



Hope For America's Youth

By

Mark McGee

- 1 70-75% of Christian young people leave the Church after high school
- 2 One of the major reasons is intellectual skepticism
- 3 Most Christian young people are not equipped to deal with the anti-Christian message from professors, fellow students and friends
- 4 College professors are five times more likely to identify themselves as atheists than other members of the general public
- 5 More than half of all college professors view students with Christian backgrounds unfavorably

I shared those statistics [in an article](#) several years ago. There are at least three ways of dealing with statistics – accept as true with concern about the outcome .. accept as true without concern about the outcome .. dismiss as false. I accepted the statistics as true based on three things: accuracy of statistical surveys methodology, decades of observing churches and youth groups in the United States, and personal experience. I accepted the statistics as true with concern about the outcome because I was one of those “church kids” who left the church. I quit attending church during high school and became an atheist during college.

I would like to first share the conflict, followed by the resolution.

Conflict

Young people have been leaving church during or after high school for decades. Many religious trend studies at the end of the 20th century demonstrated that churches were in decline and losing ground with youth and adults. The numbers are not insignificant with some denominations reporting the loss of millions of members.

When I read news reports about the large number of church youth leaving the church and percentage of atheist college professors impacting those youth (e.g. ABC, USA Today, CNN, The Huffington Post, Los Angeles Times, New York Times) I knew the Holy Spirit was moving orthodox Christians to respond in meaningful ways.

The problem with young people leaving their churches did not “just” begin. I saw it as a young person in the 1960’s and as a Christian involved in ministry during the 70’s, 80’s and 90’s. What I also saw was the Holy Spirit raise up apologists during the last third of the 20th century to answer the call to bring hope to young people who were turned off to church and the Christian worldview.

That was a great encouragement to me because God used Christian apologists to challenge my atheism and answer my questions. They were not called apologists at the time, but that’s what they did. They presented a strong defense (apologia) for theism and Christianity. Their passion to reach me for Christ introduced me to the Holy Spirit’s desire to reach people who are often viewed as being unreachable.

I'm not the only person sounding an alarm about the large number of young people leaving their churches. Here are some other voices –

- [Ravi Zacharias](#)
- [Cross Examined](#)
- [Reasonable Faith](#)
- [Cold Case Christianity](#)
- [Stand To Reason](#)
- [Eric Metaxas](#)
- [Kirk Cameron](#)

You may also find these articles helpful to learn more about the conflict facing families and churches in the United States.

[A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity](#) (Barna Research)

[Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church](#) (Barna Research)

[Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Churches](#) (Barna Research)

[Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years](#) (Barna Research)

[America's Changing Religious Landscape \(Pew Research\)](#)

[Family Life Council Says It's Time To Bring Family Back To Life \(SBC Research\)](#)

[LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18-to-22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church](#)

[None's On The Rise](#)

[Are Young People Really Leaving Christianity?](#)

Resolution

We come now to resolving the conflict. What can a Christian do if they accept as true with concern the statistics about youth leaving the church? Is there hope for youth in America?

As we've seen, the statistics are staggering and sobering. How could this happen? How could parents and church leaders invest 15-18 years teaching a child about Christianity only to see that child abandon the Christian worldview for another belief system (e.g. atheism, agnosticism, Buddhism)?

If Christianity is true and every other worldview is false (which it is), parents and church leaders are faced with the dilemma of how to deal with young people's rejection of the truth. Suggestions?

Answers

“... be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you ...” 1 Peter 3:15 (KJV)

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

Remember when your son or daughter started asking the “why” question?

Parent – Time to go to bed!

Child – Why?

Parent – Because you need your rest.

Child – Why?

Parent – Because sleep is good for you.

Child – Why?

Parent – Because you'll wake up strong and ready for a new day in the morning.

Child – Why?

Parent – Because I said so!!!

Child – Okay, Daddy. I love you.

Parent – Sigh

Children do not outgrow the need for answers to questions. The questions will change, but your child still needs answers.

The Greek word Peter used that is translated “answer” in 1 Peter 3:15 is *apologia* – hence the name “apologetics.” Some English Bibles translate *apologia* as “defense” (e.g. NKJV, NASB, HCSB).

“... always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” NKJV

The ministry of Christian apologetics is providing answers, giving a defense, for the Christian worldview. Young children look for answers – older children and teens look for reasons. That, I submit, is where many parents and churches can improve.

Reason

Young people are looking for “reasons” for what their parents and church leaders say is true about Christianity. The exciting thing is that Christianity was founded on reason; the Church was built on reason!

“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” Acts 17:2

“Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.” Acts 17:17

“And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.” Acts 18:4

“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.” Acts 18:19

“And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” Acts 19:8-9

“Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’ But he said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.” Acts 28:24-26

The Greek noun Peter used translated “reason” in 1 Peter 3:15 is *logos*. It is the same word the Apostle John used in his Gospel – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Greek reads – “εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος.” John wrote that in the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word (*logos*) was with God, and the Word (*logos*) was God. In case there were questions about the identify of this *logos* who was God, John wrote –

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ... For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John 1:14, 17

John’s powerful statement is that the Word (*logos*) who is God became flesh and lived among men. That *logos* (reason) is Jesus Christ.

The Greek verb Paul used translated “reasoned” and “reasoning” is *dialegomai* – “converse, address, preach, lecture; I argue, reason.” The usage of the verb in ancient Greece was “getting a conclusion across.” It was used in the context of a discourse between two or more people who held different viewpoints about a topic and wanted to come to the truth through reasoned arguments. The English word “dialogue” comes from *dialegomai*.

The ancient idea of *dialegomai* was different than what we might term “dialogue.” It was more than just passing time by talking about the weather. To *dialegomai* with someone was to use logic and reason to get across their point about the truth of a matter. They used *dialegomai* to “persuade” the thinking of another person.

Persuasion

That's what Paul did when he "reasoned" with people about the Christian worldview – "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." Paul's purpose was to persuade people about changing their beliefs about God and truth and become Christians. Watch what Paul does and says when he has the opportunity to present his apologia before King Agrippa –

"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.' Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!' But he said, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.' Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a

Christian.' And Paul said, 'I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.'" Acts 26:19-29

King Agrippa understood what Paul was trying to do – persuade him to become a Christian. How did Paul respond to that? He admitted it! "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." Paul's purpose in presenting his defense before the king and others in the room was to persuade them to become Christians!

Conflict Resolution

I remember hearing that term, “conflict resolution,” decades ago in the context of management. Managers learned how to help resolve conflicts in the workplace through communication and moderation. If a manager was successful in resolving conflicts, employees saw that management valued them and their ideas and would do their best to come to the best resolution for the good of the team.

The conflict many Christian parents and church leaders face today is the attack of non-Christian worldviews on the minds and hearts of their children and youth. Paul also wrote about another kind of persuasion – the kind that leads people away from obeying the truth of Christ –

“You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.” Galatians 5:7-10

We need to be ready at all times, in every circumstance, to provide answers and reasons to our children about the truth of the Christian worldview. We also need to prepare young people to deal with people who will attempt to hinder them from obeying the truth.

Hope For America's Youth – Ratio Christi

Ratio Christi Campus Apologetics Alliance is an international ministry dedicated to providing answers and reasons defending and explaining the Christian worldview. Ratio Christi's college chapters – close to 170 of them on campuses – minister to college students. Their College Prep branch (RCCP) reaches out to high school students, while "Ratio Christi Prof" is for college professors. RC's International branch has chapters in several countries answering questions and presenting evidence about Christianity. That's a lot for a young ministry to take on, but demonstrates the urgency and importance of the mission.

Secular thought dominates many colleges and universities today. So many Christian college students abandon their faith when confronted with intellectual challenges to Christianity. They are often ridiculed because of their beliefs. The purpose of Ratio Christi is to bring together faith and reason, to establish the intellectual voice of Christ at the university level, and to bolster high school students with reasons for Christianity even before they reach the college campus.

Ratio Christi chapters do not compete with other Christian groups on campus. They focus solely on apologetics and can fill a vital niche on campus. Ratio Christi comes alongside other campus ministries to partner with them and serve them. Ratio Christi also partners with many other apologetics ministries to bring their speakers on campus for special events and debates. It really is a win-win-win for everyone involved in ministering to college students.

Ratio Christi began at Appalachian State University in the spring of 2008 as the Reasonable Faith Apologetics Club. The idea started as a discussion between two ASU students about the need to address serious intellectual questions raised in the university about Christianity. The students formed a partnership with Southern Evangelical Seminary and the group became known as Ratio Christi ((Latin for Reason of Christ)) that summer. The number of chapters grew rapidly and Ratio Christi became an independent 501(c)(3) in February 2011.

I learned about Ratio Christi early in 2011 from friends with the Christian Apologetics Alliance and emailed Ratio Christi about becoming involved. My interest was to become a chapter director. The process included having an educational background in apologetics (Masters in Apologetics or Certificate in Apologetics from approved institutions). However, I quickly learned that involvement in Ratio Christi doesn't end at being a chapter director.

There are so many ways to help. A great place to start is becoming a Ratio Christi Booster. Mentors are also needed to work with high school students, and chapter directors and volunteers are needed to work with college students and our exciting international division. Mission-minded people can even consider raising their own support to work with Ratio Christi full-time. Ratio Christi is one of the best ways I know to help prepare high school and college students for defending the Christian worldview, and for reaching professors about Christianity. I hope you will take a look at Ratio Christi and ask God what involvement He would like you to have in reaching young people with the "hope" of the Gospel.

Hope For America's Youth – Ratio Christi Regions

We introduced you to Ratio Christi in the last part of this special series. We looked at its purpose and history in reaching high school and college students and faculty members with evidence for the truth of the Christian worldview.

Ratio Christi started on one campus in the United States in 2008 and now has about 170 chapters across the country plus scores of chapters in many other countries of the world. Serving the needs of all those chapters is a challenge and Ratio Christi has developed a unique way of meeting the challenge.

Ratio Christi has a goal of establishing a total of more than 500 high school and college chapters in the next few years. The potential number of students available to be reached on those campuses is in the millions. Ratio Christi is quickly becoming a major campus ministry and with that comes major organizational challenges.

The current organization includes Team Christi (national and international leadership), Campus Chapters (national and international college and university chapters), RCCP (high school campus chapters), Ratio Christi Prof (reaching college and university professors), RC International (international ministries), Ratio Christi TV (new ministry in 2017), and Ratio Christi Boosters (great ways for parents, grandparents, and church members and leaders to get involved supporting the ministry of Ratio Christi). Ratio Christi also has many divisions that support the ministry (e.g.

media outreach, promotions, public relations, social media, IT, human resources, prayer, women's outreach, volunteer coordination, training, resources, chapter formation, finance, accounting).

Given the sheer size of Ratio Christi's current ministry and its projected growth in the next few years, what's the best way to organize for maximum efficiency and impact in the lives of tens of thousands of students? Regions. A region can be a state (e.g. Alabama, Florida, Texas, Indiana, Ohio), a section of the country (e.g. Southern New England, Upper Midwest) or another country (e.g. Philippines, South Africa). The job of serving the needs of each region belongs to regional directors.

Colleges and universities have a long history in the United States. For example – Harvard University and College of William and Mary were founded in the seventeenth century; Yale and Princeton in the eighteenth century. Some were established by governments, others by religious groups. There are thousands of public and private colleges and universities in the U.S. with a student population numbering in the tens of millions. Reaching them with the Gospel of Christ is a large undertaking. Add to that tens of thousands of public and private high schools in the country and we see the awesome opportunities for presenting the logic and reason of the Christian worldview to young people.

Look through the [Ratio Christi Chapters](#) web section and you'll see how many states are involved. The first state alphabetically is Alabama, so let's begin there.

Alabama has scores of public and private colleges and universities and hundreds of high schools. Ratio Christi has divided the state into two regions to reach the students in these schools. The North Alabama Region covers the top half of the state from the Huntsville area to the Birmingham/Tuscaloosa area. The South Alabama Region covers the bottom half of the state from south of Birmingham to Mobile.

[Regional directors](#) are charged with the responsibility of providing oversight for the college and university programs through service, care, encouragement, support, guidance, and problem solving. They also initiate and oversee regional strategic planning, partnerships, and growth. In addition, regional directors work closely with the [RCCP](#) mentors in their areas to support their work and provide opportunities for graduating high school seniors to participate in local Ratio Christi chapters when they enter college.

From north to south we currently have chapters at —

- [University of Alabama in Huntsville](#)
- [University of North Alabama](#) (Florence)
- [University of Alabama in Birmingham](#)
- [University of Alabama](#) (Tuscaloosa)
- [Auburn University](#)

- [University of South Alabama \(Mobile\)](#)
- [University of Mobile](#)

The number of students at these universities is almost 100,000. We are also looking at restarting our chapter at [Jacksonville State University](#) in addition to starting new chapters across the state.

The Alabama region is one example of what Ratio Christi is doing to reach students in the United States and around the world. It's an exciting story that is far-reaching in the opportunity we all have to make a difference in the lives of high school and college/university students. Investing now in students and the men and women who teach them can impact the future of cities, states and nations for decades to come.

Ratio Christi has great opportunities for volunteers. You can read through some of those [opportunities on this page](#). Every high school and college/university chapter needs volunteer help ([we love retirees!](#)). If you'd like to make a big difference in the lives of students, please [contact us about your interest](#). Ratio Christi also needs prayer warriors and financial support, so anything you can do will be a blessing.

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”