

The Christian Life Survey 2014-2015 Administration at 22 Christian Colleges



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Students' religious self-identifications: Bible-believing, born again, nondenominational

Which religious labels do devout students at Christian colleges self-identify with?

The students were asked, "Do you think any of these phrases describe you?" and they were presented with a randomized list of 18 terms. They had the option to say yes, uncertain, or no for each label.

As is shown in Chart One, the students primarily identified their religious *group* as evangelical Protestant (as would be generally expected from students attending the specific 22 colleges that participated in the survey).

Chart Two shows their preferences in religious *labels*. There were two labels they commonly embraced. Ninety-three percent self-identified with the label "Bible-believing" and 78 percent self-identified with the label "born again."

There were three additional phrases which roughly 40 percent of the students said were each an appropriate self-identification: "contemplative" (42 percent said yes), "theologically conservative" (38 percent said yes), and "seeker" (38 percent said yes). None of the other labels had more than a quarter of the students self-identify with it.

There are a couple of additional findings worth noting.

First, these students are open to being seekers but not to being identified as "spiritual but not religious." If there is a group of people out there which adopts the popularly discussed phrase "spiritual but not religious," it is not comprised of devout students at Christian colleges. While it has been suggested that young adults today are unwilling to self-identify with being religious or organizationally connected to religion, the over 6,000 traditional-age, full-time students at Christian colleges who took the survey clearly are willing to say they are religious.

Second, these students are also not willing to self-identify with either the "religious right" or religious left" labels. Common media references to the "religious right" as a political entity in the United States may effectively describe some group, but it is not the devout students who are attending Christian colleges. In fact, if we also consider these students' consideration of the phrases "theologically liberal" and "theologically conservative," we see that the only phrase that has a notable percentage of the students self-identify with it is "theologically conservative." Even then, only 38 percent accept the label "theologically conservative," 40 percent are ambivalent about it, and 22 percent do not accept that label for themselves.

The students were also asked at the end of the survey, "What religious tradition or denomination do you identify with?" The most frequently self-reported answer was "nondenominational" (23 percent of the students). All answers that were chosen by more than 100 students (out of 6,441) are shown in Table One.

In sum, then, students at Christian colleges in the United States embrace the self-identifications "Bible-believing" and "born again." They do not generally accept the phrase "spiritual but not religious," and while they do have some willingness to indicate that they are theologically conservative, they do not identify themselves as part of the "religious right."

Chart One: Students' religious groups (percents; classifications are not mutually exclusive)

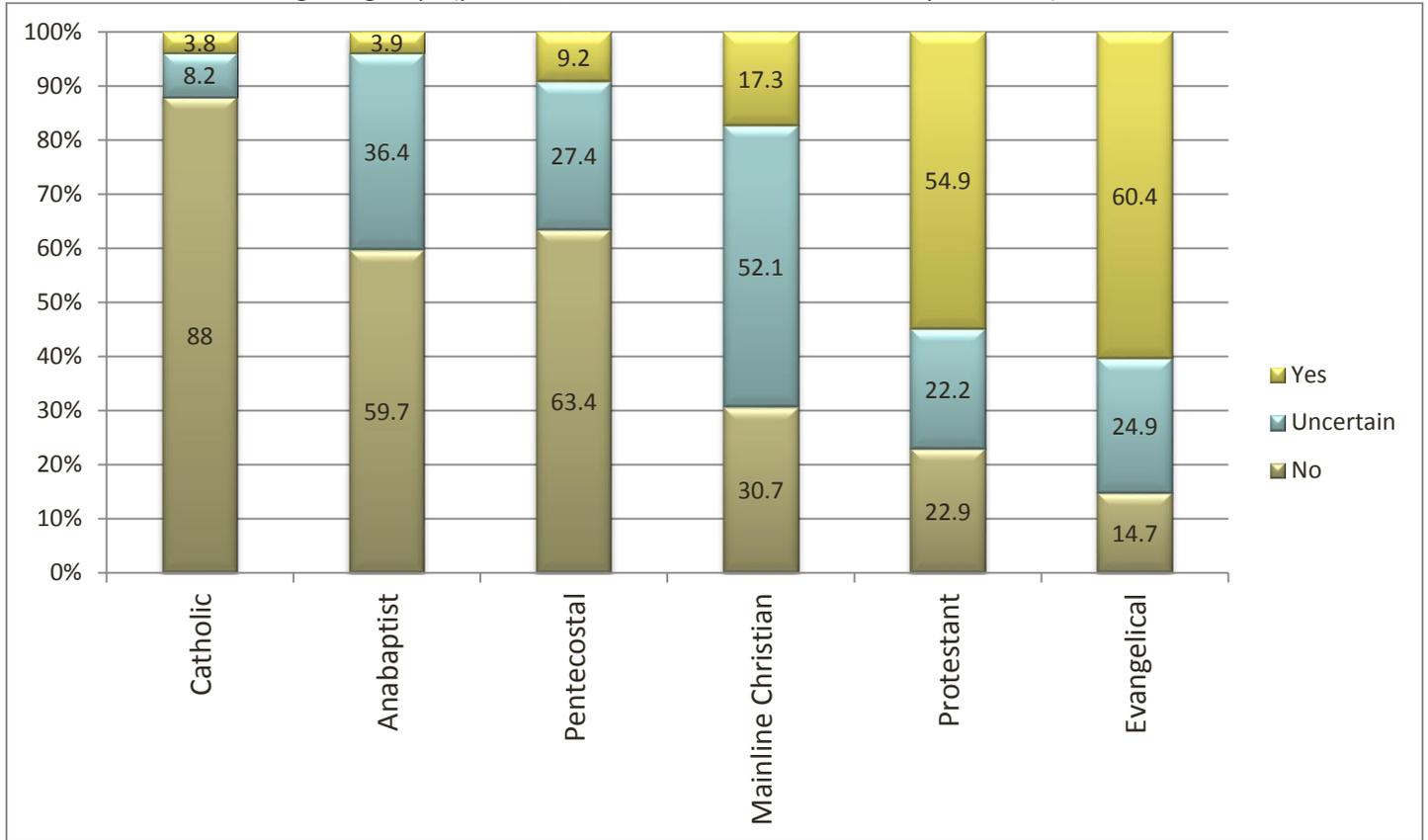


Chart Two: Students' religious labels (percents; classifications are not mutually exclusive)

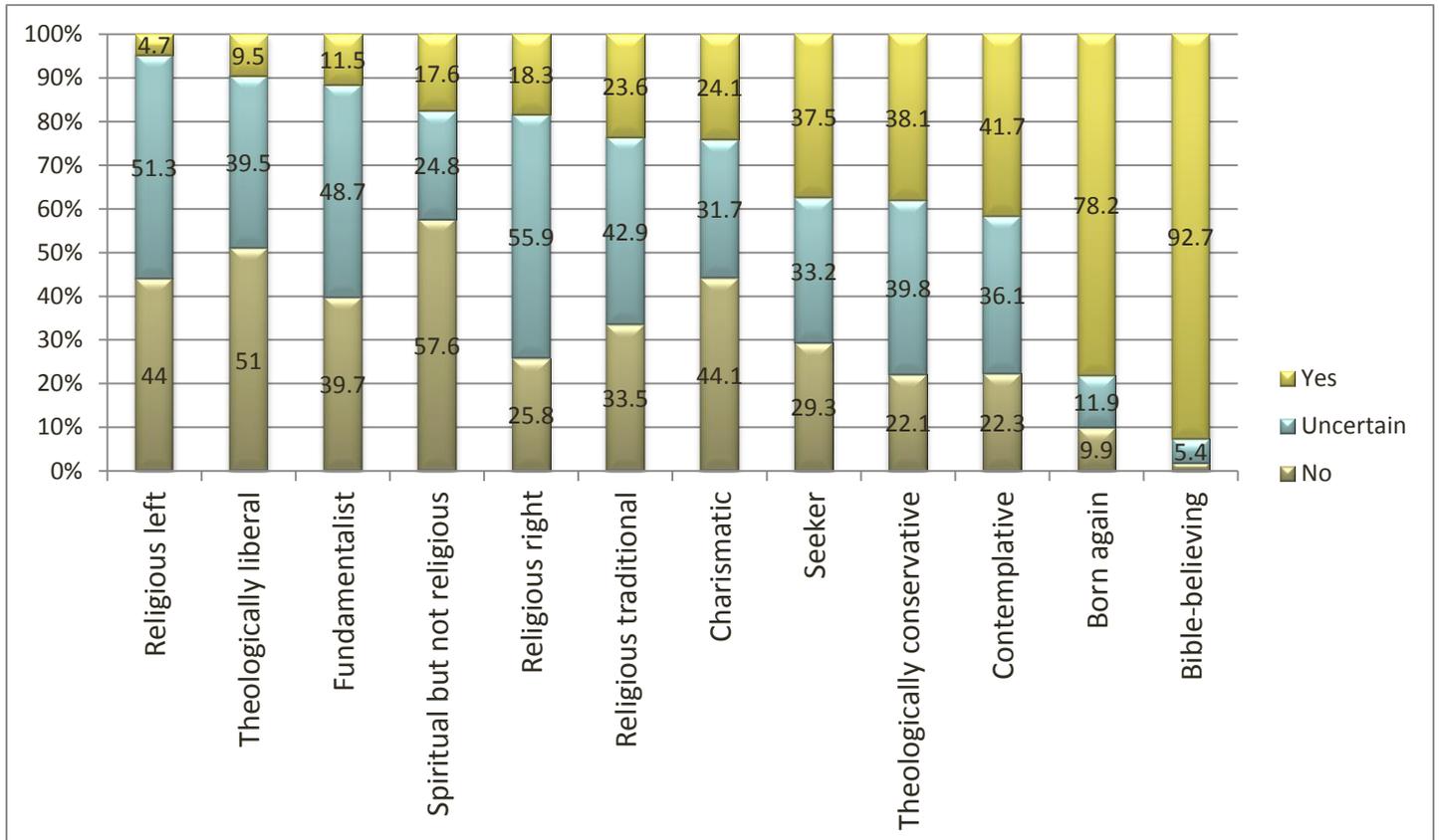


Table One: Most frequently self-reported religious identifications	Frequency	Percentage
Nondenominational	1487	23
Baptist unspecified	753	12
Christian unspecified	559	9
Southern Baptist	207	3
Evangelical	179	3
Catholic	157	2
Presbyterian	157	2
Pentecostal or Charismatic unspecified	126	2

Who are the students in this study?

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Christian Life Survey was administered to students at 25 Christian colleges in the United States. The results shown in this summary brief, however, are only for the traditional-age, traditional-program freshmen through seniors from the 22 colleges that provided population proportions that allowed representative weighting to be used. Students are weighted to be proportionately representative for sex and year in school for their colleges.

These results are for 6,074 students from 22 Christian colleges in the United States.

The students are overwhelmingly Protestant Christians who are serious about their spiritual life (they chose to attend a Christian college and they agreed to participate in a half-hour survey about their spiritual life).

The students represented here, then, are traditional-age, devout Christians attending 22 Christian colleges in the USA. Great care should be employed when generalizing these results to any other groups.

How was this topic measured?

The survey question used:

Participants were asked, "Do you think any of these phrases describe you?" The answer choices were yes, uncertain, and no.

Eighteen items were presented and the list was randomized (the online surveying software put the items in a random order for each student so responses would not be systematically affected by the order in which the items were listed).

The items in Chart One and Chart Two were all mixed together in the randomized list the students responded to.

The survey:

The Christian Life Survey (CLS) is an online, half-hour survey on Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Orientation (lifestyle), and Scripture Engagement and was conducted in the 2014-2015 school year at the following Christian colleges: Bethel; Biola; California Baptist; Charleston Southern; Corban; Cornerstone; Crown; Fresno Pacific; George Fox; Gordon; Houghton; Judson; The Kings; LeTourneau; Northwest Nazarene; Nyack; Patrick Henry College; Spring Arbor; Tabor; Taylor; Union; Wheaton.



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