They sang "Amazing Grace-My Chains Are Gone," "Defender," and "Doxology." After musical worship,

[62] Before COVID-19 chapel met indoors at the Regent auditorium.

the headmaster spoke for about seven minutes on the Gospel of John. He was not the featured speaker for the day; he is also not a seminary or Bible College graduate. But I found his biblical exposition of John chapters 1-7 quite engaging as he focused on the responses of the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus to Jesus' identity-claim as Lord. Toward the end of his seven-minute message, he declared, "If we accept this message [about Jesus], there's then a claim on our life. Bekah (alias name) understands the claim on her life." He then introduced Bekah, a missionary in her 20s who spent the previous two years as a missionary in East Asia.

Bekah spoke at length about her ministry in East Asia. She emphasized that the gospel changes our lives and our very identities. After her message, Mr. Shapleigh spoke again, telling students that simply attending Regent does not make them Christians. He continued, "So you may want to ask yourself, 'Have I resolved the issue of the identity of Jesus? The greatest step in your life begins with this decision.'" Mr. Shapleigh sounded as if he could have been a youth group minister at a summer camp presenting an altar call as he challenged the students to put their faith in Jesus.

After chapel, when I ran into Mr. Shapleigh at the entrance to the football field, he underscored how important he believes it is that each student makes a conscious decision to follow Jesus, *to become a Christian*. Moreover, he stressed that the school notifies parents when students make decisions to put their trust in Jesus and become Christians. He then encourages parents to work through these faith-decisions for Jesus with their children.

Data from my study indicated that parents' desire to transmit their Christian faith to their children was a significant factor in their selection of Regent. For example, Kevin told me directly, "I want them [his children] to be able to find their Christian identity, not mine, but theirs, through the teaching and education at Regent." Likewise, Marybeth, from whose words emerged the heading for this second theme, stated the following:

> It's more important to me to pass on a set of beliefs and *a faith that can become their own* [emphasis added], that really, truly belongs to them, and isn't just the faith of their parents or the faith of their grandparents. That's probably most important to me.

Both Kevin and Marybeth expressed that transmitting their Christian identity to their children is neither automatic nor mechanistic because becoming a Christian requires a point-in-time volitional choice and continuous effort in cultivating virtues.[63] Although understanding that Regent cannot force their children to become Christians, both Kevin and Marybeth still asserted that the "teaching and education" at Regent can help their children "find their Christian identity" and make it "truly belong to them."

Sarah expressed Kevin's and Marybeth's viewpoint with greater clarity and nuance, explaining,

> I think *there's a higher probability of your child growing in their relationship with Christ* [emphasis added] and developing a greater scope of understanding with more depth [at Regent] … but that's not a given because they are in a Classical Christian school.

Again, neither Sarah nor any of the parents I interviewed assumed their kids would robotically or inevitably adopt and faithfully practice Christianity simply because their kids attend Regent. However, many believed that Regent would not only help transmit Christian faith to their children but also assist their children to develop Christian virtues. Tom remarked,

> it feels like *we're always on the same team, in the same page* [emphasis added], and always going in the same direction with what we believe and cultivating wisdom and virtue in our children, nourishing their souls. The true, the good, the beautiful when

[63] The traditional Protestant theological term for the cultivation of virtue is sanctification. Sanctification is the spiritual growth of Christ-followers in virtue and holiness through cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Christians believe that the Holy Spirit begins dwelling inside them after they make a faith commitment to follow Jesus (Grenz, S. J., et al., 1999). I utilize "cultivating Christian virtues" instead of the term "sanctification" because cultivating Christian virtues better represents the language that parents vocalized in interviews. Not a single parent used the term sanctification.

they're there [at Regent]. When they're there, it's just an extension of what we're doing at home.

By the phrase, "what we're doing at home," Tom denoted his (and his wife's) intentional efforts to impart Jesus-like virtues into the core of their children's character. As Tom uttered these words, my mind drifted back to a memorial stone I remembered glancing at on the Regent Circle. This stone, fifth from the top on the second row from the left (Figure 5.7), reads "Train Up a Child… The Bradfords."

This verbiage "train up a child" refers to the New American Standard translation of Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child* [emphasis added] in the way he should go, even when he grows older he will not abandon it." This oft-cited Bible verse in homeschool circles instructs parents to inculcate within their children at a young age the biblical beliefs, virtues, and habits they want their children to live by, so that as their kids grow older, they will own (and not abandon) their upbringing. What Tom was getting at was that he felt supported by Regent in the character- and virtue-oriented goals he has for his children. Tom's objective in a Regent education was not only cultivating his children's minds but buts also "nourishing their souls."

Figure 5.7

Proverbs 22:6 ("Train up a Child") on the Regent Circle

One element of cultivating Christian virtues that surfaced repeatedly was parents' appreciation for Regent's intentionality in calling out lying among its students. This emphasis of Regent comports with Wilson's (1991) suggestion that ACCS schools should confront and not excuse the sinfulness in children. Mitch, a parent who expressed gratitude for this posture and orientation, shared the following incident about his son:

> I think he had wadded up some toilet paper in the bathroom, got it wet, threw it up on the ceiling. Well, again, my days in public school, teaching in public school … that's not a big deal. Oh, it was a big deal. At Regent. … He was broken about it; he was very remorseful about that. But, we would have never known, had the teacher not come to us and said, "Here's what happened." You know, it's a heart issue. He's [Mitch's son] trying to get attention for himself.

Mitch went on to describe how distinctly Christian character traits, like humility and honesty, are cultivated when kids are confronted with their wrong and (in Mitch's words, "sinful") behavior. Another parent, Lynn, also valued the school's emphasis on cultivating the virtues of honesty, humility, and integrity in students. She related this story about her daughter:

> When our oldest was in E-3, so kindergarten. She lied to her teacher. … I think she wanted to go to the nurse just because kids want to go…so, she made up the story. She lied. And so she was caught. … The nurse kind of figured it out because it didn't make sense … We contacted the teacher and said, "Can we come 10 minutes early to school, our daughter needs to have something she needs to talk to you about?" So, she goes into, you know, to ask for forgiveness or confess that I did lie to you.
>
> > And this is the sweetest, most beautiful picture of the gospel, the way this teacher says, "Of course I forgive you. And do you know why? *Because Jesus forgave me"* [emphasis added]. I mean, it was just the way she did it was just sweet and precious and we just thought, "Oh, my goodness. You don't get this everywhere."

> And once again, it's another adult for coming alongside the parents, teaching the same things to our kids that we want so, that was a [*sic*] very sweet.

Noteworthy in Lynn's portrayal of this event is not only her appreciation for the extra time the teacher took to hear her daughter's confession of lying, nor how Lynn felt supported by the teacher. Most salient in Lynn's mind is *how* the teacher resolved the issue. The teacher did not frame forgiveness in language like "we all deserve second chances," and she did not minimize or excuse the infraction. The teacher couched her forgiveness in the greater gospel narrative, in Jesus' substitutionary and sacrificial death upon the cross: "because Jesus forgave me" (on the cross), the teacher stated, "I forgive you." In Lynn's words, the teacher enacted and verbalized "the sweetest, most beautiful picture of the gospel," thereby engendering in Lynn the feeling Regent *is passing on a faith that becomes their own*, or in Lynn's own words, "teaching the same things [Christian virtues] to our kids that we want."

Another parent, Tristan, made an explicit connection between the first theme, *rooting education in the biblical worldview*, and the second theme, *passing on a faith that becomes their own*. Tristan said,

> they're [Regent] teaching morality, they're teaching [*sic*], there's like a point behind what they're learning and it's, it's our worldview of a, you know, a Christian worldview and how do you serve others. You know, love others and, you know, put others before yourself and that kind of thing, that you're learning as a kindergartener. You know, they're learning to read, but they're also learning so much more.

Even though our interview occurred over Zoom, I heard Tristan's voice perk up as he spoke these words. Tristan expressed deep satisfaction over the integration of a biblical worldview with practical biblical virtue, that students are taught to adopt "biblical morality." Put another way, in Tristan's view, Regent students are not only academically rooted in a biblical worldview but also encouraged to internalize and emulate its ethical and moral implications in their lives.

David also conveyed these sentiments: “I don't want my kids just to *know about God* [emphasis added], I want them *to know him* [emphasis added]. That's probably number one on my list.” Tyler articulated this notion as well: “One of the reasons we selected Regent is that it would likely agree with our own worldview, and it’s important that *we pass on our worldview to our kids*” [emphasis added]. Tyler’s worldview included a personal and intimate relationship with God.

To summarize, the artifactual, documentary, observational, and interview data indicated parents enrolled their children at Regent to root instruction in a biblical worldview with the aspiration that their kids would adopt a Christian identity and cultivate Christian virtues. These findings comport to the findings of Pelz and den Dulk (2018) who made the following assertions based on data collected in their empirically-based study:

> While we find limited support for private school enrollment based *on religious identities tied to a specific tradition* [emphasis added], enrollments are related to the religious identity tied to traditionalism in at least one important case. Private schools not necessarily affiliated with a particular tradition appear to be capturing students from families that demonstrate high levels of religious commitment. This trend in private education corresponds with the broader movement in Christianity to look *beyond established denominational institutions* [emphasis added]. From this vantage point, these unaffiliated private schools may represent the latest incarnation of the dynamic influence of religion on the private school marketplace. (p. 106).

The data from my study corresponded to Pelz and den Dulk’s (2018) conclusions in a few ways. First, Regent is not based on “religious identities tied to a specific tradition” (p. 106). Indeed, Regent intentionally looks “beyond established denominational institutions” (p. 106) to position its doctrine within the broad, historical stream of traditional and theologically orthodox Christianity.

Thus, Regent had drawn parents from dozens of church affiliations, including Catholicism (A. Shapleigh, personal communication, September 28, 2020). Regent's Christian diversity is made possible by its emphasis upon first-tier, primary doctrines such as the divinity of Christ, regeneration, the Trinity, etc. Regent leaves adiaphora (often the source of sectarian traditions and differences) to each parent's discretion.

Second, as Pelz and den Dulk (2018) wrote, Regent is indeed "capturing students from families that demonstrate high levels of religious commitment" (p. 106). Each of the families I interviewed regularly attended both Sunday worship services and midweek fellowship gatherings. In pastoral parlance, the Regent parents I interviewed were not "CEO Christians"—**C**hristmas, **E**aster **O**nly church attenders, but committed practitioners of their faith. Thus, Regent parents not only valued their children learning about Christianity but also *practicing it*. Tom's words come to mind:

> I think for me, like if I summarize everything we were saying, like at what I know today, there is no better place *to help us cultivate wisdom and virtue in our children, and to nourish their soul in the true, good and beautiful* [emphasis added]. That is … I don't know of a better option. I mean, I didn't have that language before this. This option has exceeded beyond our dreams, that we could have imagined.

Therefore, based upon Regent's emphasis on developing piety and virtue, and its eschewal of specific sectarian traditions, I submit that Regent, and by extension, the schools of the ACCS (of which Regent is a member) are another iteration and incarnation of "the dynamic influence of religion in the private school marketplace" (Pelz and den Dulk, 2018, p. 106). Both Regent and the ACCS schools have exhibited stellar growth in the 40 years since their establishment, adapting successfully to the ever-changing U.S. religious and educational environment.

Since Regent only admits students whose parents are Traditionalists, Regent may appear to be a very exclusive group. When considering the issue of exclusivity, it is helpful to take into consideration U.S. religious demographics. According to Pew Research Center, 25.4% of

Americans are Evangelical and 20.8% Catholic (Pew, 2014a).[64] Among Evangelicals, 88% reported that they are "absolutely certain" about their belief in God; 79% reported that religion is "very important" in their lives (Pew, 2014c). Among Catholics, 64% reported they are "absolutely certain" about their belief in God; 58% indicated religion is "very important" to them (Pew, 2014b). Among mainline Protestants, who represent 15% of Americans, 66% were "absolutely certain" of their belief in God and 53% indicated that religion is "very important" in their life (Pew, 2014d).[65]

Therefore, contemporary U.S. demographics show that Regent, and all other private Christian schools that hold to Traditionalism, have quite a large pool of parents from which to draw students. Viewed statistically, according to Pew, the majority of Americans seem to have religious beliefs more closely aligned to the philosophies of ACCS schools than the secular ideological stance prevalent in U.S. public schools. Seen in this light, Regent is not nearly as exclusive as it might appear to be, especially considering its emphasis on primary doctrines and de-emphasis on doctrines that tend to divide Christians. Regent might feel exclusive to those who do not profess or practice Christianity, but Regent's parents viewed U.S. public schools as excluding their own religious beliefs and values.

Put another way, non-religious parents who send their children to U.S. public schools have a higher chance of preserving their children's' non-religious (secular) identity than religious parents who send their children to public schools have of preserving their children's religious identity, since secularism dominates public schools (Cohen-Zada & Justman, 2019). Many American parents are not overly concerned about transmitting their religious identity to their

[64] The third largest religious demographic is "Nones," those unaffiliated with any particular religious tradition.

[65] Some of the larger denominations commonly considered as mainline Protestant denominations are African Methodist Episcopalians, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians. From the beginning of the 19th through the middle of the 20th century Mainline Protestants were a cultural force in American society. However, since the 1960s their membership has declined precipitously; the progressive-conservative factions also have lessened their cultural influence.

children through the instrumentality of private religious schools; the cost of tuition is a deterrent. However, for the large subsection of religious Americans for whom Traditionalism is important, private religious schools become an attractive alternative to protect their children from external secular influences in public schools that might compromise their children's religious identity.

A Community of Like-Minded People

During my interview with Hannah, I asked her to describe the emotions of her school-selection journey. Hannah expressed her love for Regent and that "it feels like a little family." Then, she voiced a description I heard repeatedly throughout my research: "The community is the best unexpected by-product of sending my children to Regent. I feel as if have found a village of moms who are *like-minded* [emphasis added], even if we are different." Hannah's word, "like-minded," and her phrase, "A village of moms who are like-minded," anchors the third theme of this study: *a community of like-minded people*. However, I have substituted the word "community" for the word "village" since many Regent described the school as a community. I have also replaced Hannah's word "moms" with the more inclusive word "people" because fathers, students, and teachers also perceived a high degree of like-mindedness at Regent.

"Like-minded," verbalized by 73% of parents to describe the Regent community and ethos, was one of my initial in vivo codes. "Like-minded" was also articulated by two parents on the Regent YouTube channel to describe their experiences of Regent's community. Other similar codes such as "feels like family," "relational and relationships," and "kindness" were also prevalent. Frankly, parents like Hannah spoke about Regent's like-mindedness and close-knit relationships in such glowing and affectionate terms that, even to an "external-insider" like me,[66] their sentiments seemed farfetched and almost unbelievable at the outset.

For instance, Risa observed, "The people I've met have been great, probably more like-minded than any place that we've been around. And so, that's a comfort, very welcoming, very

[66] I discuss the meaning of "external-insider" under the heading "Researcher Positionality" in Chapter III.

helpful in getting us involved, inviting us to things." Risa associated like-mindedness with comforting and welcoming kindness. Beyond that, Mitch associated Regent's like-mindedness with relational intimacy, articulating that the Regent community is a "tight-knit" group of individuals.

The degree of like-mindedness created and nurtured among parents and students at Regent surprised even the headmaster, Mr. Shapleigh, when he began working as the school's first headmaster in 2000. Mr. Shapleigh contended that Regent's rich, kind, and caring Christian community "is sort of a fringe benefit of pursuing this sort-of-unique thing together. We've ended up creating a community that I didn't anticipate when we started 20 years ago. It is very *like-minded* [emphasis added] and special."

Grace, along with a few other parents, even asserted that the communal like-mindedness is greater at Regent than at their churches. Grace said,

> The community here is a family. We attend a solid Presbyterian Church. I feel that Regent is a bigger church. The moms, the dads, if I need anything, I can call them all, whether it be a ride, a pick-up, an item for school, a book, it's just, it's a bigger church; I don't think you find many schools like that.

Grace denoted that she had numerically more parents to call upon at Regent for favors like carpooling and watching kids than she had at her church. Later in the interview, she addressed the intimacy of Regent friendships, considering them deeper than friendships at her church. Grace's sentiments are reflective of the experiences of many other parents. For instance, Beth remarked,

> I think some of our dearest friends and community, it [*sic*] kind of came out of Regent. And because of Regent, and just the like-mindedness of how we're all wanting to raise our kids the same way. [*sic*] In a church we have good friends, but you know, I think everybody is still like, "There's still a lot of differences of how you do that and this."

By the phrase "all wanting to raise our kids the same way," Beth was referring principally to inculcating a Christian identity and virtue in her children, primarily on a theological and moral

level. However, her observation that Regent did not have "a lot of differences of how you do that and this" seemed to communicate that like-mindedness at Regent also encompassed socio-cultural elements.

Most of the parents I interviewed had been attending their churches longer than Regent. Even so, Regent still afforded a greater sense of belonging and friendship than their churches. Further, parents seemed to prefer participating in ministry and leisure activities (like Bible studies, moms' and dads' prayer groups, and father-son outdoor trips) with other Regent parents more than with congregants from their church. Thus, it appears that the warmth and connection parents described can be partially accounted for through common social bonds. These parents did life together. They did life together.

Throughout my research, my thoughts intermittently drifted back to a television show I watched growing up and later watched with my daughters. *Little House on the Prairie* takes place during the late 1800s in the frontier prairie town of Walnut Grove, Minnesota. Harriet Oleson and her two children, Nellie and Willie, constantly bicker with the Ingalls family, and particularly with their second daughter, Laura. Nonetheless, a dynamic spirit of togetherness overcame all communal contentiousness. The Walnut Grove community manifested their closeness in times of celebration and difficulty, and especially on Sunday mornings at church. The *Little House on the Prairie* community also did life together.

Due to Covid-19, Regent's weekly chapels were not held inside the usual location of the school auditorium. Instead, chapel services were moved to the football field. The students sat in the stands, the parents sat on the sidelines, and the platform was placed on the football field. In most chapels I attended, I observed a friendly and congenial atmosphere among parents. I saw many elbow-bumps and air-elbow-bumps between parents.[67] Further, many lingered on after chapel was dismissed and engaged each other in casual conversations. The atmosphere at chapel

[67] Due to COVID-19 they were unable to shake hands or hug, so these gestures reflected socially distanced warmth and friendship.

evoked images of a tight-knit, small-town community on an afternoon picnic and, as I just noted, the memories I have from watching *Little House on the Prairie*.

Like-mindedness was not a theme I expected to discover at Regent. Then again, the headmaster was not expecting a "like-minded" community when the school was launched. But throughout my research I sensed strong bonding between parents, between children, and even intergenerational bonding between parents and non-related children. I submit that this communal bonding is rooted in the theological unity that stems from the theological and devotional criteria found on Regent's application documents.[68]

Regent requires all parents to sign its statement of faith and thereby affirm every article found therein.[69] This statement of faith requires more than mere intellectual acquiescence to a particular worldview, ideology, political party, or theology. Christian traditionalism, as theorized by Pelz and den Dulk (2018) and affirmed by Regent's statement of faith, also requires volitional determination to live life in an altogether different kind of way with particular theological values and devotional practices.

For instance, Regent's application asks specific questions regarding each family's faith and how it plays out in the home: "Describe your son's/daughter's relationship with God;" "Describe the ways in which you integrate your faith into your family's life;" and "Describe how discipline is handled in your home" (Regent, n.d.-h, p. 5). Underlying these questions is Regent's assumption and expectation that prospective parents are integrating their faith with biblical conduct and that they are cognizant of the need for children to develop a personal relationship with God. Further, the word "discipline" implies that prospective parents are taking action to encourage their children's compliance in the development of virtues. Thus, at a theological and devotional level, Regent begins creating a community of like-minded individuals before the first

[68] Parents' like-mindedness also derived from the educational, SES, and racial commonalities that I discuss in this section. I also consider social aspects of *a community of like-minded people* both here and under the fifth theme, *we kept running into people who sent their kids there*.
[69] Regent's statement of faith is found at the beginning of this chapter.

day of class is even taught. As a private religious school, Regent is not required to admit students whose parents do not subscribe to or align with the school's own theological and devotional ethos.

To describe this phenomenon in Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) terminology, Regent selects and then matriculates children of *traditionalist parents* into its school. These parents prioritize theological orthodoxy, religious devotion, and piety. Regent, unlike public schools, can craft (to a degree) the community of students and parents it desires. One effect of Regent's admittance criteria is the creation and development of a "like-minded" community. One parent, Hannah, picked up on this phenomenon when she stated the following:

> Bottom line for this question was that we were looking to couple our desire for high-quality education with a *Christian worldview* [emphasis added]. Having *a school that screened for like-minded families* [emphasis added] was a huge plus. All the fruit we saw from Regent was positive.

Three salient points emerge from Hannah's statement. First, she mentioned "Christian worldview," which points to her desire for a theological "like-mindedness" among parents. Second, she understood that Regent "screened" and consciously selected parents who would conform to the traditionalist orientation at the school. Finally, the word "fruit" connotes behavioral norms and virtuous qualities in Christian character. Jesus desires fruit from his followers, as detailed in the previous discussion of John 15. Thus, I submit that the like-mindedness Regent parents' experienced is principally anchored in their common, theological, traditionalist beliefs and practices.

There are other less influential elements that contribute to Regent's like-minded community. A second factor is parents' homogeneity is their educational levels. Although parental educational attainment is not a factor in the admissions process, every parent I interviewed had obtained, at minimum, a bachelor's degree. Thus, it appears that Regent parents ascribe significance to education.

Bindewald (2015) delineated the distinctives between Fundamentalists and Evangelicals,[70] noting that while both groups hold to the same five "fundamentals,"[71] Evangelicals are more inclined to pursue and accept the knowledge produced from higher education.[72] Evangelicals' posture can be characterized as proactive engagement with knowledge from all disciplines and thoughtful integration of this knowledge into a biblical worldview. Conversely, Fundamentalists' posture (especially after the Scopes Trial in 1925) can be characterized as a withdrawal from both the academy and society. Regent's adoption of CCE curriculum indicates an evangelically-oriented position,[73] so it is not surprising that Regent attracts thoughtful, university-educated parents who prioritize their children's intellectual and academic development.

A third factor contributing to Regent's like-mindedness is SES. As noted in Chapter IV, the average income of this study's participants was $259,300 a year. The annual tuition at Regent ranges from $4,260 for Enrichment II (Pre-K) students up to $10,700 for ninth-12th-grade students (Regent, n.d.-g). Thus, lower SES parents cannot afford to send their children to Regent. As a result, Regent's community is comprised of primarily middle- and upper-class families.

This is not to say that tuition was not burdensome for any of the parents. On the contrary, parents making under $100,000 a year mentioned that tuition "adds up" with many students enrolled at Regent. Further, tuition jumps astronomically when students enter the ninth grade. A

[70] When I mention "Evangelical" or "Evangelicalism" in this study, I refer to primarily Evangelicalism's *theological orientation and beliefs* and not the political or social connotations associated with Evangelicals or Evangelicalism.

[71] The five fundamentals of Fundamentalism are the inerrancy of the Bible, the Virgin birth of Jesus, Jesus's substitutionary and sacrificial death on the cross for humanity's sins, the miracles of Jesus, and Jesus' eventual second coming.

[72] Another difference between Evangelicals and Fundamentalists is their view of biblical inspiration. Whereas Fundamentalists veer toward a more literal and verbal view of biblical inspiration, namely, each and every word of the Bible was inspired by God, Evangelicals are more comfortable with an array of understandings. While Pelz and den Dulk (2018) do not classify Traditionalism within either the Fundamentalist or Evangelical camp, the Traditionalist (and Traditionalism) nomenclature aptly describes Evangelical Christians and the Regent parents in this study. However, Traditionalism can also include Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and other Christians. Thus, it is generally true that while all Evangelicals are Traditionalists, not all Traditionalists are Evangelicals.

[73] I discuss Regent's curriculum in the fourth theme.

few parents even intimated possible withdrawal from Regent due to COVID-19's impact on finances and employment. Yet, consistent with the findings of Cohen-Zada and Justman (2019), Regent parents appeared "willing to incur the added expense of sending their children to private schools while continuing to pay the taxes that support public education" (p. 203) because they value religious schooling over secular schooling. Even so, tuition's cost and limited need-based financial aid precluded families with inadequate financial resources from attending Regent, thereby effectuating a community of (predominantly) middle- and high-income earners.[74]

On its admission form, Regent states it does not discriminate in admission or administrative policies "based on any race, color, creed, or national ethnic origin" (Regent, n.d.-h, p. 1). In my conversations with Mr. Shapleigh, he conveyed that although Regent wants to increase its racial and ethnic diversity, only a few black and Hispanic students are currently enrolled. Regent's tuition seems to exclude not only lower SES families but also to reduce the number of students of color because minority parents tend to have less disposable income to allocate to private school tuition than whites do.

When I asked parent-participants about the weaknesses of Regent, many noted its limited SES diversity, but only a few referred to its limited racial diversity. One parent brought her college-aged son to our interview. He attends a racially diverse southern university and completed middle and high school at Regent. Although quiet for most of the interview (because I was interviewing his mother, not him), toward the end of our time, I asked him specifically about the weaknesses he perceived at Regent. His immediate response was a lack of racial diversity.

The data indicated that most Regent parents regarded their middle- and upper-class SES status as minimally contributing to the "like-mindedness" they perceived at Regent. Correspondingly, it appears that parents were not attentive to (or at least did not verbalize) the reality that the predominantly white racial make-up of Regent could have also contributed to

[74] The Regent administration is aware of its minimal SES student-body diversity and is working to increase SES diversity through offering need-based tuition assistance.

Regent's like-mindedness. If parents were cognizant of the lack of racial diversity, they certainly did not articulate it during the interviews.

It appears that this quietness about race stems from two factors. First, Regent's parents are evangelically oriented. Unlike proponents of collective identity-based theoretical frameworks,[75] most Evangelicals do not acknowledge race as significant to individual identity. McDermott (2020) argued most Evangelicals believe that identity is determined first by human beings' anthropological union with each other by virtue of a common creation by God.[76] Second, Evangelicals believe that human identity is shaped by common, universal sinfulness and condemnation.[77] Third, Evangelicals believe that an added identity marker is given to those who decide to follow Jesus (Christians) through regeneration.[78] My perception was that Regent's parents conceptualized identity like the majority of Evangelicals do—not in collectivist terms.

Second, Regent's parents' quietness about race stems from immersion in their own subculture. A fictional account of two fish who cross paths in a lake illustrates this point. One fish is swimming from the north end of the lake, and the other is swimming from the south end. When they meet in the middle, the first fish asks the second, "How's the water on the south side of the lake?" The second fish wonders, "What's water?"

The second fish does not recognize the existence of its surroundings—water. The fish is so used to its existence within water that it does not perceive the ubiquity of the substance immersing it. Correspondingly, Regent's parents did not seem to recognize (and certainly did not

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[75] Critical race theory is one example of a collective identity-based theoretical framework. Hiraldo (2010) asserted that five elements undergird it: "Counter-storytelling: the permanence of racism; Whiteness as a property; interest conversion, and the critique of liberalism" (p. 54).

[76] Acts 17:26 supports this supposition: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live (The Holy Bible: New International Version, 1984).

[77] Copious biblical verses posit the universal sinfulness of humanity. A few examples are "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10), and "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) (The Holy Bible: New International Version, 1984).

[78] Regeneration is discussed at length under the second theme of this chapter: passing on a faith that can become their own. Regeneration for Christians includes the idea that Jesus births a new spiritual identity within his followers (Christians) and then reconstructs that identity as they grow in virtue.

verbalize) how their common lived experience (educational, SES, and racial commonalities) in their own subculture may have contributed to their perception of *a community of like-minded people*.[79]

So, are immigrants, minorities, and students of color welcome at Regent? According to Mr. Shapleigh, they are, and the need-based scholarship fund created a few years ago is intended to help rectify the lack of racial and SES diversity. But Mr. Shapleigh, like Regent's parents, perceived that the most pressing questions for students are *becoming a Christian* and *developing Christian virtues*, questions based on individual agency and identity and not race- or group-based categories. In elevating these fundamental questions of transmitting a traditionalist socio-religious identity, Regent parents were unified. Moreover, they were unified that Regent's like-mindedness was not based upon racial, SES, educational, or cultural categories, but rather on traditionalism expressed in a shared ethos of kindness, warm relationships, and neighborly concern among parents and students.

For example, Tom stated, "I think the part that has been beautiful for me is, these are, [*sic*] these are *people that have your same worldview* [emphasis added]. We're comfortable sending them to other people's homes, so you have a deeper relationship." Noteworthy in Tom's comment is that rich relationships are grounded in "the same worldview." Relational harmony sprouts from a common, traditionalist religious identity.

Other parents commended the deep relationships students have with each other. Mitch stated that Regent kids are "getting together and loving on each other." When I asked Risa if there was an incident that encapsulated her feelings about Regent, she responded, "I think it's the friendships she's [her daughter] made. There have just been some great like-minded families that she's really become close with. And I think that, that's [*sic*] a big positive thing for her." Another

[79] I develop this thought further in this study's fifth theme: we kept on running into people who sent their kids there.

parent, Kevin, added that "the kids make great friendships and encouraging friendships. … They pour themselves out to their school and their friends … that's been great!"

Lynn utilized the metaphor of "family" to explain Regent's like-mindedness: "You know, so there's just this real family feel. The kids probably know, almost every student's name in the [*sic*] from K through 12." Lynn's use of "family" connotes not only depth, but also a neighborly concern among students for each other. David also noted the edifying relationships among students:

> I would say that a huge positive has been some of the older kids and their interactions with our kids, and the impressions that our kids … you know, younger kids, naturally look up to older kids. At Regent, the support and the warmth and the welcome and the encouragement that the older kids give the younger kids is amazing.

David stated that older students knew younger students' names and intentionally encouraged them. This behavior reflects an emphasis on kindness that Regent parents appreciated.

Regent's community of like-minded people disincentivizes parents to leave for another school. Tom stated, "And you grow year by year, you know … *and that would be a hard thing to give up now* [emphasis added]. It is a [*sic*], it is a big factor, I think in my decision making." Beth added, "The difference, I would say now, it's probably the relationships of those teachers or peers that he [her son] has, or families that we know … *the relationships might be the thing that keeps bringing us back* [emphasis added]."

Parents provided many concrete examples of relational like-mindedness through stories about their children's experiences. I was particularly moved, almost to tears, by Tyler's story about his son. Tyler explained that his middle-school son "idolizes" high school kids and that his son was preparing for declamation in front of an auditorium full of high school kids.[80] The worst thing that could happen in his son's mind was the microphone and lights blacking out. Tyler

[80] Declamation is an integral part of Classical curriculum. It is a rhetorical speech, oration, or recitation as an exercise in elocution in front of one's peers. Regent hosts declamation evenings every year.

reassured his son that the microphone would not malfunction and that the lights would stay on. However, in the unlikely event that the power stopped, Tyler instructed, "Just soldier through." Tyler continued,

> he [Tyler's son] gets up there. He's nervous cause the high school students are there…And he gets about three-fourths of the way through, and lo and behold, you hear this big pop, and all the lights and the microphone go out. It didn't happen to any other kid, and it hasn't happened since. But in that moment, everything went off. And so standing up there, barely big enough to see over the podium, he soldiered through. And eventually, many seconds later, the microphone popped on again and the lights came back on. It was very disruptive. But he soldiered through the whole thing. And when he was done, a high school student stood up and applauded, *and the whole room gave a standing ovation. And he'll identify that moment, even today, as the best moment of his life* [emphasis added].
>
> But that moment was emblematic to him, declamation. Because that's what classical schools do—we're actually memorizing the past, things that have been said, and we're declaiming them and doing it in seventh grade. But the fact that those high school kids that he already idolized, the fact that they led the applause. *Oh my gosh, that made his life and he gave him the confidence he needed to try out for the play, which he would never do* [emphasis added]. And he got a part in the play. And then he formed a very good relationship with a young lady and she still writes her from college. And you know, that had a little to do with the curriculum but a whole lot to do with relationships, and *the kind of kids* [emphasis added]. There are some kids you send your kids to and they get made fun of. But he got applauded.

In this incident, Tyler spoke approvingly about classical curriculum and specifically, declamation. But more prominent were older students' responses to the disruption his son encountered. First,

older students did not mock or tease his son in the immediate aftermath of the technological glitches. Second, an older student intentionally developed a mentoring relationship with his son. Tyler observed that although the kindness his son experienced is somewhat related to Regent's curriculum, this kindness primarily relates to *the type of community Regent fosters*. The "kind of kids" that Tyler was referring to were kids who act with loving-kindness and respect toward others.

To summarize, a community of like-minded people was not a significant factor that initially drew prospective parents to enroll their kids at Regent. Parents had limited experience of the Regent community during the admissions process. However, the data indicated that the benefits of Regent's like-minded community incentivized re-enrollment. Parents spoke with glowing enthusiasm and gratitude about the warmth, kindness, and depth of relationships they experienced. For many, the relational authenticity at Regent surpassed their experiences at church.

Parents perceived that their community of like-minded people was grounded in Traditionalism. Parents also attributed like-mindedness to shared academic standards for children and expectations from Regent teachers. Although parents did not view their common race, educational attainment, or SES status as significantly contributing to a like-minded community, I submit that these commonalities contributed to the like-mindedness they experienced. I further discuss the social component of like-mindedness under the fifth theme: we kept running into people who sent their kids there.

Our Kids Are Being Challenged

Along with the religious benefits of a Regent education, parents also acknowledged Regent's nonspiritual and non-religious advantages in their school-selection process. Instruction based on a biblical worldview and transmission of the Christian faith to their children was admittedly vital. However, parent-participants also conveyed that Regent's challenging academics factored heavily in their school-choice decision. Accordingly, *our kids are being*

challenged, a phrase spoken by numerous parents like David, is the heading for the fourth theme that emerged from the data.

The image on the bottom left-hand quadrant of Regent's insignia (Figure 5.1, 5.5, and 5.6) reflects Isaiah 64:8: "We are the clay, and you are the Potter; we are all the work of your hand." This image signifies Regent's goal of all students discovering and *developing* their God-given abilities. The published mission statement asserts that these twin aspirations occur through "an academically challenging experience" (Regent, n.d.-b)." Thus, the mission statement corresponds to parental perception that Regent was academically challenging.

Participants repeatedly stressed the rigorous nature of Regent's academics. Documentary data from parent testimonials on Regent's YouTube site also furnish many examples of this sentiment. For instance, Terry articulated,

> Regent has an accelerated curriculum. And that's one of the most important things to us. If we were going to invest, we wanted to invest wisely. We weren't investing just about this unbelievable worldview that we have here, this truth-focus. *We were investing for excellence. And that's what we've seen in the education* [emphasis added]. And we see that simply in metrics, as our average ACT score is higher than anyone else in the city. There's a reason for that because we have an advanced curriculum (White, n.d.)

For Terry, Regent's "accelerated curriculum" was evidence that he had "invested wisely."

Another pair of parents on Regent's YouTube site, Josh and Angie, concurred with Terry. Although their children are in a different age group than Terry's kids, Angie declared that she and her husband were "flabbergasted by the amount of information that four- and five-year-old children were learning in a short period of time" (Juarez & Juarez, n.d.). In other words, Regent academically challenges even Pre-K and kindergarten children.

Most parents conveyed that if Regent excelled at delivering education through a biblical worldview and transmitting Christianity to their children, but provided only an average or ordinary education, they would most likely have enrolled elsewhere. Nancy explained,

> I think first and foremost, we believe that it [Regent] is a firm foundation of an education. Okay. We have our children at Regent for the education. It falls in line also with our spiritual values. But we want them to have a *rigorous education* [emphasis added]. And if for some reason we felt that the rigor fell short, we might, we would [*sic*] consider moving them elsewhere.

Nancy continued that her kids must work "really hard" and "struggle through" certain classes. When she verbalized that Regent "is rigorous, that our children have to work for it, and it is not something that is easily given or handed over to them," an authentic expression of contentment broke out on her face, as if to communicate that arduous academics is exactly what she expected from a private school.

Parents perceived that the primary vehicle through which Regent challenged their children was a demanding classical curriculum. But in parents' minds, teachers also contributed to the exceptional education. Thus, the two most prominent sub-themes that contributed to *our kids are being challenged* were the *rigorous classical curriculum* and *Regent's teachers*.

A Rigorous Classical Curriculum

In the first round of coding involving 15 semi-structured interviews, "classical" was the second most-referenced word or phrase. Only "biblical" and/or "Christian worldview" was mentioned more. From parents' perspectives, the classical curricular component of Regent's education was the vehicle that most challenged their children. David shared, "The classical education ... I see that our kids are being challenged. Like … my fifth grader … he's studying and learning a work ethic that I never had to, just because … as I said before, I just wasn't pushed." David stressed that the *sheer amount* and *difficulty* of the work challenged his children. Nancy expressed similar sentiments:

> One of the primary factors [for choosing Regent] is that we believe that they are getting a *rigorous education* [emphasis added]. And we know that because there are certain classes our children really have to work, work through [*sic*] that there are certain classes [*sic*]

they have to struggle through. We like that. We like that they have to really work and grapple to understand.

"Rigor" and "rigorous" were repeatedly voiced. Nancy associated rigor with the amount of her children's work ("they have to really work"), and the difficulty of the content ("and grapple to understand"). Nancy, like David and others, juxtaposed "our kids are being challenged" with the relative easiness of the public education they had experienced. Although they enjoyed their public school at the time, they (and other parents) expressed regret at the modest amount of work public school teachers had expected.

In the semi-structured interviews, participants highlighted specific classical components of the curriculum they deemed especially valuable, like emphasis on reading Western literature. Grace said her daughter has "loved the books they're reading. She's reading *Jane Eyre* right now." Margaret added, "I have a high view of literature and what you are putting into your mind. … When we just go to the public library or public-school books, it's a lot of watered-down vocabulary and themes." Hence, Margaret valued children reading content that "would push us to excellence" and "challenge us to think critically." For this reason, she appreciated Regent's emphasis on the great books of Western Civilization.

When I asked Mr. Shapleigh, Regent's headmaster, about incorporating the classics of Western Civilization into the required reading list, he analogized Regent's philosophy to something unexpected—food. He explained, "If you've got beef tenderloin and bologna, why would you waste your time serving up bologna because there's so much of that out there?" He continued, "We're going to pick great books, we're going to pick excellent art and composers … all the things that are of high quality that have been around for 500 years, as opposed to things that have been around for five years."

Mr. Shapleigh's philosophy for selecting Regent's required texts corresponded to Douglas Wilson's sentiments. Wilson (2003), co-founder of the ACCS, penned that "works of imagination are not the dessert of education; they are the meal" (2003, p. 154). They engender a

delight in language and imagination. The classics inform students about "the history of their people" (p. 156), but not in a senseless, jingoistic fashion. On the contrary, by understanding the classics of Western Civilization, students come to appreciate their own culture and thus, other cultures. In other words, according to Wilson, it is impossible to genuinely appreciate another culture without deep historical-cultural situatedness in one's own.

Wilson (2003) argued that culture is best inculcated through reading inspirational works. In short, education should inspire because inspirational works not only hold students' attention but also stimulate and motivate them. Thus, Wilson detailed a list of his 25 canonical books for ACCS schools, beginning chronologically with *The Bible*, *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*, and ending with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *The Lord of the Rings* (p. 214-219).[81]

Regent, as an ACCS school, not only teaches the classic literature of Western Civilization, but also readily and prolifically displays common themes, people, events, and places in the Western tradition as several hallways reveal. One example is Figure 5.8, which depicts the Eifel Tower and Venice. Another illustration is Figure 5.9, which depicts a typical village church.

Figure 5.8

The Eifel Tower and Venice

[81] The other 19 books are as follows: *The Oresteia, History of the Persian Wars, Oedipus Rex, The Republic, Nicomachean Ethics, The Aeneid, On the Incarnation, The Confessions of St. Augustine, Beowulf, The Divine Comedy, The Canterbury Tales, Hamlet, Macbeth, Henry V, Much Ado About Nothing, Midsummer Night's Dream, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vindicae Contra Tyrannos, The Temple, Paradise Lost, Pilgrim's Progress, Pensées, Pride and Prejudice,* and *Faust.*

Figure 5.9

A Village Church

Walking through the hallways, I did not observe artistic genres like Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Suprematívism, Constructivism, Abstract Expressionism, Postmodernism, or Deconstructivism—all characteristic of historical periods after the disintegration of the Classical-Christian synthesis in Western Civilization. Regent's art program reflects its classical curriculum.

Another challenging component of classical curriculum that parents lauded is Regent's development of students' critical thinking ability. This emphasis springs from the second element of the Trivium: logic. Tom remarked, "I feel like they're trying to produce independent thinkers at the end of the day." David approvingly added that Regent desires to "make them [students] kind of critical thinkers, you know, to be able to look at things, and think about them, and make their own decisions." Therefore, parents like Kevin asserted that Regent students "get the best of two worlds" because they receive a challenging classical education and learn how to think critically. Mike also was thankful that Regent challenges his kids to think critically, noting that this skill is an anomaly in most other private Christians schools.[82]

The third prong of the Trivium is *rhetoric.* Although rhetoric formally begins in ninth grade, Andrew emphasized his gratitude for how Regent challenges kids to develop rhetorical

[82] Ramifications of Regent's emphasis on logic and critical thinking will be developed later in this chapter.

skills from day one. Tom agreed and referenced Grandparents' Day, when elementary students stand on a stage and recite content "with clarity and confidence." Beginning in seventh grade and extending through the end of sophomore year, students memorize a significant poem, speech, or literary passage and declaim it in front of their peers. Declamations average around 10 minutes; every student is required to memorize the entire text. Another weighty component of rhetoric is the senior thesis comprised of original research and a 20 to 30-minute oral presentation before peers and parents. Hannah observed that she had seen "the most confident leaders look much less confident by poor public speaking skills. I am very thankful my children will have practiced this many times before college."

Thus, the data indicated that parents appreciated the classical content of Regent's CCE curriculum. Moreover, parents also valued what the classical content does *to* and *within* their children: it inspires a passionate and inquisitive love for learning. Sarah shared,

> I will say that one thing that set Regent apart from the beginning is the concept of wanting to capture children at a young age *to enjoy learning* [emphasis added]. I remember not necessarily enjoying learning when I was young, and it's the same with my husband. We were both good students, however my husband jokes, saying he got out of high school and only read two books! We wanted our children *to enjoy learning* [emphasis added] and to be able to engage in that early. The love of reading is another thing that Regent fosters.

Because her children enjoy learning, they study harder than she and her husband did in public school. Disciplined study habits, in turn, facilitate a greater love for learning. And a greater love for learning, consequently, leads to more resoluteness and determination in their study habits. And so, in the end, their fusion of disciplined study habits with a desire to learn are like two lumps of snow that form a snowball. Placed on a steep hill full of snow, the snowball grows bigger as it rolls down the hill. Similarly, Regent parents contended that their students' study habits and love for learning has grown over the years.

David was another parent who recounted his kids' enthusiasm for learning. He shared the following with great joy:

> My son had been back at school for two days, and my sister called … I answered the phone on speakerphone in the car. And I said, "Hey son, say hi to Aunt Jen." And he was like, "Hey." She was like, "How was school?" and he said, "Like the best day of summer camp!"

David proceeded to explain his sister's confusion over his son's conflation of "school" with "the best day of summer camp." Her children attend public school, and David explained that his sister's children's experience is significantly different from his son's. His sister's children have less homework and less engaging lessons. But David was confident that his son thoroughly enjoyed Regent. His son's simile, comparing school to the best day of summer camp, was not unexpected because David knew that Regent challenged his son.

Hannah provided the most emotionally moving interview. She painted a beautiful picture of how she viewed the academic rigor that Regent provided. Her metaphor was based on two events that occurred while one of her children was enrolled in Regent and the other was studying in an alternative private school. Hannah relayed,

> I went on a field trip to an apple orchard here [in Oklahoma]. I have a picture of her holding an apple. It was nothing special. The trip was fun … but the apple was nothing fantastic. That fall break we took the kids and we went up to see my brother, who lives upstate New York, and we were offered a trip to a New York apple orchard. Well, this was an entirely different experience than Oklahoma, there were rolling hills of breathtaking gorgeous trees. It was just beautiful. This particular orchard grew Empire Apples that only grow in upstate New York. They allowed you to pick and eat. I took a bite of one and it was the best apple I've ever had. I've never had a better one since and doubt I ever will again.

> And I felt like the Lord just showed me when you are growing something, *environment is everything* [emphasis added]. My older daughter's education environment at the time that semester was kind of like the Oklahoma apple; she was getting an education but wasn't getting what was best for her to grow into what God had for her. The environment at Regent has provided the soil and enrichment where she could thrive and accomplish much more than we thought she could. What Regent was doing to her that I didn't realize until we pulled her out was they *were kind of holding the bar, just a little above her capabilities and she was able to meet those higher standards with a nurturing environment* [emphasis added].[83]

Hannah contended that most schools lower the academic bar because of low expectations. Many believe kids will not excel if exposed to an advanced, rigorous curriculum. Regent, however, does the opposite. Regent holds the bar high because it has "a belief that you can do hard things." However, Hannah continued that teachers "don't just throw you in and expect you to do hard things. They incrementally train you in habits that enable you to be successful." Therefore, Hannah perceived that students' study habits and skills develop as children grow older.

Hannah, like David, did not believe her kids were academically gifted: "We knew we didn't have academically gifted students but wanted them to be in an environment with high standards." Her words surprised me because my initial expectation was that Regent parents would mostly view their children as academically advanced. However, the vast majority of parents judged their children as academically average or slightly above average. Even so, parents wanted their children to be challenged through classical curriculum.

[83] I address Hannah's comments about "nurturing environment" in the next sub-theme: Regent's teachers.

The parental desire to academically challenge kids was often juxtaposed with previous experiences or general knowledge of private Christian schools doing just the opposite. For instance, Tyler stated,

> *I want a school that takes academics seriously* [emphasis added]. And we looked at schools; I'm not going to name names here … but it seemed like the academic part was not very rigorous. At all the private schools we looked at, it seemed rigorous at Cascia [a private Catholic preparatory school]. The Catholic schools seem to have a to have a degree of rigor and high regard for academics … *But a lot of the* [Protestant] *Christian schools, they* [*sic*] *lean so heavily on relational Christian aspects, that they lose the academics side of it* [emphasis added].

Tyler was specifically looking for a private Christian school with rigorous academics but found that many Christian schools "lean heavily on relational Christian aspects" while underemphasizing academic rigor. Likewise, Hannah confessed, "But where I grew up, it [private Christian education] was anything but excellent. So, my view was my children will never attend a Christian school."

Private Christian schools focusing on fostering relationships and limiting outside, non-Christian educational influences are reminiscent of Fundamentalism, a socio-religious movement launched in the early 20th century in response to modernism, liberalism, and pluralism's encroachment into the church and U.S. society (Bindewald, 2015). Fundamentalists' raison d'etre focused on preserving and promoting five doctrines they viewed as fundamental (or essential) to Christianity: the miracles of Jesus, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the inspiration of the Bible (Enns, 1989, p. 613). The movement took a decidedly anti-intellectual turn after the "Scopes Monkey Trial" of 1925 (*The State of Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes*). Retreat from society and withdrawal from robust intellectual engagement in the academy (especially the sciences) henceforth characterized Fundamentalism's posture.

I submit that Regent is unique in its amalgamation of Fundamentalist and non-Fundamentalist principles in two ways. First, while Regent upholds all five Fundamentalist tenets, Regent (and most of Evangelicalism) is less dogmatic in its articulation of biblical authority than Fundamentalism. As a result, Regent implicitly communicates its desire to avoid the numerous contentious nuances of biblical inspiration and inerrancy while upholding the general doctrine. This posture mirrors that of the ACCS' co-founder Doug Wilson who emphasized that ACCS schools should focus on major, first-tier doctrinal issues while leaving secondary and adiaphora doctrines for families to decide.

Second, while sharing Fundamentalism's theological and social conservativism, Regent's posture toward non-Christian viewpoints is more akin to Evangelicalism: active and engaging. Not only did parents inform me that Regent students study other religions, but students also actively and protractedly study Greek and Roman works whose ontological and epistemological viewpoints cannot be reconciled with a biblical worldview. Latin study begins in fourth grade and at a minimum, extends through eighth grade. Students do not stand as passive, ill-informed, and outside observers to the ancient Romans' worldview. On the contrary, Latin acquisition engenders greater capacity to enter, understand, and empathize with the alternative classical ways of thinking.

Moreover, Regent students are taught logic for two years: material logic in seventh and formal logic in eighth grade. Studying logic equips students to debunk fallacious arguments, challenge faulty reasoning, and evaluate arguments critically and analytically in an array of disciplines. Logic, if students wish, also provides conceptual tools to deconstruct Christianity. Regent's emphasis on logic is a salient distinction from other Christian schools often perceived as less academically oriented. Finally, the absence of religion classes, theological textbooks, and specific denominational doctrinal statements provides freedom for students and families to explore and develop their own interpretations of the Bible. Thus, students are not spoon-fed dogma that would more likely occur in a fundamentalist tradition, but copiously exposed to

biblical texts with the expectation that they will read, interpret, and analyze Christianity's primary source document—the Bible.

Therefore, I submit that the evangelical orientation of Regent parents reflects the type of school Regent advertises itself to be: "Regent's curriculum exposes students to texts of the Western intellectual tradition, joining the study of ancient and modern classics with study of math, science, music, and art" (Regent, n.d.-a). Put another way, the data appear to indicate that Regent parents want their children to intellectually engage society as they mature. Thus, settling for average academics or a lack of deep, critical thinking is not a plausible option.

Regent Teachers

The second contributing factor to *our kids are being challenged* was *Regent teachers*. The data indicated that parents believed Regent teachers were challenging their children in three principal ways: through high academic expectations and teaching ability; through creating a warm and nurturing environment in which learning can be maximized; and through a morally exemplary role in students' lives that fosters growth in virtue.

Teachers' High Academic Expectations and Teaching Ability

Regent teachers are instrumental in challenging children through demanding high academic performance, especially in the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. According to Tristan and Beth, teachers enabled students to begin mastering the three Rs at an extremely young age. These parents visited a kindergarten class during their school-selection journey. Beth, a former public-school teacher, shared her experience:

> But when we also sat in there after that little session. Then they [the students] were bringing, like the kids [*sic*] were kind of swapping out books with her [the teacher] and … there was a kindergartener … reading it. I don't even know what book it was now, but you could just see that, like, it had clicked for them. And they were soaring through those books. And it was a chapter book. I was just like [sic] I mean, when I taught, where I

> taught, there was like, no way. … You could just see how school and home were working so closely together. The kids were excelling.

By "school and the home were working together," Beth primarily referred to teachers working with parents. Notably, Beth observed that Regent students began reading significantly earlier than public school students.

Regent teachers also impressed Tristan on that same visit, especially with the quantity of information kindergarteners had memorized Tristan said,

> they were sitting around the circle, I guess kindergarteners. And the teacher was talking about, like, she had a penny or a nickel or something. And so … they were doing math with it [the penny or nickel]. They were, you know, adding it to things they were talking about the history behind it, they're talking about the president, what number president it was, *and the kids knew the president's wife and holy smokes, all these facts about this* [emphasis added]. They could just use one penny and that could be an example of math, history, you know, so many things. And I was just, I was very impressed how they could tie that all in, but you [*sic*] they're teaching them every time they pull out a penny there, like all these things are coming to mind. And they know, they know [*sic*] so much from just this one little object … *whatever they're* [Regent teachers] *doing, they're doing it right* [emphasis added].

In ACCS schools like Regent, students' elementary years focus on the grammar component of the Trivium, which entails copious memorization of materials. Here, Tristan was confounded by the amount of material the teacher had asked kids to memorize. More astoundingly to Tristan, the kids had memorized the material and then had made interdisciplinary connections to subjects like math and history.

Parents were also impressed with how teachers challenged kids in middle school. Kevin declared, "Students are being pricked and prodded *and challenged* [emphasis added] to, you know, they start writing essays, or essay tests, starting as young as seventh grade." He further

remarked that essays are more engaging and educationally fruitful than multiple-choice tests, because essays create "that inquisitive child that's thinking about bigger picture things, deeper things, than just what's going on in the current teen culture."

In high school, students move from an analytical, logical focus to the persuasive communication and presentation of knowledge—*rhetoric*. Parents perceived that teachers made rhetoric rigorous and challenging, as teacher also had make grammar and logic rigorous and challenging. Noah shared that Regent high school kids communicated "winsomely." Other parents communicated how the senior thesis and declamation challenged kids to aspire for rhetorical excellence.

Teachers Creating a Warm and Nurturing Environment

The data indicated that parents believed Regent teachers challenged their children by creating a warm and nurturing environment in which to maximize learning. Hannah referred to this environment through the story she told about Oklahoma and New York apples:

> And I felt like the Lord just showed me when you are growing something, *environment is everything* [emphasis added]. My older daughter's education environment at the time that semester was kind of like the Oklahoma apple; she was getting an education but wasn't getting what was best for her to grow into what God had for her. *The environment at Regent has provided the soil and enrichment where she could thrive and accomplish much more than we thought she could* [emphasis added]. What Regent was doing to her that I didn't realize until we pulled her out was they were kind of holding the bar, just a little above her capabilities and she was able to meet those higher standards with a *nurturing environment* [emphasis added].

In this story, Hannah connected "higher standards" with a "nurturing environment," implying that her child achieved academic success not only through teachers' high expectations but also because teachers created a "nurturing" environment where students could thrive. Other parents

connected terms like “rigor” and “challenging academics” with “warm environment” or “calm environment.”

When I asked Risa why she chose Regent, her response echoed Hannah’s words. Risa shared, “Christian environment. Classical. I like the size. The teacher-student ratio … And when you go and you [*sic*], you look around, you tour, and it was just a *calm environment* [emphasis added], and I liked that as well.”

Risa, a former elementary education teacher, also described the current learning environment in public schools as “chaotic,” because the public teachers have too much on their hands. Marybeth was also a former public-school teacher and recounted a special education class where a cacophony of noises was constantly audible in the hallway. She explained, “It just wasn't the environment that I wanted my son to be in … a lot of yelling, it just made my heart sad.”

The quality and quantity of teacher-student interactions were integral to parental perceptions of a calm learning environment. Linda explained, “I was incredibly impressed with how the teachers interacted with the students … how the students responded to their teacher with respect and with order.” In Mitch’s words, “teachers really care” for the students. Grace lauded this dual combination of *challenging* and *caring for* students: “But there is a high standard of academics here and I love that … it is really important to us, but more than that, the teachers here, I know they *care about the kids’ souls* [emphasis added] more than anything.”

Teachers’ Morally Exemplary Role in Students’ Lives Fosters Growth in Virtue

Tom valued the archetypal role teachers played in engendering his children’s growth in virtue. Tom stated,

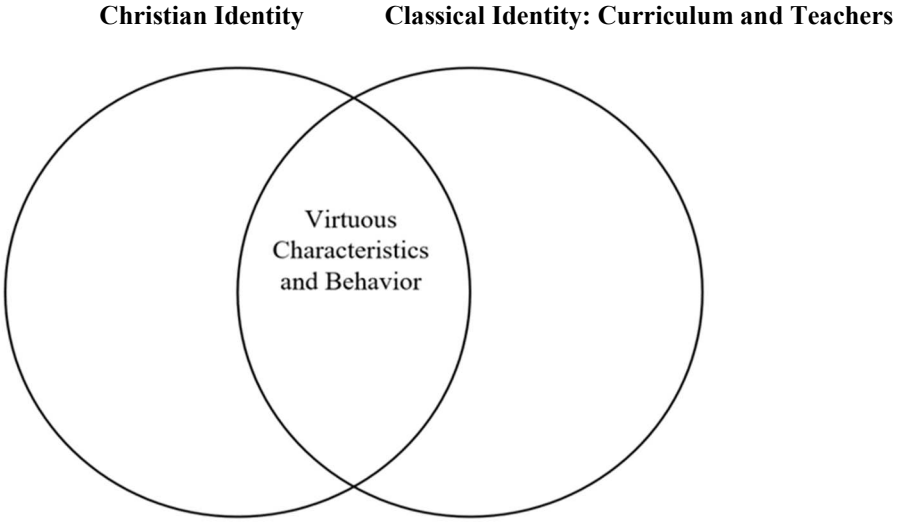
> The teacher selects a virtue for every child that they excel at and gives them a certificate [at the end of the year] and then talks about … their experience with that child during the year and why they saw that virtue. And that's a great moment.

Tom’s experience is representative of other parents. Further, parents asserted that the development of virtuous dispositions within their children resulted from both the school’s

religious identity and classical orientation. Virtues like love, honesty, and patience can be characteristics of good Christians or good human beings. These virtues occupy a liminal space, fruits of both the religious *and classical orientation* of Regent, as Figure 5.10 portrays.

Figure 5.10

The Intersection of Regent's Christian and Classical Identity



Note. Parents perceived that students' growth in virtuous character was an outcome of both Regent's Christian and Classical identity. Regent's classical identity fostered students' growth in virtuous character in two ways: through its classical curriculum, and through its teachers who (consistent with the classical tradition) both model and teach about virtue.

It is here that I return to Tyler, the businessman inspired by classical education's telos of forming virtuous human beings. Tyler remarked,

> *I'd say putting a good teacher who has a view of virtue and the idea that you can form a child* [emphasis added], that, that child didn't come out of the womb fully formed [*sic*]. We tend to have that view. That sixteen-year-old girl who wants to lecture us about the environment [alluding to Greta Thunberg], whatever. Yeah, we have that view, that if you have the right ideas, and you're a sixteen-year-old, then suddenly you can be an

> authority figure on things. But the reality, even as a forty-five-year-old man, I'm still learning. I heard Martin Kaufman say virtue takes time, and it does. Virtue-signaling takes no time, but virtue does, *and virtue should be the end of education* [emphasis added].

Tyler unambiguously articulated the notion that teachers should foster their students in developing a virtuous disposition. Moreover, he believed like Adler (1982) and Hicks (1999) that being a Christian is not a prerequisite for this pedagogical role and responsibility. This conviction was one reason Tyler decided to launch a public classical charter school instead of a private CCE school.

Tyler was not the only Regent parent who conceptualized Regent teachers as prototypes in cultivating virtue for their children. David agreed with Tyler, and shared,

> I would say a huge thing that I value for my kids in education, as well, is the teacher-student relationship. I like that they have a *role model* [emphasis added] that's teaching them and training them and *more than just subject matter* [emphasis added]. You know, I think that's been huge. I just think that *our kids need good role models to just display how life is lived right with the character, godly character* [emphasis added]. Their teachers have been so patient. And they also draw lines, like "this is how we act. This is what we do. This is what we expect."

Both men emphasized that although classical curriculum communicates the rationale, rewards, and process for becoming virtuous human beings, virtuous teachers are nonetheless indispensable to teach the curriculum and foster the development of virtue in children. David and Tyler's thinking conforms with the educational philosophy that undergirds Regent. In Mr. Shapleigh's words, "Our vision for education is person to person, it's not person to computer screen. It's an engaged conversation that you have with another human being" (Shapleigh, n.d.).

This philosophy illuminates why half the parents interviewed were antagonistic toward exposing their young children to electronic devices. Regent asserts that face-to-face interaction

delivers a higher quality of education than electronic or digital devices. Accordingly, Regent keeps its class sizes small since education is "an engaged conversation" with another human being and since overcrowded classrooms produce overwhelmed teachers resulting in mediocre educational outcomes.[84]

To summarize, *our kids are being challenged* signifies the intellectual content and rigor of Regent's classical curriculum and the teachers who conveyed it. Parents valued teachers' high academic expectations and teaching ability, the warm and nurturing classroom environment teachers created, and teachers' morally exemplary role in students' lives which fostered their growth in virtue.

We Kept Running into People Who Sent Their Kids There

The fifth and final theme is encapsulated in a phrase uttered by Hannah and representative of how parents were introduced to Regent: *we kept running into people who sent their kids there*. This theme goes beyond the parameter of this research's theoretical framework—it was not speculated on by Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) theories. In fact, *we kept running into people who sent their kids there* was the biggest surprise from the data.

Chapter IV offered a vignette of every parent's school-choice journey to contextualize this fifth emergent theme. Thus, this section will not re-describe parents' pilgrimages but proceed directly to analyze and interpret them. Fourteen of the 15 parental units interviewed were introduced to Regent or influenced to seriously consider the school by someone in their social network. The most frequent influencers of prospective parents were other Regent parents who also attended prospective parents' churches. However, co-workers and even current Regent students also influenced prospective Regent parents.

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[84] Children who transferred into Regent came from class sizes of 30 students (public schools) and more manageable class sizes of 16 to 18 students (other religious private schools). Parents indicated they were especially attracted to Regent because of the 10-student limit in kindergarten classes. Sarah is one such example. She visited a Regent kindergarten class during her school-search journey and observed that "the [classroom] aesthetics was completely different … not a lot of opportunity for distraction" with just 10 students.

Based on parental interviews, social networks were not determinative in parents' decision to enroll and re-enroll children at Regent, but they were significant in generating interest and awareness of the school's existence. Once parents were informed about Regent by someone trusted and esteemed within their social network, they followed up by learning more about Regent through visiting a class or attending an open house. Thus, prospective parents' social networks were most often the first step in the school-selection process.

Prior research has shown that parents rely on their social networks in the school decision making (Altenhofen et al., 2016; Holmes, 2002; Schneider et al., 1997). Lareau (2014) labeled parents' social networks as "a set of strikingly taken-for-granted happenings in parents' lives" (p. 172). Lareau continued that social networks enable awareness particularly in middle-class parents of what everybody knows to be true about certain schools. The "everybody" Lareau described is individuals within parents' social circle.

The data indicated that the social network theory factored into parents' school-choice decisions, but not in the same sense as the first four themes. Social networks did not convince parents to enroll their children at Regent. Rather, they provided glimpses of Regent's biblical worldview, Christian identity, like-minded community, and rigorous curriculum (the first four themes), thereby helping to inform, shape, clarify, and crystallize parents' educational ideals and goals.

Alluding to the opaqueness outsiders experience when attempting to understand CCE, Marybeth offered this helpful analogy from her college days:

> *It's [CCE] probably misunderstood, quite often, by people who are not in it.* [emphasis added]. … I went to Texas A&M, and we had this thing there, 'From the outside looking in, you can't understand it; from the inside, looking out you can't explain it.' And that's a little bit how I feel about classical education. Being in it, I can't really explain it to my friends … I can't really explain *why I feel so passionate about it* [emphasis added], why I

think it's been so good for us as a family. But, but I know from their [non-Regent parents] point of view, they can't exactly understand that [CCE] either.

Salient in Marybeth's comments are three points. First, even though her kids had been studying at Regent for two years, she still struggled to articulate exactly what CCE is. Second, those outside CCE struggle to understand it too. Finally, Marybeth is passionate about CCE.

Even though Marybeth struggles elucidating the pedagogy, content, and worldview of CCE,[85] her passion illustrates how current parents attract prospective parents. Mr. Shapleigh even articulated that Regent's best advertisement was "word-of-mouth," which meant the social networks of parents. Word-of-mouth provided knowledge that Regent utilized an avant-garde curriculum and piqued the interest of all but one parent interviewed.

But word-of-mouth alone was not sufficient. Prospective parents' social networks engendered an initial comfort level in the possibility of a Regent education for their children. This comfort level led prospective parents to examine the school with more critical scrutiny through exploring the website, researching CCE, visiting classes, and meeting with teachers and the headmaster. In other words, prospective parents' social networks led them to behave in a way consistent with the rational choice theory.

The rational choice theory, first applied to school choice by Chubb and Moe (1990), asserts that parents act rationally in their school-choice preferences and toward their greatest self-interest.[86] Rational choice theory envisages that parents gather information, calculate the costs and benefits of potential school alternatives, and make the most advantageous decisions. Holmes Erickson (2017) contended that literature over the last 20 years reveals that regardless of SES status, all parents *gather information* before making their school decision.

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[85] CCE theorists like Wilson (2003) indicate that CCE's three salient components are its educational pedagogy (Trivium), content (primarily the Trivium and Quadrivium), and cultural-historical situatedness (Western Civilization).

[86] I extensively discussed the rationale choice theory in Chapter II. Pelz and den Dulk (2018) derived their conceptualization of the social identity and secular goods theories (the theoretical framework of this study) from the rational choice theory.

When I first conceptualized this study, I expected the rational choice theory to offer a better lens than the social network theory to understand parents' decision-making processes. Extracting one's children from neighborhood schools, paying annual tuition, and requiring one's children to learn Latin beginning in the fourth grade, all seemed to presuppose critical thinking and maximizing utility, essential tenets of the rational choice theory. Indeed, Regent's parental behavior and thought processes did reflect the practical applications of the rational choice theory.

However, what I did not expect was the explanatory utility of the social network theory. I supposed that most parents would begin learning about Regent from doing a critical, proactive search of possible schools on the internet. But the data revealed that parents' social networks preceded and then worked in conjunction with the rational choice theory.

Specifically, most parents in the study have belonged to a strong social network for years via church membership. Not only do participants see many members in their social network every Sunday morning, but they also belong to smaller and emotionally tighter networks through their church's regular mid-week meetings. As traditionalist Christians who value practicing their faith, these participants also engaged in various volunteer activities and social outings that had the effect of enlarging their networks and deepening the relationships within it. Thus, it is not surprising that the general topic of education (and the particular topic of Regent) surfaced in social networks. Education and schooling are enormously consequential life decisions; hence, it is natural that prospective parents dialogued about them with friends.

Here I circle back to the third theme, a community of like-minded people. I noted that Regent's proportion of racial minority students was not proportionate to Tulsa's demographics. It was significantly lower. It appears that the social network theory helps explain this low percentage of racial minorities at Regent. Since Regent's greatest advertisement is through through word-of-mouth, and since word-of-mouth occurs mainly at majority-white churches, neighborhoods, places of employment, and social networks, it follows that Regent's percentage of

white traditionalist students (compared to non-white traditionalist students) would be over-represented compared to Tulsa's demographics.

In other words, the daily lived reality and relationships of current Regent parents is the greatest on-ramp for future Regent students. If current parents' social networks are bereft of racial diversity, it follows that Regent's student body would also lack racial diversity. This statement is not to suggest that social network is the sole determinant of Regent's minuscule racial diversity. Other aspects like parents' education and SES were discussed in the third section of this chapter. Even so, I conclude that social network theory provides insight into Regent's racial demographics.

Finally, unique to this research's findings is the role that current Regent students played in piquing the interest of potential parents. Several prospective parents met Regent students, usually in younger grades, before considering the school. Students' composure in adults' presence, politeness, articulateness, and recitation of biblical passages provided an embodied example of Regent's educational and outcomes.

Therefore, I submit that interaction with Regent students prompted interest in prospective parents because they placed a high value on the second theme of this study, *passing on a faith that becomes their own*, and one of its sub-themes, *cultivating Christian virtues*. When prospective parents observed the mannerisms, behavior, and Bible knowledge of Regent students, data indicated they saw a living ideal of what they desired in their own children.

Summary

This chapter presented, interpreted, and analyzed the five main themes emerging from the data. Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) social identity and secular goods theories were the conceptual tools through which analysis and interpretation occurred. The five themes were (a) rooting education in a biblical worldview, (b) passing on a faith that becomes their own, (c) a community of like-minded people, (d) a rigorous classical education, and (e) we kept running into people

who sent their kids there. Chapter VI discusses the broader implications of these themes and concludes the study.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

"**Education, n.** The bringing up, as of a child; instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. To give children a good *education* in manners, arts and science, is important; to give them a religious *education* is indispensable."

- Webster, N. (1828). *An American Dictionary of the English Language (Kendall, 2010, p. 11)* [87]

Chapter VI begins by recapping the purpose, methodology, theoretical framework, research questions, and methods of this study. Next, a summary of the findings from the research is provided and then answers to research questions and conclusions are offered. Afterward, this chapter introduces and considers implications that arise from the study for educational theory, practice, and research. This chapter closes with a description of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Overview

The purpose of this naturalistic inquiry study was to explore why parents choose to enroll their children in a CCE school. Regent, located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is the name of the school.

[87] This is the second time I have included Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary definition of education in this dissertation (the first time was Chapter I). I do so to stress how CCE's understanding of education largely aligns with Webster's conceptualization of education two centuries ago.

While findings are not generalizable, outcomes of this study contribute to and expand existing research on parental rationales for choosing private religious education for their children. Findings also touch upon the broader issues of school choice, school environment, parents' social networks, and democratic pluralism. Transferability of these findings to future research may be possible based on identifying similarities and differences in the context, methodology, and theoretical framework of this study and then applying it to others.

The theoretical framework that informed the study was the fusion of two theories by Pelz and den Dulk (2018), the social identity and secular goods theories. The social identity theory conceptualizes school choice as an avenue for parents to preserve and transmit their socio-religious identity to their children. The secular goods theory suggests that parents' demand for private religious school is anchored in the non-religious benefits that a religious school may provide. According to Pelz and den Dulk (2018), these two theories are theoretically distinct but not mutually exclusive. In fact, they frequently operate in combination with each other to explain traditionalist parents' private school choice.[88]

Two research questions anchored and guided this study:

1. What role does parents' religious identity play in their decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school?
2. What other factors significantly influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in a CCE school?

[88] Pelz and den Dulk (2018) articulated the two salient components of Traditionalists as the following. First, Christians with high levels of commitment and religious devotion, and second, Christians who hold to the traditionally accepted essential doctrines of the Christian faith. The Traditionalist (and Traditionalism) nomenclature aptly describes Evangelical Christians and the Regent parents in this study. However, Traditionalism can also include Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and other Christians. Thus, it is generally true that while all Evangelicals are Traditionalists, not all Traditionalists are Evangelicals. Further discussion on the core *theological elements* of Evangelicalism is found in chapter V.

Conclusions

The data from artifact and documentary analysis, observations, and interviews of 19 parents (from 15 family units) revealed five themes. First, a compelling reason parents chose Regent was its biblical worldview. Specifically, parents perceived that Regent's biblical worldview aligned with their own biblical worldview. Regent's integration of the Bible throughout the curriculum as well as the copious memorization and reading of the Bible played into parents' perception that Regent was *rooting education in a biblical worldview,* the first theme that emerged from this study. This finding is consistent with other literature that indicates curriculum's religious content is a significant reason parents choose private religious schools (Bosetti & Pyryt; 2007; Sherfinski, 2014; Stewart & Wolf, 2014). This finding suggests that Regent parents placed a high priority on integrating religion into their children's instruction and learning.

A second factor contributing to parents' selection of Regent was their desire to impart their religious identity to their children. This finding, articulated in the theme *passing on a faith that can become their own*, is also similar to findings from other literature examining parental rationale for choosing private religious schools (Bosetti & Pyryrt, 2007; Cohen-Zada & Justman, 2019; Cohen-Zada & Sanders, 2008; Hastings et al., 2005; Holmes Erickson, 2017; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Pelz & den Dulk, 2018; Stewart et al., 2009).

This theme suggests Regent parents viewed schools as institutions of both knowledge and culture transmission, consistent with how some educational anthropologists conceptualize education as the process of transmitting culture (Spindler, 2011). Thus, parents expected Regent to convey, impart, and reflect their own traditionalist, religious identity and subculture to their children, including beliefs, values, piety, and commitments. Expressed differently, parents enrolled their children at Regent because they perceived the school was "working with them" toward these objectives, reinforcing the values and behavior *that they instilled and modeled in their homes*.

Third, Regent parents lauded the sense of like-mindedness and comradery in the Regent community that they experienced. Parents indicated that the third theme, *a community of like-minded people*, did not factor significantly into their enrollment decision because as prospective parents they were outside and foreign to the Regent community before their children enrolled. However, once their children had matriculated, Regent's warm and family-like environment became an added incentive to re-enroll their children, year after year.

Fourth, the data indicated that strong academics was profoundly important for parents. This finding is reflected in the fourth theme, *our kids are being challenged*, and it echoes conclusions of other related literature in which academics are a driving force (Holmes Erickson, 2017; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Lincove et al., 2016; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). However, diverging from other related literature, Regent parents contended that academics were challenging chiefly because of the *rigorous classical curriculum* (the first sub-theme). Regent parents also attributed challenging and advanced academics to *Regent teachers* (the second sub-theme). Parents saw Regent teachers as holding students to high academic standards, creating a warm and nurturing classroom environment, and playing an exemplary role in fostering their development in virtue.[89] The importance attributed to teachers is similar to findings in other related literature (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; DiPerna & Catt, 2016; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Schneider et al., 2002).

The fifth and final theme is *we kept running into people who sent their kids there* (to Regent). The theory that best explains this theme is social network theory. The data indicated that the most frequently utilized social network through which parents learned about Regent was their own church, echoing findings of other related literature (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016). Once prospective parents met current Regent parents, and especially after prospective parents observed the biblical knowledge, behavior, and mannerisms of current Regent students, prospective parents

[89] In regard to fostering students' virtue, Regent parents' understanding of education is congruent with Noah Webster's 1828 definition of education: "Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper and form the manners and habits of youth" (Kendall, 2010, p. 11).

took concrete steps to learn more about Regent, including visiting classrooms, attending open house evenings, talking to more parents, and doing research on the internet. This fifth theme *was qualitatively different* than three of the first four themes insofar as it opened prospective parents' hearts and minds to consider Regent as a viable school-choice possibility. Once Regent became a plausible option, themes like a biblical worldview, transmission of religious identity, and rigorous academics became determinative in parent decision making.

In sum, these five emergent themes helped answer this study's two research questions: first, the role parents' *religious identity* plays in selecting a CCE school; and second, the *other factors* influencing parents' decision in school choice.

In regard to the first research question, a biblical worldview and transmission of faith reflected the role parents' *religious identity* played in their school-choice decision. Because parents believed in the indispensableness of a religious education,[90] most parents did not seriously consider private non-religious or public schools as viable alternatives to accomplish their goals. Rather, because their financial means allowed, they mostly contemplated only private Christian schools that reflected and fostered their own Traditionalism that they viewed as vital for their children's religious formation. Further, the first two themes reflect parents' deep-seated conviction that school is one of the two principal arenas for children's socialization. *The second is the family.*

Therefore, parents desired to select a school that aligned with and buttressed their own families' religious beliefs and values and not a school that openly or subtlety challenged them through its curriculum or environment. Public schools—incongruent with parental religious beliefs and values because of their differing priorities, policies, values, and ethos—would pose negative and perhaps even destructive consequences for the development of their children's traditionalist faith. Parents viewed their children spending eight hours a day over the course of

[90] Webster wrote, "To give children a good *education* in manners, arts and science, is important; to give them a religious *education* is indispensable" (Kendall, 2010, p. 11).

many years at a public schools as too high a cost because of the spiritual, emotional, relational, and academic formation that occurs at schools.

In regard to the second research question, the study's fourth theme signifies that Regent's rigorous classical curriculum and outstanding teachers were also vital in parents' decision making. Parents articulated with zealous ebullience the curriculum's impact on their children's learning. Parents expressed that CCE's curriculum was *a qualitatively different type of Christian curriculum* than they had ever experienced before and that they were enamored with it. Parents also praised teachers, viewing them as highly competent in their field and exemplars in leading students to pursue the true, the good, and the beautiful.[91]

Consequentially, if parents had perceived that Regent only excelled in academics or only at impartation of a Christian identity and worldview, they would not have chosen the school. *It is precisely because* parents viewed Regent as successful in both these arenas that they selected it and stuck with it. These findings are consistent with other literature; they indicate that both high-quality academics and religious and moral values are vital factors influencing parents' choice of a private Christian school (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Cohen-Zada & Justman, 2019; Holmes Erickson, 2017; Pelz & den Dulk, 2018; Stewart & Wolf, 2014). Also consistent with previous research, my study indicates that effective teachers and a warm and nurturing classroom environment were highly significant to parents (Figlio & Stone, 2000; Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Schneider et al., 2000).

This research adds to the body of literature on private religious school choice insofar as it is one of only a handful of studies examining the CCE school movement. To the best of my knowledge, it is the only extant research exploring *parental rationales* for enrolling enrolling their children in a CCE school. Thus, it fills a knowledge gap. Further, this research contributes to

[91] Plato argued that contemplating and studying this triad of transcendental ideals is an essential part of education and human flourishing (Hicks, 1999). Both Classical and Christian education and CCE incorporate this triumvirate into their curriculum.

the social foundations of education by revealing the nuances and complexities of Traditionalists' perceptions and approaches to education. It also illuminates CCE's philosophical and pedagogical assumptions and the meaning-makings of CCE parents. On a broader level, this research has situated CCE within the historic Classical and Christian educational tradition. Classical and Christian education has 2,500 year-old roots in Western Civilization and is making a comeback today through home, hybrid, and private school modalities, profoundly affecting education in innovative ways.

Discussion

I begin this section by discussing three specific implications for theory after which I consider implications for practice and research.

Implications for Theory

In regard to theory, these findings point to the difficulty of keeping traditionalists' children enrolled in public education due to the theoretical incompatibility of CCE with public education's philosophical underpinnings and pluralistic nature that Dewey argued was crucial for the continuance of democracy. Second, these findings have implications for the scope of rational choice theory and social network theory's interaction with it. Third, these findings have implications for pedagogies that emphasize copious and continuous memorization during the elementary-school years.

Implications for Dewey's Theory of Democratic Pluralism

Private schools, by nature, exclude the vast majority of students but are legally permitted to freely emphasize their religious beliefs, values, rituals, and the ideological suppositions undergirding them. Conversely, public schools are not permitted to endorse one religion above another or any religion at all. Hence, public school teachers cannot ground education in a biblical worldview or attempt to inculcate religious faith in students. Therefore, some traditionalist parents who experience this tension have left public schools, thereby discarding Dewey's vision for education as extraneous to their family's values and goals.

Dewey (1916) observed that "within every larger social organization there are numerous minor groups" (p. 51). These groups are political, industrial, scientific, and even religious. Further, Dewey observed that every society contains both good and bad people, and that members of any particular group will naturally be socialized by that group. Therefore, according to Dewey, society should not set up "something we regard as an ideal society" (like a religious school) because isolation and exclusiveness by one group "shuts it out from full interaction with other groups, so that its prevailing purpose is the protection of what it has got instead of reorganization and progress through wider relationships" (pp. 52- 53).

Thus, Dewey discouraged private schooling due to its societal effects of cloistering groups from one another and thereby *decreasing dialogue among people who are different*. In other words, Dewey theorized that public education comprised of all societal groups *was essential* for the development of peaceful, respectful, and civil coexistence among different groups with different lifestyles and convictions within one society. However, this study's findings indicate that Dewey's locus and incubator of democratic pluralism—the public schools—did not factor into Regent parents' decision making. On the contrary, Regent parents valued a biblical worldview and a suitable school environment within which to transmit this worldview and the traditionalist faith associated with it to their children. As one parent, David, remarked, "Teaching them [his children] about the Bible and truth and stuff. Huge! Probably the number one factor in us choosing Regent."

Regent parents may reflect a broader current of thought found in traditionalist circles that view public education as working against their religious interests. Accordingly, they withdraw their children and thereby deny them the opportunity to engage pluralism in public schools. Further, they reduce the engagement of non-traditionalist children with traditionalist children in public schools. Therefore, this study points to the need to look outside the institution of public education to inculcate and proliferate pluralism.

One possible and promising solution is Kloppenberg's (2016) conceptualization of democracy's locus as an *ethical ideal*, not an institution.[92] In a massive 892-page historical analysis of the history of democracy, Kloppenberg asserted that *charitable reciprocity* has been and is an essential (and often unspoken) premise undergirding democracy. Charitable reciprocity is the idea that each individual has a different concept of the good life (pluralism) and therefore it is incumbent upon citizens to allow all other citizens the freedom to pursue their own individual flourishing. Kloppenberg did not argue that pluralism or charitable reciprocity were fully actualized because slavery, sexism, and other forms of discrimination were engrained in U.S. society from its establishment. However, Kloppenberg determined that for democracy to flourish, charitable reciprocity, along with pluralism and thoughtful deliberation, must be engrained in the hearts and minds of the people and ubiquitous in society.[93]

Accordingly, this study raises a cluster of questions. First, how might Christianity's emphasis on considering the needs of others affect the degree and disposition of charitable reciprocity in CCE graduates when they encounter significant diversity in college and as young adults?[94] A corollary question is how CEE's stress on formal logic courses (that would seem to foster a disposition of thoughtful deliberation) might affect CCE students' proclivity for rationale

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[92] Dewey likewise viewed democracy as a "moral ideal," (Hook, 2009, p. 491), but anchored its locus and development (unlike Kloppenberg) in public education.

[93] At present, charitable reciprocity—seeing the best in those who disagree with one's point of view and yet treating them with respect and empathy—appears to be waning in U.S. society (Haidt & Rose-Stockwell, 2021). Deterrents to uncharitable public discourse are significantly less today than in previous generations due to social media platforms through which the populous can initiate non-deliberative, uncivil, and uncharitable virtual speech that rips at the fabric of pluralism (Haidt & Rose-Stockwell, 2021). The Pew Research Center documented the public's the tendency (through technology) to respond with caustic acrimony to people who politically, religiously, or socially have contrarian convictions or lifestyles, underscoring that "emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content" (Brady et al., 2017). (Emotion, of course, is contrary to logical deliberation that Kloppenberg asserts underpins democracy.) Haidt and Rose-Stockwell (2021) observed that social media posts communicating "indignant disagreement" receive double the engagement than posts that do not, prompting them to observe that "citizens are now more connected to one another, on platforms that have been designed to make outrage contagious."

[94] Examples of charitable reciprocity in the Bible are plenteous. The Golden Rule states, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" Matthew 7:12). Further, Philippians 2:3-4 states, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Zondervan.

and measured dialogue? On a more general level, how might CCE students' seclusion from public education and enculturation in a highly religious environment affect their ability to relate to a more diverse America than what they encountered in school?

Second, how might educators incubate the moral and ethical ideal of democratic pluralism to non-CCE students who are also not enrolled in public schools? Roughly one in 10 Americans are educated non-publicly, and one effect of COVID-19 might be to permanently and significantly boost this percentage.[95] Thus, what avenues, curricula, or pedagogies might be utilized to foster a proclivity for charitable reciprocity, rationale deliberation, and robust pluralism for these future American adults?

Finally, how effective is public education in actually fostering diversity among its graduates? Might some changes be needed? As charitable reciprocity, pluralism, and thoughtful deliberation were birthed and developed in an age when Classical-Christian education was more prevalent, what correlation (if any) exists between Classical and Christian education and instilling a democratic ethos and orientation in students? In sum, this study raises questions of how the next generation of Americans can live charitably and tolerantly with deep and irreconcilable differences, and offers an opportunity for SCFD theorists to begin addressing it.

Implications for Rational Choice and Social Network Theories

This study's findings largely align with rational choice theory and Schneider et al.'s (2002) articulation of it. First, parents collect and evaluate information according to their educational preferences. Next, parents make a rational school choice based on their perception of

[95] As noted in Chapter V, demographers estimate that about 10% of American students are educated privately every year. Before COVID-19, the two principle demographic blocks engaging in home schooling were Evangelicals and "anti-institutional progressive parent[s]" (Samuels & Prothero, 2020). However, due to COVID-19-induced school closures, Education Week estimated that 9% and Gallup that 10% of U.S. children were homeschooled for the 2020-2021 school year (Samuels & Prothero, 2020; Brenan, 2020). This is a marked increase form 5.0% of homeschooled children in 2019 (Brenan, 2020). Initial post-COVID-19 data suggests that even after the U.S. population is inoculated against COVID-19, many children may never return to public education because their parents are enjoying homeschooling and disappointed with public education (Tuccille, 2020).

the school that will maximize their families' benefits and utility. However, this study's findings extend the parameters of rational choice theory in two important ways.

First, as in other literature (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016), many parents indicated that their social networks familiarized them with Regent. However, diverging from other studies, Regent parents underscored that their social networks introduced them to both Regent parents and *Regents students*. Further, Regent students' intellectual abilities (for example, recitation of lengthy texts and critical thinking skills) left an indelible impression on parents vis-à-vis Regent's outcomes. Expressed differently, prospective parents observed firsthand that Regent was producing intellectually exceptional children who were not only confident and articulate in talking with adults, but also well-mannered and kind. Interacting with these Regent students, the embodied fruits of Regent's educational mission, was part of the "information" that parents gathered and then evaluated in their school-choice decision.

Heretofore, rational choice theorists have asserted that the qualities and training of teachers are factors pertinent to school choice (Bosetti, 2004; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Schneider et al., 2002). While aligning with this literature, these findings also extend the parameters of rational choice theory by signifying that another category of individuals—children, the enfleshed product of education—are also a factor that parents observed and evaluated before making their school selection.

Second, Regent parents' school-choice pilgrimages to CCE involved religious experiences or perceptions. For example, Roy and Linda stated, "Nothing compared to what we felt would be right at Regent. And maybe it was just the Lord's leading, I mean honestly, we prayed and asked the Lord to show us and we were in peace about it." Sarah also felt supernatural guidance. After running into a friend at church who praised Regent, Sarah communicated that the rendezvous felt like "a divine appointment" because everything her friend described about Regent was what she desired for her kids. Even so, Sarah and other Regent parents still gathered more

information and made evaluative decisions. Sarah subsequently visited three other private schools and then sat in on a Regent classroom.

Consequently, spiritual insights and guidance were factors in the school-choice decision, but never the singular, determinative factor. Thus, this study extends rational choice theory's parameters regarding the types of information religious parents gather and evaluate during school selection. The personal, subjective sense of what God was leading them to do vis-à-vis school choice was one piece of information in the larger process of gathering data and evaluating them. While non-religious people may view divine leading as irrational (and thus contrary to rational choice theory), the point here is that divine leading was not irrational to these parents. Just as Regent integrated the Bible across the curriculum, these Regent parents exerted thoughtful and deliberate effort to integrate the Bible into all facets of their lives because to them, faith was a way of life.

Implications for Pedagogy

Although some Regent parents majored in education as undergraduates, none of them received instruction in CCE's pedagogy or had even a basic awareness of it before their children enrolled at Regent. Yet, all parents spoke effusively in regard to how CCE had fostered their children's learning and the excellence of CCE's pedagogy. For instance, Marybeth contended that the Trivium's *proven structure* is not "about the latest fads and the newest techniques and all that stuff." Rather, it involves copious memorization because, as Dorothy Sayers noted, young children are able to continuously memorize large quantities of material. Accordingly, this research touches upon a different pedagogy peculiar to contemporary U.S. education and a different set of anthropological assumptions about what young children can and should learn.

Dewey's (1916) child-centered approach to education championed learning-by-doing. Dewey's understanding of truth as rooted in utility and what works—and not in eternal essences or the biblical Triune God—moved U.S. education away from its Classical and Christian moorings. Dewey envisioned that children should learn through doing activities and projects that

piqued their natural interests. He wanted education to comport with children's innate curiosity and natural proclivities.

However, this study points to a different vision for education among CCE parents and the ACCS movement. CCE's anthropology envisions children's minds and hearts as eminently malleable and fillable. Mitch's comment comes to mind here: young kids are "sponges and they just soak it in." Other parents echoed Mitch's sentiments, namely, that one goal of elementary education should be liberal memorization of materials that constitute the building blocks of knowledge because this content will later shape and form children's minds and hearts.

Regent's crest also reflects this anthropological view on the malleable nature of children. In the bottom left-hand corner of the crest, an image of a potter's hands shaping a clay vessel appear. The point is clear: children should be shaped and molded by the biblical God, and derivatively, by a biblical worldview. For this reason, Mr. Shapleigh conveyed the following challenge to parents during Regent's open house:

> if you've got beef tenderloin and bologna … if you have both, why would you waste your time serving up bologna because there's so much of that out there? We're going to pick great books, we're going to pick excellent art and composers and you know hymns and all the things that are of high quality that have been around for 500 years, as opposed to things have been around for five years.

Thus, this study points to a different vision of how to think about education. CCE education, like instruction in the Islamic tradition (Lewis, 1995), envisages significant memorization as a constituent element of learning in children's Pre-K and elementary school years. CCE education envisages children as malleable, formable, and fillable, and the goal of the Christian educator is to fill them with ample servings of the "right" kind of information, material grounded in and integrated with a biblical worldview.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for the curriculum of public education, diversity, and school as a place of belonging. These implications for practice are addressed below.

Implications for Public Education

Although most Regent parents graduated from public schools and thus were not ipso facto opposed to them at the beginning of their school-selection journey, by the time they chose Regent they became apprehensive that impartation of Christian identity to their children could successfully occur if their kids were educated in public schools.

For instance, Beth stated, "I think about all my wonderful years in a public school, and I think, "Oh, no way [for her son]!' Like … *he would be formed by whatever was happening around him* [emphasis added] … and it was just hard for me to think that." Another parent, Lynn, spoke about how education's environment had changed from her generation to her kids' generation. Her words were emblematic of how Regent parents' attitudes toward public school had shifted over the decades:

> we [her husband and her] did not get excellent education in our public school education, but it was, it was decent and good, and we had good experiences and we had Christian friends. … But the world has changed so much since we were there [public school], *and just knowing the, the liberal bent, that's so prevalent in the educational system* [emphasis added].

These sentiments raise larger questions vis-à-vis traditionalists' approach to and perception of public education. Unlike the 1960s through the 1990s when Traditionalists actively lobbied for religiously-oriented policies to be enacted in public schools, these Regent parents had altogether disengaged from public schools as an avenue to address their educational and parental concerns. While Regent parents genuinely extolled (most) public school teachers for doing the best they could with students, Regent parents did not want their children exposed to the harshness and secularity of the public educational environment. Perceiving themselves as a religious minority

with negligible voice and agency—and thus impotent to meaningfully influence school district policies and curriculum—Regent parents simply walked away from the system.

Accordingly, this study points to the perception among traditionalist parents that the secularity of public education works against transference of their own religious beliefs. Expressed differently, they perceived that the longer their kids remained in public education, the less likely their children's religious commitments would carry through into adulthood. Thus, contemporary conditions demanded intentionality to spiritually and emotionally protect their children during their young and formative years.

Ample literature points to an inverse relationship between attending public schools and declining religiosity among students (Voas & Doebler, 2011; Wadsworth & Walker, 2017). Franck and Iannaccone (2014) reported that massive government entanglement in education teaches children more than just subjects and content: it also inculcates *a secular worldview and orientation toward life*. As government control and involvement in education has risen the last 60 years, less room for constitutionally-acceptable religious content and ways of thinking and making sense of reality has followed. Although unaware of this empirical data, the traditionalist parents in this study articulated their perception of this inverse relationship between attending public schools and students' declining religiosity.

As a result, this study suggests that educators might want to think more deeply about the predominant secular ethos and orientation of public education because Traditionalists' (or any group's) withdrawal from public education is not in the best interests of fostering civil and tolerant mutuality across difference. Further, it is not in the best interests of local school districts' revenue as it is often tied to number of students enrolled. Finally, it is undemocratic in the sense that a large percentage of Americans appear to have religious beliefs more closely aligned to ACCS schools than to the secular environment and orientation of public schools.[96] Granted, some

[96] I made this observation in Chapter V based on Pew Research Center's demographic information.

religious parents may be unconcerned about the conflicting worldview messages between schools and home.[97] Other religious parents may be concerned about schools' secular environment, but nonetheless chose public education for a variety of reasons, including insufficient financial means for private education. Whatever the case, Feinberg and Layton (2014) and Nord (2010) asserted that the secularity of public education's environment and curriculum is illiberal and thus undemocratic.

Here I repeat the story of two fish from Chapter V.[98] One fish was swimming from the north end of the lake, and the other from the south. When they met in the middle, the first fish said to the second, "How's the water on the south side of the lake?" The second fish replied, "What's water?" The second fish, of course, does not recognize the existence of that which surrounds it. Simply put, the fish was so used to its own existence within water that it did not perceive the ubiquity of the water it swam in.

Likewise, Nord (2010) asserted that teachers, administrators, and academicians in education are so accustomed to the currents of secular and non-religious ways of making sense of the world in their academic disciplines that they rarely give space to thoughtful and comprehensive religious alternatives *not based* in appeals to sacred text, religious authority, or the supernatural.[99] On a collegiate level, in the social foundation of education departments (SCFD), the predominant regime of truth (Foucault, 1995) appears to be that students are able to engage subjects and acquire a liberal education without having to systematically and critically grapple with religious ways of thinking and with people who think about the world religiously. One example of this broad phenomenon is the American Educational Studies Association

[97] Based on the statistics from Pew Research Center I discussed in Chapter V, Mainline Protestants are the least likely major religious demographic group to be concerned about conflicting messages between the home and school.
[98] The context in Chapter V was Regent's parents' inattentiveness to the paucity of diversity at the school during my interviews with them.
[99] Secularism, of course, is the viewpoint that because theology and religion are inadequate, indefinite, unreliable, and unbelievable, religious considerations should altogether be rejected and excluded from the public square of debate and discussion, including from public schools.

(AESA) which promotes SCFD. Established in 1968 as an "international learned society for students, teachers, research scholars, and administrators who are interested in the foundations of education," AESA's website mentions it examines how the liberal arts disciplines of sociology, history, anthropology, philosophy, history, politics, economics, and comparative/international and cultural studies "bear in developing interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives on education, both inside and out of schools" (AESA, n.d.-a).

Conspicuously, no mention of religion's significance (or existence) is included in AESA's description of disciplines contributing to the SCFD. Moreover, examination of the ten major presentation tracks at the 2019 AESA Conference revealed no mention of the word "religion" in any track title,[100] nor in the titles of the 152 different seminars. (AESA, n.d.-b). Nord (2010) reported a similar experience at an AESA Conference: only two out of 500 seminars addressed religion. Thus, based on this review, it appears that religious ways of conceptualizing SCFD are trifling in the academy.[101] This non-incorporation of religion raises the broader question of how religious education is presented in public education and teacher training.

Royer and Bindewald (in press) presented a number of non-coercive and constitutionally-acceptable options to introduce high school students to religion and religious ways of thinking. One possibility is for high schools to offer an elective course on the Bible as literature. Feinberg and Layton (2014) contented that an elective course on the Bible as Literature, based on philosophical and social reasoning and utilizing social scientific methodology, is "the most academically promising [approach] with the least potential for explicit violation of the norms of educational legitimacy" (p. 138). A second avenue is to offer an elective course on the major

[100] One tract, however, used the word "spirituality" in its title.
[101] I am grateful that the Oklahoma State University (OSU) SCFD Department Faculty have been a wonderful exception. None of the department's four professors have overtly or subtlety denigrated religious ways of making sense of the education's social foundations.

world religions to increase mutual tolerance, empathy, and the understanding that having religious beliefs and values is not necessarily irrational or ipso facto unscientific.[102]

Finally, Nord (2010) offers helpful secular arguments for religion to be taken seriously without privileging it over non-religious ways of thinking. Arguing that government neutrality in regards to religion requires fairness, and that fairness requires social and religious interpretations of the world in each academic subject that is taught, Nord put forward the "5 Percent Rule." It proposes that every textbook allot five percent of its pages to "locating the host discipline in the interdisciplinary conversation that is central to a liberal education" (p. 201). Textbooks would discuss philosophical, historical, contextual, and normative (existential, moral, and religious) matters pertaining to each subject to provide students with a broad and deep context to situate each discipline.

Such an approach, which fosters and develops critical thinking about the big, metaphysical questions of life (and religious and non-religious ways to approach them), is required if education is to truly be liberal.[103] Students who are able to parse facts from fads, trivia from truth, and possess the inter fortitude to communicate their learning unhindered by society's prevailing winds, are truly recipients and practitioners of a liberal arts education.[104] According to Nord (2010), apart from exposing students to all intellectually serious systems of thought which grapple with metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological questions, education can become socialization, or even worse, indoctrination. Thus, thinking through Nord's challenge is an important implication for educational practice. If actualized in some form, it would fulfill a fundamental responsibility of education: to create thoughtful human beings.

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[102] Courses on world religions have been successful in school districts like Modesto, CA. Administrators received input from various stakeholders before launching the course and effectuated "a truce" in the local culture wars (Lester & Roberts, 2009).
[103] Liberal is the Latin word for free.
[104] Socrates is the patron liberal arts. He possessed the intellectual faculties, inner fortitude, and autonomy to question the conventional wisdom and views of the Athenian public.

In sum, Regent parents were willing to sacrifice SES and racial diversity, not because they were ipso facto against it, but rather because they perceived the need to restrict their children's exposure to the strongly secular ethos and environment of public education. Accordingly, thoughtful consideration to the philosophical, curricular, and pedagogical avenues to attenuate the predominantly secular ethos and environment of public education is one implication arising from this study.

Implications for Diversity

This study's third and fifth themes point to communal relationships. Data that constituted the fifth theme indicated that all but one parent learned about Regent from their social networks. Data also signified that once their children had matriculated at Regent, parents were delightfully surprised at Regent's family and like-minded atmosphere.

Much literature supports the important role that social networks and relationships play in school decision making. Research indicates that parents tend to associate with other like-minded parents vis-à-vis SES, religion, age, values, race, and even cultural tastes (Altenhofen et al., 2016; Bishop, 2008; McPherson et al., 2001). Further, parents utilize information gathered from and shared within their social networks in their school decision making (Teske et al., 2007; Bell, 2009; Lareau). Thus, this study's results are similar to findings from other literature on social network theory.

However, this study departs from conclusions drawn by Bishop (2008) and Lareau (2014) who reported that high-income families' school-choice decisions required little effort due to reliance upon their social networks. This research found that Regent parents (who are all middle- or high-incomes earners) exerted tremendous energy and effort in their school decision making. Regent parents "did their research" which included visiting the school, meeting the headmaster, observing classes, attending open houses, and personal prayer for guidance. These actions are reflective of rational choice theory. Also reflective of rational choice theory is the transactional

language like “investment” and “outsourcing education” within which parents situated their school-choice decision.

In sum, Regent parents desired to maximize utility and seek their own best interests, which is characteristic of rational choice theory. Also, Regent parents were introduced to Regent through their relationships, which is characteristic of social network theory. Hence, *cognitive faculties* and *relationships* (along with spiritual inclinations and insights) were involved in the school-selection journey of these traditionalist parents. In short, these two theories operated side by side as helpful lenses to understand parents’ actions.

And yet, negligible in parents’ social networks or rational choice decision-making was SES or racial diversity. The social environment of Regent parents is primarily white, middle- and upper-class, and the Regent student body is also predominantly white, middle- and upper-class. During the 15 semi-structured interviews only two parents verbalized the lack of racial diversity; roughly half vocalized the limited SES diversity. Thus, this study suggests a level of racial and SES insularity among Regent parents and raises questions about the priority of diversity among Traditionalists when diversity conflicts with other educational values, particularly high academics and transference of religious identity. Accordingly, Regent students will not have the same exposure to diversity as public school students in their school socialization spaces and process.

While a common assumption is that parents desire their children’s exposure to multiculturalism to develop within their children a disposition and outlook of tolerance and empathy toward difference, this study indicates these considerations were low priority. In this regard, parents’ valuation of SES and racial diversity echoes findings from other related literature. For instance, Roda and Wells (2013) argued that New York City parents were more concerned about their children’s “race to the top” than a diverse educational environment, even though diversity was a *highly stated priority*. Thus, their children studied in a primarily white, high SES school demographic with limited SES and racial diversity. Also, Holmes Erickson (2017), summarizing 20 years of school-choice literature, concludes that diversity is not a

consistently top-rated priority among parents. Rather, the only quality that parents regularly seek during the school-choice journey is strong academics (Holmes Erickson, 2017).

Thus, this study connects with other literature that indicates the living curriculum of diversity (racial, sexual, class, religious, etc.) is not a main concern for Traditionalist parents. Traditionalist parents appear to be part of larger racial and economic bifurcation between the resourced and the poor and whites and people of color,[105] which becomes determinative in their children's exposure to diversity. Simply put, SES and racial diversity is not these parents' top priority; rather, generating Christian identity that is grounded in a biblical worldview predominates all other socialization and diversity concerns.

Implication on the Importance of Belonging

The third theme of this study accentuates the importance Regent parents ascribed to a community where they and their children experienced the feeling of belonging. Parents' utterance of phrases like "Regent feels like family" and "the like-mindedness here" indicated parents' perception that Regent was a loving and kind educational community. Parents also communicated that their children benefited from the community's life-giving relationships—with peers, teachers, and other Regent parents.

In their seminal research, Baumeister and Leary (1995) identified the essential human social need to belong, analogizing it to the physical need for food and water. They compellingly and comprehensively built a case that belongingness is not only essential for emotional healthy human beings, but that belongingness also *directs and influences motivation*, whether people are conscious of it or not. Subsequent theorists have indicated that belongingness is not merely dyadic but also includes larger social collectives (Asher & Weeks, 2014; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cacioppo et al., 2015; Hawkley et al., 2005).

[105] As mentioned in Chapter V, the Regent Headmaster was aware of the lack of SES and racial diversity in the school and thus, a fund to increase diversity at the school has been established. However, parents seemed less aware of (or less inclined to vocalize) the negligible diversity at the school than the headmaster.

Gabriel (2021) argued that in the 26 years since Baumeister and Leary (1995) published their research, academicians have extended their constructs from "a need for close relationships to a broader need for all kinds of social connections" (p. 1). In other words, because humans are fundamentally social creatures, the motivation to belong may affect human behavior in ways and manners which individuals may not be aware of because this need underpins all kinds of social phenomena (Gabriel, 2021).

As aforementioned, Regent parents did not attribute their school-choice decisions to Regent's like-minded community or their own desire to become part of it. Parental rationales were biblical worldview, transference of faith, and strong academics. However, many parents lauded the "warm and nurturing" classroom environment created and sustained by teachers. Parents desired their children to receive instruction in such a safe, secure, and edifying social space.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) theorized that the "invisible hand" of belongingness motivates people to make all sorts of decisions that they might not consciously realize. Hence, although not articulated, it may be that Regent parents subconsciously coveted this community of belongingness for their children (and perhaps even for themselves) during the school decision-making process. Even if not the case, parents perceived that belonging to the Regent community brought joy, purpose, and value to both their and their children's lives.

Hence, for educational practice, Regent parents' experience points to the importance of fostering warm and edifying relationships within educational communities, whether public or private. Parents' conceptualization of Regent was more than transactional—like a relationship with a mortgage company or car mechanic. Rather, parents viewed their school as an extension of their values and of their very selves. School was a place to belong.

Accordingly, this study signifies that school administrators and teachers might want to consider creating safe and warm social spaces in their classrooms. Bowles and Gintis (2007) have argued that that education is preoccupied with order, organization, and efficient management, and

that administrators have capitulated to outside demands made upon them, thereby diminishing education's focus on students' learning environment. Hence, modern public education has drifted from progressivism's goals (Bowles and Gintis, 2007).

Although not subscribing to progressivism, Regent parents did not want their children to be treated as statistics or numbers, mere cogs in a machine. Ample data indicated the over-crowded public and large private school classrooms are one reason Regent parents left those environments. Parents desired their children to learn in a warm, educational community. As such, this study aligns with current literature that emphasizes parents' desires for safe and uplifting classroom environments (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; DiPerna & Catt, 2016; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Stewart et al., 2009). Hence, these results can be impetus for educators to re-consider their school and classroom social environments.

Implications for Research

The results of this study contain a number of implications for future research. First, Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) social identity and secular goods theories have been helpful in framing and guiding this study that found parents chose Regent because its efficacy in transmitting social identity and delivering secular goods. In other words, it was not one theory or the other, but both. Hence, due to the utility of their theories, future researchers might consider exploring other private religious schools with Pelz and den Dulk's theoretical framework.

Second, this study signifies that parents valued qualities like a biblical worldview, efficacy in faith transmission, and like-minded people at the school their children attend. Conversely, parents did not indicate that narrower denominational formularies were influential or even pertinent. Pelz and den Dulk (2018) theorized that in America's ever-changing and dynamic private religious school marketplace, Traditionalism's appeal will henceforth *supersede that of sectarian* (denominational) *schools* Although this research's data bore out their supposition, it is merely one non-generalizable study.

Therefore, comparing Regent (a traditionalist, non-sectarian CCE school) with a traditionalist, Southern Baptist and a non-traditionalist, Episcopalian private school would be an intriguing qualitative or mixed-methods research project. Southern Baptist private schools are largely Traditionalist and thereby fit Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) traditionalist categorization. But Southern Baptists, by definition, are sectarian. Episcopalian schools, however, are usually regarded as non-Traditionalist but still sectarian. Thus, a case study exploring parents' rationales for choosing these three modalities could prove informative in confirming, disconfirming, refining, or extending Pelz and den Dulk's theories.

A third implication is that further research examining CCE's curricular and pedagogical efficacy is warranted. CCE, a contemporary movement within Classical and Christian education, is now 41 years old. Nevertheless, researchers have gathered a paucity of data on ACCS students' standardized test scores like the ACT, SAT, and PSAT. Statistical analysis of ACCS students' test scores over the last 29 years is one place to start,[106] but even more useful would be comparing these test scores with students who attend non-ACCS private Christian schools, other private schools, and public schools. Heretofore, only Vaughan (2018), though a casual-comparative study, has compared ACCS PSAT scores to scores at non-classical Christian schools. Additional quantitative research in this area would assist CCE schools assess the accuracy of their "challenging academics" claim and parents who are considering alternative schooling modalities.

Fourth, this study's results indicate that parents learned about Regent primarily through their social network. Further qualitative and quantitative research is needed on ACCS schools to determine how other parents learned about their ACCS school. A deeper understanding of this phenomenon might benefit ACCS headmasters and administrators in increasing enrollment and promoting their school. One specific avenue to extend knowledge on social network is

[106] Although the ACCS is 41 years old, the movement began matriculating students in the younger grades. Therefore, the ACCS did not produce substantial numbers of high school graduates until 12 years after it began, and thus my suggestion of analyzing data over the last 29 years.

conceptualizing a study that accounts for prospective parents' networks with parents *and students*. The reason is that data from this study indicated that Regent students' mannerisms, behaviors, and learning positively influenced prospective parents to consider Regent. So, how prevalent is this phenomenon in ACCS school-choice processes, and in school choice in general?

Finally, this study has surfaced then touched upon religion's role in public education and democracy. Bloom (1987) asserted that true intellectual freedom requires "the presence of alternative thoughts. The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity, but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities, that makes it seem inconceivable that other ways are viable" (p. 93). Theorists like Nord (2010) and Prothero (2007) assert that the environment and ethos of modern public education "have removed awareness" of religious ways of making sense of life's existential questions and thereby indoctrinated children into secularism. Regent parents, although presumably unaware of these authors' theories, nonetheless concurred by voting with their feet and leaving public schools. Accordingly, one implication of this research is that academicians might want to consider utilizing the tools at SCFD's disposal to analyze these claims and subsequently propose some fruitful suggestions.

Waks (2013) described some of SCFD's foundational purposes as follows. First, through using the tools of description, interpretation, and inquiry, to offer a wide-ranging understanding of education, educational institutions, and their relationships with other civic institutions and academic disciplines. Second, to interrogate education in the past and contemporary times, probing how education and its social foundations have changed over time. Third, to understand and evaluate the values and purposes fundamental to and underlying education and to suggest desirable change through the various publications and avenues at its disposal.

Accordingly, SCFD's disciplinary orientation aligns with questions this study raises, namely to examine afresh the intersection of secularism, religion, and democratic pluralism in education, and to provide recommendations for religious and non-religious ways of examining existential questions through methods grounded in social sciences. A few possible questions

come to mind. First, how prevalent is the secular ethos in public school campuses and curricula? Second, what are some avenues to buttress understanding across difference between Traditionalists and non-Traditionalist? Other questions would certainly be asked; these questions are merely a starting point arising from parent experiences in this study.

Limitations of the Study

There are many varieties of private Christian schools in the U.S. These findings are limited to one specific type of private Christian school, CCE. A second limitation to this research is that the study was conducted in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which has a different cultural and demographic profile and socio-religious context than other regions of America. Readers of this study should recognize this study's situatedness and other limitations discussed in the methodology chapter.

Another significant limitation is the absence of racial, religious, and SES diversity among participants. All participants were white and middle- or upper-class parents. All parents interviewed were also Protestant. Although I made efforts to interview racially, religiously, and SES diverse parents, interviews with low SES or racial minorities were not procured. Although parents from a plethora of denominational backgrounds participated in the study, interviews with Catholic parents were not procured either.

Further, due to the COVID-19 pandemic which shuttered in-person learning and parents' involvement inside the campus buildings after March, 2020, I was largely unable to observe parents inside the Regent school buildings. There were two notable exceptions: indoor volleyball games and a socially-distanced open house for prospective parents. Otherwise, all observations occurred in outdoor environments like football games, outdoor chapels, and student drop-offs and pick-ups before and after school.

Recommendations for Future Research

Possibilities for future research suggested by this study are extensive as limited research exists on CCE. To begin with, acquiring more data on parents' rationale for choosing CCE

through additional naturalistic inquiry or other qualitative studies would increase understanding of this educational movement. One specific starting point would be Augustine Christian Academy, the other CCE school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Its location is more urban, nestled in a lower SES neighborhood with greater racial diversity than Regent. Exploring rationales parents chose to enroll their children at this CCE school might generate a constellation of helpful and intriguing findings between these two CCE schools that are less than seven miles apart.

Second, and corollary to the first recommendation, is to investigate the racial and SES diversity of CCE schools. Qualitative studies exploring low SES and racial minority parents' rationale for enrolling in CCE would provide greater context to this present study. As aforementioned, a seemingly appropriate site is St. Augustine Christian Academy in Tulsa. Also, quantitative research designs that gather minority enrollment percentages in individual ACCS schools and ACCS schools nationwide would also provide helpful data to better understand CCE.

Third, quantitative or mixed-methods' studies examining Regent parents' selection of CCE would add an additional lens through which to understand this study's results. The Regent headmaster has been extremely accommodating in the conducting of my research and his willingness to allow me to identify his school's name in the publication of this dissertation adds confirmability and contextuality to this study. Thus, additional research utilizing survey instruments like Krull's (2016) six indices of 22 school selection factors could generate greater context, nuance, and understanding within which to situate this study's findings.

Fourth, this research has taken seriously the intersection of schooling and religious worldviews and how this dynamic unfolds in families. This research has also noted that hybrid and home school models are increasingly teaching Classical and Christian curriculum. Thus, future researchers might consider exploring parents' rationales for selecting home and/or hybrid Classical and Christian education in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Researchers might then explore various aspects of Tulsa's parental social networks involved in such schooling. Quantitative studies capturing this data would supplement knowledge gained from this naturalistic inquiry study.

A fifth intriguing possibility for future research would be gathering data about teachers' rationales for teaching in a CCE school. The salaries and benefits are less lucrative than public education, and yet two Regent parents who were former public school teachers indicated a future willingness to teach at Regent but not return to public education. Why?

Further, one quality parents noticed about Regent teachers is that they love their jobs. Thus, in addition to exploring teachers' rationales for teaching at a CCE school, some other possible questions to explore might be the following: (a) how do CCE teachers view their work in CCE schools; (b) how do CCE teachers view CCE parents; (c) how much overlap exists in the social networks of CCE teachers and parents; and (d) how do teachers perceive their role in in cultivating Christian virtue and moral character in their students' lives?

Finally, a longitudinal study on the degree and intensity of CCE students' Traditionalism after high school graduation would be useful to assess CCE's effectiveness in transference of faith. Dernlan (2013) suggests that CCE students have greater religiosity after high school graduation than students who attend other private Christian schools because of instruction in the Trivium. A longitudinal study at Regent or other CCE schools, comparing it with non-CCE schools, would provide more knowledge and context with which to assess this claim.

Conclusion

The purpose of this naturalistic inquiry study was to explore parents' rationales for choosing CCE at Regent in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Chapter VI included a recap of the study's theoretical framework, methods, and findings. Data sources for the findings included interviews, observations, artifacts, and documents that I analyzed and interpreted. Five main findings, emerged from the data: a biblical worldview, transference of religious faith, a like-minded community, kids are challenged academically, and parents' discovery of Regent through social network. Chapter VI discussed these findings in relation to the pertinent literature and offered implications of the findings vis-à-vis research, theory and practice. Chapter VI concluded with limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

In conclusion, the pedagogy, content, and worldview of CCE is unique among contemporary educational models. CCE is also confusing and perplexing to both the outsider and insider as Marybeth, a CCE parent shared:

> *It's [CCE] probably misunderstood, quite often, by people who are not in it.* [emphasis added]. … I went to Texas A&M, and we had this thing there, 'From the outside looking in, you can't understand it; from the inside, looking out you can't explain it.' And that's a little bit how I feel about classical education. Being in it, I can't really explain it to my friends … I can't really explain *why I feel so passionate about it* [emphasis added], why I think it's been so good for us as a family. But, but I know from their [non-Regent parents] point of view, they can't exactly understand that [CCE] either.

One aim of this research has been to expose the reader to this ancient-modern, "tried and true, not novel and new,"[107] avant-garde educational movement growing across the U.S. Although only 41 years old in its latest iteration, the Classical and Christian tradition, progenitor of CCE, has roots extending back to the beginnings of Western Civilization. My intention in this dissertation has been to accurately portray with rich and thick description the meanings that CCE parents make as their children study in this ancient-modern curriculum.

[107] I heard this phrase from Tom, a Regent parent.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Introductory Email to Participants in the Study

From: csroyer@ostatemail.okstate.edu [Chris Royer]

To: [Email address of parent I'm asking to interview]

Subject: Arranging a Time to Interview for my OSU dissertation

Dear [Name of Parent],

Thank you for responding to Mr. Andy Shapleigh's email about my desire to interview parents whose children are enrolled at Regent for my thesis at Oklahoma State University. I'm grateful for your willingness to sit down with me.

Please let me know a few times and dates you'd be free to meet me next week on the Regent campus, in the conference room to the left as you enter the main doors. My schedule is fairly flexible, so I can probably flex with yours. Alternatively, if you'd like to meet at Ludger's Bakery on 91st street we can also meet there.

I look forward to our meeting.

Warm regards,
Chris

P.S. Feel free to call or text me if this is an easier avenue of communication for you: 918-xxx-xxxx.

Approved: 03/25/2020 Protocol #:

IRB-20-178

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured Qualitative Interview Questions

1. Open-ended questions: Could you tell me a little bit about you got involved in RPS?" "Tell me about your family.
2. What are some of your core beliefs about education?
3. What are some of your core educational values?
4. What are the educational goals you have for your child(ren)? Or, what do you want from your RPS for your child's education?
5. In your opinion, what are the core components of classical and Christian education (CCE)?
6. In what ways do you share these core values of CCE?
7. Does your faith influence your view of CCE and education in general? If so, how?
8. Describe the process which led you to enroll your child in RPS.
    a. Follow up (if necessary): Did (How did) your family's involvement in an alternative curriculum or educational program before RPS influence your decision to come to RPS?
    b. Follow up (if necessary): What were the primary factor(s) that influenced your decision?
    c. Follow up (if necessary): Were there other factors that influenced your decision? If so, what were they?
9. Was there a determinative incident or event that influenced your decision to enroll your child in RPS?
    a. Potential follow up: "Thanks, that's helpful, but I'm also interested in the more emotional and spiritual aspects of your experience. Could you share a bit more about…?
    b. Potential follow-up: "Please describe your feelings throughout your journey into CCE at RPS?"
10. What is your child's experience of CCE at RPS like?
11. In what ways have you seen your child change at RPS? Follow-up probes below, but don't ask them in a leading manner.
    a. Change intellectually
    b. Change spiritually
    c. Change behaviorally
12. Is there an incident that encapsulates the feelings you have about CCE at RPS?
13. How many years has your child (children) been enrolled at RPS?
    a. What are the primary factors that influence your decision to continually enroll your child in RPS, year after year?
    b. What are the other factors (if any) that influence your decision to keep your child enrolled in RPS year after year?

14. Describe the degree of community you experience at RPS.
15. Describe the degree of community your child(ren) experience at RPS.
16. What kind of student do you think the faculty of RPS is trying to produce?
17. What general message(s) about CCE would you have for others interested in education?
    a. Probe: If you were asked to choose one or two selling points of CCE, what would they be?
    b. Probe: If you were asked to name one or two pitfalls of CCE, what would they be?
18. What was your attitude toward public education before your child(ren) started RPS?
    a. Has any aspect of your attitude toward public education changed since that time?
    b. (If so…) What are your attitudes toward public education now?
19. What was your attitude toward homeschooling before your child(ren) started RPS?
    a. Has any aspect of your attitude toward public education changed since that time?
    b. (If so…) What are your attitudes toward public education now?
20. For parents who had previous experience with children in *public schools*, "How did you understand, interpret, and make meaning of your child's experience in public schools?" "What are the reasons you pulled your children from public education and enrolled them at RPS?"
21. For parents who had previous experience with children in private Christian schools, "How did you understand, interpret, and make meaning of your child's experience in public schools?" "What are the reasons you pulled their children from private Christian education and enrolled them at RPS?"
22. For parents who had previous experience with children in *home schooling*, "How did you understand, interpret, and make meaning of your child's experience in public schools?" "What are the reasons you ceased homeschooling and enrolled them at RPS?"
23. Was there an incident that happened to you or your child that encapsulates your perceptions of public education (homeschooling, private schooling)?
24. What changes in yourself have you noticed over the course of your student's CCE?
25. Is there anything else you think I should know as I write about perceptions and experiences of parents whose children participate in CCE?
26. Is there anything you'd like to know about this my research?

APPENDIX C

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUSIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Informed Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral thesis with me, a student researcher and graduate student at Oklahoma State University. This form outlines the purposes of this thesis and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant. The purposes of this research are the following:

1. To gain insight into the following research problem or question of parental attitudes towards classical Christian curriculum and gain insight into parental beliefs and values that influence parents' decisions to enroll their children at Regent Preparatory School with its classical and Christian curriculum.
2. To gain experience formulating and conducting qualitative research methods, including interviewing. This research fulfills criteria for the conferral of the Ph.D. degree. My doctoral advisor is Dr. Ben Bindewald, Oklahoma State University, Educational Studies, 215 Willard Hall, Stillwater OK, 74078, ben.bindewald@okstate.edu.

You are invited to participate in this study by participating in a one-hour interview with open-ended questions.

As the researcher, I agree to meet the following conditions:

1. I will audiotape our interview with your permission and transcribe the tape for the purpose of accuracy. I will give you a copy of the transcript so that you may see that I have captured your words correctly. At the end of the study, the audio recordings will be erased and destroyed.
2. I will assign a fictitious name on the transcript or you may choose one yourself. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection or in my dissertation.

As participant in this research, you are entitled to know the nature of my research. You are free to decline to participate, and you are free to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time. No penalty exists for withdrawing your participation. Feel free to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the class research activity and the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me and you may contact me at csroyer@ostatemail.okstate.edu or my adviser, Dr. Ben Bindewald at ben.bindewald@okstate.edu. In addition, for questions regarding your rights as a human subject, please contact the OSU IRB at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research process by checking one of the following statements and providing your signature below. The signatures below indicate an acknowledgment of the terms described above.

_____I wish to participate in the research described above, have read this consent form, and agree to be audio recorded.

_____I wish to participate in the research described above, have read this consent form, but I do not agree to be audio recorded.

_____I do not wish to participate in the research described above. SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTDATE

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT DATE

(The participant signs two copies; the participant receives a copy, and the doctoral student researcher retains a copy)

Approved: 03/25/2020 Protocol #:

IRB-20-178

VITA

Christopher Scott Royer

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: EXPLORING WHY PARENTS CHOOSE TO ENROLL THEIR CHILDREN IN A CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Major Field: Education

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2021.

Completed the requirements for a Diploma in Anglican Studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania in 2007.

Completed the requirements for a Master of Divinity at Denver Seminary in Denver, Colorado in 2004.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in New Testament Studies at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois in 1989.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Biblical Studies at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois in 1989.

Experience:

2014-present
Executive Director, Anglican Frontier Missions

Professional Memberships:
Anglican Church of North America, Clergy, 2012-present